

Impact of Admission Policies and Scholarship Opportunities on Access to Higher Education: A Case Study of Muni University, Uganda

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Abstract: The study intended to assess the impact of admission policies and scholarship opportunities on access to higher education at Muni University in Uganda and is objectively focused on analyzing the existing admission policies at Muni University. The study adopted the qualitative research method and results were obtained through semi-structured interview guide and focused group discussions with the selected students. The findings revealed that there exists affirmative action like 1.5 points offered to ladies and need-based scholarship opportunities like district quota that caters for marginalized groups of disabilities and rural areas and both admission policies and scholarship opportunities depend on the merit based criteria. The study further stressed the unfairness in the admission and awarding of scholarships that only favour urban area students majorly. In conclusion, the study points out unfair admission policies and scholarship opportunities offered to students in terms of equity in regions of the country. The study further recommends an improvement in the affirmative action policies and the need-based scholarships that cater for marginalised groups of people like disabled persons and doing community outreaches to make awareness of the admissions and scholarship opportunities available in Uganda.

Keywords: Admission Policies, Scholarship Opportunities, Marginalized Groups and Higher Education.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Uganda's higher education system in particular has evolved significantly since independence, with an increasing number of public and private universities. However, access to higher education remains uneven, with urban students, males, and students from higher socio-economic backgrounds overrepresented in higher education institutions (Musiige & Maassen, 2020) with most marginalized groups (the low earners, international students and disabilities) underrepresented in Uganda with issues based on admission and funding policies. The introduction of market-oriented reforms in the late 20th century led to the expansion of private universities and self-financing schemes, which have both widened and constrained access.

According to Altbach and Salmi (2011), the commoditization of higher education in sub-Saharan Africa has created a situation where access is increasingly determined by the ability to pay, thus limiting opportunities for students from

disadvantaged backgrounds. This dynamic is critical in Uganda, where limited public funding for education creates competition for the few available scholarships, particularly affecting students from rural or low-income households. Despite some progress, socio-economic disparities in higher education access remain pronounced in Uganda. Rural students, in particular, face significant challenges in accessing higher education due to poor infrastructure, lack of information, and financial barriers (Otieno & Wangenge-Ouma, 2019). For example, rural areas in Uganda often have fewer well-resourced schools, resulting in lower pass rates for national exams, which are crucial for university admissions.

Gender disparities also persist, although affirmative action policies, such as a 1.5-point bonus for female students, have contributed to increasing female enrollment in universities. A study by Morley (2013) on gender equity in African universities highlights how structural inequalities in access to education at lower levels (primary and secondary) disproportionately affect girls, particularly in rural areas. While affirmative action has

helped, Morley argues that it is insufficient to overcome deeply ingrained socio-cultural barriers. Additionally, regional disparities are evident, with students from wealthier regions such as Kampala enjoying greater access to both public and private higher education institutions. According to Basheka et al. (2020), regional balancing efforts in admissions have had mixed results, with some regions remaining underrepresented despite affirmative action programs.

➤ *Purpose of Study*

The purpose of the study was to evaluate how admission policies and scholarships contribute to the overall equity and inclusivity of higher education at Muni University. The study is aimed to explore how admission policies and scholarship opportunities influence enrollment rates particularly among students from low income backgrounds, rural areas and marginalized communities and education equity and affordability.

➤ *Objectives of the Study*

The objectives of the study were;

- To analyze the existing admission policies and their effects on students' access to higher education at Muni University.
- To assess the role of scholarship opportunities in promoting access to higher education for students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.
- To explore strategies for improving admission policies and scholarship opportunities to enhance equitable access to higher education at Muni University.

➤ *The Research Questions*

The research questions were;

- What are some of the existing admission policies at Muni University and how do they affect the students' access to higher education?
- What are the roles of scholarship opportunities in promoting access to higher education?
- What are the suggested strategies for improving admission policies and scholarship opportunities to enhance equitable access to higher education?

