

## The Role and Impact of Private Higher Education Institutions on South Africa's Educational Sector: A Comprehensive Analysis



Mixo Swetness Sithole, Ph.D

Student with university of South Africa (Unisa) address Preller St, Muckleneuk, Pretoria, 0002

**ABSTRACT:** This study presents a comprehensive analysis of the role and impact of private higher education institutions on South Africa's educational sector. Private institutions have gained prominence in recent years, raising questions about their influence on the overall educational landscape. To address this, a mixed method approach was employed, combining a quantitative analysis, and a comparative analysis. Quantitative analysis examined student enrollment trends, graduation rates, and staffing in private higher education institutions, comparing them with public institutions to assess the influence of private institutions on key educational indicators. The comparative analysis on the other hand, compared the student employability and curricula in private institutions. The literature review analyzed the differences in quality, diversity student support services, leadership, and challenges of PHIEs. This comprehensive analysis contributes to understanding the complex dynamics of private institutions in South Africa's educational sector. It sheds light on their influence on educational quality, student enrollment, accessibility, and the overall educational landscape. The findings inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders, facilitating evidence-based decision-making to further enhance the educational sector in South Africa.

**KEYWORDS:** Private higher education institutions, education quality, enrollment trends, graduation rates, South Africa, Educational Sector

### INTRODUCTION

The higher education landscape of South Africa is continually evolving, with private higher education institutions (PHEIs) playing an important role. According to Stander and Herman (2017), the increasing demand for higher education in the world due to globalization and the emergence of the information economy has led to a rise in the number of private higher education institutions. Furthermore, according to Tankou Epse Nukunah et al. (2019), the number of students enrolled in both public and private institutions has risen, with no corresponding increase in the variety of resources available, resulting in a major impact on the physical infrastructure, student standard of living and the caliber of teaching and learning provided in these institutions.

According to Singh and Trustin (2022), the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions increased from 983 703 to 1 143 245 between 2010 and 2016, indicating a rise in demand for higher education in South Africa. In 2021, the total number of students increased to nearly 1.3 million with 232 915 students enrolled in the private higher education institutions (PHEIs) and the public sector accounting for the majority of the enrollment with 1 068 046 (DHET, 2021). Additionally, according to the DHET (2021), the number of higher education institutions were 342 in 2021, with 26 public higher education institutions, 124 private higher education institutions (PHEIs), 50 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVETs) colleges, 133 registered private colleges, and 9 Community Education and Training (CET) colleges. Singh and Trustin (2021) asserted that the growing disparity between the number of students eligible for postsecondary education and the number of spaces at public higher education institutions highlights the potential of the private higher education (PHE) subsector in South Africa.

As a result, higher education institutions have emerged to meet the increase demand for higher education in South Africa and as significant contributors to the country's educational sector, offering diverse academic programs and catering to a wide range of students. According to Goel (2013), private higher education institutions were established for several reasons, including the desire to expand access, provide competition to public institutions in order to enhance quality and position higher education as a key economic driver. One advantage of private higher education institutions is that they offer wide access to higher education.

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However, the rise of private higher education has raised important questions about their role and impact within the broader education system of South Africa. In other words, given that many PHEIs are essentially profit-seeking businesses, there has been a great deal of criticism and concern about various aspects of the significant growth in PHE provision, including the physical conditions, the quality of program offerings and lecturers, as well as the motivations of the institutions (Bezuidenhout et al., 2013).

This study seeks to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the role and impact of private higher education institutions on South Africa's educational sector. Through a mixed method approach comprising of a qualitative approach and a comparative analysis, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how higher education institutions shape the educational landscape and contribute to the attainment of educational goals in the country.

The significance of this analysis lies in its potential to inform policymakers, educators, students, and other stakeholders about the dynamics of private higher education and its implications for the broader educational sector. By examining various dimensions such as enrollment trends, academic quality, accessibility, affordability, and regulatory frameworks, we aim to shed light on both the opportunities and challenges presented by the growing presence of PHEIs in South Africa.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. History of higher education in South Africa

According to Mabizela (2002) private and public higher education have similar historical beginnings in South Africa. Before the government intervention through financial subsidies, post-secondary education was provided by private institutions. This made it possible for the state to take control of how institutions are administered. Private higher education dates back from the 19th century when higher education was introduced in South Africa, however, the privately established institutions were not sustained as private institutions but were taken over as public institutions due to lack of policy at the time. This was until the mid-20th century, when the first legislation was introduced, known as the Correspondence Colleges Act No. 59 of 1965 (Mabizela, 2006). After 1994, there was a growing pressure to adhere to the principles of transformation, including the admission of black people in higher education institutions, especially on the historically white institutions.

Recently, according to Jingura et al. (2022), private higher education is expanding quickly worldwide, but Africa is lagging since many African governments oppose private higher education. South Africa may be in worse shape than other African countries given that most of South Africa's private tertiary education providers are either little, profit organizations or religious organizations. However, according to Jingura et al. (2022), there are a few large private higher education institutions registered in the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, including Stadio and Advtech Ltd.

