



Equity and Equality: The Poor and Higher Education Accessibility

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ABSTRACT

The role of education in achieving socio-economic and sustainable development of nations is paramount. Therefore, Education For All is one of the Millennium Development Goals adopted by the United Nations and its member countries. In several member countries, strategies and policies have been adopted to achieve this goal. These include: a reduction in school costs through providing universal primary and secondary education and privatization/liberalization of the education sector including higher education. This study focuses on whether equity and equality reflected in education laws and policies, which target students from low-income families accessing funds to attain particularly higher education, are realised. The study finds that these are mere rhetoric because of biased financial support and discriminative learning environment. The study recommends that government should come up with schemes that raise household income, provide for all equally, and allocate funds to higher education institutions basing on number of students and faculty.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the new millennium, the Uganda government put eradicating extreme poverty and hunger as its major target. Government now claims that the goal has been achieved because between 1990 and 2015, half the proportion of people whose income was less than one dollar a day has been enabled to earn more than that. The last national head count of 2009 indicates the National poverty rate at 24.5% [1]. Uganda's unemployment rate was 4.2% in 2009/2010 [2]. Considering the national population growth, the number of unemployed persons is rather low in Uganda because the participants in the labour force are obligated to engage in some work even for a few hours in order for them and their families to subsist. It does not mean, though, that their work is good enough to pull them above the poverty line. Government fully understands the implications of these figures and sets up measures to improve them. The main avenue is education. Globally, education is conceived as a principle means for families and children to advance. The role of education in achieving socio-economic and sustainable development of nations is paramount. Education for All (EFA) is one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) adopted by the United Nations (UN) and its member countries, including Uganda [3-6]. According to the commitments made at the 2000 World Education Forum that was held in Dakar, Senegal, disparities in education were supposed to have been eliminated by 2005, and at all levels by 2015 [7,8]. In Uganda, as in several other countries, strategies and policies have been adopted to achieve this goal. These include, among others, a reduction in school costs through providing universal primary and secondary education and privatization/liberalization of the education sector including higher education, and there has been some progress in increasing enrolment at all levels of education in Uganda and other countries [9-11,8]. Ugandan education structure is 7-6-3 i.e. primary, secondary and higher institution. There is remarkable success in ensuring the right to education through primary and secondary levels by providing literacy, the ability to read with understanding and write meaningfully in any language, and numeric skills. In 2009/10, the overall literacy rate was 73% among persons aged 10 years and above [2]. This article focuses on whether equity and equality reflected in education laws and policies, which target

students from low-income families in accessing funds to attain particularly higher education, are realised. The study finds that these are mere rhetoric because of biased financial support and discriminative learning environment. The study recommends that the government should come up with schemes that raise household income, provide for all equally, and privatise all public higher education institutions.

2. LITERATURE

Poverty poses a dilemma for liberal economic governance. Of course, poverty and inequity have always been part of free market economies. In savage economics, the dark side of capitalism is described by Blaney and Naeem [12] as the 'wound of wealth' – a wound that continues to haunt economic theory and practice. They further state that while efforts to manage global poverty since the 1940's have been constrained by liberal anxiety, the persistence of poverty remains an irritant to expert assertions that things will get better soon. The 'wound' never seems to heal, despite continued attempts to treat it.

There is no government that is concerned about the long-term welfare of its citizens that does not place a high premium on advanced education. Higher education worldwide is in a period of transition, affected by globalization, economic crisis in various countries especially developing countries, the advent of mass access, changing relationships between the university and the state, and the new technologies, among others [13]. Several people have conducted studies on financially challenged groups. This study maintains that persons with similar learning abilities should enjoy equal rights to education, but economic poverty deprives some persons of the opportunity to equal possession of educational resources, thus affecting their participation in higher education or preventing the completion of their studies. High school graduation, college enrolment, and degree completion remain strongly related to income [14].

Poverty is the key obstacle to accessing education in higher education institutions by poor students. The World Bank [1] defines poverty as "the economic condition in which people lack sufficient income to obtain certain minimal levels of health services, food, housing, clothing and

education generally recognized as necessary to ensure an adequate standard of living.” Poverty is of two categories. Absolute poverty is the complete lack of resources to sustain life; it is the deprivation of basic human needs, which commonly include food, water, sanitation, security, clothing, shelter, health care and education. Relative poverty, on the other hand, refers to the inadequate income when compared to the average standards of living. As such, relative poverty implies that the individual has the ability to sustain his or her basic needs, but may lack the resources to engage in various social activities such as acquisition of education.