II. THEORY OF STUDY

The study adopted the Human Capital Theory. Human Capital Theory, developed by economists such as Gary Becker (1964), posits that individuals' education, skills, and knowledge are forms of capital that contribute to their productivity and economic value. According to this theory, investment in education enhances an individual's capabilities, leading to higher wages, improved employment opportunities, and overall economic growth (Becker, 1964). According to Human Capital Theory, restrictive admission policies may limit opportunities for certain groups to invest in their education, thus hindering the accumulation of human capital. Conversely, policies that promote inclusivity such as merit based, need based and affirmative action policies enhance access to higher education

through bridging socio-economic disparities, allowing a broader spectrum of talented but financially disadvantaged individuals to invest in their skills and knowledge (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018). From a Human Capital Theory perspective, scholarships are seen as an investment in individuals who otherwise might not have the means to pursue higher education. By providing financial support, scholarships enable these students to enhance their human capital, leading to greater opportunities of higher productivity, innovation and economic and social mobility (Hart, 2016, Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020). Conversely, restrictive admission criteria, high tuition costs and limited enrollment quotas may hinder human capital accumulation where economic inequality affects educational opportunities (Altbach et al., 2019).

Human capital theory explores the role of higher education as a driver of economic and social development. Countries that expand access to higher education through inclusive admission policies and structured scholarship programs tend to experience higher rates of innovation, industrial growth and improved socio-economic conditions (McMahon, 2018). Limited access on the other hand, exacerbates income inequality and restricts the potential benefits of a highly skilled work force (Tilak, 2020).

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

➤ *Admission Policies in the Institution*

The structure of admissions into Ugandan higher education institutions is largely merit-based, with scores from the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) playing a dominant role. This reliance on academic merit has been criticized for exacerbating inequalities, as students from urban, wealthier, and well-resourced schools tend to perform better on standardized exams (Kwesiga & Ahikire, 2020). Although the policy framework includes affirmative action policies, such as providing additional points for female students or scholarships for students from marginalized regions, these policies have been deemed insufficient in addressing structural inequalities (Ssebowa, 2022). In particular, students from Northern Uganda, a region historically affected by conflict and underdevelopment, remain underrepresented in higher education (Okwakol, 2021). Admissions policies that focus primarily on academic merit may not sufficiently account for the disadvantages faced by students from these regions. Some scholars argue for the introduction of more comprehensive affirmative action measures that consider economic background, disability, and geographic disadvantage in addition to academic merit (Nkonge & Yiga, 2023).

Scholarships and financial aid are vital components of the admissions landscape in Uganda. However, research shows that scholarship opportunities are limited, especially for students from rural areas and low-income families (Kajubi, 2021). One of the significant trends in admissions policies in Uganda is the balancing act between merit-based and quota-based admissions.

Uganda's public universities adopt a dual admissions policy where a portion of students is admitted based on merit (via examination results), while others benefit from quotas allocated for marginalized groups, including women and students from underprivileged regions (Nakabugo, 2020).

Despite policies aimed at inclusivity, significant challenges remain in access to higher education in Uganda. High tuition fees, limited availability of scholarships, and geographical disparities continue to affect students from rural areas (Muhumuza, 2019). Moreover, private universities, which now constitute a large part of the higher education system, tend to have less structured admissions policies, leading to further disparities between students in urban and rural regions.

Private universities often have more flexible admission policies, allowing them to admit students who may not meet the strict academic requirements of public institutions. However, the high cost of attending these institutions limits access for low-income students (Musisi and Muwagga, 2020; Ssembatya, 2020).

Gender disparities in higher education have been somewhat addressed through policies like offering additional points to female students. The government introduced a gender-based affirmative action policy in 1990, offering an additional 1.5 points to female students to boost their chances of admission into public universities (Nabaho & Okwakol, 2022). This policy was implemented to address the underrepresentation of women in higher education. However, cultural and socio-economic factors still inhibit many young women from pursuing higher education, especially in rural areas (Mugisha, 2023; Nakayiwa et al. 2020).