According to McKenzie (2023), private higher education institutions have emerged as a noteworthy alternative to their public equivalents, and as a result of the increased need for high-quality education and skill development. Through customized programs, workplace-integrated learning, and, most significantly, SBL, private institutions have grabbed the chance to offer creative, encouraging, and adaptable learning experiences. Furthermore, according to McKenzie (2023), PHEI enrollments have increased, rising by an astounding 59.9% between 2010 and 2015. This demand was further fueled by the Covid-19 epidemic underscoring the growing need for PHEIs' innovative and flexible learning programs.

### 2.2. Regulation of private higher education institutions in South Africa

Jingura et al. (2022) asserted that there are several methods in which the government controls the private tertiary sector. To be authorized, all private institutions must register with the DHET and re-register on a regular basis. Although this serves to shield students from questionable providers, some contend that respectable providers aren't always treated equally. According to the DHET (2023), PHEIs must first register as a private higher education institution with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) in order to have the legal authority to offer higher education programs. The purpose of the registration is to ensure that private institutions offer quality education and that the public will be protected against exploitive operators.

Furthermore, the registration will ensure that students receive qualifications that are aligned with the Higher Education Qualifications Framework and registered on the NQF. Lastly, the registration will ensure that the education system meets the goals of transforming South Africa in accordance with the government policy and legislation and ensure that private institutions comply with the Higher Education Act, 101 of 1997. According to the DHET (2023), PHEIs offer the same National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels as public institutions, that is, NQF levels 5 to 10.

According to Ellis and Steyn (2014) private higher education institutions may offer higher education if they can demonstrate that it is institutionally registered with the Department of Education, that its programs are registered with the South African Qualifications Authority on the National Qualifications Framework, and that they have fulfilled their obligation to ensure the quality of higher education

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by obtaining institutional and program accreditation. In compliance with regulatory standards, private higher education institutions are registered and classified as either NPC/not for profit or (Pty) Ltd/for-profit. These organizations include seminaries, colleges, schools, training facilities, and professional associations that provide higher education through a combination of in-person and/or online learning environments.

### **2.3. Private higher education pros and cons**

According to Tankou Epse Nukunah et al. (2019), private higher education institutions are not only meeting the increased demand for higher education by students that fail to go to public institutions, but they also offer a safer atmosphere and are more supportive than government institutions. In addition, according to Tankou Epse Nukunah et al. (2019) other advantages of private institutions include high student satisfaction, exceptional levels of student assistance, lower class sizes with greater student-lecturer engagement, and creative and adaptable learning alternatives.

However, there are some identified challenges in the private higher education institutions. According to Teixeira et al (2012) private institutions tend to concentrate on a small number of disciplines and have fewer specialties overall. In addition, according to Teixeira et al. (2012), private institutions are associated with higher cost and poor quality. Tankou Epse Nukunah et al. (2019) further argued that the increase in competition in the private education sector due to the rise in a number of entrants in the market causes a lot of people to doubt the legitimacy of these institutions.

### **2.4. Empirical review**

Teixeira and Amaral (2001), analyzed the effects of privatization on diversity in higher education in Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. The study also provided a detailed examination of the private higher education in the selected regions to determine how far privatization of higher education stimulated diversity. The study results indicated that the private sub sector has promoted limited and partial diversification in each case. Furthermore, the study though the private institutions were established to satisfy the increasing demand for higher education, they have focused on teaching, they undertook little to no research and appeared to be of lower quality than the old institutions.

The study by De Cohen (2003) explored the dimensions and impact of private education expansion in Argentina. The study placed the study findings in a comparative and theoretical framework. The study found that despite the growth in the number of private higher education institutions, the public sector remained the dominant provider of university education. according to the study results, private institutions do not account for a larger share of university enrollment, even though they are increasing in number and are training a number of students. However, according to the study, private institutions have developed specific areas, including graduate level training and in urban areas. Additionally, PHEIs offer elite alternatives to prestigious public institutions.

Zain et al. (2013) analyzed the factors influencing student's decision in choosing private institutions of higher education in Malaysia. The study used a sample of 373 students comprising of students from secondary schools and questionnaire with 46 statements was distributed randomly to the respondents. Factor analysis was performed to decide on the number of factors underlying the influence on student choices and the Structural Equation Modelling was then used to examine the variables and the fitness of the model. The study results showed a positive effect of perception and promotion on student's choice of private higher education. The results also showed a significant positive effect of perception on influence and promotion on influence.

Yirdaw (2016) examined the quality of education in private higher education institutions in Ethiopia and identified factors of leadership and governance in private institutions that may contribute to a decline in the quality of education. The study used a qualitative case study methodology where administrators in six PHEIs in Ethiopia were interviewed and their perspectives were compared with other publicly available information. The study results showed that the selected private institutions were continuously challenged to balance government requirements and stakeholder demands in an environment with underfunding, scarcity of qualified instructors, poor infrastructure, poorly qualified students, and a biased regulatory environment. In addition, the study revealed that most educational leaders believed that educational quality may be improved when addressing more effective governance.