According to UNESCO [15], to study is the process of acquiring knowledge and imparting knowledge through teaching and learning so as to achieve a certain objective in order to increase or add to the body of knowledge. Access to education is the possibility and ability of students to enrol for different levels of education. Access to study refers to entry, to equal opportunity to take part or share in the system, and to the output/outcome of entry and participation, pertaining to equality of educational results or gains. In general, therefore, educational access denotes entry, retention and completion. In Uganda, the growing poverty and income inequality have had a negative effect on education as low-income groups increasingly withdraw from accessibility to study in higher education institutions.

2.1 Higher Education Concept

Higher Education (HE) is the postsecondary level whereby one pursues a certifiable course with a diploma or degree award. Uganda registers a variety of higher education institutions. The higher education subsector in Uganda is composed of two tiers: degree awarding universities and other tertiary institutions commonly referred to as the technical subsector, which offers diplomas and certificates. Institutions in both categories are further categorized into public and private. Public or state-funded institutions are established by an act of parliament; and the private institutions are chartered, licensed, or unlicensed [16]. According to NCHE report [16], there are five public universities, 29 private universities and 151 other tertiary institutions in Uganda. The means of accessibility to higher education are: direct entry, diploma holder’s entry, and mature age entry, among others, to provide the opportunity to formal schooling.

HE is universally viewed as essential, not only to economic prosperity in increasingly globalized, knowledge-driven economies, but also to healthy democracies and civil societies with regard to their economic development, and to individual aspirations for intellectual fulfilment, expanding life options, and the economic rewards that accompany greater productivity. The private monetary benefit is in terms of enabling the graduate employee to earn higher wages, and non-monetary benefits of having broader career choices as well as enhancing their abilities to facilitate their children for better education opportunities. Accessing postsecondary school education changes one’s economic status and self-esteem, and empowers one’s critical thinking and creativity; it also facilitates one’s commitment to civic obligations [17-19]. Not only the cycle of intergenerational poverty is broken through education, but it also enables the poor to access jobs so as to support their families, and it is a promising avenue to financial independence [20,21]. Economically, the higher an educated person earns, the more the tax revenue for the country, and the less the dependency on government finances. Education brings more awareness to the person in adjusting to as well as creating new technological tools and skills [22,23] note that education is a public good because a well-educated citizenry benefits all; it is also a private good because it develops one’s mental, economic and social status. Since a well-educated and economically able citizen is a lesser liability to the nation, government as a public beneficiary has more responsibility than the private beneficiary in providing the citizen with higher education.

At the private level, an individual’s positional attainment becomes a great deal. One strives to attain the possible desirable level of training. Various achievers vis-à-vis various attainments create an imbalance of too much educated and less educated. To reduce this gulf, Adair [19] suggests that higher education should remain a democratic project to enable social change and foster economic equity. The failure to provide access to education generates failure in the labour market by bloating the ranks of the poorly educated. Making HE more accessible eases overcrowding at the bottom of the labour market where there are more uneducated. Those with HE certification would be enabled to seek jobs at their level of education, and the uneducated would have fewer competitors for jobs at their level. Therefore, providing quality education and

equality in education are the means to achieve this [24].

2.2 Law and Policy: Contextualisation

The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda [25] recognises in Article 30 that, "All persons have a right to education." Therefore, in Chapter 18 (i) it states that, "The State shall promote free and compulsory basic education." Basic refers to literacy and numeric skills. Article (ii) of the same chapter states, "The State shall take appropriate measures to afford every citizen equal opportunity to attain the highest educational standard possible." The Education Policy Review Commission, which was appointed by the Minister of Education in 1987, recommended, and later in the Government White Paper on Education [26] endorsed by government in article 30, that, "Government makes education available to all citizens of Uganda irrespective of their age, sex, race, religion, or region to which they belong." Government further endorsed in article 455 that, "the needs of the special groups of ... the socially disadvantaged and those in backward areas and social groups," need to be attended to. Government assumed that the universalization and democratization of education would enhance alleviation of poverty.

In order to reduce the hardships, some strategies have been put in place by the government and some universities, both public and private, to extend services to rural places and universities have tried to open campuses in different places basically for students from far areas to access education close to home. Due to poverty, many students who finish secondary education in their various districts of origin far away from the capital city end up pulling out when they calculate the indirect and direct costs to be incurred and realise they cannot afford. However, if higher education were extended to them, it would enable them to easily access the education services. That is why both government and private universities such as Makerere University and Bugema University respectively have campuses in different parts of the country. However, in spite of universities opening various campuses in a bid to bring education closer to the people, proceeding to higher education (HE) remains a bottle neck to many.

