Prospects of Mobilising Resources through Private-Public Partnerships (PPPs) in Private Universities in Uganda

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Abstract

Higher education is important in fostering knowledge production and innovation, and in attracting global government investment. However, in developing nations like Uganda, the surging demand for higher education strains government funding for universities, with private universities being more affected. Thus, private-public partnerships (PPPs) have emerged as a remedy to ease financial burdens. Nonetheless, it is uncertain whether private universities in Uganda have embraced PPPs. Our purpose was to explore the prospects of mobilising financial resources through PPPs by private universities in Uganda. We specifically aimed at exploring the possibilities for mobilising resources through PPPs and the conditions necessary for effectively mobilising resources through PPPs by private universities. Using a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design, we conducted interviews with PPP experts from both private and public universities. We analysed data by coding, categorising and thematising. Our findings revealed various PPP possibilities, including securing facilities, utilising staff services from public institutions, securing government grants and strengthening the existing chartered private universities. We found, too, that conditions for effective PPPs were unfavourable in terms of the legal framework, government support to private universities, willingness to partner, transparency, accountability, partnering skills and the economic environment. We concluded that private universities in Uganda have shown minimal engagement in PPPs, as conditions necessary for them to mobilise resources through PPPs were unfavourable. We recommend that private universities in Uganda should actively embrace PPPs with strong government support to address resource gaps and leverage additional resources to strengthen their position in advancing knowledge and innovation, thus enhancing their contribution to national development.

Keywords: *Financing; Private-public partnership; Higher education; Uganda.*

Introduction

In the contemporary knowledge economy, universities play a pivotal role in national development by actively engaging in knowledge production, fostering innovation, and equipping the workforce with essential skills (Cloete et al., 2011; Boye & Mannan, 2014; Kefelegn, 2020). Recognising this crucial role, governments worldwide have responded by making significant investments in higher education. Uganda, like many countries, has followed this broader trend. The emergence of private universities in Uganda can be traced back to the late 1980s and early 1990s, following a period of political and economic liberalisation. These institutions were established to address the growing demand for higher education in the country and to provide alternative educational options to government-run institutions (Ochwa-Echel, 2016). The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed the emergence of several pioneering private universities , including Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU), licensed in 1988, Uganda Martyrs University, founded in 1993, and Nkumba University, founded in 1994 (Varghese, 2006). In 2002, the Uganda National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) was established to regulate and oversee the operations of both public and private higher education institutions. Over the years, the private higher education sector in Uganda has experienced significant growth and diversification, with the establishment of several private universities and degree-granting institutions offering a wide range of programmes in various fields of study. The growth of private universities in Uganda is a notable phenomenon that has shaped the higher education landscape in the country. These institutions have played a significant role in expanding access to higher education and providing diverse educational opportunities. However, despite their pivotal contribution, private universities in Uganda face resource constraints and funding challenges, which can impact their ability to maintain high academic standards (Ochwa-Echel, 2016). One of the most pressing challenges, and arguably the linchpin, is the financial constraint that affects virtually all facets of university education quality. This includes the recruitment and retention of competent faculty, the provision of state-of-the-art facilities, access to essential teaching and learning resources, and meaningful engagement in research activities. Notably, government funding often falls short of meeting the escalating demand for higher education. Consequently, alternative forms of provision, such as income-generating activities within higher education, partnerships and collaborations, are gaining traction (Mahmud et al., 2022).

In this paper, we contend that the resource challenges faced by private universities can be alleviated by creating an enabling environment that encourages collaborative efforts to diversify funding sources. Among the contemporary trends that facilitate such collaborative endeavours are private-public partnerships (PPPs).

The Problem, Purpose and Objectives of the Study

Private-public partnerships represent contractual agreements between one or more government or public agencies and one or more private sector or non-profit partners. The primary aim of these partnerships is to support the delivery of services, as well as the financing, design, construction, operation and maintenance of specific projects for the greater public good. According to several scholars (e.g. Fabre & Straub, 2023; Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2016; Warasthe, 2018), PPPs offer numerous advantages, including cost savings through innovative technologies, shared financial burdens, increased revenue generation from diverse sources, and economic benefits in terms of knowledge transfer and overall economic growth. While the most common PPPs involve contractual models where government entities collaborate with private providers in exchange for regular payments (Government of Uganda [GOU], 2015), this paper specifically refers to PPPs as arrangements where private universities partner with the government in financing, service delivery and the acquisition of specialised expertise.

