



Barriers to Access, Equity, Success and Inclusion to Higher Education, the Zimbabwean Context

Shava GN*, Chasokela D and Mangena A

National University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Science and Technology Education, Hillside Teachers College, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

*Corresponding Author: Shava GN, National University of Science and Technology, Faculty of Science and Technology Education, Hillside Teachers College, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

Received: November 16, 2023

Published: April 30, 2024

© All rights are reserved by Shava GN., et al.

Abstract

Higher Education in Africa and the world over is characterized by expansion, resource scarcity, increased competition, accountability to more stakeholders and the growing complexity of knowledge. Higher education is widely acknowledged as a major strategic plan for human capital development and economic growth. In Zimbabwe higher education studies are no longer a luxury to students. Higher education studies have become inevitable for human resources planning and national economic development. The principles of basic education as a human right has been silently extended to higher education but this has faced multiple challenges in terms of access, equity and success. Universities in Zimbabwe have adopted policies that are in favor of widening and deepening access, equity and success as a means of redressing past colonial imbalances and seeking to provide for high-level skilled manpower required to enhance economic growth and also contributing to the required human capital development. Since the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe higher education sector has been making a significant contribution towards national development especially through the training of human resources required for economic development and growth. Issues of quality, relevance, funding, access, equity, success and gender are the major challenges faced by most higher learning institutions in Zimbabwe. It is against this background that this chapter seeks to.

- Highlight major barriers to access, equity and success in postgraduate higher education institutions in Zimbabwe
- Analyse strategies adopted in Zimbabwe to provide for access, equity and success in higher education.
- Suggest possible measures to reduce these barriers.

Keywords: Access; Barriers; Equity; Higher Education; Success; Quality

Introduction

International World Declarations on Education for All [1] and the international convention on the rights of persons with including those with disabilities [2] have brought significant advances in the field of inclusive higher education. The rapid pace of a change in the global market has fueled call for higher education to rethink as part of a lifelong journey. This therefore requires a shift in mindset beyond the traditional degree towards more accessible, flexible, bite-size learning approach and not the one size fits all learning and methods that can be completed alongside students' personal and professional commitments. Educational access is a crucial theme in current educational research. International calls for greater access, equity and success was evidenced in the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in 1998. Which in its preamble called for quality, success equity and success [3]. It is not surprising that participation and particularly the success of these participation strategies have recently dominated the discourse. A well-educated citizenry is the foundation of social equity, success, cohesion and successful participation in the global economy. Zimbabwe like most countries has set goals to increase the share of the population with higher education and broaden access to

higher education for individuals that are under-represented because of socio-economic status, race ethnicity, religion, age, gender, disability or location. Higher education we argue, currently plays a fundamental role in the development of societies, as well as in the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. Higher education commitment the world over includes ensuring access, equity success and quality for all (United Nations for Education, Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO) [4]. Higher education transformation in Zimbabwe requires a synergy of creative strategies to engage issues of access success and quality. Access and quality in higher education remain the main mechanism for transformation in Zimbabwe. Higher education has important implications for nations' economic and social-cultural development, sustainability, and global competitiveness [5]. In Africa at large, many people face challenging circumstances beyond their control, due to discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, geographical origin, socioeconomic background, or other institutional attributes which drastically affect their opportunities to access higher education and graduate successfully. In Zimbabwe, a disproportionately high share of learners enrolled in higher education still comes from wealthier segments of society. In the Zimbabwean