Uganda's higher education system suffers from a serious financial crisis and inequitable accessibility for lower socioeconomic status students. In March 2005, the Ministry of

Education announced that government had decided to recast university sponsorship in favour of programs critical to national development such as law, medicine, engineering and so on. That policy increased the divide between the poor and the rich in accessing higher education [27]. Currently, only 18% of the more than 70,000 students in public universities are government supported and most of them are from rich families [15]. Due to the above factor, higher education tends to be accessed disproportionately by children of those who are financially well off and well educated and who share the sometimes "proper" cultural or political affiliations [18]. Funding higher education in Uganda is gaining less government input and weighing heavier on private input. The soaring costs of HE and dwindling public funding have made HE a road hard to walk by many economically disadvantaged. Despite getting the required principle passes, through hard work to qualify for entry to HE, many from low-income background fail to make it due to finances. Even among those who succeed to join, some fail to complete. Some decide to combine part time work and study to earn the tuition, and, in the process, many become fatigued, which gradually affects their academic performance and eventually leads to their dropping out. Others continually seek dead semesters or years during the course to embark on earning for the subsequent periods while others opt for part-time study. They end up staying long on a course. As Smith [28] and Long [29] note, for many low-income students, some of whom are the first in their families to attend college, navigating the channels of gaining funding for higher education can be challenging; many lack guidance at home and may not easily access guidance from elsewhere. Access to higher education is highly inequitable, since gender, socio-economic status, and region affect the level of participation [30]. This has hindered many people, who have very good potential, from accessing higher education.

There are so many programs which have been put in place by both the government and private organizations to fight poverty and also increase accessibility to study for poverty stricken people.

In the effort to make HE accessible to all, government has set up loans to be borrowed by students from poor families [28]. The government of Uganda, in conjunction with Makerere University, over the years, has put in place schemes to support poor students. These include, but are not limited to, the needy students

scheme which aims at facilitating the disadvantaged within the admitted student body through provision of special allowances; the affirmative action, which caters for the disadvantaged at entry; affirmative action as an incentive for biological children of staff members to motivate the latter and ensure staff retention in the face of inadequate salaries; the sponsorship of talented sportsmen and women in a bid to strengthen sports in the country; and, the most recent intervention, the Students Loan Scheme. It was set up in 2013 in order "to provide financing to Ugandan students who have qualified for higher education in recognized institutions of higher learning but are unable to support themselves financially." The Students Loan Scheme (SLS) was meant "to address the problem of inequitable access to higher education given the large number of dropouts due to inability to meet the costs of funding education by many of the Ugandan citizens." However, it entails a preference, in that "the approved courses to be granted students loan are [all] science disciplines" [31].

3. THEORETICAL BASIS

Koski and Reich [23] aver that horizontal equity is equal treatment of all irrespective of their need, and vertical equity is about recognising and providing more resources to the disadvantaged to overcome their disadvantages. While GWPoE article 30 is focused on the former by availing education to every Ugandan irrespective of differences and need, article 455 leans to the latter. It seeks out special groups of the 'socially disadvantaged'. Policies which target resources to the needy are equity minded. Such policies seek to treat people equally in accessing education beginning with admission to institutions, retention and completion [23].

Therefore, in the context of the Students Loan Scheme, if government is committed to vertical equity, how are low-income students who wish to pursue humanity based disciplines going to benefit from the scheme meant for equitable access to HE? Equity and equality become purely rhetoric, as Koski and Reich observe, when policies meant to target the disadvantaged instead discriminate against some of them. The trend of granting loans to science students only is not only likely to promote students' (and society's) preference of sciences and negative attitude towards humanity disciplines, but also to widen the gap between the more educated and the less educated. The low income students who

are humanities endowed will certainly miss out from benefiting from the scheme meant to provide equitable access to HE. Koski and Reich's positional good can only be justifiably striven for if there are policies that enable the less advantaged to access resources that raise them to an equal competitive level. If, by normal trend, the more educated one is, the easier for them to access better paying employment, then the gap between the poor and the rich will continue to widen. The inequity trend of the students' loan scheme may not solve the problem of unemployment among the educated and the problem of dire poverty in the country.