In Uganda, the phenomenon of PPPs is not novel. For instance, the government has engaged in partnerships with private schools to provide secondary education through programmes like Universal Secondary Education (Barungi & Kasirye, 2015; Brans, 2011; Twinomuhwezi & Herman, 2020), as well as government-aided schools. There is also evidence of PPPs involving the government and private universities, particularly in the context of scholarships and loan schemes, albeit primarily being limited to a few chartered universities (Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 2012; 2013). Mugabi (2012) additionally notes tax exemptions that are exclusively available to private non-profit universities.

However, despite the evident benefits and ongoing initiatives of PPPs within Uganda's education system, private universities face a significant funding challenge. This challenge has repercussions for their ability to recruit an adequate pool of qualified faculty and provide the necessary resources and facilities to ensure a high standard of education that contributes to national development. This predicament persists because the utilisation of PPPs as a financing option within private universities remains relatively underexplored.

In this paper, our aim is to delve into the potential of mobilising financial resources through PPPs by private universities in Uganda. To achieve this, we have outlined two specific objectives: One, to identify the possibilities for mobilising financial resources through PPPs. Two, to explore the conditions necessary to effectively mobilise resources through PPPs by private universities .

Related Literature

Public-private partnerships (PPPs)

Public-private partnerships represent intricate arrangements in which both a public and a private party establish a long-term performance contract for the delivery of mutually agreed-upon services (Boye & Mannan, 2014; Mgaiwa & Poncian, 2016). While PPPs manifest in various forms, they generally share key characteristics, such as the establishment of formal relationships through contracts that outline defined outcomes within specified timeframes and the sharing of risks between the involved partners. The overarching goal of PPPs is to foster improvements in the financing and provisioning of services without disturbing the equilibrium between public and private entities (Boye & Mannan, 2014).

Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016) contend that PPPs, particularly in the field of education, present a complex concept to define due to the evolving boundaries between public and private sectors. In the realm of higher education, Cheng (2009) emphasises that the distinction between purely public and purely private entities has blurred significantly, as even public institutions increasingly engage in private or market-oriented activities.

Moreover, Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016) emphasise that PPPs in education constitute a financing and provision model where the public and private sectors collaborate in sharing the costs and risks associated with education delivery. This collaboration typically involves the utilisation of contractual mechanisms to secure specific education services of a predefined quantity and quality, at agreed-upon prices, from designated providers, for specified durations. Within the scope of PPPs, the government and private providers establish contractual relations to procure education services at predetermined rates for defined periods. This may involve government support for private sector entities and education entrepreneurs to actively participate in the organisation and delivery of educational services. Jomo et al. (2016) further categorise PPPs into various forms, encompassing policy partnerships and partnerships for the delivery of public services, capacity-building partnerships, economic development partnerships, and infrastructure partnerships.

From the available literature, it is evident that PPPs in education encompass collaborative agreements between private educational institutions and governments aimed at providing services related to financing, service delivery, property acquisition, specific services, or expertise. The evolving nature of these partnerships reflects the dynamic interplay between public and private sectors in the multifaceted landscape of education.

Significance of PPPs to private higher education

The significance of PPPs in the realm of private higher education has garnered recognition from various authors. Several scholars, such as Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016) and Odekunle and Babalola (2008), have underscored the multifaceted benefits associated with PPPs. These benefits encompass cost savings and reductions facilitated by cost-sharing arrangements, the amplification of revenue streams from diverse sources, and economic advantages stemming from the exchange of expertise and the promotion of economic growth.

Furthermore, Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016) and Patrinos et al. (2009) emphasise that PPPs possess the potential to enhance student access to higher education. Expanding upon this notion, Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016) note that PPPs play a pivotal role in improving service delivery to both students and staff within higher learning institutions. They highlight a prevalent issue in private universities in Tanzania, where a pursuit of profit motives had led to a shortage of qualified academic staff, consequently affecting the quality of education offered. In response, PPPs were embraced in higher education to increase the number of institutions, thus bolstering access and striving to enhance education quality by recruiting a more substantial number of qualified academic staff.

However, Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016) reveal that, despite expanding access to higher education, PPPs did not necessarily lead to an improvement in education quality. In contrast, other authors, such as Boye and Mannan (2014) and Cheng (2009), maintain that PPPs contribute to the enhancement of education quality. They argue that PPPs can improve access, align higher education programmes with the country's evolving needs, bolster the role of the private sector in social development, elevate quality to enhance competitiveness, optimise management and administration effectiveness, and cultivate research capacities to drive innovation.

Nevertheless, Odekunle and Babalola (2008) contend that PPPs are not without their drawbacks. They assert that inherent risks in PPPs may include a loss of control by the public sector, biases and labour-related issues, diminished efficiency in education service provision, and concerns regarding accountability. The contrasting perspectives on PPPs have created a compelling rationale for this study, as it endeavours to explore whether PPPs, as contemporary collaborative trends, can be harnessed to mitigate some of the challenges faced by private universities in Uganda.

Possibilities/practises for mobilising financial resources through PPPs

The dynamic and rapidly expanding landscape of the higher education sector necessitates a coordinated approach to development. Public-private partnerships have emerged as a pivotal component of education reform efforts in numerous countries, which recognise the efficacy of collaborative endeavours between the public and the private sectors. Such partnerships thrive on harnessing the distinctive expertise of each partner to best address clearly defined public needs, facilitating the optimal allocation of resources, risks and rewards, as they operate as equal development stakeholders (Cheng, 2009). Consequently, many countries, both developed and developing, have embraced and devised various models of PPPs within their private higher education systems.

For instance, Cheng (2009) sheds light on a model implemented in Indonesia to tackle teacher quality challenges prevalent in private institutions, where many educators lack adequate qualifications. The government incentivised the appointment of teachers holding higher degrees by providing subsidies to private institutions for each teacher with an advanced degree, certified as a professional academic. This author notes another model used in the private higher education realm in the United States, where competitive grants are utilised for research, consultancy, training programmes or specialised projects. Private institutions benefit from indirect government subsidies, such as scholarships or direct financial assistance to students, as well as salary subsidies for educators. Additionally, they may receive one-time government subsidies in the form of land allocations or capital for infrastructure development, which are crucial for the initial operation of these institutions.

Patrinos et al. (2009) describe a model implemented in several developing countries where governments subsidise private schools, often run by faith-based non-profit organisations, by financing school inputs such as teacher salaries and textbooks, or by providing per-pupil grants. Tilak (2016) underscores several common yet diverse models of PPPs from various contexts. These encompass scenarios where the government invites the private sector to join in educational development initiatives through specific projects or vice versa. In another model, the government and the private sector collaborate in delivering specific services or activities, formalised through a contractual agreement. This may involve the private sector designing, financing, building and operating educational institutions, with the government reimbursing their investment through lump-sum payments for user charges, thereby sharing the associated risks. Alternatively, the government may invest in infrastructure while the private sector handles operations, with the government covering recurring costs for sponsored students, while the private sector recovers other expenses from additional students.

Tilak (2016) further notes that PPPs can encompass various aspects of education, including policy formulation, management, funding, academics, teacher training, extracurricular activities, examinations, support services, maintenance and security, with the caveat that policy formulation typically remains a prerogative of the state. Notably, hybrid PPPs have emerged, encompassing scenarios such as public institutions with private financing, private institutions with public funding, public institutions under private management, government-established institutions outsourced to private bodies, and private sector-initiated institutions subsequently managed and funded by the government.

Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016) illustrate a Tanzanian PPPs model where the state guides policy and funds higher education provisions through a state-funded Higher Education Students' Loans Board (HESLB). This board extends loans to students in both public and private universities and university colleges, covering tuition fees and other associated costs. This model closely resembles that of Uganda (MoES, 2012, 2013), which permits the private sector to establish, own and operate higher education institutions and offer programmes of their choice. These private institutions are expected to complement government initiatives and cater to the demand for specific academic and professional programmes.

In light of these diverse models and the extensive literature, numerous possibilities and practices for mobilising financial resources through PPPs emerge. These possibilities encompass addressing human capacity challenges, including funding teacher salaries and capacity-building, facilitating expertise exchange, providing government subsidies through land allocation or capital provision for construction, financing teaching and learning resources, and extending grants to students, among other possibilities.

