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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN BUNGOMA WEST DISTRICT, KENYA

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Abbreviations and Acronyms:
H S E S: High Socio Economic Status.
LSES: Low Socio-economic status
MS E S: Medium Socio Economic Status

Abstract

To access university education in Kenya, one needs to attain grade C+ in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education and above as a minimum qualification according to Joint Admission Board (JAB) requirements. The sample of students for this study was identified through simple random sampling while Public Universities were purposefully identified. The instruments comprised questionnaire and interviews. The validity of instruments was done through consultation with lecturers who are the experts in the Department of Education Planning and Management of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology and supervisors. Data analysis was done on computer based Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme at the ANOVA and Chi-Square value 0.05 level of significance. Both descriptive statistics involving means, mode, frequencies and inferential statistics were used. The study found out that students' socio economic status influenced the number of those who accessed university education. There is need for the government to establish a comprehensive scholarship and loan system for needy students.

Introduction

The role of the university is to contribute to ideas, work force and service for the furtherance of human equality, human dignity and development (Todaro, 1981). Todaro (1981) further states that the university is generally identified as the most important institution which produces high level manpower in the economy. Therefore investment in this level of education leads to production of high level human resource development in the economy of any nation or society; where students tend to specialize in specific disciplines like engineering, law, medicine, planning among others. According to Mugenda (2007), acquiring university education adds value to a person's life. She further enumerated direct and indirect benefits of university education, which consist of increased earnings, high productivity, and provision of high skills through research and dissemination of knowledge, poverty reduction and improved perception of personal health. Sifuna (1990), sheds further light on the objectives of university education: to produce mature and conscientious graduates with ability and desire to contribute to the development of the country; to provide for national service and development which reflect the national cultural heritages; to develop and transmit knowledge and skills through research and training at undergraduates and post graduates levels; to preserve knowledge and stimulate the intellectual life and cultural development of the country; to produce high level labor in scientific and technological fields to meet the social, cultural and economic development needs of the nation. During the renaissance era in Europe, the university also stimulated the development of intellectual life and liberated individuals in the way they managed their lives. It is noted that intellectual activities at all university centers in Europe led to the evolution of the modern world through gradual steps that gave birth to new intellectual life as basis for high level human resource development (Sifuna,1990).

In spite of the concern by the stakeholders to increase the access of their children to public universities, there is need to avoid unnecessary rash to subject their students to poor quality decrease. There was concern by stakeholders in Bungoma West that the District had fewer students from secondary schools accessing University education. University education is the most significant promoter of high-level human capital production in any country's economy. In Kenya, for one to access any public university, she/he must meet the minimum university requirement of C+ and above for both Joint Admission Board and Privately sponsored candidates. JAB lowered its cut off points from grade B+ to B plain of 66 and 64 points for men and women respectively due to government policy to increase access to higher education (Siringi, 2008).The adjustment in the minimum requirement for admission was expected to raise admission from 10,000 to 16,000 for the academic year 2007/2008. In spite of the government effort to increase the opportunities for university education, there was a worrying trend concerning access to higher education by students from Bungoma West District.

METHODOLOGY

The study focused on the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E) graduates from 2001 – 2006 who accessed public university education from Bungoma West district. It assessed the influence of socio-economic status on access to university education. The theoretical framework that guided this study was the human capital theory coined by Adam Smith (1952), in which he stated that education leads to acquisition of useful abilities of all members of the society. Okurut (2001), observed that human capital theory is the way individuals are motivated to spend money on education with hope of getting benefits in future. The study used the descriptive survey design, which focused on the description of the exact state of affairs, as they existed in the field. The population consisted of 350 university students from Bungoma West who accessed higher education in public universities in Kenya between 2002-2007. The sample size of 105 was randomly selected from a population of 350 constituting 30% of the study population. The study used questionnaires, interviews and observation of documents like Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E) results and university admission records. The test-retest method was used on a sample of ten university students at Masinde Muliro University mainly from Bungoma South District. The researcher consulted widely with colleagues in the Department of Education Planning and Management. Data analysis was done using computer based Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Programme (Richard, 1997) for both descriptive and inferential statistics. This was because the instruments yielded both qualitative and quantitative data. Content analysis was used to examine the intensity with which certain words were used in terms of numbers of respondents against question posed. Finally, systematic content analysis was done by classifying data to create specific meaning to justify the stated objective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of the study was analyzed basing on null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between students' socio-economic background and access to university education. The study established that majority of students in public Universities from Bungoma West between 2002-2006 came from medium socio-economic status followed by high socio-economic status and the last category was low socio-economic status.