4. METHODS

In order to delve deeper into the notion of poverty and accessibility to study in higher education institutions, a field study was carried out. A mixed methods approach was used whereby a cross-sectional survey was carried out on randomly selected students and semi-structured interviews were carried out on purposively selected students. The interest was mainly on students in higher education institutions in 2014/2015. This would enable reaching the voices of the new students and the continuing students sharing experiences about their financial enablers at entry and during study. Therefore, students in one public (code named MkU) and one private (code named NdU) HE institutions were our study cohort. A cross-section of 50 students per institution, 100 from both, were randomly picked to respond to some survey questions meant to ascertain the impact of family income and their access to study at HE institutions. The selected sample was not to represent all higher education institutions in Uganda but would provide applicable and transferrable findings relevant to similar situations. For a more detailed appreciation of the issue at hand, interviews were carried out on four low-income students from each institution (all code-named MkUA, MkUB, MkUC, MkUD, NdUA, NdUB, NdUC and NdUD) purposively selected based on gender (two per gender per institution), discipline (two per discipline per institution), and geographical background (one per region per institution) to explore how these factors in relation to household income may influence access to HE. The interviews aimed to provide participants with an empowering experience discussing and sharing freely their challenges as they strive to access and study in higher education. The nature of institution (public and private) was considered on the assumption that while public institutions

are government aided and have more avenues to funding low-income students, private institutions are limited in such avenues. Gender was focused on assuming that females may differ from males in appreciating the effect of household income on HE access. Participants MkUB, MkUD, NdUA, NdUB were males and MkUC, MkUA, NdUD, NdUC were females. Regional background was also a main factor in exploring how it may enable or disable low-income students to access HE. Regionally, participants MkUA and NdUB hail from the North, MkUC and NdUA belong to the Central, MkUB and NdUD belong to the East, and MkUD and NdUC are from the West. Course field was considered on the assumption that the socio-political mind-set may ease or harden HE accessibility due to availing funds to preferred courses. While MkUD, MkUA, NdUA and NdUC were science students, MkUB, MkUC, NdUB, and NdUD were humanities students.

5. FINDINGS

The survey method focused on student's gender, course field, and geographical region in relation to family monthly income. The data by survey are not intended to represent the enrolment rates of the participating institutions but the nature of participants in the study vis-à-vis accessibility to HE. The percentages of responses are reported per institution.

Table 1 details the nature of respondents per institution. In the public institution (MkU), the study accessed more males than in the private institution (NdU) which figures indicate that males in the public institution were readier than females to participate in the survey. The fact that more males than females in both institutions were involved may point to their readiness to talk about their situation than females. This has a lot to do with cross cutting socio-cultural influences. The data indicates highest figures of students hailing from low income families. Most significant are the high figures in both institutions of those who hail from the lowest income and very few in the high income range. The Central region registered the highest number of participants in the survey in both institutions whereas the North registered the lowest, followed by the West.

The survey in Table 2 indicates a higher participation of males in both universities who hail from low and lowest income backgrounds. However, females in NdU who belong to low and

lowest income ranges participated more than at MkU where more participants claimed fitting in medium range. Therefore, this may imply that households from low and lowest income range may easily afford supporting the males in private and public institutions. Nevertheless, low and lowest income households can afford supporting their female children in private than public institutions whereas those of medium and high income can sponsor their female children at public institutions.

As suggested in Table 3, at NdU more of the participants from the North and East belonged to the low income, and the Central and West presented high percentages in medium income range. At MkU, those from the North claimed highest percentage in medium range followed by the Central, whereas the West claimed the highest percentage in high income and the East maintained relatively low percentages in all income ranges. The percentages throw light on regional imbalances in household income, with the North and East having more low income families than the Central and West. However, the percentages per institution indicate that household income may not significantly affect students' choice of private or public institution.

In Table 4, the survey captured more NdU science courses participants claiming the medium income range while in MkU the highest percentage was in low income range. This may indicate that, for some reasons, low income students can afford doing science courses at public institution than at a private one. In humanities, participants in NdU and MkU represented a slightly higher percentage in low and medium income range. The implication could be that humanities in private and public institutions may be affordable by both low and medium income students.

For the data collected through interviews, a composite summary of the findings is reported in Table 5. The key questions were: "What is your understanding of poverty?" and "How does your household income affect your access to higher education?" The reasons reflect how every participant understands poverty and how their family income affects their access to HE.

The data gathered through interviews has been put into sub-themes to make it more meaningful.

Table 1. Responses per institution

Institution			Gender		Region				Course field		Family monthly income by scale			
			Male	Female	North	East	Central	West	Sciences	Humanities	Lowest (50,000-199,999)	Low (200,000-349,999)	Medium (350,000-499,999)	High (500,000-more)
NdU	No.	50	28	22	08	10	20	12	14	36	14	22	08	06
	Perc.	100%	56%	44%	16%	20%	40%	24%	28%	72%	28%	44%	16%	12%
MkU	No.	50	33	17	06	12	25	07	12	38	11	17	12	10
	Perc.	100%	66%	34%	12%	24%	50%	14%	24%	76%	22%	34%	24%	20%

