

Social Justice in Public Higher Education Institutions in Ethiopia: Gender, Socioeconomic Status and Student Satisfaction in Focus

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Abstract: *The major purpose of this research was to assess how fair and just the services of selected public higher education intuitions in Ethiopia are. In order to carry out the study, four major questions were formulated. Based on these research questions, data were collected from randomly selected 335 undergraduate students in five universities. Besides, secondary data were collected from relevant documents. The study employed a cross-sectional survey study design where data were concurrently collected from junior through senior undergraduate students in five universities. The findings showed that female students were about 35% of the 788,033 undergraduate students who were enrolled for the 2016/17 academic year, in which case gender parity was not yet achieved in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia. Second, the enrollment of female students in public higher education institutions increased from 20.36% in 2003 to 35% in 2017 which might require long years before achieving gender parity. Third, access to higher education institutions in Ethiopia reached nearly 10% of the overall Ethiopian post-secondary age population. Fourth, about 43% of the undergraduate students reported that they come from the rural background indicating available opportunity of higher education although the majority did not yet benefit out of it especially in the emerging regional states. Fifth, about 27.5% of the respondents reported that they were not feeling free in expressing their views in the classroom. There was a statistically significant difference in the proportion of males (24.6%) and females (36.8%) who reported that they were not comfortable in expressing their views freely in class ($X^2=4.36$, $DF=1$, $p<.05$). With regard to the satisfaction of students, about 63.9% said they were satisfied with the university services they received while the remaining 36.1% said they were not. Results were discussed and recommendations were highlighted for a consideration by stakeholders and policymakers.*

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Background

Since the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education has been considered as the birthright of every person. The most significant expansion of education around the world at all levels has taken place during the last 100 years. Meritocratic societies allocate social status on the basis of educational attainment. The relationship between earnings and educational levels is well documented globally. Education is the single greatest predictor of life chances. If access to education is what allows each person the opportunity to gain an understanding of the world and of self, and if educational attainment is one of the few accepted means to bestow social privileges and resources, it follows that all children should have the same opportunities to be educated, regardless of the child's gender, religious affiliation, nationality, place of birth (urban/rural) or social class of origin. This implies that equity and equality of educational opportunity for children are the most fundamental to all societies.

In Ethiopia, there are over eighty different ethnic groups. Ethiopia has been expanding educational institutions aggressively throughout the country since the introduction of Education and Training Policy in 1994. Thousands of young people are attending schools from primary up to the higher education level. This expansion must be examined from different angles (i.e., equal access to higher education for those who deserve admission based on their merit). The expansion of higher education both in developed and developing countries brought forward the issues of equity, equality, and quality as major policy agendas.

Equity has emerged strongly on policy agendas in Western societies since the early 1970s when the higher education system started to expand. In most developing countries, however, it is a somewhat newer, yet increasingly important concern. Despite major advances in the participation of formerly underprivileged groups in many countries, equity has turned into a moving target. Over time, certain groups, in particular women,

have been able to gain increased access to higher education while others remain underrepresented. As a consequence, the overall concern with achieving greater equity remains an issue on policy agendas (Martin, 2010, p.23).

It should be noted here that equity and equality are strongly related in the context of higher education. According to OECD (2008, p. 14), quoted in Martin (2010), equitable tertiary education is defined as

“that ensure that access to, participation in, and outcomes of tertiary education are based only on the individuals’ innate ability and effort. They ensure educational potential at the tertiary level is not the result of personal and social circumstances, including factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, ethnic origin immigrant status, place of residence, age or disability” (p.26).

Bishop (1989) also states that the principle of equality of opportunity in education is where everyone, regardless of social origin, should have full access to education within the limits of his/her talents and capabilities (P.118).

In view of this, one can say that the issue of equity and equality in the institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia has not been studied adequately to satisfy the expectations of all stakeholders, particularly the policymakers. Thus, this research focuses on the issues of equity, equality and students’ overall perceived satisfaction in the institutions of public higher education.

Higher education is the highest level in the education system of countries in the world as it is structurally higher than the school system. As such its capacity to contribute to the socio-economic development should be commensurate to its level. Given this, elements that contribute to this goal must be put in place. Such elements envisaged

contributing to the desired objective are mainly associated with students and the degree of their satisfaction with the services they get from the universities they have joined.

Students must be taken as the core group for without this group no proper teaching-learning would take place. Researchers like Thomas and Galambos (in Grumber and others, 2010: 106) attest to this saying, "As students are increasingly seen as consumers of higher education service, their satisfaction should be important to institutions that want to recruit new students". Other factors that must accompany the running of a full-fledged program in a university are staff and the facilities used for running the institution.