The study by Dirkse et al. (2013) studied the impact of leadership practices on service quality in private higher education in South Africa. The study used a quantitative methodology and a cross-sectional survey research design on five campuses of a prominent PHE provider across South Africa. The study literature suggested that leadership positively impacts quality, specifically, service quality. According to the study, principals at private higher education institutions have an influence on the quality of service offered to students. Furthermore, the study findings indicated a strong positive linear correlation between leadership practices of principals and the service quality at these institutions. the empirical results of the study therefore, complemented the existing literature by emphasizing on the positive impact of leadership on service quality in PHEIs.

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Stander and Herman (2017) studied the barriers and challenges that private higher education institutions face in managing quality assurance in South Africa using a qualitative method. The study identified three main categories of the challenges that private higher education institutions face when managing quality assurance. The first challenge was resources, such as financial and physical resources. Capacity development in terms of roles and responsibilities, academic leadership and development and research was the second identified obstacle. The last obstacle identified was program design including the curriculum design.

Kruss (2002) aimed to understand the private higher education landscape in South Africa by examining qualitative data from 15 private higher education institutions in South Africa and used theories from the 1980s research of the private sector in developing countries. The study argued that most private providers cater to the need for different education which includes specialized intermediate-level vocational higher training in specialized fields, aiming at increasing access to employment prospects in South Africa.

Studies focusing on customer satisfaction in private higher education institutions in South Africa includes the study by Bezuidenhout and Jager (2014). The study analyzed customer satisfaction at private higher education institutions in South Africa using a quantitative survey of 600 full-time students at three private higher education institutions. The study applied an important-performance analysis (IP) of 45 qualities and created a comparison IP matrix. The IP analysis found a negative gap between performance and importance related to the qualities. The study also highlighted important areas for strategic consideration for each of the three selected PHEIs aiming at assisting management to enhance the services they provide.

The study by Schwartzman 2002 provided a comparative perspective on public and private higher education in Latin America and South Africa. The study examined the impact of private sector on access, equity, extension work, research, and the provision of educated manpower for the new economy. The study also analyzed the issues of regulation and convergence. The study concluded that the private sector plays a useful role, however, it cannot replace public institutions. The study further confirmed that there is some convergence between the public and the private sector, however, they will continue to co-exist and perform different functions.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The study employs a mixed method approach which comprises of a quantitative analysis, specifically using a correlation approach to compare the enrollment trends, graduation rates and employment and staffing of private higher education with the public institutions in South Africa. According to Winston-Salem State University (n.d), correlation methodology makes use of statistical data to assess the strength of a relationship between two or more variables. Relationships between and among various facts are sought after and interpreted in this kind of design. While this kind of study will identify trends and patterns in the data, it does not analyze the data in a way that demonstrates the reasons for the patterns it has seen. This kind of observational research is not based on cause and effect. Furthermore, according to WSSU (n.d), the variables, their relationships, and their distributions are only detected and examined in their natural environment, they are not altered in any way.

In addition to the quantitative methodology, the study also conducts a comparative analysis on student employability and the curricula of private institutions, compared with public institutions. According to Shahrokh and Miri (2019) in comparative studies, researchers compare cases to each other, construct quantitative comparisons using statistical methods, and evaluate covariation by comparing the values of the cases on relevant variables to average values.

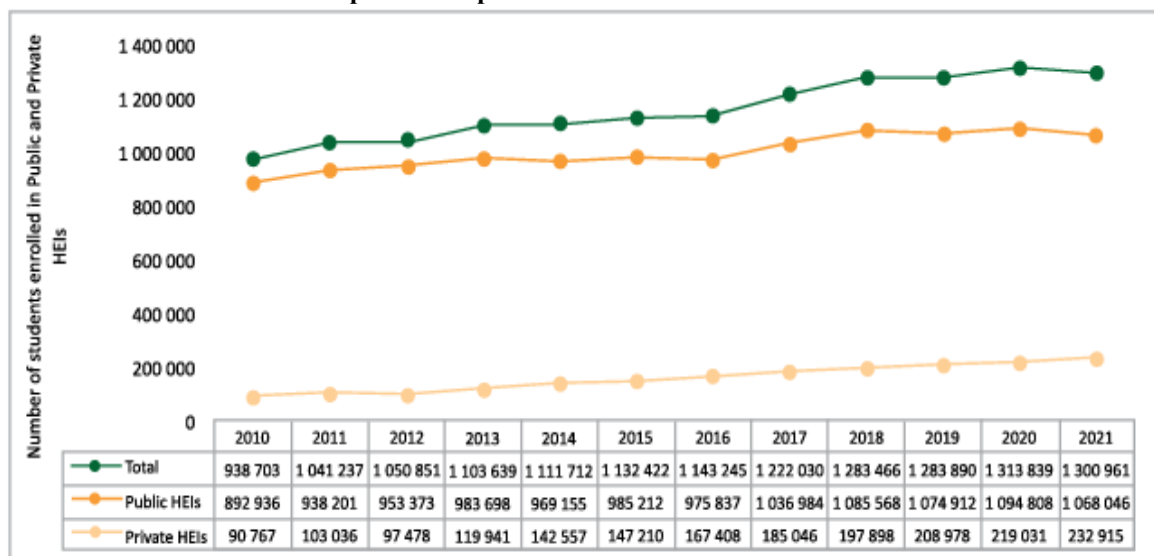
### **4. STUDY RESULTS**

#### **4.1. Enrollment trends**

The enrollment trends in both the public and private higher education institutions in South Africa are provided and discussed in the following tables and figures.