➤ *Scholarship Opportunities*

The Ugandan government has initiated several scholarship programs, such as the District Quota Scheme, which allocates a limited number of scholarship slots to each district in Uganda. However, this policy has faced challenges, including allegations of corruption, lack of transparency, and failure to prioritize the most disadvantaged students (Wakoko-Studstill & Sebuwufu, 2022). Studies show that many students who benefit from these scholarships come from relatively well-off backgrounds, calling into question the effectiveness of these scholarships in addressing access disparities (Mugisha, 2023).

A study by Kwesiga and Ahikire (2020) highlights that scholarships significantly enhance access to higher education by mitigating financial constraints, thus enabling more students, particularly women and those from rural areas, to pursue their academic goals. However, the number of available scholarships is limited compared to the demand, which means that many deserving students remain excluded. Beyond government initiatives, private sector scholarships and international scholarship programs have gained prominence in Uganda's higher education landscape. International organizations such as

the MasterCard Foundation, the African Development Bank (AfDB), Uganda Higher Education Scholarships Trust, equity group foundation Wings to Fly program, the Aga Khan Foundation, UNESCO scholarships and Education USA

According to Okwakol (2021), affirmative action scholarships, such as the additional points awarded to female students in university admissions, have led to a substantial increase in the enrollment of women in higher education institutions. Gender-targeted scholarships have played an essential role in addressing the historical gender disparities in higher education, where male students outnumbered their female counterparts (Nabaho & Okwakol, 2022). In recent years, private institutions and international organizations have also introduced scholarships specifically for women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. These scholarships have had a positive impact on increasing female enrollment in traditionally male-dominated fields, contributing to gender parity in higher education (Ahikire & Acaye, 2020).

Despite these gains, some scholars argue that the impact of gender-targeted scholarships has been limited by other socio-cultural and economic factors. For example, Mwebaza and Nyanzi (2022) note that while scholarships have improved female enrollment, many women still face challenges related to retention and completion of their studies, partly due to additional burdens such as family responsibilities and societal expectations.

Scholarships, particularly those targeting students from less developed regions like Northern Uganda, are designed to promote regional equity (Ssebbowa, 2022). The District Quota Scheme, for instance, is a government-funded scholarship initiative aimed at balancing representation from different regions by offering opportunities to students from districts that are underrepresented in higher education institutions.

While the District Quota Scheme has had some success in improving regional representation, its effectiveness has been limited by implementation challenges. According to Nkonge and Yiga (2023), issues such as corruption, lack of transparency, and political interference have undermined the program's goals. Furthermore, the scholarship allocations are often insufficient, leading to stiff competition for the few available slots.

Without scholarships, the high cost of tuition and other associated fees would make higher education inaccessible for many Ugandans (Wakoko-Studstill & Sebuwufu, 2022). Scholarships offer not only tuition waivers but also additional support for accommodation, transport, and learning materials, thus helping students concentrate on their studies without the burden of financial stress.

By supporting students from low socio-economic backgrounds, scholarships also play a role in promoting social mobility. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds who receive scholarships are more likely to complete their education and secure employment, thereby improving their economic status and contributing to the development of their communities (Nabaho, 2021).

Despite the positive roles scholarships play in expanding access and equity, several challenges persist. One significant issue is the limited number of scholarships available relative to the demand. A report by Ssebowa (2022) highlights that only a small percentage of applicants receive scholarships, leaving many qualified students without financial support. Additionally, some scholarships are not need-based, which means that students from relatively wealthier backgrounds may benefit from scholarships intended for disadvantaged groups (Mugisha, 2021).

Many scholarship schemes rely on donor funding or government allocations, which can be unstable. According to Wakoko-Studstill and Sebuwufu (2022) and Tuyizere, (2021), budget cuts and shifting donor priorities have led to the discontinuation or reduction of several scholarship programs in Uganda, exacerbating access challenges for students.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The research adopted qualitative data collection techniques based on interviews and focused group discussions among the academic registrars, students and parents. The approach was selected because it enables the researcher to describe the meaning of lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon for several individuals (Creswell 2009).

