

Socio-Economic Factors and Access to Higher Education in Uganda: A Case of Public Higher Education Institutions in Kigezi Sub Region.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between social economic factors and access to higher education in Uganda, Kigezi sub-region. Objectives of the study were to find out the effect of gender on access to higher education in Kigezi sub region, to examine the effect of family background on access to higher education in Kigezi sub region and to explore the effect of school attended on access to higher education in Kigezi sub region, Uganda. Convenience sampling was employed to select students while purposive sampling was used to select officials from higher institutions of learning. Self-administered questionnaires and interview guides were used in data collection. The data were analyzed using descriptive and correlation techniques. Descriptive results showed that 93.5% of respondents agreed that gender has an effect on access to higher education, 85.1% agreed that family background affects access to higher education and 75.1% agreed that school attended affects access to higher education. Correlation results showed that gender affects access by 27% (R²=0.27), family background affects access to higher education by 25% (R²=0.25) and school attended affects access to higher education by 13% (R²=0.13). The study concluded that gender is a very essential factor in accessing to higher education in Kigezi sub-region. It was recommended that the government should ensure support social economic emancipation and promote gender advocacy campaigns to help the region break the chains of gender stereotypes that affect access to higher education.

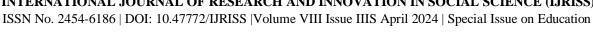
Key words: Higher Education, Access, Social Economic Factors, Socio – Economic Status (SES),

INTRODUCTION

This study examined the relationship between social economic factors and access to higher education in Kigezi sub-region Uganda. In this study, Social economic factors was the independent variable while Access to higher education was the dependent variable. Social economic factors was measured by gender of an individual, family background status and the standard of the school one attended, While Access to higher education was measured according to the Adaptability in the school education program, retention of learners in the education program and completion of the education program.

Background to the Study

In Uganda the advent of missionaries in the twentieth century (20th century) opened the door for formal education to flourish. The development of higher education in Uganda may be divided into four periods: The Colonial Period (1922 to 1950); the glory period (1950 to 1970); the crisis period (1971 – 1985) and the reform period (1986 – 2000). During the early and glory periods, Makerere University Kampala (MUK), the sole level higher education institution existed in the country. This university was structured and culturally modelled along Oxford University Curriculum. The university in the early years received majority of its



academic staff both academic and administrative from Europe (Ssekamwa, 2000)

Governments since 1920s up to today took initiatives to better the educational system by setting up Education Commissions and the most recent one was the Education Review Policy Commission (EPRC) of 1989 – 1992 which was chaired by the Late Professor Ssenteza Kajubi. This commission among its many recommendations recommended democratization of education, vocationalized curriculum and cost sharing in higher education institutions. All these were aimed at making education accessible to all Ugandans (Government White Paper on Education following the recommendations of EPRC Report 1989 – 1992).

The government of Uganda introduced Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE) and increased on the number of public universities, allowed private universities to operate and introduced cost sharing in public universities, however, access to higher education is still low because at times the selection procedures as well as entry requirements in both public and privately owned institutions may not favour students from Low Socio-Economic Status (LSES) families. Measures such as quota system and affirmative action in favour of the girl child have been introduced for admission to public universities but still students from low socio-economic status families are disadvantaged because they have to meet some costs while in higher institutions of learning (Wabudeya, 2004).

Kigezi Sub region is found in South Western Uganda. It consists of six districts: Kabale district, Rubanda, Rukiga, Kanungu, Kisoro and Rukungiri district. Higher Education Institutions in this Sub region include: Uganda Christian University - Kabale Campus, Metropolitan University - Kisoro, Uganda College of Commerce, Kabale National Teachers' College - Kabale, and Great Lakes University in Kanungu, Rukungiri Institute of Management among others. Though this Sub-region is blessed with many institutions of higher learning access to higher education seem to be hindered by socio-economic factors like unemployment, poverty, gender among others.

Initially, higher education in Uganda, like in most developing counties in Africa, was considered a public good - freely provided by the state. However, since late 1980s and 1990s, increasing demand for higher education amidst declining budget allocations and increased enrolment in public university - Makerere University by then among other reasons created ideal conditions for government to start Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST), Kyambogo University (KYU), Busitema University, Gulu University and just of recent Kabale University (NCHE, List of Private Universities in Uganda, 2019).