context, access, inclusion and equity constitute a key domain for action which should include identifying the origins of inequalities. Structural inequality and disparities exist across groups and societies, often due to historical discriminatory norms around economic class, gender, minority status based on ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural characteristics. Since the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe in 1980, equity, access, success and quality in higher education have constituted a triple cocktail of transformational imperatives in Zimbabwe. Despite the spectacular and rapid expansion that has occurred in many parts of the world in the past, several barriers to access, success and inclusion persist in higher education. The need to achieve greater access and inclusion in higher education responds to a strong social justice imperative, as reflected in target 4.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals [6]. Higher education [7] is not only a fundamental human right but also an indispensable tool in the pursuit of sustainable development. The relevance of access, equity and inclusion is stressed by the Sustainable Development Goal "Quality Education (SDG4)" as this goal includes a target (4.3) that, by 2030, equal access for all to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university, by 2030, equal access for all to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university, needs to be realized [8]. Also target 4.5 states that: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous people and children in vulnerable situations [9,10]. The United Nations Decade of ESD significantly highlighted the vital role of higher education that it must play in the universal journey towards sustainable development. The lack of engagement with higher education institutions by policy-makers where the Sustainable Development Goals are concerned is a frustration for many and no doubt contributes to the lack of progress with the development goals. Access and inclusion to higher education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) have become part of the discourse and issue in higher education contexts. Every phase or debate of higher education is now being urged to declare its support for access, equity and inclusion. In Zimbabwe, a shift in higher education towards increasing access, equity, success and inclusion is required for higher education to be in alignment with the global agenda. More than ever, one of the major challenges still facing African higher education institutions is the achievement of inclusion, success and access.

In this chapter, we argue that the concept of inclusion in education must go beyond the simple elimination of physical barriers and prejudice towards minorities. The concepts of inclusion and access represents a broader and more complex concept that seeks the full participation of students in the entire higher education process [11,12]. This is in line with the principle of equal access proclaimed by the world conference on higher education convened by UNESCO in 1998. The fundamental idea [13] from the meeting reaffirmed Article 26(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human rights which state that, 'Everyone has the right to education and higher

education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit" [14]. The principles of inclusion and equity to higher education are not only about access to education, but also about providing quality learning spaces and pedagogies that allow learners to progress, gaining knowledge and understanding their realities, and working towards a fair society [15]. The principle of universal access to education in Zimbabwe higher education has led to mass admissions. The dimension of higher education access has undergone a transformation, moving away from a model designed for students from privileged economic, social, and cultural backgrounds towards a model that opens its doors to learners who were not previously represented in higher education institutions [16]. The barriers for students in Zimbabwe to access higher education are broad and multi-causal. In this chapter we argue that, higher education must be made accessible to everyone regardless of financial, background, disability, race, gender and sexual orientation. Despite the increasing amount of research and data pointing to the inequalities in higher education in terms of access, equity success and inclusion across the world, inequalities which include both richer and poor nations remain low on the global higher education agenda. The purpose of this chapter on barriers to access, success and inclusion in higher education is to offer an overview of institutional and economic barriers to access higher education with specific reference to Zimbabwe higher education. In this chapter we aim to (a) provide the most up to date information relating to the influencing factors of access, success, equity and inclusion in higher education in Zimbabwe (b) Identify the most critical factors influencing access and equity in Zimbabwean context of higher education. The first part of the chapter provides a contextual overview for understanding equitable access, quality and inclusion from a historical perspective, we contextualize the definitions of access equity, quality and inclusion. This is followed by an exploration of contemporary concerns regarding access, equity, inclusion and quality from a historical perspective.

Defining equity, access, success and inclusion in higher education

The concepts of equity, access, success and quality in higher education are examined from a variety of ideological perspectives. Access, participation and success are shown [5] to represent degree of social inclusion underpinned by a nested spectrum of ideologies of neoliberalism, social justice and human potential ideology offering the most embracing perspective. Quality in higher education is positioned as a complex generic concept while access and success are identified as key concepts in the social inclusion domain, supplemented by concept of participation [5]. Widening and deepening access to higher education initiatives aim to improve access to higher education opportunities for all people. Driven by increased demand and massification in higher education from all segments of society as well as declarations and reforms on human rights declarations, these initiatives focus on improving access and equity for students from historically marginalized backgrounds alike ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, students from remote ru-