Data Collection techniques of semi-structured interviews were conducted with academic registrars, parents and students to gather insights on admission policies and scholarship experiences. These interviews lasted for about 25-40 minutes and were audio-recorded with consent and focus group discussions with students to discuss shared experiences regarding access to higher education in groups of 6-7 participants and lasted approximately 45minutes- 1.2 hours. The data (which later became information) told by these academic registrars, students and parents were re-storied by the researcher into a narrative chronology as guided by Creswell (2014). That is, stories from academic registrars, students and parents regarding admission policies and scholarship opportunities offered at Muni University were transcribed, identified themes related opportunities and policies and interpreted and synthesized to answer the research questions.

Table 1 Democratic Characteristics of Participants

Participant		Population(N)	Sample(S)	Sampling method model
Gender	Female	14	14	Purposive sampling
	Male	25	24	Purposive sampling
	Total	39	38	
Age	19-25	18	14	Purposive sampling
	26-34	12	10	Purposive sampling
	35 and above	09	09	Purposive sampling
	Total	39	33	
Category	Undergraduate Students	22	19	Purposive sampling
	Postgraduate students	10	10	Purposive sampling
	Academic Registrars	2	2	Purposive sampling
	Parents	5	5	Purposive sampling
	Total	39	36	

Source: Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Sample Size Determination Table

According to the results in Table 1, the study population was obtained from one institution of higher education (Muni University) with 100% representation. However, concerning the findings, male participants were the majority with 25 out of 39 and the females were 14 implying that the study was gender sensitive and nearly balancing. Based on the time of the study, the results of the respondents on their ages were not in the same age range, the majority of participants were between the ages of 19- 25 years 18 which is the normal range for students at higher institutions, implying the purpose of the study was equally represented as it focuses much on the admission policies and scholarship strategies, 26-34 years range was represented with

12 and 35 years and above were 09. The undergraduate students were represented by 19 students, postgraduate students by 10 students, 2 student lecturers (academic registrars) and 5 parents. This shows that the study is catering more to the students but also to their academic registrars and parents for viable results.

V. DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

The research question was “What are the current admissions policies offered to students at this university?”. On the interaction with academic registrars and the students as the directly involved persons in the admission process at the

university, due to limited knowledge, students highlighted a few admission policies that were broadened by the academic registrars. Some students clarified how they were admitted on government national merit, some on government quota, others on organizational scholarships like MasterCard foundation and others on private sponsorship. Most of the students are from low-income earning families where they studied in rural areas compared to those on scholarships. The admission policy doesn't cater for students from rural areas where they never get access to enough resources which makes them outperformed by students in the urban areas where they rarely lack studying resources hence higher merit-based scores which, most universities, Muni University among others consider.

➤ *One of the Students has to Confess How her Friends have Struggled to be Enrolled in Muni University but have Failed, she Stated*

“About six friends of mine tried to fill HESFB forms to acquire a loan scheme admission after the failure to obtain any of national merit or district quota sponsorships but were left baffling after missing out on those loans where well-off students were offered the loan schemes and four of the six had to drop out of the University to obtain employment to raise money to sustain the university after some years.”

Scholarship opportunities and government sponsorship schemes play a critical role in expanding access to higher education in Uganda. Approximately 4,000 students benefit annually from government scholarships, which cover tuition fees, accommodation, and a stipend for living expenses (Nabwe, 2019). However, access to these scholarships is highly competitive and often limited to students who perform exceptionally well in national examinations of Uganda's advanced certificate of education examinations, disproportionately favouring urban and well-resourced schools (Baryayanga & Musoke, 2022).

➤ *The Deputy Academic Registrar Outlined the Admission as Being Dependent on Merit-Based in the National Exams, he Stated*

“The university uses a merit-based system for most programs, which is based on national exam performance. The university has specific quotas for affirmative action candidates like national merit admissions, district quota admissions that have a specific number of students(25% of the students) admitted and those benefiting from scholarships like MasterCard Foundation, and private sponsorships. In this, every girl child is entitled to a 1.5 points addition on the weight to admission to the university following the 1990 affirmative action policy in the governance of higher education.”

