

A Comparative Review of Evaluation Systems for Private Higher Education in Nine Countries

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a cross-national comparative analysis of the evaluation systems for private universities in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Jordan, Norway, Russia, South Africa, and the United States. The research finds that although there are differences in the evaluation systems of private universities across nations, they exhibit significant commonalities at the national regulatory level. All countries consider the legality of school establishment and the quality of higher education as fundamental starting points, aligning accreditation and evaluation standards for private higher education institutions with those of public institutions. Simultaneously, the study reveals the distinctiveness of private university evaluation systems from the perspective of third-party assessments, systematically examining the notable characteristics of quality assurance mechanisms and third-party evaluation approaches in the private higher education sectors of these countries.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Private universities typically face external evaluations (such as academic and administrative evaluations by government agencies, market-oriented certification evaluations by external institutions, academic evaluations provided by industry associations, etc.) and internal evaluations (including self-evaluation, educational assessment, etc.). The certification and evaluation of private universities discussed in the article focuses on external evaluations, including informal assessments such as rankings issued by foreign institutions.

II. THE REGULATORY SYSTEM FOR PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

Since the late 1980s, Australia has systematically developed a coordinated public-private higher education governance model through progressive policy reforms. A landmark initiative was the 1988 Higher Education: A Policy Statement issued by the federal government, which fundamentally dismantled the traditional public-private binary in education. This policy formally integrated private higher education institutions into the national unified management framework, marking a paradigm shift in Australia's educational landscape. Contemporary developments are visible, including the resource optimization strategies outlined in Australian Universities. Notably, this institutional transformation not only accorded legal recognition to private colleges but also initiated an era of structured government oversight (Zhu, 2020), ultimately shaping today's multi-stakeholder collaborative governance framework.

1. Government-led regulatory framework

Australia's higher education quality assurance system operates through a dual governance framework established by federal and state legislation. This system evolved through two key regulatory bodies, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)(Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013). CRICOS registration requirement for international education providers. All private higher education providers must maintain TEQSA accreditation and CRICOS listing to operate legally(Commonwealth of Australia, 2020).

2. Specialized Regulatory Mechanism

Australia implements a tiered quality assurance system, where non-self-accrediting institutions are required to undergo regular reviews of their course materials. Designated providers (e.g., Kaplan Business School) require periodic recertification. Four-tiered benchmarks (including provider registration standards) enable differentiated supervision and improve quality(Australian Qualifications Framework, 2014).

3. Multi-stakeholder Governance Network

The vocational education sector is overseen by ASQA's specialized oversight of the VET Quality Framework, which emphasizes practical skill development and industry alignment. Industry-led regulation, facilitated through ACPET's standard-setting and COPHE's institutional collaboration (Dai, 2009). This government-led, industry-coordinated model strikes a balance between regulatory rigor and market responsiveness.

4. Evolution of the evaluation system

Through continuous institutional innovation, Australia has gradually developed a modern higher education governance system characterized by unified standards, precise classification, and multi-party participation (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020). The policy shift from a dual-track parallel to an integrated governance approach not only ensures the quality standards of education but also promotes healthy competition between public and private institutions, providing a reference for international higher education governance (Australian Government Department of Education, n.d.).

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION EVALUATION IN BRAZIL

The Brazilian higher education system exhibits a pronounced public-sector dominance, with private institutions accounting for 78% of universities but showing comparatively weaker academic performance and global recognition. While offering diverse educational programs and flexible curricula, private colleges exhibit a growth pattern characterized by quantitative expansion, accompanied by significant quality stratification (Liu & Liu, 2015). Their operational agility grants

competitive advantages in vocational training and community engagement (Li,2021).

Private higher education initially emerged as fragmented professional schools before transitioning into universities during the late 20th century. The 2004-established national evaluation system introduced an innovative six-dimensional assessment framework (incorporating indicators like institutional management and curriculum quality), particularly through value-added evaluation models that track student growth trajectories for more scientific quality measurement. This system indicates private colleges' success in mass education provision (with over 60% local admission rates), while revealing the need for breakthroughs in faculty development and research investment to enhance academic competitiveness substantially (Bo, 2016; Li, 2019).

Research data reveal that only 21% of for-profit private colleges meet tier 4-5 standards in the 2022 General Index of Disciplines and Majors (IGC), compared to 85% of public institutions. Regarding student quality, public institutions' 12% admission rate contrasts with their 32-percentage-point lead over private colleges in ENADE evaluation scores. Concerning resource allocation, private institutions face chronic underinvestment in faculty and research funding (Bo, 2016).

