

Advancing Student Empowerment via Higher Education Access in Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan and Tanzania: Bridging the Gap

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ABSTRACT

Higher education access is very crucial for individual empowerment, economic growth and progress in society, yet it is hindered by economic, social, and geographic barriers, particularly among developing nations like Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia. This paper seeks to address the crucial role higher education plays in shaping student empowerment and societal development. The study employs online survey questionnaires to gather data on advancing student empowerment through higher education access in the target countries. A 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire is used to assess participants' views on technology accessibility and awareness, education accessibility, socioeconomic mobility, and community engagement. Additionally, open-ended questions provide in-depth explanations and perspectives from participants. The findings highlight the significance of technology in raising awareness of higher education opportunities and facilitating access, as well as the importance of digital literacy for students. Moreover, respondents emphasize the necessity of making education more accessible to advance student empowerment, with concerns regarding financial obstacles, geographic constraints, and the availability of accurate information. The results from this study also indicate that community engagement is identified as crucial in removing barriers to education, although opinions vary regarding its effectiveness and the influence of cultural and religious beliefs. The results of the present study may provide valuable solutions to address higher education access barriers experienced among students in Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tanzania.

Keywords: *Student Empowerment, Higher Education Access, Community Engagement, Socioeconomic Mobility, NAMA Foundation*

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INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, Higher education institutions have one of the most significant roles in determining the direction of our society. Studies reveal that a strong higher education system plays a crucial role in the nation's capacity to succeed in the global marketplace and plays an indispensable role in the economic development and well-being of society (Teague, n.d.).

The importance of higher education in improving intellectual growth, professional growth, and one's progress has long been acknowledged. It allows exploring a world of knowledge and improves critical thinking (Chaudhary, 2023). Furthermore, a great number of individuals regard attending college as a profound journey that offers individuals experiences, knowledge, and abilities that embark far beyond the classroom. It serves as a doorway for progress in society, career growth, and personal development. It is difficult to exaggerate the significance of attending college since it has a profound impact on how people's lives turn out and how their communities develop (Mulungi, 2023). The internet, cell phones, artificial intelligence, and other technological advancements have all had a significant and wide-ranging impact on society in today's rapidly evolving world (Sadanand, 2023).

There is no doubt about the difficulty and wide range of issues facing leaders in higher learning nowadays. A wider variety of amenities, initiatives, and extracurricular activities have to be provided as higher education institutions serve a growing and diverse student body. Institutions nowadays must comply with additional regulations and rules, which raises operating costs. Many of these institutions never have enough resources at their disposal. Higher education is in peril due to the high-stakes economic climate and several difficult issues that these institutions must handle. As a result, the leadership of these institutions is vital (Teague, n.d.).

In developing nations in general, high tuition costs are a key deterrent for children from rural areas wishing to attend senior high school. Poverty and rural living limit a family's ability to pay for tuition and other direct educational expenses, therefore high tuition costs certainly pose an issue. In addition to their restricted access to healthy financial markets, low-income rural families might also be unable to borrow money to cover their tuition (Chen et al., n.d.).

Therefore, given the need for institutions to grow and educate every citizen with potential and excellent academic skills, efforts at reducing the financial barriers to higher education must be continually assessed by the government and organizations (Priyono & Ahmad,

2018). NGO access programs, such as those offered by the NAMA Foundation, play a crucial role in addressing the opportunity gap.

NAMA Foundation was established in Malaysia in 2004, the foundation focuses on education and capacity building in Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tanzania. Their interventions include programs like ACT, aimed at enhancing students' moral compass, and Technology Donation to Schools, providing laptops to assist with online learning. Another initiative, UPSKILL, targets capacity building for civil society organizations (CSOs). These efforts are essential for bridging the education access gap, fostering long-term community growth, and benefiting the country as a whole.

Significant obstacles still stand in the way of access to higher education, despite its acknowledged relevance for social progress and individual empowerment, especially in developing nations like Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia. There is still a lack of information on the particular challenges experienced by students in these nations and the efficacy of current tactics in overcoming these obstacles, although the literature already in existence emphasizes several impediments, including poverty, technological limits, and social inequality. Furthermore, not much study has been done on how community involvement helps remove barriers to accessing higher education in these situations. Thus, more research is required to pinpoint the precise obstacles and consider workable solutions to advance access to higher education and student empowerment in Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia. Thus, This study explores the major issues surrounding higher education access and also aims to promote student empowerment globally by bridging the gap, promoting inclusive policies, and providing useful knowledge through an in-depth investigation.

Problem Statement

It is a global problem to ensure equitable access to education. Particularly in underprivileged areas and emerging nations, there are still gaps in access to resources, infrastructure, and educational opportunities (OECD, 2019). Despite the advancements in education and the abundance of education opportunities, many students are discouraged from continuing their education by obstacles such as exorbitant tuition fees, living expenses, and a lack of technology equipment. In addition, economic and social gaps create cycles of inequality and poverty by hindering the advancement of students from marginalized backgrounds. To address these gaps and promote inclusion in education, successful community involvement is crucial.

However, insufficient community engagement and awareness of societal challenges limited the endeavours to bridge the educational divide and empower students to contribute significantly to their communities.

Addressing these barriers and analysing the efficacy of various strategies for promoting access to higher education and student empowerment in these countries is therefore crucial.

Objectives

1. To examine the barriers to higher education access faced by students in Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia.
2. To evaluate the role of technology in accessing higher education opportunities and facilitating access for students in the target countries.
3. To investigate the impact of socioeconomic mobility on higher education access.
4. To explore the significance of community engagement in overcoming barriers to higher education access in Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia.

Research Questions

1. What are the barriers that hinder higher education access for students in Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia?
2. How does technology contribute to raising awareness of higher education opportunities and enhancing access for students in the target countries?
3. What is the relationship between socioeconomic mobility and higher education access in Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia?
4. What role does community engagement play in overcoming barriers to higher education access and promoting student empowerment in the selected contexts?

Literature Review

Employment, education, and empowerment of young people are essential for growth in the future. To a greater extent, one of the main goals of development is to empower people with education. Its long-term advantages have been acknowledged, and it can lower poverty and increase economic opportunities (Jadhav, 2022). Countries must invest in their youth's employment, education, and empowerment if they want to reap the advantages. With 1.8 billion young people in the globe today, there is a huge amount of untapped potential. The majority of them, yet,

are living in poverty, with little opportunity to further their education or find a respectable job(unfpa, 2015). Youth who have obtained an education are more prepared to confront the challenges and obstacles that come with development. To address the social and cultural barriers that hinder positive change, this function requires exceptional effort. Youth education and the development of a positive mindset toward education could accomplish this(Al-Braizat, 2016).