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Figure 4.1: Number of students enrolled in public and private HEIs 2010-2021



Source: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023

The figure above shows the number of students that enrolled in both private and public higher education institutions between 2010 to 2021 in South Africa with the public institutions accounting for the highest enrollment rates over the years. However, the data shows a significant increase in enrollments in private higher education institutions between 2020-2021, whilst there was a decline in public institutions.

More specifically, the tables below show the enrollment trends in PHEIs by gender and by qualification type.

Table 4.1: Number students enrolled in PHEIs by Gender 2011-2021

Year	Female	% of total	Male	% of total	Unspecified	% of total	Total
2011	54 160	52.6%	48 876	47.4%	0	0.0%	103 036
2012	53 774	55.2%	43 704	44.8%	0	0.0%	97 478
2013	64 335	53.6%	55 606	46.4%	0	0.0%	119 941
2014	73 776	51.8%	65 431	45.9%	3 350	2.3%	142 557
2015	80 532	54.7%	66 516	45.2%	162	0.1%	147 210
2016	91 493	54.7%	73 801	44.1%	2 114	1.3%	167 408
2017	105 983	57.3%	77 754	42.0%	1 309	0.7%	185 046
2018	115 106	58.2%	82 347	41.6%	445	0.2%	197 898
2019	122 021	58.4%	86 037	41.2%	920	0.4%	208 978
2020	131 149	59.9%	86 721	39.6%	1 161	0.5%	219 031
2021	141 751	60.9%	89 485	38.4%	1 679	0.7%	232 915

Source: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023

The table above shows the number of enrollments by gender in PHEIs of South Africa. The data above shows that more female students prefer the PHEIs than the male students. In other words, the number of female students in PHEIs are more than the number of male students throughout the years between 2011 and 2021.

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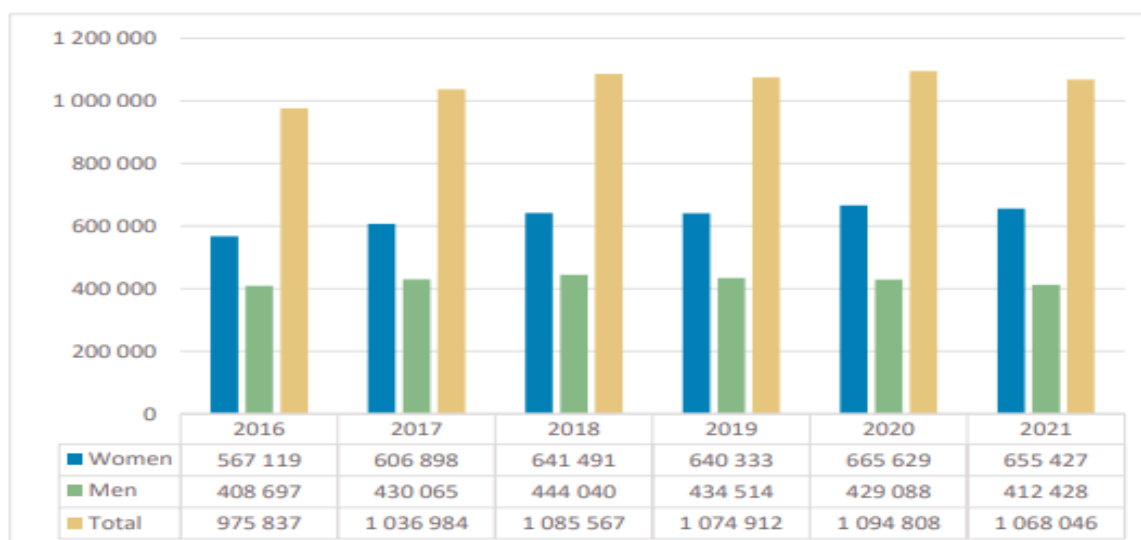
Table 4.2: Number of students enrolled in PHEIs by qualification type 2018-2021