Table 2. Gender percentage and family monthly income

Institution	Gender	(50,000-199,999)		(200,000-349,999)		(350,000-499,999)		(500,000-more)	
		No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.
NdU	Male	06	42.9%	10	45.4%	03	37.5%	02	33.3%
	Female	08	27.6%	12	41.4%	05	17.2%	04	13.8%
MkU	Male	08	26.6%	12	40%	05	16.7%	05	16.7%
	Female	03	15%	05	25%	07	35%	05	25%

Table 3. Regional percentage and family monthly income

Institution	Region	(50,000-199,999)		(200,000-349,999)		(350,000-499,999)		(500,000-more)	
		No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.
NdU	North	03	37.5%	05	62.5%	--	0%	--	0%
	East	02	20%	05	50%	02	20%	01	10%
	Central	04	20%	03	15%	11	55%	02	10%
	West	--	0%	--	0%	05	41.7%	07	58.3%
MkU	North	01	16.7%	02	33.3%	03	50%	--	0%
	East	03	25%	04	33.3%	04	33.3%	01	8.3%
	Central	04	16%	06	24%	10	40%	05	20%
	West	--	0%	--	0%	02	28.6%	05	71.4%

Table 4. Course field percentage and family monthly income

Institution	Course field	(50,000-199,999)		(200,000-349,999)		(350,000-499,999)		(500,000-more)	
		No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.	No.	Perc.
NdU	Sciences	02	14.3%	03	21.4%	07	50%	02	14.3%
	Humanities	05	13.9%	14	38.9%	10	27.8%	07	19.4%
MkU	Sciences	03	25%	05	41.7%	03	25%	01	8.3%
	Humanities	08	21.1%	12	31.6%	13	34.2%	05	13.1%

Table 5. Students' views on poverty and accessibility to study in higher education

Participants (students)	Gender	Region	Course field	Family monthly income range	Understanding of poverty	Effect of family income on your access to HE
NdUA	Male	Central	Sciences	Low (200,000-349,999)	Poverty means lack of basic needs	-My parents are poor to raise tuition. They keep borrowing. -At times I cannot have money for lunch. It affects lecture attendance -Without money, I fail to have hand outs and type course work.
NdUB	Male	North	Humanities	Lowest (50,000-199,999)	It is a situation where you do not have anything to support your life.	-My family has remained poor due to the long instability in the North. Despite the district quota which is accessible by few students, and mostly scientists, there are no other means to assist, and the available loan scheme is for sciences only -I walk long distances to class and get tired; it affects my concentration. -At times, I lack money to buy handouts and photocopy work. -The language barrier cannot enable me to look for little jobs to earn for my scholastic needs.
NdUC	Female	West	Sciences	High (500,000-more)	It means to be without basic needs	-When one is from a poor family, s/he faces difficulties in accessing HE. One does not settle in class because they are often asked to keep out until tuition is paid. I feel blessed because I have not had this experience.

Participants (students)	Gender	Region	Course field	Family monthly income range	Understanding of poverty	Effect of family income on your access to HE
NdUD	Female	East	Humanities	Low (200,000-349,999)	Poverty is having inadequate resources.	<p>-It is important that students from poor families opt for practical subjects that will make them employable, else poverty becomes cyclic.</p> <p>-I almost failed to join because of high tuition fees. My family sold off a piece of our land.</p> <p>-I cannot afford good but expensive hostels near the university. I commute from far. Transport costs at times affect lecture attendance.</p> <p>-Books for photocopying and handouts require a lot of money.</p> <p>-I opted for a cheaper arts course instead of a science one which I had qualified for but expensive for a privately sponsored student.</p>
MkUA	Female	North	Sciences	Low (200,000-349,999)	Poverty is where a person cannot afford the basics of life.	<p>-I qualified for a better science course but could not afford the tuition. I opted for a cheaper arts course.</p> <p>-I have a part time job to make ends meet and sometimes I miss lectures.</p> <p>-where notes are set on line at times I fail to access because I have no personal computer and I cannot stay at campus all the time.</p> <p>-I was tempted to turn to a man I did not truly love so as to cohabit with him simply for the sake of minimizing accommodation costs.</p>
MkUB	Male	East	Humanities	Lowest (50,000-199,999)	Poverty is a situation when one cannot access the basic needs.	<p>-I got good grades but did not have the science requirement for student loan. I am not sure how I will raise the tuition. Even if I manage this time, I may drop out later when I cannot pay. God knows. The affirmative entry scheme per district quota is too competitive and there is a lot of corruption. Sciences prioritized.</p> <p>-During lectures some lecturers ask for pay slips and some of us who have not paid end up missing</p>