Education transforms people's lives, fosters peace, ends poverty, and promotes sustainable development; nevertheless, a large number of people are deprived of an education because of discrimination that keeps them from pursuing further education or since they are not given equal opportunity.

Over a third of the world's population currently pursues post-secondary education, indicating a clear growth in universal access to higher education over the past 20 years in all parts of the world. But this does not mean that everyone in society may profit from higher education in the same way; in fact, there are still big inequalities in access, especially when it comes to socioeconomic groupings. Some of the factors that have contributed to universal access to higher education during the past 20 years include the growth of private and distance learning institutions as well as economic growth in general. Nevertheless, there are still significant obstacles in the way of providing everyone with access to higher education. Including underprivileged groups continues to be a crucial, neglected need for HE universal access. Even though data indicates that access has improved overall over the last 20 years, marginalized groups—especially those from low-income environments—remain underrepresented in these institutions(Welch & Aziz, 2023a).In the Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan and Tanzania context, a study in this regard could contribute significantly to enhancing student empowerment through improved access to higher education The paper recognizes the critical role higher education plays in shaping individual empowerment and societal development, particularly in the challenging context of rural areas. In addressing the barriers to quality higher education, we will explore three key strategies. The study emphasizes the vital role that higher education plays in encouraging social advancement and student empowerment, particularly in the difficult environment of rural areas.

Higher Education Access

Access to higher education is crucial for reasons other than financial gain; there are non-economic as well as economic benefits. undoubtedly, going to college pays off. It has the power to positively impact not just an individual's financial situation but also the prospects of entire generations,

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particularly those in developing nations. Even with all of its advantages, getting more people to have access to higher education is still an obstacle to overcome.

Even though the returns on investment in education have somewhat decreased over time, it is still a wise and beneficial investment. This is still the case worldwide, despite substantial investments in education. There are still issues in low- and middle-income nations, nevertheless. Before the outbreak, the percentage of children living in "Learning Poverty" was 57%; by 2022, it is predicted to have risen to an alarming 70%. Extended school closures and a widespread digital gap made matters worse and threatened the achievement of SDG 4 ambitions. The numerous socioeconomic status, cultural, and geographic contexts of each nation are reflected in the opportunities and challenges associated with access to higher education. For instance, knowing the particular difficulties encountered by students in communities with limited resources or remote locations might help design focused interventions to close access gaps to education (worldbank, 2023).

INDONESIA

Higher Education Access in Indonesia

Indonesia has to deal with issues of inequality in growth and regional inequities. Economic concerns frequently hinder access to higher education, especially in rural areas. To address these issues, the government has put measures in place including university growth and scholarship schemes. Infrastructure, access to technology, and the requirement for specialized methods in a range of cultural contexts are still issues, nonetheless.

Not all of the progress made in expanding access to basic and secondary education has been replicated in higher education. Access is under greater threat due to a young population profile, with at least 30% of people under the age of 15, as well as increased levels of aspiration and the expanding middle class. For many Indonesians, affordability is still a problem despite the country's expanding middle class, and corruption restricts equal access. Poverty is still an issue, Just 2.5 per cent of those in the lowest per cent were enrolled, which is much less than the 65% of those in the highest quintile. The fact that the private sector accounts for such a large percentage of enrollments tends to make things more expensive for a lot of families (wenr, 2019).

Approximately nine per cent of all education spending goes toward sponsoring higher education and research. Even though there were

over 8 million enrollees in 2017, the overall growth rate (GER) only accounted for a small portion of the difference across provinces, rising from 11.5% in 1996 to 24.3% in 2015 (or an average annual growth rate of 4.37%). In Bangka Belitung, this was 11%; in DKI Jakarta, it was 127% (wenr, 2019).

Access is further impacted by the fact that 58% of all enrolments and approximately 96% of all HEIs are in the private sector. Private HEIs are mostly fee-driven, with fees accounting for up to 90% of their budget, although the expansion of the private sector has increased access. This has a big impact on access, and while some private HEIs charge less, they're also frequently of low quality with limited options (Welch & Aziz, 2023b).

Digital Landscape of Indonesia

In Indonesia, there were 212.9 million internet users by the beginning of 2023 or 77.0 per cent of the country's population. In January 2023, there were 167.0 million social media users in Indonesia or 60.4% of the country's entire population. In early 2023, there were 353.8 million active mobile phone connections in Indonesia, which represents 128.0 per cent of the country's entire population. According to a Kepios analysis, Indonesia's internet user base grew by 10 million (+5.2%) between 2022 and 2023. For perspective, these user numbers indicate that 63.51 million Indonesians were not online at the beginning of 2023, indicating that 23.0 per cent of the country's population did not have access internet.

However, because gathering and analyzing data about internet users is so difficult, it frequently takes several months before research is ready for publishing. Because of this, the most recent statistics on internet use are rarely accurate; actual adoption and growth may be higher than those displayed here (SIMON KEMP, 2020).

MOOC (e-learning in Indonesia)

The MOOC, which began operating less than ten years ago, has been seen as a novel learning paradigm in Indonesia. Under the leadership of the Minister of Education and Culture, the Indonesian government established the country's first MOOCs in 2013. In Indonesia, there are just two universities that actively run their MOOCs as separate entities. Additionally, despite the abbreviation's assumption, Indonesian MOOCs have not been particularly large. It was shown that not a single MOOC in Indonesia had benefited over 10,000 students (Ginting et al., 2022).

There is inequality in internet access in Indonesia, as indicated by several studies on MOOCs in Indonesia. As a consequence, the majority of MOOC participants are from Java, one of the Indonesian islands. While there may be internet networks on other islands, they are not as reliable as those on Java, and Indonesian students' use of the internet is negatively impacted by inadequate internet access. Moreover, it was shown that Indonesia has poor levels of digital literacy about internet use. Although popular social media was their primary usage of the internet, Indonesians also possessed other digital literacy skills. For instance, many were unaware of online learning platforms like MOOCs and internet information searches. As a result, MOOC providers encountered difficulties in attracting Indonesian students, and MOOC programs in Indonesia should anticipate enrolling less than 10,000 participants. (Berliyanto, n.d.).