IV. QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN CANADA

In Canada, private higher education institutions are required to meet the same accreditation and quality standards as public institutions to award recognized degrees. These private colleges must obtain qualification certification from the education authorities of their respective provinces or regions before they can operate. The certification process involves comprehensive supervision of teaching quality and financial operations (Qureshi, 2023). Due to the implementation of education decentralization in Canada, there are differences in the regulatory rules for private colleges among provinces. Still, all have established a management framework centered on quality assurance and rights protection.

1. Industry Certification Bodies

Canada's private higher education sector operates under a dual accreditation system. The

Canadian Association of Private Schools (CAPS) serves as the primary accrediting body for private colleges, overseeing institutions that deliver higher education programs. Through its standardized

benchmarks, CAPS ensures educational quality and institutional resource adequacy.

For university-level institutions (including private universities), the Canadian Association of University Presidents (CAUP) conducts comprehensive evaluations. Its accreditation framework emphasizes three critical dimensions: scholarly research capacity, curriculum architecture, and faculty qualifications. This bifurcated system maintains sector-wide standards while accommodating institutional diversity.

2. Third-Party Professional Certification

Specialized programs in fields such as engineering and medicine require mandatory certification from sector-specific accreditation bodies, including Engineers Canada and the Canadian Medical Association (CMA). These organizations mandate curricular alignment with prescribed professional competencies, ensuring programs meet current industry benchmarks. Unlike institutional accreditation, this process rigorously evaluates discipline-specific content, teaching methodologies, and graduate readiness for professional practice.

3. Provincial Regulatory Framework

Canada's constitution delegates higher education governance to provincial authorities, creating a decentralized quality assurance system for private institutions. All degree-granting private universities must undergo mandatory certification processes administered by provincial education agencies, featuring:

Institutional Review: Conducted by bodies like Ontario's Higher Education Quality Council (HEQCO), evaluating governance structures and academic integrity

Program Validation: Managed by provincial ministries (e.g., British Columbia's Education Ministry), assessing curriculum relevance and learning outcomes

4. Maclean's Ranking System as a Quality Benchmark

Canada's Maclean's University Rankings offer an authoritative evaluation framework that serves as a quality assessment tool for private institutions. The ranking methodology examines three core dimensions: academic resources, financial aid, and Industry recognition of degree competencies.

V. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND EVALUATION OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN JAPAN: DIVERSIFIED THIRD PARTY EVALUATION SYSTEM

In the late Meiji to Taisho period (1918), the promulgation of the University Ordinance marked the formal establishment of a public-private university system in Japan. Private specialized schools were upgraded and transformed by adding university departments, and modern private universities such as Keio and Waseda began to emerge (Li, 2002; Liu & Liu, 2015; Liang, 2017).

During the post-war reconstruction period (1947-1949), the establishment of the University Standards Association established a national framework for evaluating higher education, and the standards for private universities established basic norms, ranging from educational objectives to institutional settings. In 1949, the National and Private School Establishment Law was established, introducing a dual mechanism of school self-evaluation and social supervision, and establishing a qualification review process for member admission (Li, 2002; Liu & Liu, 2015; Liang, 2017).

During the period of deepening quality assurance (1979-1999), the University Self-Evaluation Research Committee was established in 1979, which pioneered the regular review system. The establishment of the Methodology Research Committee in 1983 promoted the systematic development of self-evaluation. By 1999, the mandatory implementation of the self-examination and evaluation system in universities nationwide was achieved (Amano & Chen, 2006).

Modernization stage of evaluation system (1991-2005) – Japanese degree-granting institutions (1991) were reorganized into NIAD-QE (2000), establishing a dual certification system. In 2003, the revision of the School Education Law granted legal validity to third-party evaluations. In 2005, Japanese higher education evaluation

institutions received official certification, forming a professional evaluation network primarily composed of members from private university associations.

The formation of a diversified governance pattern (2014) – The current evaluation of private universities in Japan presents four typical features. Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology exercises regulatory functions through a review committee. NIAD-QE fulfills its certification responsibilities as a quasi-national institution. Industry organizations, represented by university benchmark associations, establish professional standards. Non-profit organizations provide characteristic evaluation services. In 2014, NIAD-QE established cooperation with the Evaluation Center of the Chinese Ministry of Education, marking the internationalization extension of the quality assurance system (National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement of Higher Education, 2019).