Year	Higher Certificate (120-Credits)	Advanced Certificate (120-Credits)	Diploma (240-Credits)	Diploma (360-Credits)	Advanced Diploma (120-Credits)	Postgraduate Diploma (120-Credits)	Postgraduate Certificate (120-Credits)	Bachelor's Degree (240-Credits)	Bachelor's Degree (360—Credits)	Bachelor's Degree (480-Credits)	Honours Degree (120-Credits)	Master's Degree (180-Credits)	Doctoral Degree(360-Credits)	Total
2018	34 409	3 232	6 441	55 495	2 801	6 498	0	0	66 697	10 937	4 337	6 688	363	197 898
2019	39 881	3 811	5 222	57 046	3 977	8 162	0	0	70 905	8 814	4 529	6 194	437	208 978
2020	39 189	6 579	2 999	47 785	3 678	9 906	0	249	83 715	13 447	4 974	6 097	413	219 031
2021	40 324	3 316	1 568	48 756	4 030	9 191	5 495*	569	88 874	18 640	5 513	6 225	414	232 915
Percentage contribution for 2021	17.3%	1.4%	0.7%	20.9%	1.7%	3.9%	2.4%	0.2%	38.2%	8.0%	2.4%	2.7%	0.2%	100.0%

Source: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023

The table above shows the number of enrollments in PHEIs by qualification types, from higher certificates (NQF level 5) to Doctorate Degrees (NQF level 10). The data on the table shows that PHEIs enroll higher certificates students than any other qualifications. In addition, there are very few numbers of students enrolled for NQF level 10 qualifications in PHEIs.

Figure 4.2: Headcount enrollments at public universities by gender

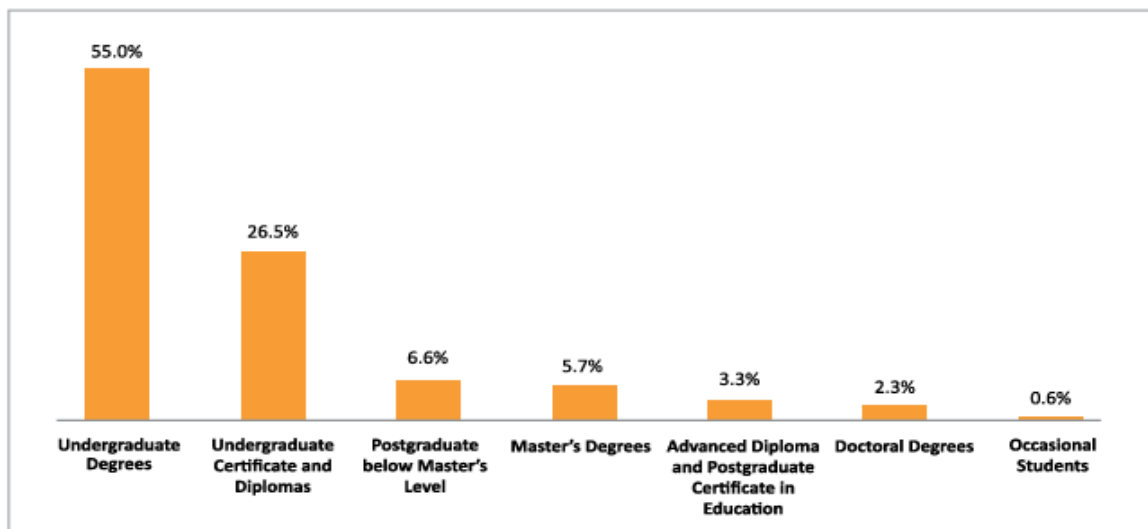


Source: Council on Higher Education, 2023

The figure indicates enrolment in public institutions by gender between 2016 to 2021. Similar to the private higher education institutions, public institutions have higher female student enrollments than male. This shows that both the public and the private sector have more female students enrolling for their higher education studies than male students over the years.

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Figure 4.3: Proportion of students enrolled in public HEIs by qualification types, 2021.



Source: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023

The figure above shows the proportion of students enrolled in public universities by qualification types. From the figure above, it is evident that public universities have more enrollments for undergraduates' qualifications (NQF level 7) than PHEIs. In other words, more students enroll for NQF level 7 qualifications in public universities than in private institutions, moreover, private institutions have higher enrollments for NQF level 5 qualifications than public universities (DHET, 2023).

## 4.2. Foreign student enrollments

The tables below will provide data on the enrollments of foreign students in both the private and public institutions in South Africa.

Table 4.3: Number of students enrolled in public HEIs by country, attendance, mode and qualification, 2021.