Table 1: Indonesian online learning site users by numbers

No.	Platform	Year	Total Users
1.	SekolahPintar	2017	15,000
2.	HarukaEDU	2018	8,000
3.	IndonesiaX	2018	155,000
4.	KelasKita	2018	500,000
5.	SPADA	2019	11,000
6.	RuangGuru	2019	13 million
7.	CodeSaya	2019	81,000
8.	MOOC of Universitas Terbuka	2019	293,000
9.	Kelase	2019	250,000
10.	Dicoding	2019	140,000
11.	Zenius	2019	11 million
Total			25,453,000

Source: Indonesian online learning site users by numbers (Barros et al., 2022)

The potential population of students needs to be allowed to strengthen MOOC utilization in this nation. In 2018, 11 million people visited Zenius, the first online learning platform, even though it just offers videos and no courses.

KYRGYZSTAN

Higher Education Access in Kyrgyzstan

The Kyrgyz Republic's Concept of Education was approved in 2002. The quality of basic education, accessibility, and equality were highlighted as three of these documents' top concerns. The current standards are

antiquated and do not meet the demands of modern higher learning. Low criteria are applied when hiring academic staff. Although a master's degree is officially needed to be a lecturer, in practice, university administrations employ individuals with bachelor's degrees or specialized certifications to instruct students (around 60% of all professors lack a degree)(UNICEF, n.d.).

The National Statistical Committee reports that 94% of schools have personal computers, and 92% of schools have internet connectivity. These numbers should make it possible to fully digitize education in schools. However, there is still a lack of equipment to allow every student and teacher to have complete access to digital learning, and questions persist about the physical functionality and compliance with the technical specifications of contemporary digitization technologies. The Kyrgyz Academy of Education (KAE) organized a webinar on bullying of children with disabilities and discussed issues related to adapting the educational program for children with disabilities with school psychologists in Bishkek. Additionally, an instruction brochure titled "The Rights and Objectives of Parents Raising Children with Disabilities" was prepared. These actions were taken to learn more about the practice of introducing inclusive education(UNICEF, 2022).

Kyrgyzstan, another developing nation, was the first to introduce online education to higher education. In Kyrgyzstan, virtual classes were used to deliver university courses that were formerly taught in person during the spring 2019–2020 semester. Most of the students mentioned having trouble accessing the Internet. The Kyrgyz Republic's Internet infrastructure is not functioning at a fast enough pace. Due to their restricted Internet access, students, particularly those who reside in rural or hilly locations, were typically unable to attend live sessions. Moreover, the second issue that students in the Kyrgyz Republic typically face is electricity outages. Students were unable to charge their phones' batteries or switch on their PCs due to the frequent power outages. Consequently, during certain periods, students were unable to attend the courses' live sessions (Afacan Adanır et al., 2022a).

Digital Landscape of Kyrgyzstan

With 5.21 million internet users as of January 2023, Kyrgyzstan had a strong online presence and a notable 77.9 % rate within its population. With 2.75 million users—or 41. per cent of the nation's total population—social media involvement was thriving during that time. With 10.78 million cellular mobile connections, Kyrgyzstan surpassed the population at 161.4 per cent in terms of mobile connectivity. According to a thorough investigation by Kepios, there was a significant rise in internet users from

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2022 to 2023 of 82 thousand (1.6 per cent growth). Despite this, as of the start of the year, 1.48 million people—or 22.1 per cent of the population—were not online(datareportal, 2023).

MOOCS (e-learning in Kyrgyzstan)

Massive Open Online Courses, or MOOCs, have become a potent force in 2023 that is changing Kyrgyzstan's educational system. Because of its dynamic digital environment, the nation has seen an important rise in the use of MOOC platforms for e-learning. In addition to giving professionals and students flexible and accessible learning options, these online courses have been essential in closing educational disparities. Because of its adaptability, MOOCs can fit a wide range of courses and students, which helps to democratize education. The country's adoption of MOOCs by Kyrgyzstan highlights a progressive shift toward inclusive, technology-driven learning experiences that will shape the country's educational landscape going forward. Students from Kyrgyzstan experienced several issues when participating in online education. The primary issue facing students is the dearth of Internet connectivity throughout the nation. Kyrgyzstan's Internet penetration rate was reported to be 40.1%. In other words, 2,493,400 of the 6,218.616 persons who make up the Kyrgyz population are currently online(Afacan Adanır et al., 2022b).

TANZANIA

Digital Landscape of Tanzania

Tanzania has reached several noteworthy digital milestones. As of the end of June 2023, there were 64.1 million telecom subscriptions, up 3.6% from 61.9 million in March 2023, according to the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority. Dataportal.com estimates that by the beginning of 2023, 31.6% (21.00 million) of Tanzanians were using the internet. The nation's push toward digitalization encompasses both popular support and governance Tanzania's median fixed internet connection speed is 12.99 Mbps, while the country's median mobile internet connection speed on cellular networks is 14.48 Mbps. In January 2023, there were 4.90 million social media users in Tanzania(Afacan Adanır et al., 2022b).

MOOCS (e-learning in Tanzania)

The most frequently mentioned concern was the lack of Internet connection. More precisely, research has indicated that Tanzania's e-learning adoption faces two primary obstacles: low Internet speed and cost. As a result of the ICT-challenged environment, successful and sustained e-learning adoption has been low for a long time, despite the critical role it plays in the quality of education given. Furthermore, the

United Republic of Tanzania government created an ICT training strategy through its Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP), but e-learning has not been properly implemented following this policy (Innocent, 2020). A recently launched pilot program in Tanzania, supported by the World Bank, aims to include Coursera offerings as part of a larger effort to assist in providing students with IT skills that are relevant to the labour market. Tanzanian employers criticize the lack of skill alignment in the country's labour market. Because there aren't enough people in the local market with the necessary skills, many positions remain unfilled. IT and ICT knowledge and skills are becoming more and more vital to meet Tanzanian enterprises' growing requirement for technically trained people.

Student Empowerment

The process by which students achieve the capacity to manage and express their autonomy in terms of choice and decision-making in an academic setting is referred to as student empowerment (Kirk, 2012).

Empowering students means offering them the capacity to not just speak up and express their opinions, but also to have faith in the power of their voices to effect constructive change. Empowering students fosters a feeling of community, personal responsibility, and identity. Young people with a sense of duty consider both their community and themselves. This produces capable and receptive people with a sense of civic responsibility and global awareness. Young people's identity also helps them develop and comprehend their es and views. Lastly, children who feel empowered are more likely to take pride in their school (schoolbox, n.d.).

A major factor in student empowerment is technology. Considering the speed at which technology is transforming the world, educators are searching for methods to leverage digital platforms to enhance their students' learning. To achieve this in a 21st-century classroom that aims to foster learning without restricting the student, media literacy instruction is essential. The conversation needs to take into account how media literacy may support the development of critical thinkers in kids as well as how teachers can help pupils become competent and effective digital citizens.