This indicates a good number of policies employed to cater for admissions for all sets of students that have improved fairness in the admission system. As the sector expanded, there was an increasing focus on democratizing access to higher education to include more marginalized groups, including

women, rural students, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Kajubi, 2018). Policies like the affirmative action program, which gives an additional 1.5 points to female students applying for public universities, are examples of interventions aimed at addressing these disparities. The push for inclusivity and equity is evident in Uganda's affirmative action policies. Research by Mugabi (2020) indicates that affirmative action has increased female participation and underrepresented regions in higher education.

The second question was, *“What are some of the challenges that have hindered the admissions of students at the university.”* In interactions with the students, parents and the academic registrar, most parents who have educated their children from rural areas highlighted the difficulty or impossibility of those children to compete well with the students from urban schools and that has limited the chances of low-income earning children attain higher education. One of the parents outline that,

“The biggest challenge we face is the intense competition and the pressure on our children and schools to perform well in national exams. This comes along with difficulties finding adequate resources for the exam preparation including school fees, tour fees, facilitation and seminar fees which are hard to raise for low earners like the rural based parents and students.”

For more clarity and understanding, most of the students emphasized how the admission policies and scholarship opportunities are not next to fair as they never cater for all marginalized groups of people and other disparities. One of the students added;

“The admission process isn't thoroughly fair as students from better-resourced schools (urban schools) have more advantages in terms of access to quality education and study material which makes them score highly in national exams and those from rural or underprivileged areas find it harder to compete. For inclusivity and equitability in all parts of the country, a revised policy should be adopted as most underrepresented regions at higher education are still left out.”

With the focused group discussions from the parents and students, the academic registrars identified based on the admission and scholarship opportunities as biased. The deputy academic registrar stressed the above statement;

“One major challenge is that national exams don't fully reflect the capabilities of students from underprivileged backgrounds, which limits their chances of admission. Financial constraints also prevent many qualified students from enrolling this is evidenced by the number of students who either drop out or apply for dead years or withdraw from different programs every academic year because of the inability to sustain themselves in the University.”

One key challenge is the reliance on national examination scores as the primary criterion for admission. This approach doesn't account for the socio-economic disparities that affect students' performance like the geographic locations of schools. Also, the growing number of private universities has introduced new dynamics, as these institutions often have more accommodating admission criteria, allowing students who may not meet the stringent public university requirements to pursue higher education (Kasozi, 2020). Policies related to admissions in private universities are often seen as more accommodating but come with higher tuition fees, thus excluding economically disadvantaged students (Namukasa & Nakabugo, 2021).

The third aspect was *“What are some of the roles played by the scholarship opportunities towards the success of students in higher education.”* During the focused group discussions with students and interviews with the academic registrars the benefits are easily realized directly by them. The academic registrars highlighted the selection criterion of offering government scholarships merit-based in the national examinations. One of the academic registrars highlighted the selection criteria of the scholarship as;

“The selection is based on academic merit and, in some cases, need. For government scholarships, the focus is often on students with top results in national exams, while private scholarships may look more closely at financial need and also the gender-based scholarships that have boosted the females in attaining higher education. This has eased the burden of tuition for the low-income families and the children from these families have gotten chances to explore their academic talents hence increased access and equity in higher education.”

Scholarships have been shown to promote gender balance in higher education in Uganda. According to Okwakol (2021), affirmative action scholarships, such as the additional points awarded to female students in university admissions, have led to a substantial increase in the enrollment of women in higher education institutions. Gender-targeted scholarships have played an essential role in addressing the historical gender disparities in higher education, where male students outnumbered their female counterparts.

Despite these gains, some scholars argue that the impact of gender-targeted scholarships has been limited by other socio-cultural and economic factors. For example, Mwebaza and Nyanzi (2022) note that while scholarships have enhanced female enrollment, many women still face challenges related to retention and completion of their studies, partly due to additional burdens such as family responsibilities, cultural beliefs and societal expectations.

➤ *A Student on a Mastercard Foundation Scholarship Argued that*

“One of the most significant roles of this scholarship is that it has reduced on the financial barriers I had to education,

particularly for students from low-income families. Without the scholarship, the high cost of tuition and other associated fees would have made my higher education inaccessible. This Scholarship offers not only tuition waivers but also additional support for accommodation, transport, and learning materials, thus helping me concentrate on my studies without the burden of financial stress.”

