Cadetship Support Scheme as Higher Education Financing in Zimbabwe: A Problem or a Solution?

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Abstract

Any central government is committed to achieving a wide range of objectives which include economic growth, distributional goals, social inclusion, liberty and security. A large part of the literature body supports the idea that Higher education is directly relevant to all those objectives. Also it is important for its own sake. This paper, however, deliberately concentrates on the distributional goals. This means that for Higher education to enhance growth, the sector needs to be large enough, of high quality, and responsive to a rapidly changing external environment. To support distributional objectives and social inclusion, the sector needs to promote access and equity. Access also supports the growth objective, since no country can afford to waste talent. By using a survey on A level students in Gweru, the paper investigates the expectations, opinions and attitudes towards higher education participation given a student's socio-economic background and current financing policy in the higher education sector. The paper finds out that although student enrolment in universities is continually increasing many from low income families are likely not able to attend college if they pass their exams: bringing the issue of student mix in universities. This means that in higher education there are persistent participation inequalities, presenting a major challenge for the higher education financing policy. The findings of this study suggest a redirection of equity initiatives that may cover both full tuition fees and living expenses. The study also suggests a further investigation on how the current job-market is influencing decisions to participate in higher education and also the extent to which high school curricula influence the decisions of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to enrol at universities.

Keywords: Higher education financing, university, access, equity, university participation

Introduction

There has been much interest in how education is financed in the whole world particularly Africa. This is because of increased acceptance that a highly skilled human capital base can help those countries lagging behind in terms of development to catch up with the already
developed ones. A large part of literature on economic growth emphasizes the high education as a pre-requisite for a marked economic development to occur (Lin: 2004, Jenkins: 1995, Barro and Sala-i-Martin: 1995). Many international organizations are also viewing education as vital to the attainment of Millennium Development Goals. Two of the MDGs pertain directly to the education while on the other hand education will also help in the eradication of extreme poverty, reduction in gender marginalization and also enhance environmental and HIV and AIDS awareness (FAO: 2005).

Many countries have or are reforming their higher education financing, introducing policies to improve access to higher education and also improving equity in delivering education to its citizens. Zimbabwe is also one of those countries that are continually reforming its education sector including financing of the same. Zimbabwe inherited a colonial education system on gaining independence from Britain in 1980. Thus change in educational policy was inevitable. The newly elected Zimbabwean government changed the law so that it embraces education as a fundamental right and it did.

A single university was inherited from the colonial era which served about 2000 students, obviously the majority being whites. By 2004, there were 12 universities in Zimbabwe catering for about 45,000 students (MHE 2004), with the majority being blacks. On the financing side, the government policy has changed a lot since independence. From 1980 to 1995, the government solely funded university education with grants as the main source of student financing. Grants were seen as crucial in the process of engaging the previously disadvantaged blacks. Because of droughts, poor performance of the economy and government’s commitment to university education as an important element in national development, new funding mechanisms for tertiary education were considered.

The year 2002 saw the government introducing a new financing policy to broaden access and opportunities in higher education. A 100% loan system was introduced replacing the grant system and catered for everyone in the tertiary system whether public or private university student.

The repayments were to be paid upon exceeding a certain salary threshold after graduating. Collection was done through a centralised government tax system. In 2006, the cost burden of university education was fully shifted to the student complimented by a partial funding of the Cadetship Support Scheme (CSS) which caters for those from poor socio-economic backgrounds.

In this era of CSS, there is an increase in student enrolment in Zimbabwe universities (Laura et.al 2011). Looking at the Midlands State University enrolment as an example.
From the table above there is a marked expansion in student enrolment at MSU though its fees are relatively higher than other state universities. On the other hand, Zimbabwe has an excess of some 8,000 students annually who qualify but fail to enter university. (Kariwo, 2007)

The student enrolment in universities is continually increasing. On the other hand a lot of students who passed A Level are failing to attend university: bringing the issue of student mix in universities. This means that in higher education participation inequalities needs close investigation.