Results for students that include personal aspects (competence, meaning, and self-determination), interactional elements (awareness, academic and interpersonal skills, connectedness), and participatory behaviours, cooperation, student-initiated conversation, activity participation, and governance) are what demonstrate empowerment (casdany, 2023)

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Academic Knowledge: A primary goal of K–12 education is academic accomplishment, which is significant. Our course selection is based on curriculum maps, and the lessons we design are shaped by academic objectives. Standardized tests are typically used to assess both our students' progress toward graduation and their acceptance into the college of their choice. Even though academic learning is important, most teachers will tell you that academics are not adequate on their own. Although a solid foundation can be laid by academic knowledge, it is not the whole building (avidopenaccess, n.d.).

Transferable Skills: Employers frequently cite abilities like communication, teamwork, creativity, and critical thinking when asked what qualities and talents they are seeking in candidates. Known as the "4 Cs," this fundamental skill set was initially popularized by The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21). Most employers rank a growth attitude and a drive to learn alongside the four Cs as vital abilities. Since employers are well aware that the particulars of any given work will always vary, they seek candidates who possess a solid foundation of transferrable abilities, which will enable them to succeed no matter how their particular role changes. These fundamental abilities that are transferable are critical for success in the future, so every subject area should incorporate them into their lessons(avidopenaccess, n.d.).

Social and Emotional Skills: These social and emotional skills—often referred to as "intangibles"—are crucial for students' success because they enable them to overcome obstacles, control their emotions, stay on target, and recognize the effects of their actions on others. The social and emotional competencies of empathy, self-control, grit, citizenship, and self-motivation are essential for students to develop before they can effectively use their academic knowledge and transferable abilities. We must incorporate the development of social and emotional skills into every aspect of education.(avidopenaccess, n.d.).

Barriers to Achieving Student Empowerment via Higher Education

Access to HE is very crucial for every country. It is the basis for a wide range of critical issues such as reducing unemployment and decreasing poverty. However, not every country can easily provide an increase in HE's access. There are many barriers to achieving universal access, including poverty, crisis and emergency, high tuition fees, exclusive entrance examinations, geographic mobility, and some forms of discrimination(Vieira, 2020).

Poverty

Cost is still the most common barrier to pursuing a degree, according to the report. Consistent with 2021 reports, financial hurdles such as program

cost (55%) and inflation-affected affordability (45%) as well as the requirement to work (38%) are the most commonly cited reasons for non-enrollment. According to the report, the most effective way to remove obstacles to pursuing higher education is to combine student loan forgiveness programs with scholarship, grant, and fellowship programs that reduce the cost of tuition (Buchanan, 2023). The cost of attending college is still rising. Students may be greatly troubled by the financial burdens of living expenditures, textbook costs, and tuition, as well as the long-term effects of student loan debt. Furthermore, it helps their families pay for their children's higher education, and working-class may need to take on part-time or full-time jobs. Thus, kids may encounter obstacles in their quest for resources, support systems, and extracurricular activities as a result of pre-existing socioeconomic inequality.

Although they do help, financial literacy initiatives fall well short of eliminating obstacles to student achievement. We need to figure out how to provide all students with financial support if we're serious about making sure they succeed (Pogue, 2023).

Technology accessibility and awareness

Innovative approaches to teaching can be provided via technology, which can also aid in closing the access gap to education. For students in distant locations to have access to high-quality education, governments and organizations should invest in technological infrastructure, such as computers and internet connectivity. Access to higher education has benefited greatly from technology, particularly with the usage of online, remote, and open learning, which has made higher education more affordable. Making use of the right technology is still a crucial component that requires attention. In this sense, mobile phones are especially helpful due to their ubiquitous availability and increasingly reasonable rates (Vieira, 2020). Furthermore, students with disabilities can meet challenges when it comes to "accessing and using" electronic learning resources. The specific challenges faced can vary greatly according to the type of disability. This obstacle results from the fact that many educational institutions lack the professionals and equipment necessary to fully realize the potential of their visually impaired students (Encalada et al., 2022).

Education accessibility

A bright future can be unlocked via education, yet the traditional classroom setting can be intimidating and alienating for many kids. Such an obstacle might have a detrimental effect on kids' academic performance and ultimately limit their potential (Johnson, 2023).

The goal of accessible education is to provide education to all individuals, irrespective of their sexual orientation, gender, ability, economic condition, or cultural background. It's best to think of it as a strategy meant to take down some of the barriers that may otherwise stand in the way of equal access to education.

Approximately thirty per cent of children in Indonesia who are disabled do not now have access to education. Some kids stay in the same grade for a long time, even if they attend primary school. Alternatively, they receive promotions devoid of proper instruction before leaving school altogether since insufficient teacher preparation programs and inadequate educational infrastructure fail to accommodate students with impairments.

In Indonesia, almost 30 per cent of children with disabilities still do not have access to education. Even if they go to primary school, some remain in the same grade for many years. Alternatively, they are promoted without appropriate teaching but eventually drop out due to the lack of teacher training and adequate school systems to accommodate children with disabilities (worldbank, 2021).

Socioeconomic mobility

Social mobility is the term used to describe changes in an individual's socioeconomic status over time, either intra-generationally or concerning their parents (generational mobility). Opportunity equality and social mobility go hand in hand. There are fewer prospects for those from underprivileged backgrounds to move up the socioeconomic ladder. Children from the most disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds in the European OECD countries earn up to 20% less as adults than children from more advantaged backgrounds. Children from low-income homes need almost five generations to catch up to the average income in their country, according to the OECD. In addition to being immoral, unequal chances also jeopardize social and economic advancement(*Understanding Social Mobility* / OECD, n.d.).

Numerous elements affect social mobility in society, but education plays the biggest role in fostering social mobility. Education affects Indonesia's upward social mobility. The likelihood of upward social mobility increases with education level. Respondent's education is the second-strongest variable influencing class, with paternal social status having the most impact. Numerous elements affect social mobility in society, but education plays the biggest role in fostering social mobility. Among such, social and economic standing are the most influential barriers. Indonesia's approximate educational participation rate may be a good indicator of the relationship between social and economic position and educational opportunity(Ariffin, 2017).

