

Scaling Access to Quality Tertiary Education Amidst Population Growth in Developing Countries

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ABSTRACT

This paper sought to examine the scaling access to tertiary education amidst population growth in developing countries. The study employed the mixed method approach with sequential explanatory strategy design. Quantitatively, 100 respondents were sampled with saturation point used to determine participants for the qualitative phase of the study. Data were collected using interview guide and questionnaire. Data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics and qualitatively using thematic analysis. The study found that scaling access to tertiary education in developing countries were largely due to the availability of scholarship schemes, expansion in tertiary institutions, availability of online and distance education option. They study also found that tertiary education gives a lot of gains developing countries some of which include economic growth and development, social cohesion and cultural diversity, improved overall quality of life and encourages citizens' participation in decision making and governance of their countries. The study therefore recommended the need to expand tertiary institutions, institute more scholarship schemes, tertiary institute charging moderate and affordable tuitions fees so as to open access to more individuals.

Keywords: Tertiary Education, population growth, developing country

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental human right and a transformative process that empowers individuals, enriches societies, and drives economic progress. It encompasses not only knowledge and skills but also values and personal growth. Education remains pivotal in shaping individuals and societies, governments and organizations worldwide. Prioritizing investments in education will help unlock full potentials (United Nations Ghana & Civil Society Platform Ghana, 2017).

World Bank (2021) defines tertiary education as all formal post secondary education, including public and private universities, colleges, technical training institutes and vocational schools that are instrumental in fostering growth, poverty reduction and ensuring sharing prosperity. Access to tertiary education in developing countries is a subject of paramount importance with far-reaching implications for both individuals and societies (World Bank, 2019). Tertiary education, encompassing universities and colleges, is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of economic growth, innovation, and social development (UNESCO, 2020).

In the modern era, the expansion of tertiary education is driven by the recognition of its pivotal role in socioeconomic development and the growing demand for specialized knowledge (Trow, 2007). This expansion was facilitated by increased government investment, the proliferation of universities, and the democratization of access to tertiary education. Tertiary education fosters intellectual growth, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, enabling individuals to explore diverse fields of study, deepen their knowledge, and embark on a journey of self-discovery (Marginson, 2020). Similarly, World Bank (2017)

reported that, tertiary education has the potency of advanced skills and expertise, drive productivity, entrepreneurship, and technological advancements.

However, the current landscape of higher education access in many developing nations is fraught with formidable challenges and marked by significant disparities. While education is a universal right, access to quality education is not equitable globally. Challenges such as inadequate resources, teacher shortages, gender disparities, and socio-economic inequalities persist especially in developing countries (UNESCO, 2021). Kumar and Das (2018), Jamaludin and Loh, (2020) mentioned that the unmatched level of enrollment was necessitated by a number of factors which include but not limited to financial constraints, infrastructure deficit, geographic disparities.

According to UNESCO-IESALC (2020) there has been a global increase in the access to tertiary education in the past two decade where one third of the global population has enrolled in some form of post-secondary education. Vieira, Takudzwa & Chinchilla (2020) corroborated that global access to tertiary education and its enrolment has seen a tremendous increase to 38 percent in 2018 compared to 19 percent in the year 2008.

Nonetheless, statistics from the World Bank (2017) indicated a significant regional imbalance in terms of increment made globally with slower increase in access to tertiary education in that of developing countries. Although, Sub-Saharan Africa has had a high relative increment for access to tertiary education in almost two decades from 2000 to 2018 obtaining a 125% increase over the period, similar to other developing countries such as the Latin America and the Caribbean's relative increase (Vieira, Takudzwa & Chinchilla, 2020). Against this background, this study sought to examine scaling access to quality tertiary education amidst population growth in developing countries.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine the scaling access to quality tertiary education amidst population growth in developing countries.

Research Objectives

1. Investigate the policies and interventions to enhance access to quality tertiary education amidst population growth in developing countries
2. Assess the gains of scaling access to tertiary education amidst population growth in developing countries.

