



How Harmful Is the Commercialization of Higher Education for the Academic and Social Environment?

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Abstract: The commercial market for higher education in Europe is expanding as governments cut spending on universities in the wake of the 2008 global economic crisis, and universities must be self-sufficient to survive. This commercialization is mainly reflected in the fact that universities begin to pay more attention to fund accumulation rather than improving academic value. With the continuous increase of tuition fees in colleges and universities, students are regarded as consumers and universities are essential commodities needed by consumers. Although commercialization of higher education has some beneficial aspects, such as more funds for schools to provide students with more advanced equipment and more comfortable learning environment, overall, the threat of commercialization to academic quality and social environment cannot be compensated for by those advantages. This paper aims to find out the two main reasons for the commercialization of higher education and the three threats to the social and academic environment brought by the marketing of higher education. Also, the paper also puts forward corresponding solutions for the three major risks; the two reasons analyzed in this paper are mainly the economic crisis and the development of globalization. The three threats are mainly aimed at the teaching quality of educational value and the financial pressure of students. At the same time, the paper gives three corresponding solutions to the threats. This paper argues that the commercialization of higher education severely hinders the improvement of educational value, reduces teaching quality, and brings heavy pressure to students' economy, which directly hinders the healthy development of higher education. If higher education institutions can adopt corresponding strategies to mitigate the threat of commercialization, the commercialization market of higher education may bring many opportunities for the development of higher education industry.

Keywords: higher education, commercialization, academic value, strategies, university, threats, teaching quality

Introduction

In recent years, universities have been pursuing commercialization more and more. The reasons for the commercialization trend of higher education are various (Ylijoki 2003, p.307). On the one hand, when the economic crisis broke out in 2008, the government reduced the financial expenditure on higher education institutions, and universities need to pay for academic research by themselves ((Bercovitz and Feldman 2006, p.175). On the other hand, the development of globalization promotes academic communication between countries, and some enterprises need to cooperate with universities to research science-based products together, which largely determines the commercial nature of universities ((Slaughter and Leslie 1997, p.7). However, this phenomenon brought several different problems.

There is a strong motivation to make money in the commercial activities of universities, which is not conducive to the educational value and teaching quality that universities actively pursue (Domino 2006). Meanwhile, rising tuition fees are putting financial pressure on students, as in 2007, more than 50 percent of students graduated with debt (College Board 2008). Obama (2007) claims that as commercialization grows, there is no doubt that tuition fees will continue to increase in the coming years. Given these issues, the primary purpose of this paper is to analyze the reasons for the commercialization of higher education and its threats to the social and academic environment and to evaluate the strategies to solve the risks. It suggests that strengthening professors' theoretical knowledge to help them develop scientific teaching methods and accumulating funds through online teaching are both useful strategies in dealing with threats.

1. The reasons for the commercialization of higher education

1.1 The economic crisis has commercialized higher education

The economic crisis was an essential factor in the formation of the marketing of higher education, although the relationship between the financial crisis and the commercialization of education did not seem very close. (CONSTANTIN 2015, P.229) In the wake of the economic crisis, European finance was struck, governments got loans from different international agencies,

to overcome these debts, countries cut public expenditure in various fields, with higher education as the primary target. From December 2009 to February 2010, most European countries reduced spending in almost all education-related areas, with higher education spending as the top priority. In the long run, the financial pressure on European higher education has been on the rise due to the economic crisis (CONSTANTIN 2015, P.229). Under such a background, colleges and universities have to turn the traditional education model into a commercial education model to meet the cost requirements or even make profits in this way, so that the school can operate normally. For example, starting in September 2012, the cost of higher education in the UK increased from 3,000 a year to 9,000 a year (Browne 2010). As Bunce claims that (Louise Bunce P.1959) Ten years ago, the Dearing Report (Dearing 1997) began to support students as the primary consumers. The definition of students is recognized. At the same time, the government has issued a new policy to remove the restrictions on the number of students. The government is said to encourage students to Consumers are the guide. Higher education is adapting to commercialization to survive.

1.2 Globalization promotes the commercialization of higher education

Another important reason for the commercialization of higher education is the development of globalization, which mainly includes two aspects: one is economic globalization, the other is information globalization. They have developed rapidly in the world and even changed everything. The development of globalization promotes the formation of liberal policies, which are the acceleration of the globalization of education. Over time, higher education becomes more and more diversified, and to meet the needs of students and society, many private universities have been established (Aktan 2007). As Murat AKYILDIZ claims that More and more large enterprises are entering the higher education industry because the globalization of information and economy requires them to master more extensive knowledge and more professional technology. In this case, they have to cooperate with universities around the world or establish their research units or even universities (Murat AKYILDIZ 2010).

Moreover, In the era of information and economic globalization, the public's demand for higher education is gradually increasing. If the courses people first learn cannot meet the needs of the commercial market, the public needs to study the for-profit professional courses provided by universities on the internet or go to other countries for higher education as international students. For example, both TED and MOOC offer online courses that audiences around the world can learn, and these courses are profitable.

2. The threat of the commercialization of higher education

2.1 The commercialization of HE increases students' financial burden

The commercialization of higher education has imposed a great economic burden on the educated at the economic level. Some researchers claim that the higher education sector's policy has changed since 2012, with the reform raising fees to 9,000 pounds a year and lifting the cap on student numbers (House of Commons, 2018). There is no doubt that the cost of higher education has risen; the increase of tuition fee increases students' financial pressure to a great extent. The study in Economist London (2011) suggest that tuition fees in Britain rose seven-fold between 2002 and 2012, some British students took out government loans to pay for their education, but 30% of the loans will never be repaid.