By supporting students from low socio-economic backgrounds, scholarships also play a role in promoting social mobility. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds who receive scholarships are more likely to complete their education and secure employment, thereby improving their economic status and contributing to the development of their communities (Nabaho, 2021).

The third question was, *“What strategies can you recommend to enhance the admission policies and scholarship opportunities at the institution.”* During the interaction with the students, parents and the academic registrars, the academic registrars emphasized the need for more need-based scholarships to cater for other disparities and obtain inclusivity in higher education. The deputy academic registrar suggested that;

“It is crucial to establish more need-based scholarships to complement the existing merit-based schemes. While merit-based scholarships are valuable, they disproportionately benefit students from better-resourced schools, often leaving behind talented students from poorer families. Need-based financial aid, which considers the socio-economic background of applicants, could help bridge this gap. We need policies that recognise that not all students have access to the same resources, and providing opportunities based on financial need would help level the playing field for disadvantaged students. I believe the quota systems for marginalized groups, such as affirmative action points for female students, have shown positive results, but similar measures could be extended to include students from disadvantaged regions or minority groups. This could ensure a broader range of students gain access to higher education.”

With the unfairness in the scholarship opportunities offered to students in higher education, most parents advocated for clear coordination between the scholarship-offering bodies and to address the existing inequity. One of the parents suggested that.

“There is a need for better coordination between the government, universities, and the private sector to increase funding for scholarships. Universities could partner with private companies, NGOs, and international organizations to identify more opportunities for financial aid and sponsorships. This collaboration could result in more need/ targeted scholarships, addressing specific fields of study that are in high demand or underrepresented groups within the education

system. I think we should explore ways to reduce non-tuition expenses that burden students. Many students struggle with the costs of accommodation, meals, books, and other necessities, expanding work-study programs, offering subsidized housing, or providing stipends for essential living costs could make a significant difference and ease access to higher education.”

With the interviews from the academic registrars and the parents, the students outlined the need for awareness calls made to schools and communities towards admission scholarship criteria used in most universities. One of the students stressed this;

“There should be more outreach programs specifically designed to raise awareness about the availability of scholarships and financial aid, particularly in rural areas, marginalized groups like the disabled and underserved regions. Many students like me in these areas are either unaware of scholarship opportunities or lack the necessary guidance to navigate the often complex application processes. Effective outreach could include working closely with secondary schools, community leaders, and local media to ensure that information reaches the right people. These programs should also focus on educating parents and students about financial literacy, showing them how to apply for scholarships, the requirements to apply and manage educational expenses.”

Research outlines the importance of need-based scholarships in expanding access to higher education for low-income students. For example, need-based programs in other African nations have proven successful in increasing university enrolment from disadvantaged groups (Ouma & Molla, 2021). The introduction of more need-based scholarships that prioritize students from low-income families, regardless of their academic performance should be emphasized. These scholarships should cater not only for tuition but also to living out allowances such as accommodation, learning materials, and transportation. Scholarships could also be directed to specific groups such as orphans, rural students, and those from refugee backgrounds.

Currently, government scholarships are limited and highly competitive. Many students who qualify for university admission are unable to enrol due to financial constraints. Increasing the number of government-funded scholarships would improve access for financially disadvantaged students and allow more students from marginalized regions to pursue higher education (Ssembatya et al., 2020).

VI. RECOMMENDATION

For students who do not qualify for scholarships, flexible payment plans and student loan schemes could provide vital support. Universities can introduce instalment-based payment systems, allowing students to pay tuition fees in smaller, manageable amounts throughout the academic year and

expanding access to the existing Higher Education Students' Financing Board (HESFB) loan scheme could make higher education accessible to more students. The scheme can be improved by lowering interest rates, extending grace periods, and ensuring it targets students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Ssembatya et al., 2020).