Participants (students)	Gender	Region	Course field	Family monthly income range	Understanding of poverty	Effect of family income on your access to HE
MkUC	Female	Central	Humanities	Medium (350,000-499,999)	Poverty is the inability to access basic life needs like health and education.	lectures. -I sometimes cannot afford to buy handouts. -I feel university education does not pay and it is like a prolongation of poverty. At times I feel tempted to consider joining business life. -My family is not that badly off but I suppose poverty lowers a student's confidence and makes students to shy away from lectures especially when they fear being chased out for non-payment. -Courses in humanities are not well regarded by the President and society. Students doing them feel they are recycling poverty yet poor family income did not enable them access good preparation for sciences.
MkUD	Male	West	Science	High (500,000-more)	Poverty is lack of basic needs in life.	-I thank God that my parents can afford paying for my education. But I realize the struggle fellow students from poor families go through. Some are chased out of exams. -I live in a nearby hostel which enables me to fully utilize the university facilities e.g. library, internet access ... the nearer a hostel is to the university, the more expensive it is. Those who can't afford living in these hostels miss out on this benefit. -Buying handouts needs money and those without can't have them. -Students from poor families experience low performance because they cannot afford scholastic materials.

5.1 Poverty as a Deprivation

All participants, regardless of institution, gender, region, or financial background appreciate that poverty is a lack of basic needs. Some indicated beyond needs to lack of adequate resources that support healthy living. In other words, poverty is a deprivation. Generally, the findings revealed that the family's financial ability may influence the type of higher education institution chosen and study field.

5.2 Family Resources Strained for Higher Education Access

Participants who hail from low income families shared that to access higher education makes a far reaching impact, especially, on the family because of the involvement. NdUA's parents "keep borrowing" money from money-lenders, friends or relatives in order to support the participant at HE. In the same vein, NdUD intimated that, "I almost failed to join because of high tuition fees. My family sold off a piece of our land" in order to provide tuition.

5.3 Family Income and Retention at Higher Education

Having a poor financial background not only deprives many from buying lunch at school as NdUA claims, but also disenfranchises them from buying "hand-outs and photocopy [their] work" as shared by NdUB and NdUD. MkUA expresses further that, "Where notes are set on line at times I fail to access them because I have no personal computer, and I cannot stay at campus all the time." Participants NdUC, MkUB, MkUC, and MkUD acknowledged that due to failure to pay the tuition in time, they are occasionally chased out of the lecture rooms. This negatively affects their academic work.

5.4 Family Income and Students' Boarding Facilities in Higher Education

MkUD who belongs to a more financially able family stated that "I live in a nearby hostel which enables me to fully utilize the university facilities e.g. library, internet access ... the nearer a hostel is to the university, the more expensive it is. Those who can't afford living in these hostels miss out on this benefit." This implies that many

students from poor income families cannot afford staying in hostels near the campus or those on campus. Many commute from far where rent is affordable or where they can stay with relatives. Important to note is that the issue of long distances to campus was raised by participants NdUB, NdUD, and MkUD hailing from North, East and West respectively. It could be that those from the Central where institutions are located are easily aided by close relations who stay near campus. It points to the fact that migrating to a campus far away from home mostly affects the poor who cannot afford hostels and yet may not have close relations near campus. Some who can neither afford hostels nor manage commuting fall into MkUA's temptation "to turn to a man I did not truly love so as to cohabit with him simply for the sake of minimizing accommodation costs." Other students from poor financial background opt for part time jobs in order to make ends meet at campus. Combining work and study may eventually negatively affect their academic life.

5.5 Family Income and Academic Performance and Aspirations

Some students felt that being financially poor determined their fate. NkUC believed that students doing humanities "are recycling poverty yet poor family income did not enable them to access good preparation for sciences." Good secondary schools that have facilitated laboratories are expensive to access. Poor people can afford poor schools which have poorly equipped laboratories and no good science teachers. It can be hard for them to pass sciences well. They instead opt for humanities. This has made them lose out on "the district quota [which] is too competitive and there is a lot of corruption. Sciences prioritized" and "the available student loan scheme is for sciences only" as affirmed by NdUB and MkUB, both of whom are males, doing humanities and hailing from the lowest income families. During interviews, all females who participated, regardless of region and income, perceived arts subjects as cheaper and, therefore, easily opted for by the poor. MkUA sharing their situation particularly stated that due to high competition and corruption in accessing funding programmes, some would-be science students from poor families decide to opt "for a cheaper arts course."