ral areas and students from low- income backgrounds to address inequalities and success in higher education. In the Zimbabwean context we argue that, the heart of widening and deepening policies in higher education revolves around making access, equity and success to higher education more fair and equal. Zimbabwe and the entire higher education institutions must determine how best to achieve the twin goals of equity and inclusion if at all the 2030 Global goals are to be achieved. The concepts of access, participation and success are shown to represent degrees of social inclusion underpinned by a nested spectrum of ideologies of neoliberalism, social justice and human potential [5]. At a glance with reference to higher education, it appears that the terms equitable access, success and quality are regarded as conceptual meaning the same and can be either in harmony with each other. A deeper analysis of the terms equitable access success and quality and the relationships among the terms are complex and multi-perspectival and can be framed differently in various contexts depending on the underlying ideology of the discourse. Quality in higher education is to a certain extent equated with success especial in as far as achievement is concerned and other performance indicators. In our view the terms equitable access and success are intimately linked with the notion of inclusion in higher education. Access to higher education requires both equality and equity, two principles that are complementary, but they frame the idea of fairness differently. That equality is based on the fairness principle that every individual is entitled to uniform opportunity to access and participate in higher education [5]. Equity in higher education is based on the fairness principle that every individual is entitled to just opportunity to access and participate. Equity means that everyone has a human right to access and participate in higher education as a matter of social justice as described in the United Nations' Universal Declaration on Human Rights [1]. Countries with a low rate participation in higher education seek to expand access and equity by increasing the number of opportunities available. Countries that have archived a significant level of inclusion and participation in higher education tend to focus on broadening access and equity to include individuals from under-represented groups. Zimbabwe is one country that is committed to promoting the twin goals of equitable access to, and successful participation in higher education for all members. Zimbabwe as a nation believes that equitable access to quality learning attributes significantly to the development of the national human resources, promotes social justice and cohesion, enhance personal development, employability and, in general facilitate sustainable development. In Zimbabwe the major challenge still facing universities is to achieve inclusion in all their study areas. While progress has been made especial in areas of access by increasing the number of universities [9], but complete inclusion has not been achieved through access alone.

Towards a definition of inclusion in higher education

The term inclusion is multi-faceted term with several layers of meaning. [17] defines inclusion as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all children, youth and adults

through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, reducing and eliminating exclusion within and from education. The term inclusion can be used in different ways depending on the context in which the word is used. Inclusion in higher education refers to the social and cultural inclusion practices of including all people. In higher education it is contrasted with practices that exclude, segregate and privilege one group of students over another. At a human right level, several related and conventions govern inclusion in education at all levels, such as the Convention against Discrimination in Education and the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [1,2]. Within the Zimbabwean context of higher education, the predominant emphasis regarding social exclusion in relation to access is on the following groups, disadvantaged remote geographic rural areas and those living with homelessness including disability. Inclusion in higher education is rooted in the democratic principles of justice and equal opportunity. Inclusive higher education is therefore vital to the ongoing development of a democratic society. At the heart of inclusive education is the cultivation of a mindset that supports growth and respect for human differences.

Equity, access and success in Zimbabwe higher education, no longer a luxury

In Zimbabwe while there has been notable improvement in response to policy initiatives on widening and deepening access to higher education, the other side of the coin which represents learner access, success and quality of learning outcomes has not shown comparable improvement. Equitable access and success in higher education cannot be regarded anymore as a luxury or an afterthought. Zimbabwe aspires to be a country where all people, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, ability, socio-economic status or intersectional background have an equal opportunity to succeed. While comparable progress has been recorded in terms of physical access measured by sustained increases in quantitative measures from previously marginalized and remote rural communities accessing higher education, the evidence on success and quality of learning outcomes and epistemological access has been dismal. Despite the rapid and expansion that has occurred in Zimbabwe in the past years, several disparities persist. Inequality and access to higher education in Zimbabwe may be viewed as the result of differential access across social groups and also based on spatial categories.