The current merit-based mechanism to accessing higher education in Uganda is discriminatory and inequitable, giving exclusive advantages to students from families with higher socioeconomic backgrounds. This state is not good for a country, whose vision is to transform Uganda from a predominantly peasant and low-income country to a competitive upper middle-income country (Mugizi, 2018). If policies related to access to higher education are not reviewed, denying access to higher education to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds is likely to increase the socioeconomic inequity between the very rich and the very poor (Burke, 2017).

In contributing to the above gap, the proposed study will promote a debate on how the current merit-based mechanism of accessing higher education is too competitive for a student from a relatively poor rural school to attain. Secondly, the study will show how Uganda's policies on accessing higher education are inadequate to meeting higher education needs of the needy. Thirdly, the study will show how Uganda's current higher education is lacking in its pursuit to transform the economy from one that is predominantly peasant and lowincome to one that is competitive and middle-income.

Statement of the Problem

Access to higher education can produce positive outcomes to both the individuals and the wider community (Prodan, 2015). Uganda has taken strides to widen the access to basic education through programs like



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Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE).

However, access to higher levels of education remains very low, attributed in part to the selection procedures that favor students from higher socioeconomic status. Studies, reveal a drop in admission to health professional education in central and western Uganda over the periods 2001 - 2010 and 2011 - 2014. Admissions in the central and western regions over the two periods reduced from 1,708 to 849 and 1,113 to 867 respectively (Galukande, 2018). Gender, regional representation and the schools attended increased inequalities in admission. While the introduction of the student loan scheme, and State House Admission-Scholarship were seen to advantage the under privileged students, the schemes appear to favor the well-to-do and those with political backing (Mugizi, 2018).

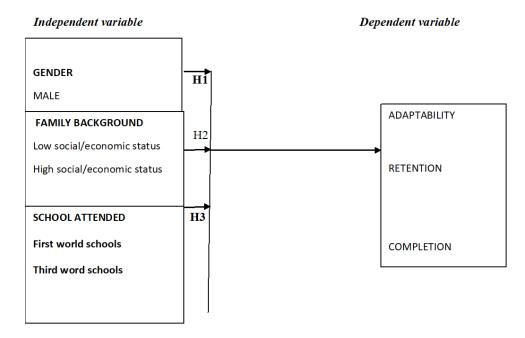
Any society, however rich it may be in terms of resources, cannot claim to be a developed society if it's an illiterate society (Musaazi, 2006). Education is an important investment that a country can make and making education accessible to all is very crucial in the Development of a nation (World Forum on Education, 2000). This is because education positively affects socio-economic behaviour of people's productivity and standards of living. It is a societal obligation to make the provision of Education accessible and affordable (UN, 2006). Therefore, no country or society can progress if higher education is in jeopardy, thus access to higher education is a vital component of sustainable development. Education, indeed, has a great contribution to the development of persons, communities and nationals at large (Farrant, 2007).

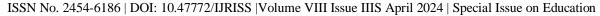
Therefore, it is imperative for counties like Uganda to invest heavily in higher education and to make it affordable and accessible to all Ugandans because the future of this country lies in the hands of educated people (Othieno).

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to assess the effect of socioeconomic factors on access to higher education in Kigezi sub region, Uganda. The specific objective to investigate the effect of gender on access to higher education in Kigezi sub region, Uganda, to examine the effect of family background on access to higher education in Kigezi sub region, and to explore the effect of school attended on access to higher education in Kigezi sub region, Uganda.

The Conceptual Framework.







Source: Developed by the researcher from the findings and gaps in the literature review.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Since 1988 when Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) was established, the number of private universities has grown from one to more than 50 and Metropolitan University – Kisoro and Great Lakes University in Kanungu in Kigezi sub – region are cases in point (NCHE, 2019, 2010, 2018). The growth of higher education and the demand there of represents a market response to a situation in which public education institutions do not provide sufficient quantity of admission to Ugandans yearning for higher education. Therefore, institutions like Rukungiri Institute of Management, Great Lakes University and Metropolitan University in Kigezi Sub – region emerged largely due to government failure to absorb all students qualifying for University Education (Wabudeya, 2004; Kasozi, 2003).

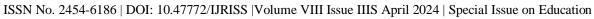
Unfortunately, despite the fact that, the government of Uganda democratized and liberalized education in the country, many unprivileged Ugandans in rural areas from low socio – economic status families do not have access to higher education because many home steadies are engulfed in absolute poverty. Higher education rates on the African continent are still the lowest in the world, averaging at around 7% (Omona, 2012).

