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Access and Equity as Addressed Through Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs)

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Abstract

Ethiopia has embarked on expanding education throughout the country since the promulgation of the Education and Training Policy (ETP) in 1994. This is more so in regard to higher education. Higher education plays a pivotal role in human resource development. Public and private higher education institutions have expanded after 1994 enrolling thousands of students. However, a cursory observation shows that all college-age students do not have equal opportunity to join tertiary level education. Currently, the issues of access and equity are being given special attention in higher education institutions including PHEIs. Thus, the major purpose of this paper was to examine the issues of access and equity as addressed through PHEIs. Equity in education is a measure of fairness, achievement and opportunity in education. It is widely believed that educational equity is dependent on two main factors. The first is fairness and the second is inclusion. These two factors are closely related and are dependent on each other for true academic success of an educational system. In the Ethiopian context the issue of equity is related to the expansion of higher education. From the point of equity, girls still have limited access to the institutions of higher learning as compared with boys. Furthermore, the majority of young people who are joining higher education institutions are from urban areas. Disabled students have limited access to higher education institutions including PHEIs. In this study secondary data were used for analysis. Documents from MoE, CSA were also used to collect secondary data. The obtained data shows that even though the majority of the Ethiopian population lives in rural areas, students coming from the urban areas have high admission rates (access) to tertiary level education than those coming from rural areas. In the Ethiopian context PHEIs are of recent phenomenon. However, they are playing their share in opening up opportunities for young people to get tertiary level education. Despite their positive role, the issue of access and equity is still a challenge as the data shows and they need to pay close attention to these issues in order improve the current status quo of higher education.

Key Words: *Private higher education institutions, access, equity, Ministry of Education*



1. Background

Countries throughout the world have recognized that education as a foundation for social, economic and political development. Without education societal progress is unthinkable.

The role of education in enhancing the development of a given country became quite clear in 1960s, especially after the propagation of human capital theory. In simple terms the human capital theory postulates that:

Schooling is one way of investing in the development of human capital. Those who follow the premise of this theory assume that humans are rational beings who will make choices that maximize their well being. Accordingly, students as individuals make rational decisions in their choices to stay in school to enhance their human capital development by learning skills. Developing skills, selecting curriculum related to personal interests and looking for specific jobs related to training is considered as means of developing an individual's human capital (Becker, 1975; Campbell, 1984).

The world is becoming a knowledge-based society and the role of education, especially at higher level is the center of this phenomenon. Reflecting this view, Neyere (as in Todaro, 1985: 334) stated that: "The role of a university in a developing nation is to contribute; to give ideas, manpower, and services for the furtherance of human equality, human dignity and human development".

Higher education can be taken as the apex of knowledge generation and dissemination center... (Olukoshi and Zeleza, 2004. According to Africa Region Human Development Working Paper Series No. 66 (2004:1):

tertiary education plays a key role in the economic and social development of any nation. This is particularly the case in today's globalized, information and knowledge-based economy. No country can expect to successfully integrate in, and benefit from, this 21st century economy without a well-educated workforce.



Higher education institutions (HEIs) are (a) expected to train the professional and political leaders needed in various public and parastatal organizations (b) bestowed also with the responsibility of shaping national development (Journal of higher education in Africa, 2003; p.58). These mandates emanate from the fact that HEIs are often the only national institutions with skills, the equipment, and the mandate to generate new understanding through research. University roles in research, evaluation, information transfer, and technology development are therefore critical to national social progress and economic growth (Revitalizing Universities in Africa: Strategy and Guidelines, 1997:i).

In an effort to modernize its own society, Ethiopia introduced tertiary level education in 1950 and embraced mass education rather than elitist education, since the promulgation of the Education and Training Policy (ETP) in 1994. The policy states the following concerning higher education: “Higher education at diploma, first degree and graduate levels, will be research oriented, enabling students become problem-solving professional leaders in their fields of study and in overall levels of formal education” (p.15). Upto 1994 higher education was the sole responsibility of the Ethiopian government. After the promulgation of ETP, private higher education institutions were allowed to operate within the Ethiopian educational system. This was quite a benchmark in the history of the Ethiopian higher educational system. According to MoE document in 2012/13 both public and private higher education institutions enrolled a total of 553,848 students in regular, evening, summer and distance education. The share of private higher education institutions was 79,650 (14.4% of the total enrollment). Even though enrollment in higher education has increased to a large extent since 1994, the issue of access and equity has not been given due attention both in public and private higher education institutions so far. This study has attempted to look into the issues of access and equity in regard to private higher education institutions (PHEIs).