Community engagement

Community involvement is essential in bridging the education gap. Communities should actively participate in the education of their children by supporting schools, volunteering as tutors or mentors, and advocating for policies that promote education. Parents and caregivers can play a critical role in ensuring that their children attend school regularly, complete their homework, and stay motivated to learn. Community involvement can also help address social and cultural barriers to education. For instance, community leaders can work with families to challenge cultural norms that prevent girls from attending school. They can also advocate for policies that promote gender equality and inclusivity in education (varthana, 2023).

Students are often unaware of the societal problems surrounding them. When they do become aware of these issues they often feel powerless to do anything to change the situation and do not realize just how important their contributions can be. Students often feel a lack of connection to the community (Afacan Adanır et al., 2022c).

METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study was an online survey questionnaire method using a quantitative approach. The advantage of survey questionnaires is the data can be collected online from respondents and the results can be generalized to the population.

The samples consisted of participants who were beneficiaries of NAMA Foundation's programs from Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia. The researcher collected a total number of 20 respondents. The instrument used for collecting data was an online survey provided by Google Forms form. To determine participants' agreement on statements about technology accessibility and awareness, education accessibility, socioeconomic mobility, and community engagement, a questionnaire survey with 5-scale Likert-type questions was used to gather primary data. In addition, open-ended questions were used to get in-depth explanations and perspectives from the participants about their experiences. To thoroughly examine the complex facets of higher education access in the chosen nations, the study concentrated on characteristics. To present a deeper understanding of respondents' points of view, quantitative analysis of Likert-type responses and qualitative theme analysis of open-ended narratives were merged.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In presenting the findings and discussion, the researcher would present the findings sourced from questionnaire that analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings presented sequentially based on the variables. There were four variables on this study; technology accessibility and awareness, education accessibility’ socioeconomic mobility and community engagement. After presenting the findings, the researcher would discuss them to find out qualitatively and quantitatively to what extent these factors influence student empowerment via higher education access in Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan and Tanzania.

Descriptive analysis

The demographic analysis of the survey conducted in Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia shows a well-balanced representation of respondents across important categories. The study's gender distribution was balanced, with 45.0% of respondents being men and 55.0% of women, guaranteeing a varied viewpoint. The age categories were further divided into less than 25 years (15.0%), 36-45 years (35.0%), and 25-35 years (50.0%) to provide some insight into the experiences of the respondents at various phases of their lives.

Table2: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Per cent
Female	11	55.0
Male	9	45.0
Total	20	100.0

TABLE3: Age Group

Age Group	Frequency	Per cent
25-35 years	10	50.0
36-45 years	7	35.0
Less than 25 years	3	15.0
Total	20	100.0

The respondents had a wide range of educational backgrounds: 21.4% had a bachelor's degree, 35.7% had a doctorate, and 42.9% had a master's degree. The study's conclusions are enhanced by this educational diversity, which captures the opinions of people with varying degrees of intellectual achievement. With 33.3% working for the government, 37.0% in the private sector, 14.8% being self-employed, 3.7% being students, and 11.1% being jobless, there is clear occupational diversity. This allows for a thorough examination of perspectives from a range of professional backgrounds.

Table 4: Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Per cent
Bachelor degree	3	21.4
Doctorate	5	35.7
Master degree	6	42.9
Total	14	100.0

Table 5: Occupation

occupation	Frequency	Per cent
Governmental employee	9	33.3
Private sector employee	10	37.0
Self-employed	4	14.8
Student	1	3.7
Unemployed	3	11.1
Total	27	

Furthermore, the survey successfully gathered responses from three countries, with 35.0% from Indonesia, 25.0% from Kyrgyzstan, and 40.0% from Tanzania. This geographic diversity ensures a cross-cultural analysis, considering the potential influence of cultural contexts on the study's themes. Overall, the well-distributed and diverse characteristics of the respondents enhance the reliability and depth of insights into factors influencing student empowerment through higher education access.

Table 6: Country

Country	Frequency	percent
Indonesia	7	35.0
Kyrgyzstan	5	25.0
Tanzania	8	40.0
Total	20	100.0

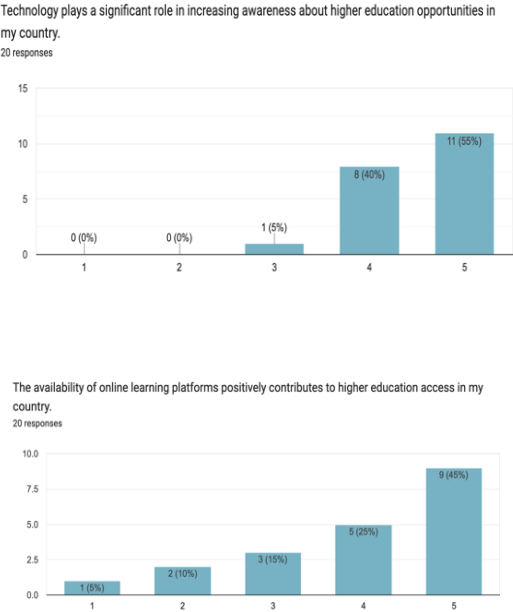
Findings on Technology Accessibility and Awareness

To find out how does technology contribute to raising awareness of higher education opportunities and enhancing access for students in the target

countries? it can be seen in the results of a close-ended questionnaire consisting of 5 question items with the results showed in the figure below.

Based on the figure below, it can be concluded that all questions received a positive response from the participants.

The findings in figure below indicate that a significant proportion of respondents (55%) demonstrated strong agreement when evaluating the contribution of technology to raising awareness of opportunities for higher education by giving it the highest rating of 5. This suggests that there is a consensus regarding the important role that technology plays in raising awareness.



However, when they were asked the second question the role that online learning platforms play in facilitating access to higher education, the participant mostly (45%) rated these platforms a perfect score of 5, indicating a consensus regarding their beneficial effects. The ratings distribution shows that opinions are mostly positive, with only 5% disagree with statement.

When the participants were asked access to digital resources, such as e-books and online libraries, enhances the educational experience for students. There were sixty per cent of respondents gave digital resources such as e-books and online libraries the highest rating of five when it came to improving the educational experience. This finding implies that

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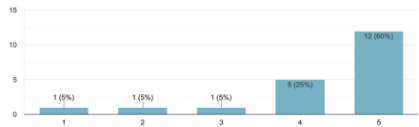
respondents strongly agreed on the importance of digital tools for enhancing the learning process.

Further, the respondent emphasised about the importance of availability of digital platforms, resources to promote equality in access to higher education in the following excerpts.

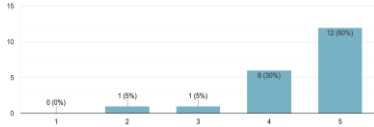
“ To make accessible of online resources in school like computer and other and also to have the accessibility of libraries that make accessible of education website for student.”