The attributes of the students' socio-economic status were based on the person who pays fees and work done by the person who pays fees; type of the house the respondents stay in; size of land and its productivity, type of crops grown and animals kept; monthly income; main source of water at home; family assets; amount of fees balance and whether parents/guardians were alive or deceased. A study carried out by Odebero (2006), states that a multiple of indicators in a study are preferred to capture various socio-economic characteristics common in African families. The coding was done before entering the university students' socio-economic status variables using the statistical package for social sciences involving inferential statistics. These varieties of indicators were used in this study to categorize the university students into three classes of their socio-economic status. The first item on who pays fees scored 2 points for either father or mother and guardian 1 point. On the second item about the type of work done by the person who pays fees scored 4 points for lawyer, medical officer and pharmacist since these professions are equally competitive in terms of income generation. Teaching and laboratory technician scored 3 points; small scale farmer scored 2 points while peasant farmers were the least scoring 1 point.

Human beings are active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, and initiate socio economic and political development (Todaro, 1981). The person who pays fees greatly influences the level of education for students who depend on them. Those

with low income may not be able to cater for the rising cost for attaining higher education. This in itself indicates that most of the people within this region are low income earners and thus their children may either lack access to higher education or dropout of their courses or finish with large fees arrears. Any of this is a great challenge to the parents who have great hopes and wish for bright future for their children.

The third item on the type of house respondents stay in were scored 4 for permanent house with electricity, 3 for permanent house without electricity, 2 for semi-permanent house with or without electricity while 1 for grass thatched house. The type of a house one stays in can be a possible measure of a person's income and hence the SES (Odebero, et al 2007; Odebero,2008).

The fourth item was land size which scored 4, 3,2 and 1 for those with 6 acres,3-5 acres,1-2 acres and those with below 1 acre respectively. By owning several acres, one may easily convert them into cash by selling or invest in income generating ventures to earn income. Similarly the researcher wanted to establish family land productivity which was scored 3 points for very productive, 2 for fairly productive and 1 for not being productive. Land productivity is crucial for family development especially among households that entirely depend upon agriculture as a source of income. Thus most of the families can only produce food for subsistence and very few, if any, have some surplus produce for commercial purposes bearing in mind the small land sizes owed by most of the families.

The sixth item on type of crops grown on family land was scored 4 points for coffee and sugarcane; 3 for tomatoes and cabbages; 2 for tobacco and cotton and 1 for maize. The kind of crops grown on the family land indicates some of the possible sources of income that the family may have to enable it sustain itself in all aspects including the academics of the family members. Hence most of the households do plant maize simply because it is not only the staple food crop but also grown for commercial purpose in Kenya. Ecological conditions of Kenya may not favor the production of maize on a large scale. Though majority plant maize, the land size for most families is small allowing only maize production on small scale for domestic use.

The seventh item was on the animal categories kept on the respondents' farms at home. Exotic cattle score was 4; indigenous cattle 3 points; pigs, rabbits, sheep and goats scored 2 points while poultry scored 1 point. Type of livestock if well managed can be a major boost to the family income.

Item eight was on personal, spouse, parent or guardian monthly income. Those who earned above Ksh 100,000 were scored 4 points; Ksh 26,000-100,000 scored 3 points; Ksh 5,000-25,000 scored 2 points while those who earned below Ksh 5000 were scored 1 point.

The ninth item was main source of water at home: piped water generated 4 points, roof catchments 3 points, deep well 2 points while stream, dam and pond 1 point. The results revealed that 51.6% get water from deep wells, 26.3% from streams while only 11.6% used piped water. This shows that most of the respondents in rural settings basically obtained water from poor quality sources due to their low socio-economic status.