Country	Contact								Distance							Total contact and Distance	
	Occasional students	Undergraduate Certificates and Diplomas	Undergraduate Degrees	Advanced Diplomas and Postgraduate Certificates in Education	Postgraduate below Master's Level	Master's Degrees	Doctoral Degrees	Total Contact	Occasional students	Undergraduate Certificates and Diplomas	Undergraduate Degree	Advanced Diplomas and Postgraduate Certificates in Education	Postgraduate below Master's Level	Master's Degrees	Doctoral Degrees		Total Distance
Zimbabwe	41	422	4 329	103	681	2 145	1 978	9 699	46	668	4 955	209	1 164	533	311	7 886	17 585
Democratic Republic of the Congo	6	1 390	611	206	138	311	108	2 770	12	109	216	44	83	67	18	549	3 319
Namibia	13	37	700	15	223	646	241	1 875	12	142	410	128	238	96	45	1 071	2 946
Nigeria	9	109	297	19	117	565	1 406	2 522	6	27	228	18	86	82	97	544	3 066
Lesotho	9	223	750	51	217	485	255	1 990	7	39	232	18	173	41	18	528	2 518
Swaziland/Eswatini	4	154	747	32	103	269	177	1 486	6	51	391	49	204	68	22	791	2 277
Zambia	4	32	320	6	50	245	241	898	2	22	154	2	31	26	25	262	1 160
Botswana	4	10	196	2	59	274	173	718	2	11	202	5	36	35	29	320	1 038
Kenya	35	9	172	4	46	228	375	869	0	2	36	2	18	25	40	123	992
Ghana	3	11	28	8	23	186	521	780	2	8	48	10	25	22	189	304	1 084
Other foreign nationalities	944	765	2 384	141	534	2 144	2 207	9 119	18	155	856	60	270	252	591	2 202	11 321
Total	1 072	3 162	10 534	587	2 191	7 498	7 682	32 726	113	1 234	7 728	545	2 328	1 247	1 385	14 580	47 306

Source: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023

In 2021, there were 47 306 foreign national students enrolled in public higher education institutions, accounting for 4.4% of all enrolment (1 068 046). Zimbabwe accounted for 37.2% or 17 585 of the foreign national students, while Kenya (2.1% or 992), Botswana (2.2% or 1 038), and Ghana (2.3% or 1 084) had the lowest percentage of students (DHET,2023).

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**Table 4.4: Number of foreign students enrolled in PHEIs by country and qualification type, 2021.**

Country	Qualification type														Total
	Higher Certificate	Advanced Certificate	Diploma (240-Credits)	Diploma (360-Credits)	Advanced Diploma	Postgraduate Certificate	Postgraduate Diploma	Bachelor's Degree (240-Credits)	Bachelor's Degree (360-Credits)	Bachelor's Degree (480-Credits)	Honours Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degrees		
Zimbabwe	438	16	22	344	16	54	274	3	1 602	80	128	121	20	3 118	
Namibia	701	8	5	545	19	22	194	143	1 857	22	284	235	9	4 044	
Eswatini	104	6	1	24	5	1	67	0	863	15	37	36	1	1 160	
Lesotho	58	3	4	27	5	0	11	1	165	5	7	8	0	294	
Nigeria	23	0	1	21	3	5	28	0	106	4	13	39	5	248	
Democratic Republic of the Congo	102	3	7	54	6	0	18	0	307	20	17	12	1	547	
Botswana	40	7	0	22	3	0	20	1	194	2	11	25	3	328	
Zambia	25	3	2	17	2	2	16	0	152	4	9	26	4	262	
Kenya	15	0	10	5	2	0	6	0	87	7	5	7	3	147	
United States of America	7	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	34	4	7	10	23	88	
Other Foreign Nationalities	513	19	14	492	56	106	330	1	1 970	70	137	397	63	4 168	
<b>Total</b>	<b>2 026</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>1 551</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>965</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>7 337</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>916</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>14 404</b>	

Source: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023

According to DHET (2023) there were 14,404 foreign national students enrolled in PHEIs in 2021, that is, 6.2% of all students enrolled at PHEIs. Namibia accounted for 28.1% (or 4 044) of the student body, with Zimbabwe (21.6% or 3 118) and Eswatini (8.1% or 1 160) following. The United States of America accounted for the least percentage of pupils (0.6% or 88).

From the information above, public institutions account for more enrollments of foreign students in South Africa, with more students from Zimbabwe. However, the PHEIs account for more Namibian students with Zimbabwean students being the second highest. Additionally, PHEIs also accounts for about 0,6% of students from United States of America, with none at the public institutions.

### 4.3. Graduate rates

The tables and figures below provide data on graduations rates from public versus private higher education institutions.

**Table 3.5: Number of graduates in public HEIs by gender, field of study and qualification type, 2021**

Qualification type	Female					Male					Unspecified gender	Total number of graduates
	SET	Business and Management	Education	Other Humanities	Total	SET	Business and Management	Education	Other Humanities	Total		
Undergraduate Certificates and Diplomas	8 579	17 214	5 138	11 209	42 140	7 830	8 157	784	4 814	21 584	1	63 725
Undergraduate Degree	16 872	10 280	16 409	20 478	64 039	14 457	7 218	5 623	8 838	36 136	24	100 199
Advanced Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate in Education	1 524	4 478	5 382	1 410	12 794	1 338	2 292	2 567	743	6 940	3	19 737
Postgraduate below Master's Level	4 844	6 899	2 938	5 897	20 579	3 566	5 003	1 085	1 976	11 629	18	32 226
Master's Degrees	3 497	1 495	504	2 150	7 646	3 116	1 503	249	1 281	6 148	2	13 796
Doctoral Degrees	814	168	206	456	1 643	974	261	173	523	1 930	1	3 574
<b>Total</b>	<b>36 130</b>	<b>40 534</b>	<b>30 577</b>	<b>41 599</b>	<b>148 841</b>	<b>31 279</b>	<b>24 433</b>	<b>10 481</b>	<b>18 174</b>	<b>84 367</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>233 257</b>