Moreover, the commercialization of higher education drives the development of intermediary institutions. As Robinson (2018) suggests that in European countries, intermediaries have been created since 1996, universities and intermediaries from Europe have cooperated to recruit international students since 1999. Surprisingly, about 70 percent of international students go to university through the services of an intermediary, which can cost up to 6,000 pounds. (The Economist London,2011) Academic economic pressure has far exceeded transportation, housing, and consumer goods. More and more families with higher education rely on loans from the government or commercial banks, and the expected loan rate has been rising year by year.

2.2 The commercialization of HE threatens academic values

Through long-term research and observation, it can be reflected that the embodiment of academic value is becoming weaker and weaker due to the commercialization of higher education. Bok (2007) objectively pointed out that the profit purpose of higher education can provide some suitable conditions for academic development, but the negative impact of its profit motive completely covers the positive result, which is mainly reflected in the reduction of academic standards and the damage to academic reputation. Batnett (2008) expressed similar concerns, saying that entrepreneurship is positive, but to meet the accumulation of benefits; entrepreneurial universities are infiltrated with improper regulations, which may lead to a lot of corruption in academic research and may lose the real academic value. The damage of the academic value of this

phenomenon directly affects the image of the university operating community.

2.3 The commercialization of HE threatens the quality of education

Since commercial higher education attracts a large number of international students, large class teaching has become an essential product, which will directly reduce the quality of education. As Jenkins (2002) pointed out in a study that the government's cuts in education budget resulted in the cost reduction of universities and the new enrollment policy no longer limited the number of students, which led to the expansion of class sizes. Cuseo (2004) claims that large class teaching is not only a problem of the number of students but also a challenge for teachers to provide quality and equal learning opportunities for students. Although there is no evidence of the optimal class size for active learning, there is evidence that learning benefits will decrease with the increase of class size. For example, the curriculum of large classes often focuses on the explanation of theoretical knowledge, because a large number of students cannot meet the needs of students to participate in the discussion, and more students will be distracted (Maringe 2014; Sing 2014). The impact of commercialization on teaching quality will be a significant challenge in higher education, given that the purpose of students is to get a better education.

3. How to reduce the threat posed by the commercialization of HE

3.1 Accumulate funds by developing online learning

The accumulation of funds for higher education should not come from students' colossal tuition fees. It can make profits by developing online teaching. Daniel (2013) claims that the vital feature of open online courses in public education, which has a vast audience. Globalization and limited financial budget promote the development of online learning. At the same time, the development of online education will also become an essential means for colleges and universities to accumulate. For example, MOOCs and TED can be regarded as two similar enterprises, both of which provide perfect opportunities for universities to develop online education, and universities can cooperate with them to build open and scalable business models with existing online teaching methods (Yuan 2013). Therefore, it appears that colleges and universities should earn profits through online education, rather than raising tuition fees to accumulate funds so that fewer families take on jumbo education loans and students receive an education more fairly.

3.2 Improve the academic ability of the staff and develop scientific teaching methods

Protecting academic quality from threats is the most fundamental principle for the development of higher education. In a basic sense, colleges and universities should provide their academic staff with regular skills training and encourage them to learn similar teaching methods for the updated continuously teaching environment. These skills can provide opportunities for the improvement of academic value and teaching quality (Altbach et al., 2009). In addition, Pucciarelli and Kaplan (2016) suggest that even with the involvement of commercialization, universities should give top priority to the promotion of students and academic value, which may require significant changes in the management methods of higher education institutions, managers need to reflect on the management strategy, the benefits, vision, and mission of schools will be redefined. Additionally, Brehony (2005) made the same suggestion, saying that professors and staff in institutions of higher learning need professional guidance to a corresponding extent to provide academic support for the reform of their education system. Therefore, that means that universities should adequately fulfill their responsibilities and obligations to protect academic quality under any circumstances.

3.3 Increase the time for students to participate in learning and develop learning assessment methods

The strategy of guaranteeing teaching quality is as important as that of protecting academic value. Large class teaching is an essential factor affecting students' scores, so we still need to provide corresponding strategies. Maringe (2010) point out that universities can increase students participate in time to make sure that they learned a lot of knowledge, in large classes, the professor provides students with the lowest limit of the reading material, they need to let the students read the articles and prepare presentations or posters, students can communicate with the team to learn different views and ideas. Moreover, diversified assessment is an important strategy to improve teaching quality. Considering the diversity of students in large classes, different assessment strategies are closely related to the improvement of diverse students (Brown 2001). For example, we can customize the written assessment and the open homework, which includes group presentation, role-playing, poster making and other assessment with participation characteristics (Brown et al., 1996). That is to say, in large classes with a lack of participation; we can change teaching methods and increase student participation to ensure teaching quality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen that the economic crisis and globalization are two critical factors that promote the commercialization of higher education. Moreover, the marketing of higher education harms the academic and social environment. It has been shown how the commercialization of education damages academic values and teaching quality, and how commercialization brings a severe financial burden to students and families. Perhaps the marketing of higher education can create some excellent opportunities for the development of universities. However, it also appears from the studies that the commercialization of higher education can hinder the healthy development of the higher education industry in the long term. Because of the decline in academic value and teaching quality is the least acceptable fact for the education industry.

Despite the limited scope of this study to the negative impact of commercialization of higher education on the academic and social environment, it seems clear that if commercialized higher education continues without rules, precious academic value and teaching quality will be difficult to achieve in the future, This may require universities to adopt corresponding strategies to mitigate threats. For example, instead of raising tuition fees, universities should amass funds through open online courses on MOOC, they should also strengthen training mechanisms for professors and teachers and develop scientific large class teaching methods to prevent the decline of academic value and teaching quality. Besides, we may need to study some advantages brought by commercial higher education to the education industry, and then we can combine benefits and threats to develop more scientific development strategies, the higher education industry would be better if universities followed a clear development strategy.

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