The objective of this paper was to investigate whether CSS is achieving equity and encouraging participation of the poor. This was done by analysing expectations, attitudes and choices of school students on their after school options given the present financing policy and their socio-economic background.

There are various opinions on the issue of tuition fees in universities. Some economists argue that for increased participation tuition fees and loans should be replaced by grants as this will not prevent eligible students from poor backgrounds to access higher education. Others argue that to have improved efficiency and equity, there is a great need for cost sharing, (Goodman and Kaplan, 2003).

Christoles et al (2008) analysed the determinants of University participation in Canada of which financing of HE (tuition fees) was one of the determinants. Their results show that

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Enrolments-First Semesters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>3,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>5,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>7,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>8,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>10,492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>9,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>10,527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>8,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>8,954</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>10,428</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Midlands State University, Registrar’s Department
individuals respond at least in some significant measure as rational economic agents to variations in economic incentives to attend university. They found out that an increase in tuition fees had a modest negative impact on participation, increases in wage premium increase participation and also the education and income of the family head had a positive influence on the decision to attend university. Their research used binary models, namely Probit, Logit and Poisson to explain those determinants that affect the decision of young people to attend university. Kane (1994) also estimated the causal effects of grants and fees on university participation. He found that a $1000 increase in tuition fees results in a 3.7 percentage point decrease in attendance amongst black 18 to 19 year olds. Similar to these results, were those found by Hemelt and Marcotte (2008). Dynarski (2003) analysed the effects of one – off policy change whereby financial aid was withdrawn from children with a deceased, disabled or retired father. The results showed that university participation was reduced by a 3.6 percentage point due to that reform.

A notable study of higher education financing in Zimbabwe is by Kariwo (2007). In his study he reviews the development of higher education in Zimbabwe with a particular focus on universities, as the Zimbabwean system was moving from an elite to a ‘mass’ education system. He critically analysed the factors impacting on access and the quality of higher education in Zimbabwe. Population growth and brain drain, lack of transparency in resource allocation and poor accountability were impacting on access and quality in higher education. The study called for new models of resource generation and allocation and better accountability in Higher education, the proper design of a tuition fees scheme and the promotion of private universities as a way of meeting excess demand. Though the paper touches on important issues in higher education financing, it did not look at the issue of equity.

In addition, Dearden (2010) estimated the impact of tuition fees, loans and grants on HE participation in the UK. They used the Pseudo – panel techniques. Their findings show that an increase by £1000 in tuition fees reduced participation by a 4.4 percentage point, an increase of £1000 in loans increased participation by a 3.2 percentage point and an increase in maintenance grants increased participation by a 2.1 percentage point. In the US, substantial research has been conducted on the effect of tuition fees on enrolment in university education and they indicated a negative impact of tuition fees on the enrolments rates (Heller 1997, Leslie and Brinkman 1987). In the Netherlands, Canton and de Jong (2005) studied the effects of tuition fees on post secondary education participation. They found no effects of tuition fees on the participation rates.

The Cadetship Support Scheme (C.S.S.) programme was introduced in 2006 after the funding policy which was characterized by grants and loans ceased. The removal of grants and loans was seen as a blow on the poor to the extent that the government introduced this programme to cater for the poor. Thus the cadetship programme was seen as bringing equity in higher education financing by helping those from poor backgrounds.

The policy framework within which the C.S.S must operate within was expressed in the second report of the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science and Technology and states that
a C.S.S applicant must be prepared to train on the special Cadetship Scheme at training institutions recognized by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, be a citizen of Zimbabwe, must show that he/she lacks the capacity to pay the required fees and may be an orphan or someone with physical challenges. If a student is admitted at the college or if any need arises to a person already in college, he/she pays a mandatory fee (currently around US$190) and complete cadetship forms. These forms are collected by the institution and the lists are compiled before both the forms and the lists are sent to the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education.

On receiving the applications and lists, the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education then vets the forms: looking at the citizenship status, relevant attachments, and completeness of the forms and the academic results for those already under study. A list of those who qualify is then compiled.