VI. JORDAN: BALANCED SCORECARD (BSC) MEASURES KPIS FOR PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION

Five private universities and one international benchmark university in Jordan have validated the application of the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) to the performance evaluation of private higher education institutions. BSC provides managers with a balanced view of organizational performance through four dimensions, and suggests that private universities should carefully select and apply KPIs based on their characteristics and strategic goals (Shan & Nair, 2016). The balanced scorecard, as a performance evaluation tool for private higher education institutions, has significant application value. By selecting and applying KPIs reasonably, the performance of private universities can be effectively evaluated and improved. Regularly assess and adjust KPIs to ensure they are up-to-date and effective. Strengthen internal process optimization and employee training to enhance customer satisfaction, learning, and growth capabilities. Benchmarking with international benchmark universities, identifying gaps, and developing improvement strategies (Abdali & Hourani, 2015).

VII. NORWAY: NOKUT LEADS THE EVALUATION OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

In 2003, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) issued the Evaluation Standards for Universities and Colleges as an essential part of the higher education quality assurance system, based on the accreditation, evaluation, and recognition regulations issued by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research under the Universities and University Colleges Act and the National Subsidy Act for Private Higher Education Institutions. In recent years, the development of higher education in Norway has led to a more systematic emphasis on quality assurance. This is mainly attributed to the enhancement of institutional autonomy, the influence of international standards, the sharp increase in student numbers, the introduction of new teaching methods, changes in learning environments, and the increasing demand for transparency and documentation in society. The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research has emphasized the importance of quality assessment and accreditation through relevant laws and regulations, designating the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) as the responsible agency. According to the rules of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, private institutions (especially those accredited under Article 10a of the State Subsidies to Private Higher Education Institutions Act) must meet the basic requirements of the quality assurance system and undergo regular and periodic evaluations by NOKUT. challenge affecting developed and developing societies despite the declaration of the sustainable development goals (The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, 2003).

VIII. RUSSIA: INNOVATIONS IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE

Russia's modern education quality assurance system traces its origins to the landmark 1992 Education Law. A pioneering feature emerged through the creation of Europe's first independent accreditation body in 1992, predating Bologna Process mechanisms by seven years (Motova & Pykkö, 2012). This institution separated policy

oversight from operational assessments through the implementation of state-defined quality benchmarks, Third-party evaluation, and Transparent accreditation criteria. The 2012 revision of Russia's Education Law marked a pivotal milestone in the nation's educational reform. Legislators introduced a quality-independent evaluation framework, clearly delineating the respective jurisdictions of national certification and public accreditation (Navodnov, Gevorgian, Motova, Petropavlovski, 2008; Haikun & Popov, 2015), while establishing a hybrid regulatory model that combines governmental oversight with societal participation (Gurban & Sudakova, 1997; Geroimenko, Kliucharev, Morgan, 2012).

The comprehensive university performance monitoring system, fully implemented since 2013, mandates annual assessments for private institutions across seven core dimensions: instructional effectiveness, scholarly productivity, global engagement, fiscal management, and related operational metrics. Initial implementation data demonstrated 83% coverage of national private universities, achieving measurable improvements in academic transparency and resource optimization (Geroimenko, Kliucharev, Morgan, 2012).

IX. REGULATORY PRACTICES OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMISSION (HEQC) IN SOUTH AFRICA

The quality assurance system for private higher education in South Africa demonstrates distinctive national leadership characteristics, implementing quality control through a comprehensive governance framework that includes legislative guarantees, institutional settings, and a standard system. This system employs a dual-track evaluation model that effectively combines institutional self-assessment with external government evaluation, creating unified quality standards for both the public and private education sectors (Higher Education & Training Department, 2016).