In Zimbabwe like any other country emerge from the height of the COVID -19 pandemic, new and old challenges risk forcing equity, access and success in higher education down the list of institutional and government priorities. The world over [18] the effects of COVID 19 pandemic has laid bare the extent of systematic inequalities that continue to blight the higher education sector. As the COVID -19 pandemic unraveled, so too did the unequal educational opportunities faced by students from all socio-economic backgrounds magnify themselves, resulting in school dropout. In this chapter we

argue that where education systems are confronted by substantial disruptions and disasters, the inequality and success inefficiencies of the system become glaringly obvious and become the stimulus education needs to transform itself. During the COVID -19 pandemic, higher education institutions and students experienced unprecedented disruption and new challenges. Severe reductions in financial resources, the digital gap, and lack of preparation for both students and academics exacerbated disparities in access and equity and created emotional and social distress, especial among vulnerable students. In Zimbabwe a disproportionately high share of students enrolled in universities still come from wealthier segments of society. From another strand sees social inequalities and disadvantage as emanating or mitigated by higher education institutions, in greater part through some gate keeping regulations and policies of admission and access. In Zimbabwe there exist two dimensions of educational access referred to by [19] in the process of reproduction of social inequality as the interplay of societal structures and individual agency. In this chapter we argue that the provision of access to higher education must pay attention to structural and institutional barriers within the institution. Studies carried out in Zimbabwe have identified several barriers that are preventing both youths and adults from accessing higher education. These are generally grouped as; financial, family background, socio-economic and cultural factors, infrastructural capacity, gender and exclusion admission requirements among other factors. While university education in Zimbabwe is currently very diverse in terms of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, it is imperative to address the challenges of student access, equity and retention if Zimbabwe is to move towards a more equitable system [20]. In terms of understanding the issues surrounding student drop-out and lack of success, it is crucial to shift the focus from individual socio-economic, and cultural characteristics of students to the analysis and transformation of institutional structural barriers. [21] argue that the principle of universal access has been linked to the principles of equal opportunities and not equity and meritocracy, ignoring the elements that determine differences in educational opportunities for students, and avoiding the responsibility of ensuring the fairness of the system. It is therefore imperative to examine institutional policies and their strategy together with practices to promote the development of inclusive educational processes in universities, thereby feeding into institutional transformation [22]. International studies conducted in Australia pointed out that the main barriers to the retention of university students are their family responsibilities, linked to caring for parents, children, and even other members of the extended family [23]. In South Africa [24], despite the increase in overall enrolment in higher education, less than one in five Black South Africans access it, compared to 55 percent among Whites. Similarly, [25] argued, that in Vietnam, enrolment rates of the dominant Kinh/Hoa group are four times higher than those of ethnic minorities living in remote parts of the country. Also, studies carried out in Argentina by [26] established that the main barriers to higher education access, equity, and success were

related to rational aspects like lack of funding, completion, incomprehension, absence of dialogue, lack of support in adaptation, lack of communication, lack of integration, poor coexistence, prejudice, and also lack of specialized infrastructure, lack of access to technologies and material resources that are not available to all students. Also lack of professional practices and many more factors. In Zimbabwe in particular admission policies and practices do not consider issues of equitable access, success and inclusion. The use of cut off points at advanced level deprives learners from poor and rural backgrounds who have equal talents with the urban learners. Using the same selection criteria does not promote equitable access and successful participation. In Zimbabwe Universities are seen as a strictly academic space, without considering potential as a space for transformation. Admission criteria only considers high "A" Level passes and this makes it difficult for students from rural remote areas to participate effectively in higher education learning due to an exclusion set criteria of fourteen points which only benefit students from urban high schools.