2. Statement of the Problem

Higher education institutions (both public and private) are at the apex of the educational ladder. Their roles in educating and training professionals who can play a significant role in the social, economic and political development are quite significant. Since the promulgation of ETP in 1994, the number of



PHEIs has increased a lot and in 2012/13 student enrollment reached close to 80,000. This indicates that PHEIs have opened up opportunities for young people to pursue post-secondary education. The opportunity to join PHEIs must be open to all who desire to continue further education. In view of this, how do PHEIs address the issues of access and equity within the Ethiopian context?

3. Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to examine as to how PHEIs address the issues of access and equity in relation to their student intake.

4. The objectives of the study were to:

- A. Examine who gets into higher education institutions
- B. Point out the role of PHEIs in enhancing access and equity within the Ethiopian context
- C. Indicate the share of boys/girls participation from gender perspective in private higher education institutions
- D. Forward reasonable recommendations based on the findings of this preliminary study.

5. Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following basic research questions:

- A. What is the background of students who join HEIs in general?
- B. What is the share of private higher education institutions in admitting college bound students? How does this relate to the issue of equity?
- C. What is the gender composition of students attending private higher education institutions?
- D. Do private higher education institutions give opportunities for students with disabilities?

6. Literature Review

As pointed out earlier the future of nations depends on their developed human resource. This is more so with developing countries. Education and training plays a crucial role in enhancing human resource development.



Available literature on education indicates that our world is becoming a knowledge-based society and the role of education, especially at higher level is the center of this phenomenon. Given the critical role of universities in socio-economic development, no country can afford not to support at least some higher education institutions of high quality. Such institutions cannot function adequately without reasonable levels of state investment (Council of Higher Education, South Africa, 2001).

According to Africa Region Human Development Working Paper Series - No. 66 (2004) - tertiary education plays a key role in the economic and social development of any nation. This is particularly the case in today's globalized, information and knowledge-based economy. No country can expect to successfully integrate in, and benefit from, this 21st century economy without a well-educated workforce.

The role of both public and private higher education institutions in developing skilled professionals is no more questioned. However, these institutions are criticized for not giving equal opportunities for all college-age young people. Thus, the following discussion is an attempt to elaborate the issues of access and equity as addressed through private higher education institutions (PHEIs).

7. Conceptual Framework

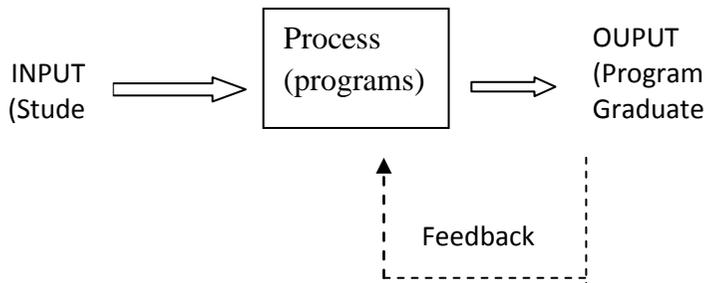
PHEIs admit students who complete their high school education and also meet the admission criteria set by concerned bodies. The question that needs to be raised in here is that what kind of students join PHEIs?

Figure 1 depicts higher education system process. Students entering the programs represent input. The programs they pursue are processes. Graduates from these programs are outputs. The feedback is the information the students give concerning their experience in the world of work. Environment is the whole context where the universities are located and include the institution itself, the community, business, industry as well as government. This conceptual framework has been taken as a basis for discussing the issues of access and equity in PHEIs.



Figure 1. Higher Education System Process

Environment (School, Community, Business, Industry, etc.)



Source: Finch and Crunkilton (1989).