The tenth item on family assets. Those who owned matatu earned 4 points; family vehicle 3 points, TV and motorbike scored 2 points while bicycle owners scored 1 point. The family assets are the main facilitators of family economy since they can be utilized to generate family income. An overwhelming 72.6% of parents and guardians owned bicycles, 9.5% owned family vehicles and motor bikes respectively while 2.1% either owned matatus. Other parents/guardians comprising 4.2% don't own any assets. This shows that majority of families are in economic quagmire and tend to languish in abject poverty since the main assets they own are bicycles which cannot generate very high economic returns.

The eleventh item was whether the respondents' parents were alive or deceased. Parents who were a live attained 2 points for both mother and mother while deceased for both father and mother got 1 point.

The last item on socio-economic status was to establish the university students that had fees balance. Those without fees balance attracted 2 points while those with any fees balance attained 1 point. An overwhelming 72.6% of the respondents had fees balances while only 27.4% had cleared University fees.

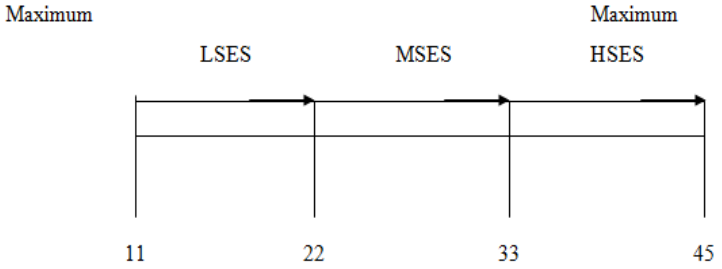
As suggested by Odebero,(2008), the socio-economic status scores were determined by coding the items on socio-economic status in the questionnaire of the recipients in order to establish numerical data. The items on SES were grouped and given scores ranging from 1- 4 where the highest items were given 4 scores. After coding, the lowest score the student

attained basing on SES was 11 points while the highest got 45 points. The range between the lowest (11) and the highest (45) was 34 points. The mean was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{\text{Range}}{\text{LSE, MSE and HSE}}$$

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{34}{3} = 11 \text{ points}$$

11-22 points (LSES)
23-33 (MSES)
34 Above (HSES)
Therefore the respondents whose scores ranged from 11 - 22 were categorized LSE, 23 – 33 points were categorized MSE while those above 34 points were categorized HSE (Odebero,2008).



Source: (Derived from Odebero, 2008 & Odebero et al, 2007)

The respondents were grouped into three categories basing on socio-economic status as per student which gave the following distribution. The impression derived shows majority of university students came from medium socio-economic background 50(52.6%); high socio-economic status which contributed 33(34.7%); while the low socio-economic families contributed 12(12.6%). There was a steady rise in the number of students who gained admission in public universities from 2002(7.4%) to 2005(22.1%). There was a tremendous drop in 2006 where only 10 (10.5%) were admitted; this was followed by a drastic rise in 2007 when 37(38.9%) students were admitted. Learning can only take place when there is minimal interruption.

Fees balance is one of the major challenges faced by learners in third world countries which culminate in terminating people's studies prematurely and even shattering the dreams of most people. The poverty index in Kenya shows that 56% of Kenyans live below the poverty line. This may imply that majority of the respondents are at great risk of either not completing their studies successfully or finishing with huge fees balances which makes it difficult for them to advance to higher levels of education. This agrees with early research which revealed that students from poor backgrounds often graduate with heavy debts (Corak et al, 2004). This also reflects that the kind of work done by most of the facilitators could only cater for subsistence needs and was not sufficient to take care of respondents academic requirements.

The socio economic status of students who accessed university education between 2002-2007 was analyzed as shown below (percentages in parentheses).

Table 1: Annual students' admission basing on Socio Economic Status

Year of Admission	HSES	MSES	LSES	TOTAL
2002	2(28.6%)	4(57.1%)	1(14.3%)	7(7.4%)
2003	5(71.4%)	2(28.6%)	0(0%)	7(7.4%)
2004	3(23.1%)	7(53.8%)	3(23.1%)	13(13.7%)
2005	6(28.6%)	13(61.9%)	2(9.5%)	21(22.1%)
2006	2(20%)	7(70%)	1(10%)	10(10.5%)
2007	15(40.5%)	17(45.9%)	5(13.5%)	37(38.9%)
TOTAL	33(34.7%)	50(52.6%)	12(12.6%)	95(100%)

Source: Field Data
KEY
LSES- Low socio-economic status
MSES- Medium socio-economic status
HSES- High socio-economic status

The trend of access basing on S.E.S

Table 2 gives the summary of respondents' access to university education basing on Socio Economic Status. It shows the distribution of students from Bungoma West district that accessed university education from 2002 to 2007 basing on socio - economic status.