Financial barriers to equitable access and inclusion to higher education

Access to higher education in Zimbabwe and participation in educational programmes is often dependent on socio-economic status of the learner. Enrolment at universities and other higher learning institutions is dominated by students from the highest income quantiles. Public funding mechanisms act to exacerbate such inequalities by providing free higher education to the best students who invariably come from the rich households due to the high standard secondary school attended. A major challenge facing Zimbabwe higher education institutions are heightened fees for both tuition and accommodation which is predominately paid in United States Dollar (USD). Due to the high tuition students in universities and colleges are forced to dropout or to defer studies and this has also affected adult learners in distance education Southern African Regional Universities Association) [27]. In Zimbabwe in the past public revenue covered the cost of higher education and students were provided with grants for their upkeep but economic meltdown has shifted the cost burden to institutions which are increasingly dependent upon non -public revenue such as tuition and other fees paid by students. The lack of financial resources has discouraged many aspiring candidates from applying to universities since it might be difficult to get a constant supply of fees for every semester. In Zimbabwe a good number of students rely on some form of financial assistance of which understanding financial aid is essential. [28] urged that, without knowledge and access to financial aid students in higher education face serious economic challenges especial fees for residence and some students opt to be squatters. In Zimbabwe and the rest of the Sub-Sahara Africa students from better economic background have better access to tertiary education than their poorer peers [6,9]. In this chapter we argue that if social justice is an international value and goal, then educational access and equity should be a means to reach that goal.

Under normal circumstances financial and economic condition should not deprive aspiring students access, equity and success in higher education.

Family and socio-cultural barriers to higher education

The familial and socio-cultural barriers are factors of discouragement emanating from the family due to certain cultural beliefs [28]. Family barriers exist when a parent does not value education and not encourage a child to go to college or university, or worse, influence a child not to go to college. Several studies conducted in Zimbabwe have documented how poverty, and rurality are closely linked to higher education access. Family barriers exist when a potential student must take care of a family member in a time of need. They exist when potential students can only attend university when other responsibilities are accomplished or met. At the tertiary level, young people encounter additional barriers reflecting the direct opportunity cost of studying, lack of social capital, insufficient academic preparation, low motivation, lack of access to information about labor market prospects. For students aged 35 years and above, common barriers involve childcare responsibilities and in most cases female students are affected more than their male counterparts [29]. Such responsibilities could mean that the affected student may not be able to attend all class sessions. For mature students who have commitments such as work, children, elderly and or ailing family members are likely to drop out of university or may not seek admission at all. In Zimbabwe female and ethnic groups may have unequal university opportunities because of unfavorable cultural and traditional practices maintained especially in rural areas or among minority ethnic groups. Family background also to a great extent tends to be a major determinant of access and success in higher education [30]. Students whose parents are better educated or have professional occupations have better access to higher education. In Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole, there is a total lack of progress towards achieving SDG4 Global Goal the Sustainable Development Goal associated with access to higher education especially for those from low-income and other disadvantaged socio-backgrounds. Substantial disparities in wealth and household income are an obvious source of inequality in higher education. Students whose parents are better educated and have professional occupations have better access to higher education. [31] argued that in the Southern African Region, participation in higher education is skewed in favor of students from urban areas, students from rural households face enormous barriers to accessing higher education. In Zimbabwe, equitable access to higher education continues to persist based on financial limitations among children from low socio-economic backgrounds especially in resettlement farming areas and other remote parts of the country.

Gender and Institutional barriers to higher education participation

Unquestionably, African higher education still currently operates in stormy waters and from the look of things it will take a little bit longer to stabilize and improve its access, equity and quality