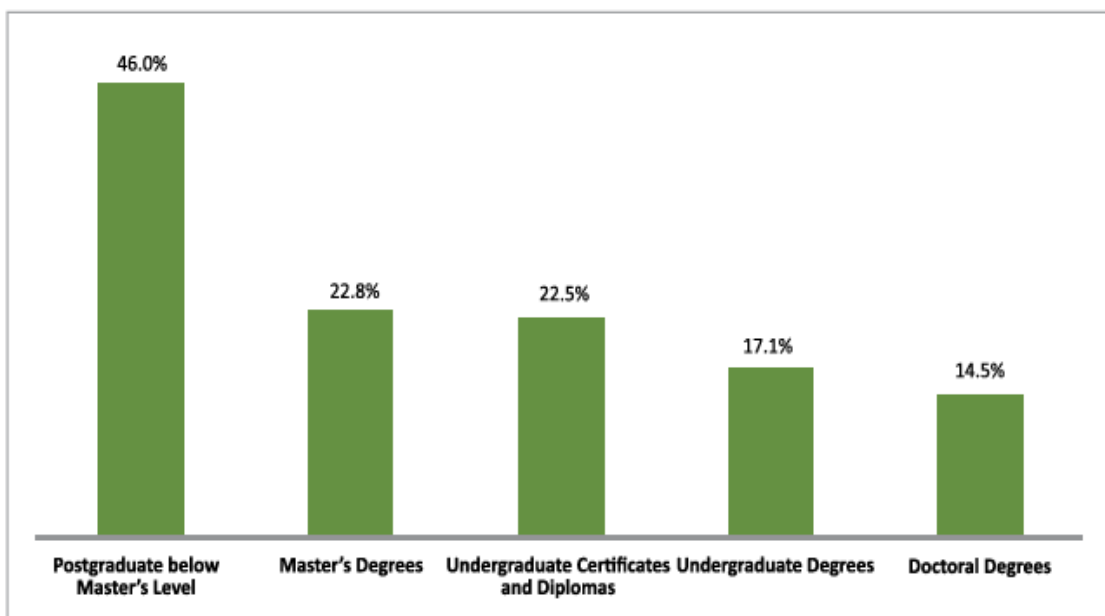
Source: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023

The table above shows the graduation rates in public institutions by qualification type in 2021. According to DHET (2023), 36.2% (84 367) of the graduates were men, while over two thirds (63.8% or 148 841) were women. The biggest gender differences were shown in undergraduate degrees (27 903) and undergraduate certificates and diplomas (20 556). However, there were 287 more male PhD graduates than female graduates.



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Figure 4.4: Average graduation rates in public HEIs by qualification type 2021



Source: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023

From the figure above, Doctorate degrees had the lowest graduation rate (14.5%) and postgraduate degrees below master’s level had the highest (46.0%). The University of Venda (75.2%), Rhodes University (75.4%), and University of Mpumalanga (84.1%) all had high graduation rates for postgraduate studies below the master’s level (DHET, 2023).

Table 4.6: Number of graduates from PHEIs, by qualification type, 2018-2021

Year	Higher Certificate	Advanced certificate	Diploma (240-Credits)	Diploma (360-Credits)	Advanced Diploma	Postgraduate Diploma	Postgraduate Certificate	Bachelor's Degree (240 Credits)	Bachelor's Degree (360-Credits)	Bachelor's Degree (480-Credits)	Honours Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree	Total
2018	7 790	393	1 905	7 297	891	1 008	0	0	11 068	1 207	1 394	988	31	33 972
2019	11 197	1 032	1 624	8 264	1 137	2 757	0	0	12 817	874	1 226	1 575	23	42 526
2020	13 134	1 739	1 543	10 227	1 138	2 500	0	0	12 704	1 059	1 616	1 383	42	47 085
2021	14 161	1 430	1 252	8 394	2 302	4 607	2 035	14	14 845	1 290	2 406	1 772	43	54 551
Percentage contribution for 2021	26.0%	2.6%	2.3%	15.4%	4.2%	8.4%	3.7%	0.0%	27.2%	2.4%	4.4%	3.2%	0.1%	100.0%

Source: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023

From the table above, there were 54 551 PHEI graduates in 2021, a 15.9% rise or 7 466 more than the 47 085 graduates in 2020 (DHET,2023). According to DHET (20223), The highest percentage of graduates from these programs held a bachelor’s degree with 360 credits (27.2% or 14 845) and was followed by a Higher Certificate (26.0% or 14 161), a Diploma with 360 credits (15.4% or 8 394), a Postgraduate Diploma (8.4% or 4 607), an honors degree (4.4% or 2 406), and a Postgraduate Certificate (3.7% or 2 035). Doctorates were earned by the fewest graduates (0.1% or 43).The statistics from the graduation rates between public institutions and private institutions show that PHEIs had higher graduations in undergrad qualifications (NQF level 5-7) with less graduates in postgraduate studies. The public institution had the largest number of graduates from postgrad qualifications in 2021. This data supports the enrollment rates previously, which showed less enrolments in postgraduate studies in PHEIs than in public institutions.