Critical success factors and conditions necessary to effectively mobilise resources through PPPs by private universities

Critical success factors are the specific areas within an organisation's activities that have the potential to significantly impact its success and performance. In the context of private higher education, these factors play a pivotal role in determining the effectiveness of PPPs as a means of resource mobilisation (Ibrahim & Ahmed, 2023). While most higher education systems are traditionally public, the contemporary landscape increasingly embraces the active participation of the private sector. Therefore, private universities must navigate their roles as private partners effectively. Cheng (2009) identifies five critical success factors or necessary conditions for the successful implementation of PPPs in private higher education:

Acknowledging the private sector as a valuable partner. Recognising and respecting the private sector as a valuable partner is fundamental. This involves understanding the advantages the private sector brings to the table, leveraging the strengths of the market, and learning from private sector practices, especially in terms of efficiency improvements.

Establishing an inclusive policy framework: Creating an inclusive policy framework is vital to legitimise the role of private institutions. This framework can include regulatory measures to formalise the position of private institutions, providing government subsidies directly to students and teachers (e.g. student loans or subsidies for qualified educators), and ensuring a level playing field for private institutions to compete for research grants and donations.

Fostering a positive attitude and creating space for the private sector: Encouraging a positive attitude towards the private sector's role in higher education is essential. This can be achieved by actively supporting and developing private institutions as a major component of higher education expansion, facilitating the establishment and growth of elite private institutions, introducing tax incentives to encourage private sector participation, and actively exploring innovative ways to involve the private sector in education.

Involving the private sector in policy formulation. Engaging the private sector in higher education policy formulation is crucial. This can involve creating platforms for policy dialogues between the government and private sector representatives. It may also entail including private institution representatives in national higher education policy-making bodies, ensuring their voices are heard and considered.

Effecting a paradigm shift in governance and administration. To harness the benefits of the market, a shift from traditional regulatory approaches to more liberal and dynamic governance and administration paradigms is necessary. This includes developing alternative accountability systems to traditional public sector administration and being prepared to tolerate temporary disruptions and minor chaos associated with market dynamics, much like one would tolerate bureaucracy.

Additionally, other scholars (e.g. Ismail, 2013; Cheung et al., 2012; Chan et al., 2010) have identified critical success factors for PPPs in various contexts. These factors include the availability of a finance market, the presence of a strong private consortium, good governance practices, transparency, project economic viability, and a suitable legal framework. Ismail (2013) further emphasises the importance of commitment from both the public and private sectors as another key critical success factor for successful PPPs.

While these scholars did not specifically identify critical success factors within the context of private higher education, these factors can serve as valuable guidance for managers and leaders within private higher education institutions seeking to implement successful PPP collaborations to mobilise resources effectively.

Methodology

To comprehensively explore the perspectives regarding the potential of mobilising financial resources through PPPs, we adopted a qualitative research approach, specifically employing the descriptive design. This approach allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the viewpoints held by our participants.

Our research involved purposively selecting and conducting interviews with six experts in PPPs. These experts were drawn from two private universities and one public university. Notably, all the participants were practising academics, possessing invaluable insights into the intricacies of PPPs within the higher education sector. Within the private universities, we interviewed four participants. In each private university, we ensured balanced representation by interviewing one male and one female expert. Additionally, we interviewed two participants from the selected public university, ensuring gender balance in this group as well.

To safeguard ethical considerations and maintain confidentiality, we took measures to anonymise both the participants and their respective institutions. Each participant and university was assigned a unique pseudonym for reference throughout our study. Specifically, we designated 'PU1' and 'PU2' for the two private universities, while 'PP' denoted the public university. For the participants, pseudonyms were assigned as follows: 'Martin' and 'Mary' for those from 'PU1,' 'Don' and 'Diana' for those from 'PU2', and 'Tom' and 'Tabitha' for the participants from the 'PP' university.

Our data analysis process entailed coding, categorisation and thematising the gathered information using a descriptive approach. This systematic methodology allowed us to distil key insights and patterns from the participants' responses, facilitating a clear understanding of their perspectives on the feasibility and potential of PPPs in mobilising financial resources.