higher education. Gender discrimination tends to impact girls from low-income groups more prominently. Gender imbalance and institutional barriers are presenting access and equity challenges in Africa higher learning institutions. Although higher education institutions have expanded in most developing countries, participation rates for females at the post-secondary level continue to be considered lower than for males. In Zimbabwe, there is a commitment targeted to the expansion of access and equity to higher education and improving higher education access for girls and women, removal of the various obstacles hindering girls and women from participating in higher education, elimination of gender stereotyping, retention, and success. In Zimbabwe, poor academic performance, concentration in non-science and Engineering disciplines, discrimination in staff recruitment, training and promotion, gender blind curriculum, and gender unfriendly institutional environment are some of the barriers affecting girl child access and success in higher education. Gender inequality in higher education manifests itself in the fields of study pursued by men versus women, leading to particular careers. In Zimbabwe, significant gender inequalities persist in access to STEM institutions and programmes. [25] argue that data from 18 countries across the world shows the rate of female graduates in STEM varying from as low as 11 percent in Switzerland to 47 percent in Argentina While there is recognition by responsible authorities that women are seriously underrepresented in all areas of higher education, very little is done to deal specifically with the redress of gender inequalities in higher education institutions. In Zimbabwe, access and equity to higher education for the girl child is not a central part of the development strategy in many higher learning institutions. While access to higher education has expanded in Africa, due to higher education massification, large percentages of students who enroll in higher learning institutions fail to obtain the qualification as a result of barriers emanating from the learning organization.

Strategies for achieving access, equity, quality and inclusion

The International Association of Internationale Universities (IAU) as a global association of universities and other higher learning institutions raised the following principles as key principles towards enhancing equity, access and inclusion in higher education:

- Access, equity, success and inclusion in higher education learning should be made possible to all regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, economic or social class, age, language, religion, location or (dis)abilities.
- The goal of access policies should be successful participation in higher education, as access without a reasonable chance of success and quality of learning is an empty promise.
- Equitable access and academic quality and excellence are essential and compatible aspects of a quality higher education
- To improve access to higher education, admission criteria must move away from a primary focus on each learner's achievements and entry qualifications towards the recognition of the student's potential, without the latter becoming the sole criterion for admission and access.

- Targeted strategies and policies designed specifically to elicit the students' full potential are required so as to increase access to, and success in higher education by individuals who are traditionally under represented because of their social background, economic status, gender, ethnic origin (dis)ability, low quality of poor schooling or other reasons.
- International mobility, exchange programmes and cross-border education activities should integrate the twin goals of increased and equitable participation and inclusion.
- To promote access and student success, different institutional models, flexible programmes of study as well as a variety of delivery models must be available to allow individuals at all stages of life to move through higher education in a manner that suits their needs.
- National and institutional policies and programmes should be developed through ongoing dialogue among all stakeholder groups and should acknowledge and address the broad array of academic, financial and personal barriers facing potential learners.
- Higher education that responds to the challenges of equitable access and successful participation requires sound policies and adequate public funding for institutions and students. Such policies must be sensitive to local conditions, borrowing policy solutions from other countries that have different problems and priorities may not be the best solution.
- Responding to the varied needs of learners and of society requires a differentiated but coherent higher education system reflected in a transparent qualifications framework, a system in which institutions are assessed according to their specific goals.
- Equitable access to and broader participation in higher education require active linkages between higher education and secondary education and seamless, educational pathways beginning with early childhood and continuing throughout life and aided by career guidance and counselling services when appropriate.

Measures to reduce barriers to equitable access in higher education

Based on the principles to achieve equitable access in higher, while recognizing the diversity of economic and financial conditions as well as the political, cultural, and historical aspects that define various national contexts we suggest the following recommendation to increase access, equity and inclusion in higher education