Over the last two decades, Universal Primary School Education was declared for all school-age children regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion or location in Uganda. This was in line with the Government White Paper of 1992, which resulted from the Kajubi's report of 1989, the Uganda Constitution of 1995 and Children Statute of 1996 in line with the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (1990) which looks at education as "a fundamental human right" (United Nations, 2006). With the associated rise in enrolment in primary schools from 3.5 million to 7.4 million in 1996 and 1997, demand for higher education in Uganda had risen sharply making access to higher education more complex because government education institutions cannot absorb all qualifying students on government sponsorship and private sponsorship hinders access to higher education by students from families of low socio – economic status (Tumushabe, 2013).

However, transition rates from primary level, secondary level and tertiary in Uganda are still low, with just under 60% of the children who complete primary school joining secondary school, and only 35% joining university at the end of high school (MoES, ministry of education and sports report on performance of education sector, 2012). The most unfortunate bit of it is that even those who are admitted in universities, some of them drop out because their families fail to meet university requirements (MoES, 2012; Wabwire, 2011; Ssempebwa, 2011).

Despite the very favourable equal educational opportunities in Uganda like government sponsorship, private sponsorship, UPE and USE, disparities exist regarding the degree of access to higher education in Kigezi Sub-region and Uganda in general between males and females in Uganda due to poverty and culturally stereotyped gender based labels. Education is a right to be enjoyed by boys and girls equally in order for this to happen all forms of inequality in access to education have to be broken (Kwesiga, 1993). Therefore, the content, orientation and impact education on women need to be reviewed to benefit boys and girls equally (Chawinga, 2016).

Women's role in social sciences, sciences and technology must be portrayed accurately. About 90% of Uganda's population live in rural areas (UBOS, 2020). The access and success of girls to educational opportunities face difficulties typical of rural society in Kabale for example, where the traditional role and status of women in society are more strictly adhered to. Some people still believe that higher education is for boys and girls are groomed for marriage. Participation of girls in domestic chores is regarded as a more value than the instructions given in higher education institutions (Omona, 1998; Ezewa, 1983). Many people





still believe that one of the obligations of girls' life is to get married as early as possible and start a career of running a home. This perception limits accessibility of the girl child to higher education. In this respect, the rural population in Kigezi sub-region is unaware of the contribution educated women can make in society.

Higher education in Uganda is not free because even government sponsored students and those on students' loan scheme incur some costs. Many parents in Kigezi Sub-region are not able to raise tuition to pay for their sons and daughters, therefore they would usually pay for their sons because when boys receive higher education they will later be economically helpful to the family (Omona, 2012). Whereas the girls even when educated they will get married into other families which will enjoy the fruits of her education they did not pay for. Also, when girls stay home, they help their mothers in the field to grow cabbage, sweet potatoes and sorghum, help in house work, looking after young children among others (Kwesiga, 1993).

In many families of low socio-economic status in Kigezi sub-region especially in rural areas like Kachwekano and Ndorwa peasant families prefer keeping girls at home and send boys to higher education institutions (services, 2019). In any case, girls should get married as soon as they finish primary seven or senior four in order to bring bride price to boost the family's economic status.

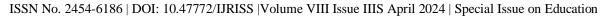
Omona (2012) observed that the socio-economic status is typically categorized into three: high, middle and low. Because of low income of many parents, students from low socio-economic status families do not get the necessary and sufficient university requirements like smartphones, personal laptops. The parents from such families lack the means and in many cases the willingness to provide their children with enough pocket money or upkeep is curtailed. Low income limits the access to higher education. Some who come from families of low socio – economic status cannot afford these things feel even poorer, they develop inferiority complexes and some even develop psychological problems which interfere with their academic studies.

Students from low SES families and communities develop academic skills more slowly compared to students from high SES groups (McCowan, 2016). Initially academic skills are correlated with the home environment, where low literacy environment and chronic stress negatively affect the student's ability to acquire skills especially those related to ICT. In 2019 COVID 19 broke out and the mode of university teaching and learning shifted from physical attendance to E-learning where students were required to study online (MoES, Ministry of Education and Sports standard operating guidelines for schools and institutions during covid-19 pandemic, 2021).