Findings and Discussions

Possibilities for private universities to mobilise resources through PPPs

Participants who were experts in PPPs from PU1, PU2 and PP were asked if there were any possibilities for private universities in Uganda to mobilise resources through PPPs. Almost all the participants from PU1, PU2 and PP observed that private universities were playing a critical role in education provision; however, they were faced with many challenges which rotated around having inadequate funding. The inadequate funding had led to payment of poor salaries, insufficient facilities, incompetent and inadequate academic staff and poor research capacity, which affect quality and hinder private universities from competing favourably with public universities. The participants, mainly from PU2, supported the idea of PPPs being adopted in private universities by noting that according to the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), chartered private universities are assumed to have satisfied the requirements for running as universities. So, the government should partner with private universities on programme and student offload in private universities and pay tuition for students in those universities since students belong to the government. Don noted, "Why should public universities suffer with big numbers [of students] when there are private universities which can ably take on students?"

The participants revealed that there are many possibilities available for private universities to partner with government. They pointed out PPP possibilities in the areas of securing facilities, utilising staff services from public institutions, securing government grants, redeploying government secondary school teachers with master's degrees, supporting staff in private universities to pursue further studies, strengthening existing chartered private universities, financing priority areas, and through government establishing resource centres. Martin highlighted the possibility of private universities arranging and securing needed facilities from public universities at a fee in areas where they face shortages. Tom noted that "because of the financial crisis, private universities would take time to have their own facilities." Securing the required facilities from the government is in line with what Tilak (2016) had revealed in a model where government could support the private sector to construct facilities.

The participants also pointed out the possibilities for private universities to share academic staff with public universities. Don had this to say:

> Private universities should have an arrangement with public universities to get staff who have minimum load in public universities to be allocated to teach in their universities. The private university may probably meet allowance such as transport and feeding.

Mary noted, "From my experience, some people [academic staff] have load in one semester and less than the required load in another semester."

Judging from the participants' views, such an arrangement could relieve private universities of some costs, and help them overcome the academic human resource challenge they face.

The participants further observed that universities can explore the PPP arrangement where government, through public institutions, can organise seminars and presentations by experienced professors or distinguished researchers at specified times (e.g. twice in a month or semester) to help academics in private universities in their teaching and research roles. This is because "private universities are limping and need to be helped", as Tabitha lamented. Tabitha went on to stress that "such arrangements [of having experienced professors or researchers] is an indirect way of financing research or teaching activities." This view about staff of private universities learning from experienced staff of public universities, as put forward by the participants, is similar to capacity-building which Cheng (2009) and Odekunle and Babalola (2008) revealed as a practice by PPPs in other countries.

The participants pointed out the possibilities for private universities to secure grants or subsidies from the government. For example, Don proposed that the government could provide subsidies on essential inputs such as computers, laboratory materials and vehicles, among others, because their operating costs are high. However, he observed that this should be done only provided money exempted as tax is channelled to cater for the pedagogical needs of learners. The government granting subsidies is similar to what Cheng (2009) had noted in connection with the granting of tax incentives which was practised in PPPs in Indonesia.

The participants suggested that PPPs could be explored in the area of deploying secondary teachers with master's degree qualifications to private universities. Don observed that "there are many secondary school teachers who have master's degrees and are on government payroll." He suggested that "PPPs can also be explored by deploying such teachers to private universities which have human resource gaps and they continue to earn a salary." On the same issue, Martin observed that "the issue of salary is good because one is sure that a monthly salary will be made." Diana supported this view, stating, "The government can think of paying salary to key staff in private universities such as professors and top administrators since they are not many and yet they play critical roles in contributing to university education." Tabitha stressed the importance of salary thus: "Students are starved because staff are not of high calibre. This is because private universities cannot pay staff well and prefer to go for cheap human resource." The participants' view on redeploying teachers with master's degrees and paying professors and top administrators was in line with what scholars (e.g. Cheng, 2009; Patrinos, et al., 2009) had highlighted regarding the appointment of teachers with higher degrees in private institutions using the PPP practice.

Another possibility voiced by the participants was that the government should have the means to train staff or build the capacity of existing staff by supporting them to pursue higher degrees at master's and PhD levels. Martin said, "The government should think of improving capacity of staff in private universities. They should help staff who have master's and bachelor's to secure loans to pursue further studies and later be absorbed in private universities." However, on this issue the participants observed that, in case the government supported such staff, there should be some conditions attached. For example, after completion, one should be bound to work in one's institution for a specified period of time before thinking of quitting. This was in line with what Mgaiwa and Poncian (2016) had reported in connection with staff securing loans from HESLB in Tanzania to help them upgrade. Another area of capacity-building that the participants pointed out was mentoring the human resource in private universities by public universities. Mary stated that "public universities attract better human resource who could mentor staff in private universities at [a] free or subsidised rate."