- Integrate the goals of equitable access, success, quality and inclusion together with successful participation for all learners into the institutional strategy, and mission and develop specific objectives and key strategies for achieving them.
- Higher education institutions should work in partnership with the government, representatives of other educational sectors, professional associations and employers to address issues of access, equity, inclusion, and quality considering successful participation holistically, taking into account the outcomes of high school level, labor trends and national development needs bodies to develop policies and secure adequate financial support for the pursuit of the access and quality agenda
- Call for and participate in a multi-stakeholder dialogue with government and/ or competent bodies to develop policies and secure adequate financial support for the pursuit of access, equity and inclusion agenda in higher education.
- Governments at all levels should assume an essential role in promoting and enabling access to high-quality higher education and ensuring equitable access for all members of society.
- Develop or strengthen admission policies and practices that emphasize the potential of each applicant and address equity of access, inclusion and successful participation by offering a variety of flexible learning pathways for university entry and exit.
- Provide students with a comprehensive academic, financial and social support system paying particular attention to specific needs of learners from under-represented groups and/ or those who experience difficulties.
- There is need to reward quality teaching, research, curriculum innovation and responsiveness to learner diversity in the academic career structure of faculty members.
- Provide faculty staff with pedagogical training and professional development based on a culture of student-centered learning and with a focus on learning outcomes.
- Facilitate equitable access and inclusion to learning, responding to diverse learning needs, and increase outreach by the appropriate and effective use of a variety of delivery modes.
- Allocation of national funding for equitable access. success and inclusion should be considered especially in developing countries in light of Education for Sustainability being an integral dimension of access equity and quality education as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal4 target 4.7
- Reward and recognize higher education institutions that successfully serve individuals from under-represented groups
- Within higher education institutions, several measures can help boost the access and success of students from various equity groups, for example, outreach activities, and additional financial aid.
- Invest in the necessary and appropriate infrastructure to support the effective use of information communication technologies in education, thereby improving opportunities for all learners, especially adults, and expanding outreach activities in higher education institutions.
- Report on the achievement of access and retention goals and make widely available accurate, timely, user-friendly information that may serve to facilitate access, including information on financial student aid
- There is a need for concerted work that is honest about the inequalities that exist in higher education participation across Africa, especially the work that shows how addressing these inequalities is crucial to economic and social development.

- To achieve equitable access to higher education, equity promotion policies must be defined comprehensively, considering both financial and non-monetary aspects, coordinating actions and national and institutional levels in a complementary manner, and putting as much emphasis on completion as access, which has historically received more attention.
- Zimbabwe should remodel curricula to include a more direct linkage with employment, entrepreneurship, skills and vocational learning to attract students from diverse backgrounds.

Conclusion

Successful educational reform is a necessary step to create the basics for sustained economic growth and requires equitable access to higher education which to a great extent is the key enabler for sustainable development. Universities in Zimbabwe need to address the aforementioned challenges so that higher education is accessible in an equal manner for the entire population. In this chapter, we argue that access, equity and quality linked to success represent the cornerstone for the successful transformation of higher education towards achieving sustainability. Quality, access and equity cannot be addressed as mutually exclusive issues since there is no quality in the absence of access and equity. As indicated in the chapter one of the major challenges facing universities the world over is to achieve inclusion in all areas. Concerning Zimbabwe, progress has been made especially in the area of access but complete quality and inclusion is not achieved through access alone. The knowledge of factors that influence student participation and retention is essential to improve participation and retention rates in universities, especially for the most vulnerable students considering, among other things their already low rate of admission. In our systematic review of literature, the main barriers to access, equity and success are identified as: economic, lack of resources to participate in higher education, institutional factors cultural and family responsibilities. In this chapter, we have argued that the issues of access and equity dare not to be overlooked, lest we undo the democratic gains made in Zimbabwe. Higher education systems in which opportunities are equally distributed are the basis for sustainable development and the construction of fair and democratic societies. Higher education is required as an agent of social and economic change and development. Across the world, countries that have accorded high level of priority to equitable access and supporting higher education have tended to experience sustained levels of social and economic growth.

Finally, the barriers identified in the synthesis review allow us to lay a foundation so that the different agents of the university community develop action plans and strategies aimed at guaranteeing equity, access and success for all students including the principles of social justice and equality combined with inclusion. The identification of barriers to access, equity, success and participation of socio-economically and culturally disadvantaged students highlighted in this chapter allows local and national public administrations to develop lines of action aimed at guaranteeing

equitable access and participation of all people, without exception in higher education.