Legislatively, the 1997 Higher Education Act mandates private institutions to register with the Ministry of Higher Education and Training. Subsequent legislation, including the 1998 Skills Development Act, established three fundamental requirements for private institutions: (1) adequate financial resources for sustainable operations, (2) course quality matching public institution

standards, and (3) compliance with the South African Qualifications Authority Act (1995). The 1998 White Paper on Higher Education Reform further enhanced the quality assurance framework with specific provisions for teaching infrastructure and resource allocation (Higher Education & Training Department, 2016)

The system's core regulatory body, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), was established in 2001 under the Ministry of Education's Higher Education Council. Its primary responsibilities include developing institutional accreditation standards, implementing quality monitoring of teaching, and overseeing equitable distribution of resources. The system was optimized in June 2003 when the Higher Education Council issued comprehensive implementation guidelines covering institutional accreditation, quality monitoring, and resource evaluation. Later developments included additional certification requirements under the 2006 Continuing Education and Training Act (Higher Education & Training Department, 2016)

X. PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION EVALUATION SYSTEM UNDER THE UNIFIED CERTIFICATION FRAMEWORK IN THE UNITED STATES

The unified evaluation approach for both public and private higher education institutions represents a defining characteristic of the U.S. system of quality assurance. This standardized framework employs identical evaluation agencies, methodologies, and indicator systems across all institution types. The American higher education evaluation system comprises two primary components: external evaluations (e.g., institutional accreditation systems, professional program accreditation, and state-level licensing and evaluation procedures) and internal evaluations (e.g., institutional self-assessment processes and internal quality assurance mechanisms) (Qiu, 2018). Despite this unified framework, notable differences in evaluation exist between public and private universities. These distinctions primarily manifest in four dimensions (Table 1).

Table 1. Evaluation comparison between private universities and public universities in the United States

Evaluation comparison between private universities and public universities in the United States		
	Public university	Private university
Targets	The evaluation objectives are diversified, aiming to improve the quality and performance of teaching, research, and services, while meeting the needs of public authorities for the control and supervision of universities.	The evaluation objectives primarily focus on enhancing the school's market competitiveness, brand influence, and economic benefits. At the same time, it is essential to prioritize the quality of teaching and student satisfaction.
Subjects	The main body of the evaluation encompasses government agencies, universities, professional institutions, and various sectors of society, thereby forming a diversified evaluation system.	The main body of the evaluation is the school itself. At the same time, third-party evaluation institutions may be introduced for certification or ranking evaluation to enhance the credibility of the school.
Methods	There are various evaluation methods, including self-evaluation, peer review, and external institutional evaluation, which focus on the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.	The evaluation method may be more flexible. In addition to adopting evaluation methods similar to those of public universities, it may also focus on market research, customer satisfaction surveys, and other commercial evaluation methods.
Feedback	The evaluation results are primarily used to enhance the internal management of the school and improve the quality of teaching, and may also serve as the basis for government funding and resource allocation.	The evaluation results are more applicable to the school's strategic planning, market positioning, enrollment publicity, and tuition pricing, aiming to improve the overall competitiveness and economic benefits of the school.

XI. A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GLOBAL PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION EVALUATION SYSTEMS

The global private higher education evaluation system exhibits significant institutional diversity. Based on education systems, cultures, and policy orientations among countries, distinctive quality assurance and evaluation systems have been established. This study selected nine countries based on materials and conducted a systematic comparison from three levels: evaluation subjects, content dimensions, and evaluation tools.

1. Classification of evaluation modes

Russia has established a three-tier system of licensing, certification, and university evaluation, with regulatory innovation earlier than the Bologna Process, balancing government control and social participation through legislation. Australia implements federal-state dual-level regulation through TEQSA, while South Africa's HEQC reflects strong national leadership characteristics.

The United States implements a nondiscriminatory evaluation system between public and private institutions, with private colleges focusing on market competitiveness indicators and utilizing commercial evaluation tools, such as customer satisfaction surveys.

Japan has formed a four-in-one evaluation pattern of government, third-party university society, while Canada implements a provincial decentralized certification mechanism.

2. Comparison of evaluation dimensions

The core indicators of common concern in various countries include education quality (curriculum design, teaching outcomes), governance structure (management autonomy, decision-making mechanisms), resource security (financial sustainability, hardware facilities), and social benefits (employment integration, social contribution). Jordan's innovation utilizes the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) to establish a performance indicator system across four dimensions: finance, customers, internal business processes, and others.

3. Evaluation tools

NOKUT emphasizes the construction of a quality culture and requires universities to establish a complete process recording system. Canada implements a unified certification standard for both public and private sectors, emphasizing on-site evaluation and continuous improvement. Russia adopts differentiated regulatory tools to classify and evaluate different types of private institutions.

4. Suggestions

International experience has shown that an effective evaluation system requires: establishing a diverse structure of evaluation subjects, designing indicator frameworks that balance commonalities and characteristics, developing methods and tools that combine quantitative and qualitative approaches, and strengthening the application and transformation mechanism of evaluation results.

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