Research Question

1. What are policies and interventions to enhance access to quality tertiary education amidst population growth in developing countries?
2. What are the gains of scaling access to tertiary education amidst population growth in developing countries?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Tertiary education, also known as higher education or post-secondary education is a crucial phase in an individual's academic journey. It represents an advanced level of learning that occurs after the completion of secondary school and typically takes place in colleges, universities, technical schools, and other specialized institutions. Tertiary education plays a vital role in personal development, societal progress, and economic growth (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

Tertiary education encompasses a diverse array of educational programs and institutions, each designed to

meet specific academic and vocational needs. UNESCO & Knezevic (2021) identify several key types of tertiary education which include: Universities and Degree-awarding Institutions that run undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral (Ph.D.) programs across a wide range of academic disciplines. It also includes Colleges that provide a more practical and applied approach to post-secondary education which mostly award diplomas, and certificates. Technical and Vocational schools are also considered to be part of the tertiary institutions with focus of career training programmes rather than degrees and certificates. It also includes online and distance learning which is driven by technological advancements.

Trends of Tertiary Education in Developing Countries

Tertiary education in developing countries has witnessed significant transformations in recent years. As these nations strive for economic growth, development, and social progress, their tertiary education systems have evolved to meet the demands of a rapidly changing global landscape. One of the most notable trends in access to tertiary in developing countries is the growing effort of governments, institutions and private individuals to broadening access to participation tertiary education, often through the establishment of new universities, colleges, and vocational institutions. This expansion aims to accommodate a growing youth population and address educational disparities (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010). There has also been a huge investment in faculty development, curriculum reform, and the adoption of modern pedagogical methods to enhance the educational experience and ensure graduates are competitive in the global job market in many developing countries (World Bank, 2017). Developing countries, are diversifying their program offerings to meet the evolving needs of students and industries. This includes the expansion of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programs to provide practical skills aligned with labor market demands (United Nations, 2018).

Universities in developing countries are forging partnerships with foreign institutions, encouraging faculty and student exchanges, and promoting cross-border research collaborations to enhance the global competitiveness of their institutions (Marginson, 2011). Developing countries have also invested in research and innovation to address local challenges and contribute to global knowledge. They are establishing research centers, funding research projects, and incentivizing academic publications (Marginson, 2011). Developing countries are focusing on addressing gender disparities, improving access for marginalized communities, and offering scholarships and financial aid to disadvantaged students (World Bank, 2017). Similarly, developing countries are leveraging online and blended learning platforms to reach remote and underserved populations, making education more accessible and flexible (Altbach et al., 2010).

Importance of Tertiary Education

Tertiary education allows individuals to acquire specialized knowledge and skills in their chosen fields of study (Teichler, 2020). Whether in science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), humanities, social sciences, or the arts, higher education provides in-depth training that prepares students for careers and leadership roles. Tertiary education is often a prerequisite for accessing a wide range of professions and career opportunities (OECD, 2019). Many employers require a bachelor's degree or higher for entry-level positions, and advanced degrees are essential for specialized roles in fields such as medicine, law, academia, and engineering. Tertiary education is a driver of economic growth and innovation. Research conducted by the World Bank (2017) highlights the positive correlation between higher education attainment and a country's economic development. Graduates contribute to the workforce, stimulating productivity and innovation through their expertise and research contributions.

Tertiary education equips individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to participate in the global economy and to address complex global challenges, such as climate change and public health crises (Mok, 2019). Tertiary education institutions are hubs of research and innovation. They conduct groundbreaking research, develop new technologies, and drive advancements in various fields (Marginson, 2020). This

research contributes to societal progress and addresses pressing global issues. Higher education fosters civic engagement and active citizenship (Hillman et al., 2019). Graduates are often more informed, socially aware, and engaged in their communities, contributing to the betterment of society through their knowledge and leadership. Tertiary education fosters personal and intellectual growth by exposing individuals to a diverse range of subjects, ideas, and perspectives (Bloland, 2019). It encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and the development of analytical skills. To the researcher, tertiary education become the conduit through which innovative skills are acquired, Tertiary education instills a sense of civic responsibility and social engagement. Graduates are often more actively involved in community development, social justice initiatives, and advocacy for positive societal change. Also tertiary education equip learners with analytical and problem solving skills for societal growth and development.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the mixed method approach for the reason that the research sought to explore the credibility of the work buy triangulating data that was gathered from the methods used. The mixed method research approach relies of both quantitative and qualitative research competencies to solving a social problem that man is confronted with (Kuranchie, 2021). The study adopted the “Sequential Explanatory Strategy” as a design for the study. Kuranchie (2021) posit that the sequential Explanatory strategy design aimed at collecting and analyzing a quantitative data and supporting it with the collection and analysis of qualitative data in order to have a further and deeper exploration of the data quantitative data collected and analysed. In this light, the researcher administered and analysed the quantitative data and later conducted interviews and analyzed data qualitatively.