The participants also indicated that the government could also partner with private universities by directly financing the priority strategic areas which are short of academic staff, for example, Medicine, Science, Engineering and Technology. This is because such areas contribute to national development irrespective of whether students are from private or public universities.

The participants further revealed that the government needed to partner with and strengthen the already existing private universities instead of establishing new ones in an agreed arrangement. Tom gave the example of how such arrangements exist in government-aided secondary schools like Namilyango College, Gayaza High School and others, which had resulted in these schools being the best in the country. He said, "The management is good because schools are aided by government which reduces on the financial burden." Martin commented that university education is expensive and that this had made public universities continually perform better than private ones because the government has more funds than private education providers. The same participant went on to lament, "How long will government turn a blind eye on private universities and yet endowments are inadequate?"

The participants suggested that the government could establish resource centres which all students, regardless of the university they came from, could access to use the resources available there. These centres could host experienced researchers who would be able to help students where there are gaps, and also offer facilities needed by users. Diana expressed the view that "such provision is indirect financing to universities which can help to cut down costs." The participants pointed out that it was also possible for the government to sponsor students studying in private universities. Tabitha stated that "students can be accommodated on government sponsorship but be made to study in private universities and government pays for their accommodation."

The participants also noted several PPP possibilities which private universities can explore which are beneficial to them. They pointed out some of the benefits: (1) Private universities would support government in its pursuit of relevance and quality. Quality should be a concern of government because education is a public good. Don observed that "this can attract international students who would bring in money as was the case with one university (name withheld).When foreign students discovered that quality had reduced [in the university], they withdrew and the number of foreign students is continuing to reduce". (2) PPPs can make non-qualifying universities work harder in an attempt to win government support. The proprietors of such non-qualifying universities can capitalise and put in place the required facilities, which would boost society's confidence in institutions. (3) Once government is willing to pay salaries for academics in private universities, as Martin noted, "PPPs will encourage people to join academia to weed away fake academics in private universities". Martin gave the example of Universal Primary Education (UPE), a programme where the government is fully in charge, which has good teachers appointed and paid by the government, even though the pay is inadequate.

Conditions necessary for private universities to have successful PPPs

In our second objective, we attempted to explore the conditions necessary for successful PPPs for private universities. Regarding this objective, the participants revealed that conditions for effective PPPs were unfavourable in terms of the legal framework, government support, willingness of private universities to partner with government, transparency, accountability, partnering skills and the economic environment, which need to be addressed.

The participants noted that PPPs have a legal dimension and implications and, therefore, legal issues had to be streamlined, yet in Uganda private universities have to contend with a weak legal framework for their operations. Martin observed that,

> Private universities have so many stakeholders. This means there is no sole owner; instead, ownership is vested in different stakeholders this need[s] streamlining and this has legal implications. It requires signing a memorandum of understanding which stakeholders in some private universities may even refuse.

The observation by the participants that private universities are encumbered by a weak legal framework is contrary to what Cheng (2009) observed. According to Cheng, the success of PPPs requires formulating an inclusive policy framework where the private sector has an active role to play. It was also not in line with what Ismail (2013), Cheung et al. (2012) and Chan et al. (2010) had observed, which is that an adequate legal framework is key to the success of PPPs. This, therefore, implies that setting out regulations to legitimise the position of private universities is a necessary condition for PPPs.

The participants also stressed that PPPs call for a high level of commitment and goodwill on the part of government and yet, in most cases, government has limited funds to support private universities. They noted that at times even when the government promises to provide funding, it fails to honour its commitments, even in the case of public universities. In this connection, Tom said:

> The government should indicate that they will finance or support private universities and actually do so. In most cases there is a dilemma between what is promised [commitment] and what is actually implemented. This also depends on the availability of resources by government.

Diana added, "The government is always faced with inadequate funds and may have other priorities to fund than engaging in PPPs with private universities." The observation that government commitment may not be realised does not tally with what Ismail (2013) had noted, which is that commitment on the part of both the public and private sectors was a key success factor for PPPs.