Table 2: Trend of access basing on S.E.S

SES	Frequency	Percentage
HSES	33	34.74%
MSES	50	52.63%
LSES	12	12.63%
TOTAL	95	100%

Source: Field data

Table 3: Analysis Of Variance on Students' Socio Economic Status on access to University Education

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
who pays your university fees	Between Groups	16.372	4	4.093	2.179	.000
	Within Groups	169.060	90	1.878		
	Total	185.432	94			
state the type of work done by person who pays your fees	Between Groups	42.299	4	10.575	1.610	.002
	Within Groups	591.238	90	6.569		
	Total	633.537	94			
state the type of house you stay in at home	Between Groups	3.138	4	.785	.453	.031
	Within Groups	155.767	90	1.731		
	Total	158.905	94			
what is the size of your family land	Between Groups	4.588	4	1.147	1.275	.032
	Within Groups	80.949	90	.899		
	Total	85.537	94			
how is your land productivity	Between Groups	.484	4	.121	.876	.000
	Within Groups	12.421	90	.138		
	Total	12.905	94			
give the type of crops grown in your family	Between Groups	1.684	4	.421	.303	.000
	Within Groups	125.053	90	1.389		
	Total	126.737	94			
state the main source of water at home	Between Groups	10.345	4	2.586	1.449	.001
	Within Groups	160.603	90	1.784		
	Total	170.947	94			
assets owned by your parent or guardian	Between Groups	6.273	4	1.568	.833	.003
	Within Groups	169.475	90	1.883		
	Total	175.747	94			
are your parents alive or deceased	Between Groups	3.743	4	.936	.578	.003
	Within Groups	145.794	90	1.620		
	Total	149.537	94			
do you have any fees balance	Between Groups	3.247	4	.812	4.544	.002
	Within Groups	16.079	90	.179		
	Total	19.326	94			

The above data shows that majority of university students admitted in public universities in Bungoma west 50 (52.63%) came from medium socio economic status. The lowest percentage came from low socio-economic background 12 (12.63%) while those from high socio-economic families contributed 33 (34.74%). Those from medium and high socio economic status contributed the highest proportion of university students from Bungoma West in Public Universities. This is quite apparent in table 4.3 showing the number of those who accessed University education in Bungoma West District between 2002-2007.Though majority of students from HSES and MSES qualified to join public universities, most parents and guardians found it difficult to pay fees due to their own reasons; this could justify why majority of students had fees balance(72.6%).This study tallies with the one carried out by Odebero (2006) that showed over 56% of the Kenyan population living below the poverty line (Republic of Kenya, 2005 in sessional paper no 1 of 2005) on a policy frame work for education training and research. The findings from this research indicated that 56% of people in Bungoma West District may be living below the poverty line (Republic of Kenya, 2002).

This is reflected from the low number of students who qualified to access public university education from the LSES and MSES. Majority of the families stayed in semi permanent houses without electricity (52.6%) while others stayed in grass thatched houses (13.7%). The highest percentage of families owned 1-2 acres of land (41.1%) which were fairly productive. The main crop grew was maize (61.1%) which was both a stable food crop and partly used as a cash crop. Though some families grow coffee, sugarcane and tobacco, it was on a very limited scale due to small land size and low soil productivity. Most of the residents kept indigenous cattle (62.1%) which were less productive in terms of milk and meat though their cost of production is high, especially treatment and feeding. Only 6.3% kept exotic cattle. The main sources of water were deep wells (51.6%) streams (26.3%) and a very limited number uses piped water (11.6%)

The main assets were bicycles (72.6%) with a few owning matatus (2.1%) for commercial purpose. From the above analysis, it indicates that majority of Bungoma West District residents could be of LSES and MSES which could be the limiting factor on the number that accessed university education which is very expensive in Kenya. Unless this trend is changed, most of the students may dropout of university or defer their studies.