The target population was therefore the stakeholders such as students, lecturers, administrators, principals of tertiary institutions in developing countries. Quantitatively, a random sample of 100 participants was employed. The study conveniently sampled participants for the qualitative phase of the data using data saturation to determine the sample size. The analysis was done in two phases. The first phase of the analysis was done using SPSS and was presented in a table using frequencies and percentages. The second phase has also employed the thematic data analysis procedure to present the qualitative aspect of the data. Gay, Mills & Airasian (2009) posit that every researcher resorting to the use of thematic method for data analysis.

Table 1: Personal Records of Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentages
Bachelors	68	68
Masters	26	26
Doctoral	6	6
Items	Frequency	Percentages
Student	76	76
Lecturer	16	16
Administrator of tertiary institution	8	8

Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

It could be evidenced from the Table 1 above that 68 representing 68% held or were pursuing bachelors degree, 26 (26%) held or were pursuing masters degree whilst, 6 (6) % held or were pursuing doctoral degree.

From the Table 1 above, 76 representing 76% were students, 16 (16%) were lecturers and 8 (8%) were

administrators of tertiary institutions.

Table 2: Policies and Interventions to Enhance Access to Quality Tertiary Education amidst Population Growth in Developing Countries

Items	Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Government scholarships and financial aids have contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries	Strongly Agreed	27	27
	Agreed	38	38
	Undecided	11	11
	Disagreed	15	15
	Strongly Disagreed	13	13
Expansion of tertiary institutions has contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries	Strongly Agreed	27	27
	Agreed	52	52
	Undecided	10	10
	Disagreed	6	6
	Strongly Disagreed	5	5
Affordable tuition fees has contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries	Strongly Agreed	17	17
	Agreed	49	49
	Undecided	11	11
	Disagreed	11	11
	Strongly Disagreed	12	12
Online and distance learning options have contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries	Strongly Agreed	40	40
	Agreed	45	45
	Undecided	8	8
	Disagreed	3	3
	Strongly Disagreed	4	4
Gender equality initiatives have contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries	Strongly Agreed	14	14
	Agreed	57	57
	Undecided	16	16
	Disagreed	10	10
	Strongly Disagreed	3	3
Reduced cultural or societal barriers have contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries	Strongly Agreed	20	20
	Agreed	56	56
	Undecided	14	14
	Disagreed	8	8
	Strongly Disagreed	2	2

Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

It is indicative from the Table 2 that 27 of the respondents representing 27 percent strongly agreed that government scholarships and financial aids have contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries. With 38 (38%) agreed, 11 (11%) were undecided, 15 (15%) disagreed and 13 (13%) strongly disagreed with the assertion.

From the Table 2 above, 27 of the respondents representing 27 percent strongly agreed that expansion of tertiary institutions has contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries. With 52 (52%) agreed, 10 (10%) were undecided, 6 (6%) disagreed and 5 (5%) strongly disagreed with the assertion.

Also in the Table 2, 17 of the respondents representing 17 percent strongly agreed that affordable tuition fees has contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries. With 49 (49%) agreed, 11(11%) were undecided, 11 (11%) disagreed and 12 (12%) strongly disagreed with the assertion.

It could also be noticed from the Table 2 that, 40 of the respondents representing 40 percent strongly agreed that online and distance learning options have contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries. With 45 (45%) agreed, 8(8%) were undecided, 3 (3%) disagreed and 4 (4%) strongly disagreed with the assertion.

As to whether gender equality initiatives have contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries, it was recorded in the Table 2 that, 14 (14%) of the respondents strongly agreed to the assertion, 57 (57%) agreed, 16 (16%) were undecided, 10 (10%) disagreed with 3 (3%) of pupils strongly disagreeing to the assertion.