Students from low socio-economic status had their semesters deferred because many of them could not afford data or buying smartphones or laptops. E-learning limited access to higher education. Many students had to wait for the universities to be opened up. Virtual learning disadvantaged many students. Many students remain confined to low quality institutions which offer quality education. There are few students from low SES families who go for courses like engineering, medicine or law on private sponsorship (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2012).

However, some higher education institutions have opened up open distance learning programmes which do not favour students from low socio – economic status communities. Family background is the most important influence on students' learning, parents' level of education, family size greatly impacts on educational attainment of students. Smaller family size and well educated parents have been linked with higher academic achievement of the children (Omona, 2012, 2008). The academic aspirations of the students are related to the socio-economic status of their parents. Students tend to imitate their parents and so aspire to be as highly educated as them. There are fewer doctors, lawyers, teachers and engineers in the families of low socio-economic status. The students often lack such aspirations and as such they have a limited outlook on education and achieve less.

Some good looking female students are sexually harassed not only by fellow students but more alarmingly by their lecturers who sometimes threaten to fail them unless they meet their sexual demands. Sex





harassment affect access to higher education. Many sugar mummies and daddies drive to halls of student residences to take them out. Those students who indulge too much in this exercise do not do very well because they are distracted and do not give themselves enough time to study some of these relationships result in unwanted pregnancies or contraction of STDs and STIs. Such acts are majorly attributed to low socio-economic factors (Tumushabe, 2013).

Although access to higher education for low SES students also depends on other social and economic factors, basing entry into the university on cutoff points or performance at 'A' level examinations also plays a role. Students who go in for USE 3rd world), for example, still perform relatively poorer than their peers in 1st world schools. Not much is known about their performance when they enter universities but it is likely to follow a similar trend. The introduction of UPE and USE in 1997 and 2007 respectively came as a result of the government realizing that many families in Uganda were low SES families and make education free, compulsory and accessible in primary and secondary schools.

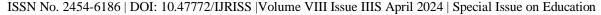
Students from low SES families have fewer chances of getting government sponsorship and even less chances of accessing the highly competitive tuition or courses offered in tertiary institutions or universities. The entry requirements in universities is two principal passes. Many students from low SES families may not afford to get the two principal passes. This entry requirement limits access to higher education. The government of Uganda came up with affirmative action where girls are added 1.5 points. This has greatly increased access to higher education more especially in public institutions.

The Joint Admission Board (JAB) selects students to join public universities and other public tertiary institutions. During the selection, the best students preferably those from 1st word schools from high SES families get the lion's share and the rest more especially those form low SES families are invited to apply on private sponsorship. If they went for USE because of lack of fees, how do you expect them to meet high university tuition on private sponsorship? The students from low SES families are the most affected because on many occasions, parents have resorted to selling of land to meet education expenses for their children subjecting families to vicious cycle of poverty.

However, socio-economic status concept is difficult concept to measure. It is usually conceived as concerning the access of an individual to goods and services that are desired by an individual in society. These may be material goods or immaterial like authority and power or education among others (Nshemereirwe, 2016). In Uganda, university admissions are based on 'A' level results and Mature Entry Aptitude Examinations which have shown to consistently disadvantage students especially those from low socio-economic status families. Many students from such families are more likely to attend schools with inadequate resources and lack of enough experienced teachers and this in the long-run will impact on the performance in National Examinations like UCE and UACE Examinations.

In a study on the interaction of SES and admission at Makerere University conducted by Mayanja (1998) revealed that the practice of admitting students basing on their 'A' level performance reinforced the social stratification that occurred at lower levels of formal education where students with higher socio – economic status were more likely to attend better primary and secondary schools and therefore perform well at 'A' level. Liana (2004) found out that of the merit-based government scholarships awarded to students at public universities, 65% are enjoyed by those students who attend first class secondary schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2012). The disparities between low SES and high SES continue to widen the education gap between students from different socio-economic status and makes education not accessible to many.

Some writers have pointed out that Japan and Germany recovered so fast from the devastations of the 2^{nd} World War (1939 – 1945) because the governments mobilized resources after the war and made investment in the education sector and increased accessibility irrespective of the home background of the citizens. The educated Japanese and Germans could therefore understand and participate in the reconstruction of their





countries. The same is said of the United States of America whose recovery from the civil war would not have been so fast if its nationals had been illiterate (Vaizey, 1962). The more people with high education, the better because they are the planners and the supervisors of the implementation of the national plans.