The money of those who qualified is sent to the institution as a lump sum and students are required to sign for the receipt of that money. Reconciliation of payments and acquittals is done at the institution and sent to the Ministry for double checking. The money which is not collected is returned to the Ministry together with the list of the names of those students who did not collect their money.

Names of students who repeat are sent to the Ministry and are not paid for that semester. Those whose fees are paid for by the government through the CSS agree under the Memorandum of Agreement they sign to be bonded for the period equal to the education of the period they were engaged as cadets. The funds that were used to pay for their fees are not repaid but covered by serving the country through any form of employment in Zimbabwe during the bonding period. During that period, the certificate and transcript of results is held by the institution. If the student wants to work outside Zimbabwe, he or she is required to commit 1/3 of his/her salary during the bonding period. The Memorandum of agreement states that a special agreement will be entered into between Zimbabwe and the former students’ employers for the remittance of that foreign currency. The agreements are administered through The Attorney General’s office by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education. If a student fails to complete his/her course because of lack of serious application on the student’s part, the surety binds himself/herself to repay the state’s money.

Carpenter and Western (1984) have hypothesised a causal ordering of the variables influencing student choice and opportunities for access to tertiary education and on top was the social origins of the student which can be divided into sex, parental occupation, geographical location, perceived family income, area and wealth. The research framework of this study is the interaction of socio-economic background of the student and after school options given the current Higher education financing policy. That is investigating equity and access in university participation.
Methodology

Due to the nature of the research which looked at qualitative data (i.e. expectations, opinions and attitudes) and also figures, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the collection and analysis of data. Data were collected through a survey, using a questionnaire adapted from James (2002).

The population of the study was all A Level students in the 16 High Schools in Gweru District. The study looked at A level students because they are the once whose decisions to participation in university or otherwise are in final stage of being built.

A sample of 4 schools was selected using Simple Random Sampling. The procedure used is the Lottery method, where cards with school names were put in a hat and the first four schools were randomly selected. Simple Random Sampling is a random, or probability sampling technique which gives each member of the target population a known and equal probability of selection.

The main advantage of the Simple Random sampling is that it is highly representative of all subjects under study. Its main disadvantages are that it is not possible without complete list of population members; potentially uneconomical to achieve; can be disruptive to isolate members from a group and time-scale may be too long.

In this study the mentioned disadvantages were overcome because the researchers had the list of all schools in Gweru District that can enter the population and isolation of members was not possible since high schools in Gweru have a good mix of students from different socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, a highly representative sample of the population was needed. This motivated the researchers to use the Simple Random Sample since its disadvantages did not have much influence in our case.

In the four sampled schools 420 A level students were surveyed using a questionnaire. Only 400 questionnaires were fit for analysis, 20 were spoiled.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

In this study categories of the socioeconomic background are based on the income level of the family head. The Poverty Datum Line (PDL) was used to divide students into 2 socio-economic backgrounds: low income group for those whose family heads earned below PDL and high income group for those whose family head earned an income equal to or above the PDL.
Table 1: Distribution of positive responses (a yes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Below poverty datum line</th>
<th>Equal or above poverty line</th>
<th>% of total respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you intend to attend university if you pass?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>126 (56%)</td>
<td>161 (92%)</td>
<td>71.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>72 (32%)</td>
<td>64 (36.6%)</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Highest level of education attained by family Head</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He /She did not finish high school</td>
<td>10 (4.4%)</td>
<td>3 (1.7%)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate from high school without further education</td>
<td>90 (40%)</td>
<td>9 (5.1%)</td>
<td>24.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received certificate or diploma without degree</td>
<td>71 (31.5%)</td>
<td>23 (12.3%)</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received a degree</td>
<td>54 (24%)</td>
<td>140 (80%)</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Is your family able to pay your university tuition without government help?</td>
<td>34 (15.1%)</td>
<td>150 (90%)</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Is your family able to cover your tuition + living expenses at university without government help?</td>
<td>26 (11.5%)</td>
<td>85.71% (85.71%)</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If admitted into Cadetship, are you able to pay the mandatory fees and your living expenses only</td>
<td>62 (27.5%)</td>
<td>144 (82.28%)</td>
<td>58.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Are you comfortable with the bonding arrangement after completion of your studies?</td>
<td>120 (53.3%)</td>
<td>173 (105)</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you own a house in the urban areas?</td>
<td>45 (20%)</td>
<td>98.85 (98.85%)</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses in the table above are divided into 2 groups: those of lower socio-economic background students and those of students from higher socio-economic background. In each category of socio-economic background, there is one column of positive responses and another one for the percentage relating the absolute figure of positive responses and the total students in that category. The last column constitutes percentages of positive responses per question in the whole sample.

