

# **Equitable Access to Higher Education in Uganda: The Uganda Students' Higher Education Financing Policy Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

Given the enormous benefits that higher education (HE) accrues to individuals and nations and its pivotal role in creating and achieving sustainable socio-economic transformation, equity and social justice issues in HE has assumed a central position in HE policies of many countries. Notably, equitable access to HE has been at the centre of discussion in the Bologna Declaration of 1999, the aspiration of Africa Agenda 2030, Africa Agenda 2063, the East African Community (EAC) Vision 2050, and as the Uganda Vision 2040. Moreover, equitable access to HE is configured as one of the cornerstones of ensuring the right to education. Against this backdrop, I explored equitable access to HE via the Uganda Students' Higher Education Financing Policy by exploring how it broadens access to HE, ensures retention and completion of the policy beneficiaries, and deepens access to HE. My motivation for this area was intrigued by the ominous Government reports and publications indicating that the majority of the children who join universities in Uganda are children of rich individuals who take their children to "elite" secondary schools which are not regionally balanced; the low transition rate from secondary schools to universities; low Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) with a high dropout rate in universities in Uganda, as well as glaring regional disparities in access to HE. To carry out this study, I adopted a qualitative, descriptive case study design rooted in transformative justice and Michel Foucault's discourse analysis philosophies and guided by an interpretivist paradigm. I used data from semi-structured interviews with nine participants I selected through snowball and purposive sampling. I then triangulated data sources with documentary analysis and review. I used the inductive thematic analysis method to analyze data on objectives one and two and Foucauldian discourse analysis on objective three. Findings showed that equity in the implementation of the policy is amiss. Issues of corruption, influence-peddling, limited publicity of the loan policy, and support of mainly STEM programmes are all signs of systemic elitism imbued in implementing the policy. Moreover, the findings also showed that the policy does not explicitly promote the retention and completion of the beneficiaries. Also, the study revealed that the term 'regional balance' as used in the policy is cynical policy rhetoric and a discourse that is used to establish and perpetuate the hegemony of the Western part of Uganda through unequal power relations rather than a pure act of social justice. Thus, regional balance is used as an assemblage of governmentality, showing that policies are not just institutional mechanisms for producing agreement but also the stage on which theatrical and symbolic modes of exemplary politics are performed. Thus I recommend that there is a need: for the HESFB to expand its capital base beyond the funds appropriated by Parliament, the HESFB should adopt a two-tier model of

awarding student loans, increase public awareness and popularity of the policy, and use regional quotas when selecting loan beneficiaries.

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