The participants also found it helpful and supported the statement technology has the potential to bridge educational gaps and promote equality in access to higher education. The participants gave a positive response to this statement as much as a significant majority (60%) gave technology's ability to close educational gaps and advance equity in access to higher education the highest grade of 5, reflecting a widespread belief in the transformative power of technology to overcome educational inequities.

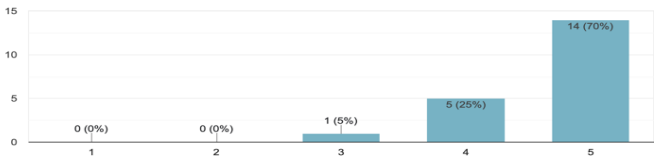
Access to digital resources, such as e-books and online libraries, enhances the educational experience for students.
20 responses



Technology has the potential to bridge educational gaps and promote equality in access to higher education.
20 responses



Developing digital literacy skills is crucial for empowering students in their pursuit of higher education.
20 responses



The participants also gave positive feedback to the statement that developing digital literacy skills is crucial for empowering students in their pursuit of higher education. Participants who expressed a positive attitude towards this statement were 70% indicating that respondents were in complete agreement on this point.

The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended question on how technology helps students from different backgrounds access and improve the quality of education in their region clarified the finding, as indicated in the following excerpt.

“Technology simplifies the process of finding and applying for scholarships, making financial assistance more accessible to students from various backgrounds. Technology also aids language learners using apps that provide language translation services and allow students to easily access educational materials and resources.”

This result corresponds with the findings of Manyengo (2021), who found that the usage of digital skills in secondary schools has been negatively impacted by a lack of access to digital learning resources and technology in both homes and schools. Additionally, Marshall and Ruohonen (2013) stated that having access to the internet is likely to have a big impact on digital abilities.

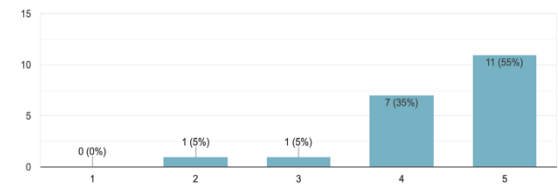
Findings on Education Accessibility

To find out the barriers to higher education access faced by students in Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia. The researcher indicated the results of a close-ended questionnaire that consisted of 5 items as described in the below figures.

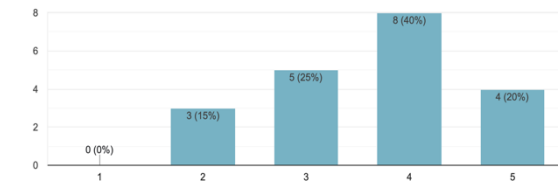
In response to the first question on how important it is to make education more accessible to advance student empowerment in the countries of the respondents, the majority (55%) gave it the highest grade of 5, indicating that they believe it will make a big impact. Only 5% of respondents suggested that most people agree that increased accessibility to education has a beneficial effect.

The responses differed when asked if they thought students in the area had access to the appropriate knowledge. The majority (40%) gave the availability of accurate information the maximum rating of 5, indicating a substantial belief in its availability.

Improving education accessibility significantly contributes to advancing student empowerment in my country.
20 responses

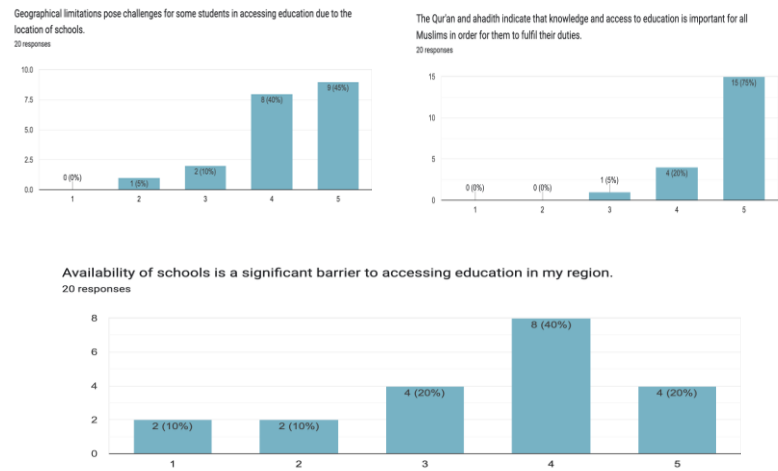


Students have access to the right information in my region.
20 responses



Regarding the idea that having schools nearby is a major obstacle to getting an education, 40% of respondents gave it a grade of 4, suggesting that they are quite concerned about the possibility of this being a barrier. The distribution of scores, however, was not uniform; 20% of respondents gave a rating of 2, which suggests that there was some disagreement. Respondents' perceptions varied on the issue of geographic restrictions as a barrier to accessing education because of school locations. The majority (45%) gave the highest rating of 5, demonstrating a widespread perception of the difficulties presented by geographic constraints. Nonetheless, a sizeable percentage (40%) gave a grade of 4, indicating a complex viewpoint regarding the severity of these difficulties.

The necessity of knowledge and access to education for Muslims, as dictated by the Qur'an and ahadith, was also universally acknowledged by respondents (75%). This unanimity highlights a common conviction of the religious importance of education for carrying out obligations.



A study by (Hauge 2019) found that. Unequal access to excellent educational opportunities in Kazakhstan's many regions continues to be a significant issue. Particularly in rural and isolated locations, disparities in infrastructure, resources, and trained teachers continue to exist. For students in these areas, overall growth and possibilities are hampered by this imbalance, which also maintains social and economic disparities.

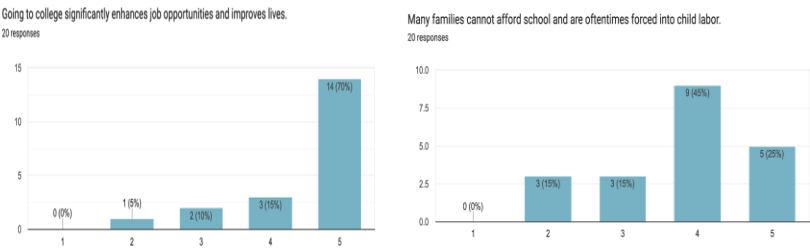
Findings of Socioeconomic Mobility

To find out the relationship between socioeconomic mobility and higher education access in Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia. It can be seen in the the results of the quantitative descriptive analysis which contains the 8 questions items accordingly.