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Biased Financial Support

The findings indicate a bold claim to unfair entry. UNESCO [15] lists entry as the primary issue for higher education accessibility. Entry refers to equal opportunity to enrol in higher education institutions. Accessing higher education not only changes one's economic and social status, but also shapes their critical thinking [17,18]. Therefore, it is important to regard any higher education course as contributing to these benefits. Many people have a mind-set that humanities hold a lesser value than sciences. Many participants indicated that society regards humanities as equal to poverty, and students pursue them simply to earn a higher education certificate but not to get out of poverty. This negative attitude refutes researchers' claim that any higher education attainment is an avenue to financial independence [20,21]. These researchers are right in that every course has enormous financial and social benefits if well applied in society. Any course of study can make the graduate more practical, critical and relevant to society [22]. Therefore, disparaging remarks create an attitude of inequality in courses which may make higher education hard to join by students who are inclined to perform better in the humanities. Actually, many study participants noted that they simply turned to humanities as a last resort because they offer affordable fees than sciences. An equal-minded government needs to recognise diversities in endowments that not every person can do well in humanities or in sciences, and should put in place opportunities for individual initiatives and growth in any area of expertise than discouraging them. Ahimbisibwe [27] notes, with concern, that offering sponsorship in favour of some programmes widens the gap between the poor and the rich because the favoured access national benefits at the expense of the disfavoured. The students' loan scheme and the district quota system which the government set up to benefit students from poor background did instead focus on science students. These schemes draw on national funds contributed by the tax-payer. Enabling science students only to access them creates an imbalance in the entry to higher education. There are other higher education funding opportunities that could be navigated, but it remains hard for students from poor families because some lack internet access and knowledge about them [28]. Establishing student service desks not only in schools but

also in some centres; for example, in national libraries or designated offices in major towns, can aid many poor students.

6.2 Discriminative Study Environment

Unfair retention in higher education also stands out conspicuously in this study. Among the components of accessibility, as defined by UNESCO [15], is the equal opportunity to take part or share in the system. The process of taking part in higher education includes ability by all members to access facilities equally, to freely interact without interruption, and to access the basics of life which enable comfortable stay. This enables participants to fairly benefit from the common resources and environment. It is common knowledge that a healthy mind is mirrored by a healthy body. Students' access to food at the institution helps to keep them on their activity. NdUA's claim that "At times I cannot have money for lunch; it affects lecture attendance" underlines the importance of making all students, regardless of their economic background, access food at the institution. This has implications on funding from the public sector because if education has a public good [23], then government's commitment is expected. Many participants claimed to lack money to buy hand-outs, typing coursework, photocopying, and take care of other scholastic needs. This implies that the poor are denied the right to access study materials especially if they have to pay for them. Adair [19] rightly suggests that higher education ought to remain a democratic project. This requires providing resources that could be shared by all. Education theories outline the nature of home where one stays and the proximity of the learning centre as among the contributors to good learning. Students need to stay in habitations which are conducive to learning and to have easy and quick access to the learning centre. Many poor students stated that they cannot afford hostels near their institutions. They have to commute long distances. It could be that even where they stay is not favourable to their learning. Such students can hardly be equally rated with those who are able to stay in nearby accommodations.

In her research on higher education and single mothers, Adair [19] dwelt extensively on work and study and noted that many fail to cope with the demands of study and work, and end up dropping off the course. MkUA, a female student from low income background, said that "I have a part time job to make ends meet and sometimes

I miss lectures.” Her struggle is similar to the participants in Adair’s study. The intention for work is to raise money for tuition and pay for other scholastic materials. Balancing work and study puts her on an uneven terrain with other financially able students. Many participants were displeased by the humiliating and depriving practice of chasing them out of lectures or exams due to failure to pay the total fees. They obviously miss lectures as they try to find money to pay for their tuition. The likely outcome for those who fail to raise the money is dropping out of the course. Policies that encourage high dropout rates clog the bottom labour market where the uneducated are common. They need to be replaced by those that reflect equity and equality [24].

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

When the income of poor students is improved, there is great propensity for them to access study, improve their academic performance, and even complete their studies at university. Therefore, the researchers postulate that an increase in income for poor families is likely to have a noticeable positive effect on the performance of the students from these families. This necessitates government to introduce programmes that target the development of household production. Since many households engage in agriculture at a small scale, easing their access to national or even international market where middle parties are avoided can increase the income.

Although government has tried to increase accessibility to study at all levels of education, there is need to revisit some policies which do not promote equal access to higher education. For example, admission on the basis of merit on government scholarship is still selective: the state bursary benefits certain groups and now the loan scheme which targets only 1000 science students, a very small ratio compared to the demand for quality higher education. Policy and decision makers have to change their mind-set and be more broad-sighted. Any course of study can make the graduate more practical, critical and relevant to society [22]. For example, expertise in researching and developing national historical facts, in site guiding, linguistics and language analysis are all fields in humanities and relevant to economic growth. Government simply needs to support students who register for such courses by opening opportunities for them to apply their acquired knowledge and skills. Where

bursaries and loans are maintained, measures should be made strict to identify the truly needy, regardless of course differences, and an increase in the numbers of beneficiaries is also necessary. However, although giving out loans to students is the most plausible avenue taken by government, Long [29] observes that this may not help much because loans have to be paid back. This has a long term effect on the borrower. The burden of debts can have a negative impact on the borrower’s academic career and the effect may be extended to the family decisions.