The sample that was used indicated that most of the family heads of A level students in Gweru (about 56%) were earning an income below the poverty datum line. The table shows that 71.75% of the students whose family head earned above the poverty datum line PDL intended
to go to university if they passed their exams. Among those with family heads earning below the PDL, 56% of them intended to go to university. This may be explained by the fact that they wanted to pursue shorter courses that would give them income quickly. Most of these students also indicated that they preferred apprenticeship programmes where they can learn while being paid.

The findings also confirm the statement by James (2002) that the highest level of education attained by the family head can be used to categorise students into socio-economic groups. In this study the highly educated family heads were also likely to earn above the PDL.

From the responses given by students, 46 % of the sample indicated that they were able to pay for university tuition without government help. Of this 46%, the majority (85.71%) were from the better-off families leaving 15% from lower socio-economic backgrounds that were able to pay tuition fees without government help.

When it comes to covering tuition fees as well as living expenses at university without government help only 11.5% of those below PDL were able to pay while 82.28% of those above the PDL are able to cover them. In the whole sample 46% of the students indicated that they were able to cover both tuition fees and living expenses. This shows that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds really need government help for them to participate in university education.

When it comes to current government help, 27.5% of those from a lower socio-economic background were able to pay the mandatory fee and cover living expenses if admitted into the Cadetship programme. This percentage is far below half meaning that the financing of higher education is not achieving equity as was its purpose. Even among those from relatively higher socio-economic backgrounds 98% could cover the mandatory fees and living expenses.

When it comes to the bonding arrangement, only 35% of the students were comfortable with bonding. Of which 53% of those students came from lower socio-economic background.

**Conclusion**

From the analysis above it can be seen that the current financing of higher education, the Cadetship Support System, does not bring a solution to the issue of equity and access that arises due to the abolishment of student loans. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are failing to enter universities while those better-off students are increasing their demand for higher education. When enrolments in universities increase, the tendency are to glorify our country when in fact elite is being created. This study calls for a renewal of the social covenant in which all students, despite their socio-economic backgrounds have access to university education.
Recommendations

The study suggests that income levels of family heads might provide the best means for identifying less advantaged students and for monitoring overall change and development in the higher education sector. Care must be taken though, as others may earn higher incomes but the family is too large. Thus family size must also be taken into account.

The cost of higher education and the cost of living is a very decisive factor for young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who reach the point of considering entering university. The government must consider covering the whole part of the tuition fees and give some amount to cover living expenses for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Since there is a negative perception of the cadetship arrangement, the government must consider introducing a deferred payment system.

Implications for policy research and practice

The attitudes of young people towards post-secondary education as they near the end of secondary schooling are of critical importance and must continually be investigated by the government. The government of Zimbabwe, through the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, should carry out regular surveys on A Level students to establish challenges faced by A level students in order to come up with appropriate policy measures.

The findings of the present study also raise a number of considerations for education policy and programmes. Besides the findings on financial influences, there is need for A Level students to be familiar with methods of learning at higher institutions: there is a need for researchers to investigate the High School curricula to see if it motivates students to proceed with their studies and participate in higher learning.

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