Bibliography

1. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. World Conference on EFA (1990).
2. United Nations. "Convention on the rights of persons with Disabilities Treaty". Series 2515 (2006): 3
3. UNESCO. "World Declaration on Higher Education" (1998).
4. United Nations for Education, Science and Culture Organization [UNESCO]. Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensuring inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. UNESCO (2016).
5. Gildeley J., *et al.* "From access to success: an integrated approach to quality higher education informed by social inclusion theory and practice". *Higher Education Policy* 23.1 (2010): 123-147.
6. UNESCO. "A Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education". UNESCO (2017).
7. Boereen E. "Understanding Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on quality education from micro, meso and macro perspectives". *International Review of Education* 65 (2019): 277-294.
8. Shava GN. "Quality Education for Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe Higher Education" Towards UNDP 2030 SDGs. The Education Systems of Africa, Global Systems Book Chapter". *Springer Publication* (2020): 1-26.
9. UNESCO. "International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Towards universal access to higher education: International trends*: UNESCO (2020).
10. UNESCO. "Berlin Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development. World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development. Paris: UNESCO (2021).
11. Malins P. "How inclusive is inclusive education in the Ontario elementary classroom? Teachers talk about addressing diverse gender and sexual identities". *Teaching and Teacher Education* 54 (2016): 128-138.
12. Miskovic M and Curcic S. "Beyond inclusion: Reconsidering policies, curriculum, pedagogy for roma students". *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 18.2 (2016): 1-14.
13. Shava GN. "Barriers to Access and Equity in Higher Education: The Zimbabwean Experience". *Annual International SASE Conference Proceeding: Mafikeng 1213* (2013): 421-433.

14. Eggins H. "Access and Equity, Comparatives Vol 20". Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, Mexico 20 (2010).
15. UNESCO. "A Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education". UNESCO (2017).
16. Dovigo F. "Casanova. Good Practice for Equality and Inclusion in Higher Education". *Collana Educazione Inclusive* (2017): 12-20.
17. UNESCO. *The DESD at a Glance* (2014).
18. Owen DR, *et al.* "An oral SARS-CoV-2 Mpro inhibitor clinical candidate for the treatment of COVID-19". *Science* 374.6575 (2021): 1586-1593.
19. Giddens A. "The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration". Cambridge: Polity Press (1984).
20. Arana M and Bianculli K. "Anthropology and University Education: Contribution to the diagnosis of enrolment retention. Univeridad Nacional de Mar del Plata FACES". *Revista de la Facultad de Ciencias Economicas y Sociale* 11.22 (2005): 65-77.
21. Donoso S and Schiefelbein E. "Analysis of exploratory models of student retention in college: A view from social inequality". *Estudios Pedagogicos* (Valdivia) 1 (2007): 33. <http://doi.org/10.4067/s0718-07052007000100001>
22. Bowles TV and Brindle KA. "Identifying facilitating factors and barriers to improving student retention rates in tertiary teaching courses: A systematic review". *Higher Education Research and Development* 36.5 (2017): 903-919.
23. Hearn S, *et al.* "Investigation of the factors contributing to Indigenous students' retention and attrition rates at the University of Adelaide". *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 50 (2021): 20-28.
24. Akoojee S and Nkomo M. "Access and quality in South African Higher Education: the twin challenge of transformation". *SA-JHE* 21.3 (2007): 385-399
25. Salmi J. "Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education". *International Higher Education* 113 (2023).
26. Hanne A. "Indigenous students and University: Realities and Challenges in the face of cultural diversity. Case of the National University of Salta". *Alteridad* 13.1 (2018): 14-29.
27. Southern African Regional Universities Associations (SARUA) (2010). *Investing in higher education for %20R, New direction* (2010).
28. Teran CJ. "Studies on Barriers to Higher Education in Africa". A and M University, USA (2007).
29. Ziramba T. "Participation of Low Income Earning Families in Higher Education. A Survey of Southern African Tertiary Education Systems. Centre for Social and Development Studies (2011).
30. Nguyeni, P. "Literature Review on Equity and Access to Tertiary Education in the East Assia Region" (2010).
31. Southern African Regional Universities Associations (SARUA). "SADC Higher Education Study- Funding Report, Johannesburg: SARUA (2008).