ACCESS & EQUITY IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

S. Rizwan, A. Huma

Allama Iqbal Open University (PAKISTAN)

Abstract

“Education, and specifically higher education, has characteristics of being a consumption good and an investment good” (Ramsey, 2012). Education is one of the major socio economic indicators of development of any country. It is no doubt the backbone of strong economy. Higher education is offered to the people with a perspective of preparing them to bring a better future through their expertise. In the era of knowledge economy it can be safely said that a nation can be transformed into a developed nation if Higher Education is given due importance. Access has a two-way role for reaching, providing a passage, an entrance or a doorway to education, availability of educational services for population at different levels, beginning from primary to tertiary levels. It is not only important to provide education opportunities but also to keep track of the utilization of these opportunities. Equity means creating equal opportunities for equal access in higher education. This include Representational (proportional participation) and Resource (educational resources) equity which whenever unequally distributed, broadens the equity gaps. Pakistan not only aims to achieve the Millennium Development Goals but also to eliminate gender disparity at all levels of education. Equity in education reflects the extent to which access and opportunities for students are just and fair. This includes reduction in disparities based on gender, poverty, residence, ethnicity, language, location etc. The Government of Pakistan is planning to raise the gross enrollment ratio to 15 percent by 2020, whereas the Higher Education in the country still remains closer to the elitist rather than masses stage. Therefore a risk prevails that the mode of selection of this “elite” will be based as much on social/financial or other factors as on academic merit. Already, cost-recovery is at high levels, and may constitute an obstacle for talented but poor students. It is critical that, as the system expands, meritocratic values prevail. The major purpose of the study was to provide a description and an assessment of the current status of access to tertiary education in Pakistan and to discuss which schemes need to be in place so that equity of access is guaranteed when enrollments are expanding. For this purpose 31 universities were requested to provide enrollment and financial aid data. Over all enrollment and financial aid data was also obtained from the statistics and Human Resource Department of Higher Education Commission. Previous studies and National Survey studies of Bureau of Statistics were reviewed and analyzed. A situational and gap analysis was conducted on the basis of available data. It was found that there is gender disparity within each level of education especially according to areas of specialization. There is regional disparity although scholarship schemes have quota for the deprived areas, yet the students coming from these regions often cannot fulfill the merit criteria and fail to avail the funding opportunities. Time line of scholarship and income bracket is inappropriate for ensuring equity and access to higher education.

Keywords: Access, equity, tertiary education, assessment.