Therefore, allocation of government support to higher education institutions basing on the number of students and faculty can be a more welcome approach whereby all students can equally benefit from national support. In extreme cases, government would give bursaries through institutions to needy students. Bursaries can make a better effect because they are not to be paid back and they give peace of mind. Bursaries to financially struggling students could help in raising them to an equal competing ground with the others. Bursaries could be sustained by support from alumni, philanthropic foundations, and private sector, among others. Where bursaries are lacking, allowing students to study and do exams and then withhold their academic transcripts until they have paid off the required tuition can be a more welcome option.

Another possibility could be for institutions of higher education making partnerships with national and international organizations that can afford to provide for the needs of the needy students. For instance, at the national level, Madhvani Foundation has registered success in sponsoring the needy students especially those in the natural sciences. The Foundation could consider extending the assistance to social sciences and humanities students because they, too, are critical to economic development of a nation. At the international level, DVV – a German organization that sponsors adult education programs- is a proud partner of the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education at Makerere University. It sponsors part of adult and community education field practice for both private and government sponsored students. The United Nations and International Monetary Fund, as the world’s largest external financier of education, should also adopt a rights-based approach in its funding policies so that even the poor can realize access to higher education.

Denying scholastic resources to the financially disadvantaged is equal to forcing the poor out of the system. In situations where equality is targeted, the system has to devise means that enable all to equally access the benefits. This would mean that print and computer libraries would have to be well stocked with up-to-date devices, printed and electronic materials, hand-outs will have to be issued out to all, and students could be encouraged to submit coursework electronically using the institution's availed computers instead of requiring them to submit their work in hard copies. As regards housing, a system that seeks to provide affordable accommodation to the poor students especially in the institution's own hostels can be welcome. Ranking hostels, private or public, and setting affordable fixed rent fees per rank can also assist the poor students.

8. CONCLUSION

This article has focused on poor students' accessibility to study in higher education institutions in a developing nation. It has looked at the existing laws and policies on higher education, particularly, on funding poor students. While the policies and laws rhetorically underline equity and equality for all, in practice, they do the opposite. The issue of equitable accessibility to study in higher education conceals far-reaching contradictions. The study has focused on two institutions, a private and a public university, to explore the effect of the family income on the student's access to higher education. The family income, being a major descriptor, has been studied in relation to the nature of the institution, gender, region of origin and nature of the course. Using a mixed methods approach, the highest percentages of low income students enrolling at a private institution (Male 45.4% and Female 41.4%) may indicate some impact of family income on the nature of higher education institution accessed by their children. Although gender perceptions and region of origin are apparent in judging the type of course, they do not pause a main factor in the poor students' access to HE. The nature of the course of study, however, contributes a lot to the poor students' access to higher education.

The study findings reveal that poor students struggle to access funding; and available meagre loans and quotas are generally slotted for science students only. There is a social negative attitude regarding the nature of course studied. Some of those who make it to higher education

still struggle to access lunch at school, or to pay for hand outs and photocopy materials, and some commute long distances to higher education institutions. These reflect unfair entry and unfair retention as areas where poor students face hardships. The unfair entry focuses on issues of discriminatory policies and grants, student attitude, and social mind-set regarding the nature of course in relation to family income. The unfair retention puts emphasis on issues of physical and financial resource distribution and factors that affect poor students' access and/or stay at higher education.

The study has recommended setting up schemes that can raise the family income. Government needs to set policies which treat all students as equal citizens that have a right to access national benefits for their study at higher education. This should be coupled with being broader sighted in order to tap the resources invested in every nature of study. The attitude that discourages students from pursuing some courses is detrimental to national development. Government's stake in education should, therefore, not stop at dividing and re-dividing the meagre slots for sponsorship. Making education equally accessible to all by providing enough scholastic resources and affordable accommodation to minimise students' over-spending is the responsibility of government in service to its citizens. Government sponsorship for students is a key access issue that needs to be revisited in view of the changes that have taken place. General debates have indicated that it is no longer justifiable to select a few students for the comfortable life inside the campus while the majority pine away as private students and languish in 'campus poverty'. Moreover, those who actually get to that sponsorship are already the privileged, largely urban and from predominantly good schools. These are complex questions which call for equally far-reaching, long-term solutions. Quotas can only serve as temporary measures.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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