The participants noted that PPPs can work if private universities allow the government to influence their operations. In this regard, Tom commented:

> Profit-oriented private universities need to relinquish their powers and allow government to influence what they do by allowing power-sharing to create a win-win situation. Government should have the mandate to appoint the vice chancellors and Council Board. This has to be done to ensure that both the interests of government and proprietors are respected.

The success of PPPs will also depend on the credibility of universities. Public-private partnerships can only work in universities that meet basic requirements such as adequate infrastructure. Mary observed that "some universities are like secondary schools; they do not meet the requirements of a university in their goals. So, partnering with such universities will not add much."

The participants added that credibility in terms of transparency as well as proper and timely accountability by private universities is needed for successful PPPs. Tabitha revealed that "private universities are sometimes not open in terms of accountability. The government will want to partner with institutions whose operations are clear and transparent." Diana added, "Our universities are had to deal with because their systems are unclear."

The participants observed too that, besides, private universities have weak partnering skills, which hinder them from having effective PPPs. Mary remarked that "effective PPPs will call for strong collaboration and partnering skills from the private sector."

Some participants, too, observed that successful PPPs need a favourable economic environment where private universities are not overtaxed, but rather given tax incentives. Diana asserted that "at times private universities are overtaxed which affected their financial status more, instead of being exempted from paying some taxes by government." Cheng (2009) had observed that tax incentives were key to the success of PPPs.

Regarding the participants' view that staff with lower loads should be allocated loads in private universities, some participants opined that assigning such staff needed the cooperation and willingness of the heads of units in public universities. Tabitha observed that "there is micro-politics where staff may not be allocated as they will associate it with getting extra allowances and staff will not easily be released." Don noted that "PPPs can successfully work when universities appreciate the role each is playing and look at each other as partners in providing education. Otherwise, the competitor spirit may make universities unwilling to help each other." The observation by Don tallies with what Cheng (2009) had observed, which is that public universities should view private universities as partners in education provision.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In light of the current financial challenges facing higher education institutions globally, the use of PPPs as a collaborative effort between private institutions and governments has emerged as a potential solution to alleviate financial burdens. However, based on our findings and analysis, we conclude that: (1) private universities in Uganda have only minimally embraced PPPs as a means of mobilising financial resources, despite the significant possibilities available for enhancing their financial sustainability through collaborative efforts with the government; and (2) the conditions necessary for private universities to effectively mobilise resources through PPPs are not highly favourable. These conditions include the absence of a robust legal framework, insufficient government support, limited willingness among private universities to partner with the government, and challenges related to transparency, accountability, partnering skills and the economic environment. Thus, we recommend that: (1) Private universities in Uganda should actively embrace PPPs and proactively seek partnerships with the government. Possibilities exist within the country to address financial gaps and leverage additional resources that can enhance their contribution to national development. (2) The government should demonstrate its commitment to private universities by providing various forms of support. This support can include allocating funding to private universities, even if in modest amounts, offering subsidies, and facilitating access to loans for private institutions. Additionally, public universities can collaborate with private universities by sharing some of their services and facilities that are in short supply within the private sector. (3) To facilitate successful PPPs, a well-defined legal framework should be established to legitimise the position of private institutions in higher education. Clear and comprehensive regulations can govern the collaboration between private and public universities. (4) Private universities must be willing to partner with the government by enhancing the transparency and accountability of their operations. They should establish transparent systems and provide timely and accurate accountability for all their activities. (5) Universities in Uganda should recognise and appreciate the roles each plays in providing higher education. Public universities should view private universities as partners in education provision, thus fostering a collaborative environment that benefits the entire higher education sector.

Limitations and Further Research

This study employed an interpretive approach, utilising interviews as the sole method of data collection and involving a relatively small number of participants. Consequently, the generalisability of the findings may be constrained. To enhance the robustness of future research in this domain, it is recommended to embrace methodologies that encompass larger and more diverse participant samples as well as a broader spectrum of data collection methods. Moreover, expanding the research horizon to encompass a comparative analysis of PPP practices in private higher education institutions overseas could offer valuable insights and best practices. Despite these recognised limitations, this study has significantly contributed by introducing the concept of PPPs to private universities and by delving into the critical prerequisites for successful PPP initiatives. To build upon this foundation, future research should consider a range of promising avenues.

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