Analysis of Variance on students' socio-economic status and access to university education

Hypothesis one: There is no significant difference between the students' socio economic status and access to university education.

To find out if there is significant difference between the students' socio-economic status and access to university education, the following null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. The results are as shown in table 3.

The F statistics (2.179) and its associated significance level ($p<.05$) indicate that the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between students socio economic background and access to university education is rejected. In other words, there appears to be a significant difference between students' socio economic background and access to university education.

Based on the descriptive statistics in the analysis of variance that showed that there was a significant difference in means between students' SES and access to university education it was found necessary to carry out a post-hoc pairwise comparison test. This was meant to identify where the differences lie, on the basis of which conclusion and recommendation were to be derived. Table 5 gives the result of the post hoc pair wise test.

The results presented in Table 5 for multiple comparisons showed the existence of a statistically significant difference in means between students' SES and access to university education in favour of high and medium SES ($P<0.05$). From the sampled data there was enough evidence to reject the test hypothesis "there is no significant difference between students' socio economic background and access to university education." The implication of these results is that more of those students from high and medium socio economic classes access the university more compared to those in low socio economic income groups in that order. Aluanga (2008) observed that poor students though may be intellectually superior, face serious challenges of fees payment which hampers their access to university education.

Table 5 Post Hoc Tests showing students' socio- economic status and access to university Scheffe

Dependent Variable	(I) Class status	(J)Class Status	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std Error	Sig.	95% confidence interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Class Size	Low socio economic	Medium socio economic class	7.5806*	.57942	.000	-9.0223	-6.1389
		High Socio economic class	7.2273*	.87088	.000	-19.3941	-15.0604
	medium socio economic class	Low socio-economic class	7.5806*	.57942	.000	6.1389	9.0223
		High socio-economic class	-9.6467*	.83046	.071	-11.7130	-7.5804
	High Socio Economic class	Low socio economic class	17.2273*	.87088	.000	15.0604	19.3941
		Medium socio economic class	9.6467*	.83046	.083	7.5804	11.7130

Therefore it is difficult for a student from low socio-economic background in accessing education in secondary and hence university level in any sub-Saharan country. Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1995) observed that poor families find it difficult to pay fees even free education imposes substantial burden through earnings foregone and out-off pocket expenses for clothes, travel, books and other learning materials. On the other hand, Gitonga (2009) stated that the high cost of education is one of the greatest challenges that influence Kenyan students to pursue degree programmes they never anticipated in their lives. A study carried by Corak, et al (2003), observed that many students in Canada (Saskatchewan) who desired to access university education could not afford due to low financial aid (loans, grants/bursaries and scholarships).This confirms an interview carried out by Mwiria (2008), in education watch in Kenya which revealed that though education historically is known to be the best tool for fighting inequality in the society, its supply in Kenya is skewed to favour students from rich families at the expense of the poor. These views were similarly shared by Odebero (2007), in his study on equity in access to university education where he observed that the children of the rich are most likely to access university education more than the poor. This study established that 72.6% of students had fees balance while the main assets owned by most families were bicycles (72.6) %. The implication of this was that if the socio-economic situation is not addressed in Bungoma West, higher education may remain the preserve of children from high socio-economic status.

CONCLUSION

The distribution of the number of students to public universities in Bungoma West District from 2002 – 2007 appear to have been influenced by their socio-economic background where the highest number were from families of medium to high socio-economic status while the lowest percentage were from low socio-economic status. Therefore there is need for the government to increase the constituency development fund and allocate part of it to well identified needy students from mainly low socio-economic backgrounds to enable them pay for their university fees and clear outstanding balances. The government should establish a comprehensive scholarship and loan systems to enable well identified needy students to pursue competitive university programmes of their choice. The government should intensify rural electrification programme to stimulate setting up of small scale industries to empower residents of Bungoma West economically to have ability of investment in their children education. The government should also access more soft loans to farming community in Bungoma West for improvement of their agricultural land productivity. The government needs to improve the infrastructure in this region for easy transportation of perishable agricultural products to the markets as a way of improving the community socio-economic

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