As indicated in the figure below, an average age 70 % of the respondents strongly agreed that Going to college significantly enhances job opportunities and improves lives. In a similar,r study the researchers explored the hat majority of the students (current and previous students)a had strong belief that higher education is the security of The majority of students (81.3%) tried to get higher education with a comparison of lifetime income source in return of their parents’ investment in education.

In addition, respondents had differing opinions about how affordable education is and how common it is for households to have children working. A considerable portion of respondents (45%) assigned the financial obstacles to education and child laboured maximum grade of

5, demonstrating serious concern. However, 25% gave this difficult topic a lower rating of 2, indicating disagreement.

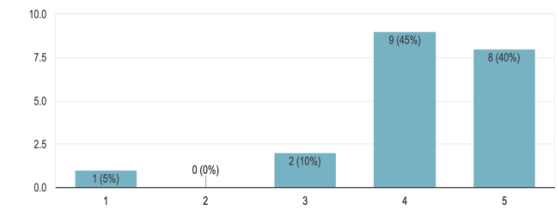


In comparison to our methodology, the previous research used statistical data, academic papers, relevant prior studies, and other secondary information as primary sources. The findings indicated that social and economic position, as well as differences in location and culture, are some of the obstacles that prevent people from pursuing higher education. Social and financial status, however, are the most influential barriers among those elements. The approximate percentage of Indonesians who participate in school may be a good indicator of the relationship between educational opportunities and socioeconomic status.

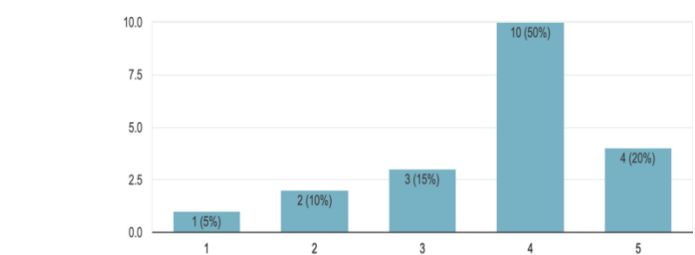
In assessing the belief that providing students with a quality education contributes to families gaining wealth and breaking the cycle of poverty, a majority (45%) assigned the highest rating of 5, emphasizing the perceived importance of education in breaking socioeconomic barriers. However, a significant portion (40%) provided a rating of 4, indicating a nuanced perspective on the effectiveness of education in wealth accumulation.

Respondents' opinions on the segregation or disregard of minority groups from educational opportunities were not uniform. A significant proportion (50%) gave the highest grade of 5, suggesting that there is a consensus regarding the marginalization of minority groups. Nonetheless, 20% of respondents gave this topic a lower rating of 2, indicating that perspectives on it vary.

Providing students with a quality education contributes to families gaining wealth and breaking the cycle of poverty.
20 responses



Minority groups are often excluded or forgotten from education opportunities.
20 responses

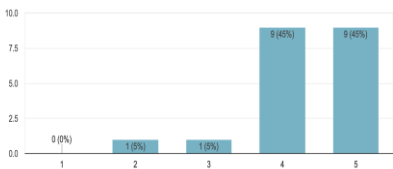


In determining the affordability of education for students from low-income families, respondents expressed varied perspectives. The study findings indicate that 45% assigned the highest rating and emphasizing the financial challenges faced by low-income families, 30% provided a rating of 4, suggesting a nuanced view of the extent of these challenges.

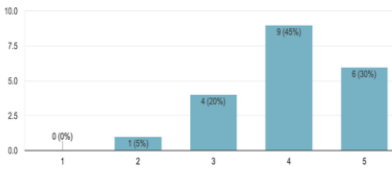
The open-ended questions from our respondents provided further clarification on this finding, as indicated in the following statement.

“ Provide students, especially from poor families with technology facilities that could enable easy access to digital libraries, online databases, and educational websites to facilitate independent research and learning. Furthermore, establish clubs particularly tech clubs that would focus on technology initiatives within schools and increase awareness on various education opportunities and the technology usage for education purposes.”

Luck of scholarships and financial aid can deprived students to further their education.
20 responses

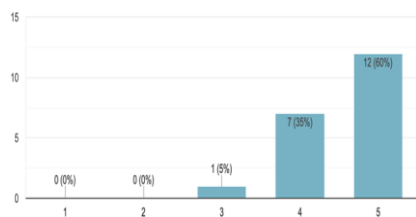


Students from low-income families cannot afford to attend school and universities.
20 responses

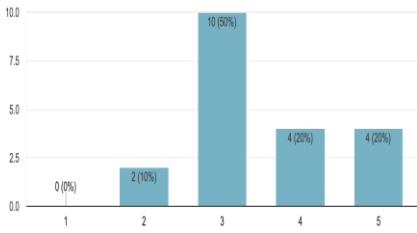


The finding of this study about access to education, including higher education, is a basic right of every individual and emphasized in the Quran and Islamic Shariah reveals a strong consensus among the respondents where the majority expressing high levels of agreement. Specifically, 60 % of respondents have ts a significant alignment with the importance of education as emphasized in religious tags. The 35% of the respondents rated access to education below 4, indicating a smaller proportion of disagreement with the statement.

Access to education, including higher education, is a basic right of every individual and emphasized in the Quran and Islamic Shariah.
20 responses



Facilities and materials in schools do not meet the standard.
20 responses



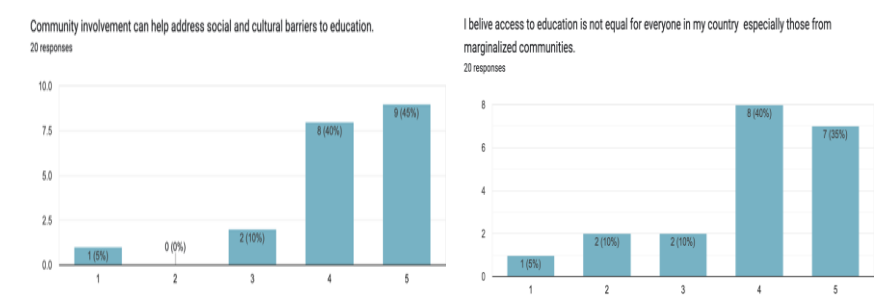
The finding highlights the significance of addressing socioeconomic barriers, such as insufficient financial aid and scholarships, especially for students from underprivileged homes who struggle to pay for their education at colleges and universities.