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## 4.4. Employment rates and types

Table 4.7: Number of staff in PHEIs by employment period and personnel categories, 2021

Employment Period	Academic/Research	Service Staff	Support Staff	Total
Full-time	4 197	1 012	5 109	10 318
Part-time	4 561	97	881	5 539
Total	8 758	1 109	5 990	15 857

Source: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023

According to Table 3.7, there were 15, 857 full- and part-time employees working in PHEIs in 2021. Of this total, 34.9%, or 5 539, were appointed on a part-time basis, while 65.1%, or 10 318, were full-time employees. Of the workers, 8 588 (or 55.2%) worked in academics and research, while 5 990 (or 37.8%) were employed in support roles (DHET,2023).

Private higher education institutions contribute to the employment of South Africa, with up to 15 857 people employed in PHEIs as both full time and parttime and in support and academic positions. This leads to a decline in the unemployment rate of the country.

## 4.5. Student employability and curricula

According to Somerville (2020), the importance of a job in enabling a better future has driven increased demand for higher education, fueled by high expectations of the potential of a qualification to realize students' aspirations. However, when graduates reach the labor market, they face impediments anchored on variables beyond the control of higher education. Rapidly evolving technology is transforming and impacting on all industries. Higher education plays an instrumental role in producing graduates as human capital whose value lies in increasing productivity for economic gain. In addition, according to Somerville (2020), graduates believe the relevant and useful programs offered by private universities sufficiently equipped them to work. PHEIs provide their graduates skills, expertise, and easy access to business networks.

McKenzie (2023) asserts that conventional teaching approaches, which are used in the majority of public universities, frequently place an emphasis on content and emphasize learning through teacher-led lectures. While information is unquestionably vital, some contend that students' development of practical and adaptive abilities is even more crucial. Conventional educational approaches frequently immerse students in theory without providing them with the tools necessary to apply that information in a variety of settings, such as the job. This brings forth the essence of Skills based learning offered by PHEIs. Through practical application and participatory, student-led learning develops skills. This method is crucial for equipping students to successfully navigate various settings and solve difficulties since it differs from traditional, knowledge-centric strategies.

Sigh and Trustin (2019) also argued that majority from their study agreed that private higher education institutions are more creative in their product design and curriculum than public universities, and they are also more successful at bridging the gap between school and higher education. according to Tankou Epse Nukunah et al. (2019), PHEIs have also expanded their teaching strategies to meet the demands of government institutions, like the Bankseta, in order to increase their competitive edge.

## 5. SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study used a mixed comparative method to analyze the impact of private higher education institutions in South Africa by analyzing the enrollment trends, graduations rates, staffing in private higher education and the student employability in comparison to the public institutions. The study results are discussed as follows:

Enrollment Trends- the study results show that, even though public higher education institutions have higher enrollment rates, more students increasingly show preference to the private institutions. this has led to more students enrolling with PHEIs in South Africa, up to 232 915 by 2021. According to the SAPHE (2023), private higher education institutions recently account for about 18% of total student enrollment in South Africa. Furthermore, there has been an increase in enrollments for foreign students in South Africa in both the public and private institutions from countries like Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Namibia. Public institutions do account for the majority of the foreign students, especially students from Zimbabwe, however, there are other foreign students found in PHEIs with Namibian students being the higher number.

Graduation Rates- the data shows an increase in the number of graduates in South Africa annually from both public and private institutions. The public institutions have the highest number of students graduating postgraduate studies while more students graduate

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with higher certificate qualifications from private higher education institutions with less students graduating postgraduate qualifications in private institutions.

Staffing in PHEIs- private higher education institutions contribute to the reduction of unemployment in South Africa, employing up to 15 857 people employed in the private institutions.

Student employability and curricula- study results show that private higher education offer a more skills-based learning that allows students to gain workplace skills and training that the traditional and theoretical learning offered in public institutions. Private higher education institutions provide the students with skills expertise as well as ease access to the business markets, thus allowing them an opportunity to gain work experience while in school.

### 6. CONCLUSIONS

Private higher education institutions continue to play a vital role in South Africa's education sector. By providing innovative education and increased access to higher education, private institutions continue to fill the existing gap in the higher education sector and to meet the increasing demand for higher education in the country. These institutions offer skills-based learning that equips students with expertise and skills that prepare them for the world of work and offer accessibility and flexibility in higher education. However, there is still a big concern in literature on the contribution of private higher education in the overall education sector. This includes concerns on the quality of education offered in PHEIs. Other concerns are their contributions to academic research. More especially, according to SAPHE (2023), it is reasonable to assume that the current state of research at PHEIs in South Africa is still rather limited, even though there are no recent figures available detailing the research outputs of PHEIs. However, the PHEIs sector can greatly increase its future contribution to national research as it grows and matures, especially as PHEIs are recognized for their relevance and strong industry linkages.

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