From the Table 2 above, 20 of the respondents representing 20 percent strongly agreed that reduced cultural or societal barriers have contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries. With 56 (56%) agreed, 14 (14%) were undecided, 8 (8%) disagreed and 2 (2%) strongly disagreed with the assertion.

Table 3: Gains of Scaling Access to Tertiary Education amidst Population Growth in Developing Countries

Items	Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Increasing access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries promotes economic growth and development	Strongly Agreed	26	26
	Agreed	47	47
	Undecided	17	17
	Disagreed	7	7
	Strongly Disagreed	3	3
Increasing access to tertiary education in amidst population growth has increased innovation and technological advancement	Strongly Agreed	21	21
	Agreed	58	58
	Undecided	14	14
	Disagreed	5	5
	Strongly Disagreed	2	2

Increasing access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries has enhanced workforce productivity	Strongly Agreed	21	21
	Agreed	49	49
	Undecided	15	15
	Disagreed	11	11
	Strongly Disagreed	4	4
Increasing access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries has fostered greater social cohesion and cultural diversity	Strongly Agreed	21	21
	Agreed	59	59
	Undecided	15	15
	Disagreed	4	4
	Strongly Disagreed	1	1
Increasing access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries has improved overall quality of life population growth in developing countries	Strongly Agreed	12	12
	Agreed	53	53
	Undecided	15	15
	Disagreed	15	15
	Strongly Disagreed	5	5
Reduced cultural or societal barriers have contributed to increased access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries	Strongly Agreed	21	21
	Agreed	54	54
	Undecided	13	13
	Disagreed	8	8

Source: Field Survey Data (2023)

Statistics from the Table 3 above reveal that, 26 of the respondents representing 26 percent strongly agreed that increasing access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries promotes economic growth and development. With 47 (47%) agreed, 17 (17%) were undecided, 7 (7%) disagreed and 3 (3%) strongly disagreed with the assertion.

Also it was recorded in the Table 3 above that, 21 of the respondents representing 21 percent strongly agreed that increasing access to tertiary education in amidst population growth has increased innovation and technological advancement. With 58 (58%) agreed, 14 (14%) were undecided, 5 (5%) disagreed and 5 (5%) strongly disagreed with the assertion.

It could also be noticed from the Table 3 that, 21 of the respondents representing 21 percent strongly agreed that increasing access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries has enhanced workforce productivity. With 49 (49%) agreed, 15 (15%) were undecided, 11 (11%) disagreed and 4 (4%) strongly disagreed with the assertion.

As to whether increasing access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries

has fostered greater social cohesion and cultural diversity, the Table 3 recorded that, 21 (21%) of the respondents strongly agreed to the assertion, 59 (59%) agreed, 15 (15%) were undecided, 4 (4%) disagreed with 1 (1%) of pupils strongly disagreeing to the assertion.

From the Table 3 above, 12 of the respondents representing 12 percent strongly agreed that increasing access to tertiary education in amidst population growth in developing countries has improved overall quality of life population growth in developing countries. With 53 (53%) agreed, 15 (15%) were undecided, 15 (15%) disagreed and 5 (5%) strongly disagreed with the assertion.

It was evidenced from the Table 3 above that, 21 of the respondents representing 21 percent strongly agreed that increasing access to tertiary education in amidst population growth has increased innovation and technological advancement. With 54 (54%) agreed, 13 (13%) were undecided, 8 (8%) disagreed and 4 (4%) strongly disagreed with the assertion.

The section below presents a thematic analysis to argument the descriptive statistics above, this was done cognizance of the research questions that the sought to answer.

Policies and Interventions to Enhance Access to Quality Tertiary Education amidst Population Growth in Developing Countries

The study found that there were some policies and interventions initiated by government, cooperate entities, and individual to enhance access to tertiary education in developing countries. The revealed scholarship and other forms of financial aids and assistance as contributed great to the increasing access to tertiary education in the developing countries. The findings suggested that the availability of scholarships and financial assistance cushion students to get enrolled and remain in various tertiary institutions till they complete. It could be deduced that scholarships make it possible for children from less privileged homes to assert their right to education. Thus, children who completed secondary education but do not have the financial means to pursue tertiary education often get their academic dreams shuttered largely due to financial constraints. The scholarships give them some form of liberation as these disadvantaged children get the opportunity to pursue tertiary education just like their colleagues from economically empowered households.