Findings on Community Engagement

To find out the significance of community engagement in overcoming barriers to higher education access in Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia. It can be seen in f the figures that this factor consists of 5 question items as follows when the participants were asked if community

involvement can help address social and cultural barriers to education 45% of participants firmly held the belief that community engagement plays a transforming role, highlighting its capacity to surmount social and cultural barriers. Even if 10% of respondents gave a worse grade, the consensus is in favour of the notion that community involvement can have a significant positive impact on educational inclusion.

Various opinions were heard on unequal access to education; 35% of respondents voiced worries about the differences, while 40% offered a more nuanced assessment of the degree of inequality.

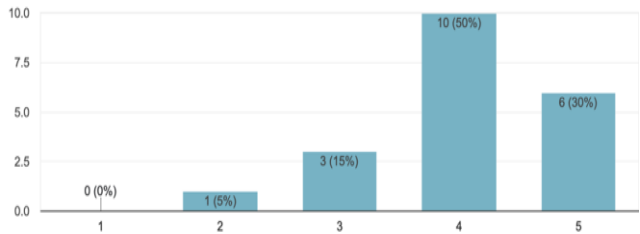


The participants were asked about the shortage of qualified teachers where fifty per cent expressed concerns about the lack of qualified teachers, and thirty per cent said the problem was of varying degrees of severity. Responses to the claim that teacher preparation programs are insufficient were divided; 70% expressed worry about how this would affect students' learning, while 15% had a more nuanced opinion on how well the current systems work.

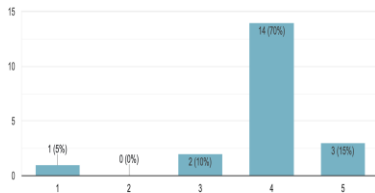
In a similar study, Haby rgreaves et al. (2009), urban schools are better than rural schools because they have a greater number of instructors and greater access to resources for learning and instruction. Though teachers in rural areas frequently lack the teaching resources they require to support their instruction in the classroom, those in urban schools have greater access to educational resources. This circumstance makes the teaching and learning process monotonous

Further, the respondents emphasised the importance of Maqasid Syariah principles help Muslims to solve the gap and empower students to get higher education access, while 20% offered a more nuanced analysis of their effects.

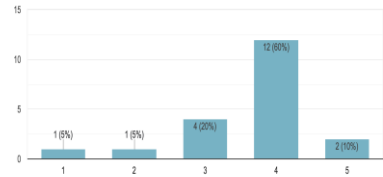
I believe there is a shortage of trained and qualified teachers in my country.
20 responses



There is no adequate teacher training and support to enhance student learning outcome.
20 responses



Maqasid Syariah principles helps Muslims to solve the gap and makes the students empower to get higher education access.
20 responses



“ Improve the quality of education, give information properly and creatively. Provide more training for teachers. Attracting more grants and financial aid for low-income families and best students. But everything starts in the family, so it first of all depends on the type of parents”.

The findings showed a range of perspectives on the role of community involvement in education, as well as different assessments of the effectiveness of the way that education is now conducted and the possible influence of religious and cultural beliefs on educational empowerment.

In contrast to our findings, previous studies have investigated the role of student empowerment in forming student well-being. For instance, This study found that student empowerment can increase relational empowerment, improve students forming networks and strengthen their collaboration. Student empowerment is believed to have a substantial impact on students' well-being (Indrianti et al., 2017).

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the research have important implications for stakeholders, educators, and legislators in Tanzania, Kyrgyzstan, and Indonesia. In these varied cultural and educational contexts, the descriptive analysis has given rise to a comprehensive understanding of the complex factors influencing the relationship between student empowerment and access to higher education. The focus on technology, community involvement, and socioeconomic considerations draws attention to how several aspects that affect student empowerment are intertwined. These findings can be used by policymakers to create focused initiatives that address particular issues that students in each nation experience, such as those about socioeconomic constraints, community involvement, and technology accessibility. Furthermore, the focus on cultural norms and the role of community leaders highlights the significance of culturally sensitive tactics in advancing educational inclusion.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations emerge to enhance higher education access and promote student empowerment:

- **Technology Integration:** Policymakers should prioritize initiatives that enhance technological infrastructure and internet accessibility to ensure equitable access to online learning platforms. Providing students with digital literacy skills should also be a key focus to bridge the technological divide.
- **Community Engagement:** Promoting community engagement in the educational process needs to be a top concern. Breaking down barriers can be greatly aided by initiatives that assist parents, caregivers, and community leaders in pushing for education, challenging cultural conventions that impede access, and developing a sense of community among students.
- **Financial Support:** Addressing financial barriers to education is crucial. Policymakers and institutions should explore options for increasing scholarships, financial aid, and income support for students, particularly those from low-income families. This can alleviate concerns related to affordability and child labour within families.
- **We must tackle the financial obstacles to schooling.** Institutions and legislators should look into ways to help more students, especially those from low-income families, receive scholarships, financial aid, and income support. This can allay worries about child labour and affordability in households.

- **Quality Education:** Enhancing the quality of education should be a continual effort. Providing additional training for teachers, improving school facilities, and ensuring the availability of accurate information can contribute to a positive educational experience for students.

CONCLUSIONS

In the present study, the goals of higher education in seven countries were extracted from international and national documents and their similarities and differences were expressed separately. Findings indicated that the most common goals of higher education in these countries are as increasing international exchanges, outsourcing more higher education activities to private section, assuring quality, pursuing future job opportunities for graduates, paying attention to availability of higher education for everyone, adapting and synchronizing higher education with job market. Yet, a variety of policies can also be recovered. In advanced countries such as the US, UK and Japan, the creation of a superior science and education ecosystem is the key policy.

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In conclusion, this research sheds light on the different points of view of Tanzanian, Kyrgyz, and Indonesian students as well as important variables affecting their empowerment as a result of pursuing higher education. The results show how technology has a big impact, and everyone agrees that online learning platforms have a good impact. It demonstrates how important it is to remove financial barriers and engage the community, which highlights the need for specialized solutions to support educational inclusion. For a comprehensive approach to student empowerment, policymakers should give financial assistance, community involvement, technological integration, and ongoing efforts to improve educational quality the top priority.

The research is being conducted to support broader socio-economic development in the investigated nations by eliminating access hurdles and promoting empowerment through higher education. Enhanced accessibility can provide students with the competencies required for global engagement, highlighting the transformative potential of education in dismantling socio-economic obstacles. To establish an inclusive learning environment that fosters student empowerment and societal growth, the recommendations emphasize the necessity of coordinated efforts in technology, community participation, and financial assistance.

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