8. Access and Equity in relation to PHEIs

PHEIs are now the legitimate part of the Ethiopian higher educational system. Elaborating on the main mission of higher education ESDP III (2005/06 to 2009/10) stated that:

The main responsibility of higher education is to satisfy the demand for highly skilled labor in the country.... Institutions of higher education are expected to produce new knowledge through research, serve as conduit for the transfer, adaptation, and dissemination of knowledge generated elsewhere in the world and support government and business with advice and consultancy services (p. 9-15).

In reference to the main responsibilities of higher education institutions, Martin (2010) stated that:

PHIEs are challenged with issues such as managing expansion, increasing efficiency, offering education and training relevant to the labour market and in line with national standards of quality, and being globally competitive in terms of research outputs (p.23). In addition to these responsibilities the issue of access and equity need to be addressed by all higher education institutions.



Available literature indicates that equity refers to the principle of fairness. It is defined as making sure that personal and social circumstances are not obstacles to achieving educational potential. According to Skillbeck as quoted in Martin (2010:25) equity in higher education means systematically fair, considerations for all on equal terms require that inequalities, when they occur, be justified by overall benefits and gains to all concerned.

Furthermore, Martin (2010) defines equitable tertiary education systems as those:

That ensure that access to, participation in, and outcomes of tertiary education are based only on individuals' innate ability and study effort. They ensure that educational potential at tertiary level is not the result of personal and social circumstances, including factors such as socio-economic status, gender, ethnic origin, and immigrant status, place of residence, age, or disability (P.26).

The above definition was further elaborated by Martin (2010) in the following manner:

Equity relates to a process of having access and participating and succeeding in higher education. This definition includes the notion of equity of access, which refers to the relative opportunities of social groups to enter into higher education. Equity of access is thus indeed one component of equity. Equity also includes equity of outcomes, which refers to the opportunities of students to progress and successfully complete a programme (p.26).

From the above discussion it can be deduced that the concept of equity encapsulates the notion of admission to higher education, progression and graduation within the context of higher education system process as depicted in Figure 1.

9. Research Methodology

In this preliminary study quantitative method was used. The data for the research was compiled from secondary sources. In the analysis and presentation of the data mostly %ages were used.



10. Data Analysis and Discussions

In the Ethiopian educational system the issue of equity is a recent Phenomenon. ESDP III (2005/06 - 2010/11) states the following about equity:

In order to address the equity aspect of the education sector in an integrated manner a “gender and equity department” will be established in the Ministry of Education. The objective of this department will be to lay out and implement a strategy to address girls’ education, the education of pastoralists and semi-agriculturalist communities and the education of children with special needs (p.57).

According to Martin (2010) equity usually relates to the following traditionally disadvantaged groups: (1) Women, (2) immigrants, (3) minorities, (4) people from low socio-economic backgrounds, (5) disabled people, and (6) possibly a determinant based on age or place of residence (p.26)

11. Access to higher education

As pointed out earlier students who join tertiary level education come from high school preparatory programs (Grades 11-12). The data from MoE shows that most preparatory programs are located in urban areas. Table 1 below shows that only 5.1% of the preparatory program students come from rural areas. The implication of this is that access to higher education (public as well as private) favors those coming from urban areas. What should be noted in here is that the majority of the private higher education institutions are also located in urban centers, creating favorable conditions for students living in urban centers. Furthermore, only those who could afford to pay school fees could join Private higher education institutions. Thus, it is a well established fact that higher education institutions favor students coming from a better socio-economic background.



Table 1. Urban and Rural Enrollment

Level	Urban Enrollment					Rural Enrollment				
	M	F	% M	% F	% Both	M	F	% M	% F	% Both
Primary (1-8)	1,622,287	1,636,183	49.8	50.2	20.5	6,697,844	5,949,457	53.0	47.0	79.5
Secondary (9-10)	687,003	564,905	54.9	45.1	85.8	118,421	89,118	57.1	42.9	14.2
Secondary (11-12)	160,856	112,426	66.6	33.4	94.9	8,553	6,082	58.4	41.6	5.1

Source: MoE (2010/11). Education Statistics Annual Abstract.