To ensure that these interventions are successful, it is essential to collect and analyze data on student admissions, scholarships, and financial aid. Public universities should regularly track data on admissions to ensure equitable representation of students from different regions, socio-economic backgrounds, and genders and monitor scholarship and financial aid programs to evaluate their effectiveness and make adjustments where necessary (Tibarimbasa, 2019).

International organizations such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and donor agencies can provide technical and financial support to increase admissions and scholarship programs. These partnerships can support research on improving access to higher education and availing funding for scholarships and infrastructural development to improve university capacity (Murphy & Wyness, 2020).

The private sector can play a significant role in expanding scholarship opportunities through partnerships with public universities. Companies and private organizations can establish corporate scholarships for students in fields aligned with their business interests and support internship-based scholarships, where students receive scholarships in exchange for working with the company during or/after their studies. This not only eases the financial burden on students but also helps create pathways to employment, improving graduate employability (Mwase & Namiyigo, 2019).

In addition to government and private-sector scholarships, universities themselves can establish financial aid offices that avail need-based financial aid; universities can allocate funds specifically for students from low-income backgrounds, regional quotas for students from underrepresented areas, extra support for students with disabilities, targeted recruitment from marginalized communities, such as Indigenous groups and even if these students do not qualify for government scholarships and work-study programs that would allow students to work part-time on campus to support their education while acquiring valuable work experience. Financial aid offices can also assist students in applying for external scholarships and loans, helping them navigate complex application processes.

VII. CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY TO NEW KNOWLEDGE

In conclusion, the study has thoroughly analyzed the admission policies and the scholarship opportunities offered at higher education in Uganda and Muni University in particular. The study emphasizes the available admission policies and

scholarship opportunities at Muni University, the challenges faced in attaining entry into the university and scholarship to the university and the strategies that can be implemented to mitigate the challenges encountered at each stage of admission and attaining the scholarships from government and private sectors in the country and the recommendation on the improvement in the policies governing the admission and scholarships in Uganda.

The study found that there are affirmative actions like additional points added to girls on entry to higher education to improve gender equity in higher education in Uganda, and the admission is so dependent on the merit-based criteria in the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE). The need-based scholarships like district quota alongside the national merit sponsorship to cater, favour and boost education for Ugandans living in rural areas in the country to access scholarships at higher education.

The study further identified the existing admissions and scholarship opportunities as unfair because they overlook the progress and the environment that a student has to go through to attain education. Students who study from rural areas are said not to be exposed to enough materials and learning resources compared to students from urban areas and the admission and government scholarship based on merit in UACE exams is deemed not equitable to all. The study has shed light on the effect of admission policies and scholarship opportunities on different groups, specifically, marginalized groups such as students from rural areas, students from low-income earning backgrounds, women, persons with disabilities, and minorities. Spotting out gaps in access provides an opportunity for policy reforms to promote greater inclusivity and fairness.

The study thereafter suggested strategies like an improvement in affirmative action to include students with disabilities, from unfavored areas and other marginalised groups of students to access higher education and the introduction of more need-based scholarships for the marginalized groups of students. The other suggested strategy was an introduction of the work-study programs at the university to allow students to do part-time work alongside studies to finance their education in case they don't attain any scholarships and a public-private university collaboration to reduce the liberalization of higher education where each private institutions regulate the tuition requirements.

The study identified different barriers in the current admission policies, such as limited scholarships, high entry requirements (the UACE merit-based admissions), and biases towards disadvantaged groups of students from rural areas, women and persons with disabilities. It has provided data on how these barriers can be mitigated to improve access to higher education.

The study has further offered insights into how scholarships and financial aid programs have influenced student decisions and retention in higher education emphasizing how financial support removes obstacles like dropouts and financial incentives (accommodation and scholastic materials) for students can guide the development of more effective funding schemes.

The findings of the study have suggested the designing of better admission policies and scholarship programs. Institutions and policymakers can refer to this study to adjust and improve admission criteria, quotas, or financial aid distribution to aid a more diverse student population.

The study finally provided valuable knowledge on the social and economic impacts of higher education access. By enhancing access through fair admission policies and scholarships, the study argued how higher education helps poverty alleviation, social mobility, and national development.

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