The study also found that the proliferation of online and distance education programmes has encouraged the increased access to tertiary education in developing countries. Inferences could be drawn that online and distance education has played a significant role in increasing access to tertiary education in developing countries. Thus, with the advent of online and distance education, many individuals even from remote areas are open to several opportunities to take up various tertiary programmes. It could be also be deduced that many students do not necessarily go to the university campus, rather, they rely of the use of technological tools such as smart devices and internet or satellite campus to obtain their tertiary education.

The study found that, reduced cultural and societal barriers have led to the increasing access to tertiary education in developing countries. The findings suggest that formally many developing countries are known to have high connection to their cultural and societal values, it is therefore uncommon for women in these countries to be encouraged to obtain post-secondary education. It could also be deduced that many of these countries are now relaxing their values and cultural practices. So many woman and girls known to be mainly prepared for the marriage and the kitchen are now rubbing shoulders with their male counterparts in pursuing tertiary education. It could also be inferred that parents now give birth to number of children they feel they can take proper care of, with this, parents are able to invest enough in their children education unlike before. It makes it possible for the higher enrollment in tertiary institutions.

It also emerged from the study that the expansion of tertiary institutions has created more opportunities to increased access to tertiary education amidst population growth in developing countries. The study found

that influx of university has been a great drive to the increasing access to tertiary education in developing countries. It is worth noting that an increase in the establishment of tertiary institutions is an increase in access to tertiary education. Thus, people take advantage of the availability of the tertiary institutions to get enrolled to acquire advance knowledge in different field in these tertiary institutions.

Gains of Scaling Access to Tertiary Education amidst Population Growth in Developing Countries

The study found that the scaling of tertiary education has hugely been beneficial to individuals, communities and country. The gains found by the study include; fostering social cohesion and cultural diversity, improves overall quality of life, improves innovation and technological advancement, improve citizen action and participation in decision making.

The findings suggest that tertiary education prepare students to tolerate and appreciate each other without recourse to cultural background. It could be deduced that students from tertiary institutions learn to respect divergent views, shared opinion and cooperation and the need to build consensus on topical issues.

It emerged from the study that tertiary education helps to improve the overall quality of life of the people. The study found that the living condition of most of the people who obtain tertiary education becomes better off since they tertiary education prepare they with the requisite skills and expertise to be productive in their companies and world of works. It could also be deduced that the services that these people render are high appreciated and this reflects in their salaries or the gains they make. This puts them at a better place to make a decent living and an improved quality of life.

The study also found that access to tertiary education has helped to improve innovation and technological advancement. It could be inferred from the findings that tertiary education help to build creative minds, it helps to imbibe in the citizen the ability to think deeply, analyse and bring out innovative ideas that can foster development. It could be deduced that tertiary education provides programmes in which students acquire training in the field of technology where they acquire advanced knowledge in technology which is one of the major drives for national development. The study found that, tertiary education makes it possible for the citizens to participant it governance and decision making. Thus, people who attain tertiary education are well groomed to occupy high decision making position and with their abilities, they are able to take decisions that contribute to the effective administration of the country. It could also be noticed that many of these people with various forms of tertiary education are able to hold their governments accountable and ensure that thing are done right and the countries govern well.

CONCLUSION

The study found that there were major and tremendous initiatives and policies that contributed to the scaling accessing of tertiary education amidst population in developing countries. These policies include scholarship schemes and financial aids coupled with the expansion of tertiary institutions, online and distance learning options and reduced cultural and societal barriers. It study concluded that tertiary education comes with enormous gains to individuals and the country at large as it promotes economic growth and development, increases innovation and technological advancement, fosters social cohesion and cultural diversity, improves overall quality of life and also encourages citizens' participation in decision making and governance of their countries.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

1. The study recommended that more efforts which be geared towards the expansion of tertiary institutions, more scholarship schemes should be instituted.

2. Tertiary institutions should charge moderate and affordable tuitions fees as it will result in opening access to more individuals into tertiary institutions.
3. It is also recommended that the tertiary institutions should introduce more academic programmes in order to attract more people and increase enrolment into tertiary institutions.

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