In Table 1 we can see that the enrollment %age in urban preparatory classes is close to 95%. In rural areas where the majority of the people live the enrollment at the preparatory classes is 5.1%. What this means is that most students from urban areas have a good chance to join universities. Thus, the input shown in Figure 1 constitutes largely urban based students. This raises the question of equity (fairness) in terms access to higher education. One of the stated objectives of higher education (Higher Education Proclamation, No.650/2009) is: Ensure fairness in the distribution of public institutions and expand access on the basis of need and equity (FDRE, 2009, p.4979). In terms of female students, comparatively more rural girls (41.6%) attend preparatory programs at secondary levels. In urban preparatory programs girls' enrollment is 33.4%.

Another important point that comes with equity issue is the question of gender- equity in higher education institutions. In a patriarchal society women are disadvantaged in terms of access to social services such as education. Table 2 was constructed to show girls participation in public and private higher education institutions.



Table 2. Undergraduate enrollment in public and private higher education institutions (2013/14).

Ownership	Sub- total	Female Students	% Female
Government	503,569	141,694	28.1
Non-government	90,005	38,324	42.6
Grand total	593,574	180,018	30.3
% of Non-government	15.2	21.3	

Source: MoE (2013/14). Education Statistics Annual Abstract.

Table 2 shows that the total enrollment (public and private) in 2013/14 was 593,574 (regular, evening, summer and distance). Out of this total, enrollment in private higher education institutes accounted for 15.2%. Female students accounted for 30.3% of the total enrollment in public and private higher education institutions. In 2013/14 the %age of female students' enrollment in private higher education institutions was 46.2%. This shows that private higher education institutions serve more female students than public universities.

Table 3. Enrollment in undergraduate by program (2013/14). Public and Private higher education institutions

Owner	Regular		Evening		Summer		Distance		Total		
	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F	% F
Gov.	308,589	88,136	59,079	18,914	102,642	24,115	33,259	10,529	503,569	141,694	28.1
Non. gov	26,489	14,297	21,126	10,868	0	0	42,389	13,159	90,005	38,324	42.6
Total	335,078	102,433	80,205	29,782		24,115	75,648	23,688	593,574	180,018	30.3
% Non. Gov.	7.9	14.0	26.3	36.5	0.0	0.0	56.0	55.6	15.2	21.3	-----

Source: MoE (2013/14). Education Statistics Annual Abstract



Table 3 shows enrollment in different programs (regular, evening, summer and distance) at public and private higher education institutions. In 2013/14 private higher education institutes enrolled 56% of the distance education students, while the public universities provided distance education for 44% of the students. Female students were more beneficiaries from distance education. The implication is that the more diversified programs you have the more opportunities you create for access to higher education.

Table 4. Graduates from Undergraduate programs (2013/14), public and private higher education institutions.

Owner	Regular		Evening		Summer		Distance		Total		
	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F	% F
Gov.	65,264	13,967	8,314	2,736	7,999	1,698	1,206	229	82,783	18,630	25.6
Non. gov	4,485	2,335	2,685	1,357	58	8	6,970	2,538	14,198	6,238	43.9
Total	69,749	16,302	10,999	4,093	8,058	1,706	8,175	2,767	96,980	24,868	25.6
% Non. Gov.	6.4	14.3	24.4	33.2	0.7	0.5	85.3	91.7	14.6	25.1	----- --

Source: MoE (2013/14). Education Statistics Annual Abstract

Completion rate/graduation from tertiary level programs is part of the equity issue. In 2013/14, a total of 96,980 students graduated from all public and private higher education institutes. Graduates from private higher education institutes accounted for 14.6%. Private higher education institutes graduated more girls than public universities in 2013/14.

12. Conclusions

This is a preliminary study that needs to be scaled up. The study has limited scope. However, there are some indications observed. Public and private higher education institutions still serve more students who come from the urban areas. Thus, the question of equity and access need more attention. Girls' participation is still low at a national level. Private higher education institutions seem to serve girls better than public universities.



13. Recommendations

- The world is becoming knowledge based society and the role of HEIs in developing the human capital is well recognized. Thus, it requires special attention by those concerned.
- There is still urban/rural disparity in terms of access to public and private PHEIs. This gap needs to be addressed with vigor.
- Students with disabilities must be given a fair share in terms of access to private higher education institutions.
- Attempts be made to give more access to young men and women from rural communities

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