In the developing world, it is now more widely recognized that Education For All (EFA) holds the key to all other elements on which sustainable development can be hinged. The four pillars of development as President Museveni has put it, that is; democracy, pan Africanism, patriotism and social economic transformation can only be realized when there is access to higher education. The students' loan scheme was launched to bridge the gap between the low SES and high SES students in Uganda (MoES, 2017, 2012).

Predictors of access to higher education in Kigezi sub-region have not been extensively investigated but at lower primary and lower secondary, geographical location and factors like SES and gender have been found to play a significant role in facilitating or hindering access to Education for instance many pupils and students are seen crossing Lake Bunyonyi in canoes to go to the other side of the lake to study on a daily basis (Education Department Kabale District, 2012). Parents around Lake Bunyonyi with reasonable steady sources of income and those highly educated take their children to first class boarding schools like St. Mary's Rushoroza and Kigezi High school whereas those from low SES families may not access education.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive research design. With a deliberate mixed approach of quantitative and qualitative approaches focusing on collecting propositions as well as testing hypothesis. The study population consisted of 141 respondents in Kigezi sub region, who have knowledge about factors that affect access to higher education. The sample size was determined scientifically using Yamane's (1969) formula as follows.

n = N/1 + Ne2

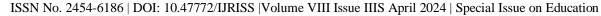
Where \mathbf{n} is the desired sample size, \mathbf{N} the size of accessible population and \mathbf{e} is the level of significance. The accessible population \mathbf{N} was 141 respondents, and these were students who did not access higher education after high school and officials from higher education institutions and the level of significance \mathbf{e} was 0.005. Therefore,

n =
$$141/1 + (141 \times 0.052)$$

= $141/1.35$
= 104

The sample was selected scientifically using stratified random sampling as shown in the table below

Strata	Elements	proportion		Sampling technique
Administrators of higher education institutions	20	14%	15	Random
Lecturers and instructors in higher education institutions	44	31%	32	Random
Students who were unable to further their education after senior six	77	55%	57	Convenience
Total	141	100%	104	





Data collection methods used were questionnaire survey and interviews. Data collection instruments used were questionnaires and interview guides. Both instruments were designed by the researcher. To ensure validity, the instruments were given to two experts (two senior lecturers) to evaluate the relevance of each item in the instrument to the set objectives to determine content validity index. To ensure reliability, the researcher carried out a pre-testing exercise through a pilot study. Data collected were analyzed using SPSS to determine the internal consistence by calculating Cronbach's coefficient alpha which turned out to be 0.957

Quantitative data analysis was carried out using both descriptive and inferential statistics. All variables of the study were considered in descriptive analysis. Correlation analysis was then carried out considering only those variables deemed most relevant and specific in the answering of the research questions. Pearson's coefficients of correlations were then computed.

FINDINGS

The study found out that of the merit-based government scholarships awarded to students at public universities, 65% are enjoyed by those students who attend first class secondary schools. The study revealed that the practice of admitting students basing on their 'A' level performance reinforced the social stratification that occurred at lower levels of formal education where students with higher socio – economic status were more likely to attend better primary and secondary schools and therefore perform well at 'A' level hence can easily access higher education.

The study found out that SES plays a significant role in facilitating or hindering access to Education. For example Students from high SES had high chances of accessing higher education than their counterparts from low SES.

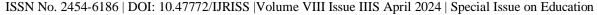
The study found out that gender significantly affects access to higher education. For example Females were more disadvantaged in Kigezi region in accessing education than their male counter parts.

CONCLUSION

The concept of access to higher education implies making education accessible and affordable to all. The sustainability of this concept will gain firm roots if the disparities that exist between the educated and uneducated, the privileged and unprivileged, the rich and the poor are dismantled. The Parish Development Model (PDM) is a good idea in this endeavour. The government of Uganda launched PDM and each parish will be given 100 million Uganda shillings to empower citizens economically to be able to take their children to tertiary institutions (MAAIF, 2022). All stakeholders in education must pool their synergies together and address gender parity issues, poverty challenges and income inequalities. The government should invest more resources in third word schools to expand their capacity in enabling students to access higher education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government should increase support for social economic emancipation and promote gender advocacy campaigns and funding to help the region break the chains of gender stereotypes that affect access to higher education. The government, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders like churches need to invest more in the sensitization and involvement of parents to participate in sustainable income generating activities that can support their children to access higher education. The government should consider an affirmative action for Kigezi region and specifically for students from low economic status and female student to increase access to higher education.





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