Statement of the Problem

Ethiopia is a country of diverse culture and wisdom. Not recognizing the diversity will automatically result in social inequality, oppression, and domination. The Ethiopian Constitution, the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy, Higher Education Proclamation, Growth and Transformation Plan (I & II), Education Sector Development Plan (ESDPI-V) and other related documents in principle underline the high value given to social justice in higher education. If the legal and operational principles are proper, then what is the problem? The question is to what extent do the public higher education institutions in Ethiopia respond to the needs of diverse social categories and claim the attainment of social justice?

Since 1994, the expansion of primary, secondary, TVET, and higher education throughout the country gave millions of young people the opportunity to get education and training according to their interests. However, there is a strong belief that thousands of young people still have little or no access to education and training. This is more so concerning public higher institutions.

This study, therefore, attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do male and female undergraduate students perceive fairness and equal opportunities in higher education institutions?
2. What is the status of gender parity in public universities?
3. Are there associations between the perceived socioeconomic status of students and access to higher education institutions?
4. To what extent are undergraduate students satisfied with overall university services?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to assess how fair and just the services are in higher education intuitions. Specifically, this study attempts:

- 1) To assess how male and female undergraduate students perceive fairness and access to equal opportunities in higher education institutions.
- 2) To assess the association between perceived socioeconomic status of male and female students and access to higher education institutions,
- 3) To assess undergraduate students' satisfaction in terms of university services.
- 4) To propose viable recommendations for action that promotes gender equality and equity.

Significance of the Study

In the academic year of 2016/17, forty-five public and four private universities enrolled a total of 788,033 students out of which 33.5% were females. In the aforementioned academic year, 28,761 Ethiopian staff members were teaching in these universities. The findings of this study will serve as a source of information for the university community

(both students and staff) policymakers, researchers, the ministry of education, the general public and other stakeholders.

Scope of the Study

This study is limited to a sample of undergraduate students in five public universities mainly due to various resource constraints. These were Adama Science and Technology University, Addis Ababa Science and Technology University, Bahir Dar University, Jimma University, and Mekelle University. Although social justice could be understood using various indicators, in this particular study, it is confined to fairness or the adequacy of services of the university for both male and female students, and equal access and opportunity to higher education for students coming from diversified backgrounds.

Operational Definitions

Social justice - The definition of 'social justice' in higher education has been understood in terms of fairness in accessing valued and beneficial opportunities (Singh, p. 482, 2011). Although there are various dimensions of justice issues, gender inclusion and fairness in accessing the opportunities of higher education and students from various socio-economic backgrounds are given due emphasis in this paper.

Equity in education – This includes two major components: fairness and inclusion. Equity in higher education relates to the process of having access and participating and succeeding in higher education. Equity also includes equity of outcomes, which refers to the opportunities of students to progress and complete a program (Martin, 2010).

Equality – The term refers to the social ideal in which a society regards and treats its citizens as equals, and implies that benefits such as certain rights should be distributed equally (Miller (1979)).

Socio-economic status - It has three major components (income, education, and occupation). The income, educational and occupational level of parents has an impact on the educational achievement of their children. Many research findings indicate that parental material wellbeing has a strong relation to students' performance in schools.

Fundamental human rights - These are rights that humans have by the fact of being human, and that are neither created nor abrogated by any government. Supported by several international conventions and treaties such as the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human rights of 1948, these rights include cultural, economic, and political rights such as the right to life, liberty, education and equality before the law.

The Perceived economic status of the family – A subjective measure of socio-economic status of respondents' parents. Respondents were asked to rate their parents' economic status as better, same or worse than other members of the community in which they resided.

Students' satisfaction - This was measured using questionnaire items that capture the students' subjective ratings of the adequacy of services provided by the university they were attending.

Design and Methods of the Study

Design

This study has employed a cross-sectional survey study design in which data were collected from junior to senior undergraduate students all at a time.

Sampling

Data were collected from a total of 335 undergraduate students selected from five public universities in Ethiopia (See Table 1). Purposive sampling was used to select public universities. About one-third of the respondents were females (23.7%) and two-thirds were males (76.3%). The sample respondents were selected using Systematic random sampling. When we look into the number of participants from each public university, we see that 20.3% were from Addis Ababa Science and Technology, 19.7 % from Adama Science and Technology, 17% from Bahir Dar, 20.3% from Jimma and 22.1% were from Mekelle universities. Two students (0.6%) did not indicate their institutions.

Table 1: Sample undergraduate students by the university

Data Source Universities		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Addis Ababa Science and Technology University	Count	58	10	68
	%	85.3	14.7	20.3
Adama Science and Technology University	Count	50	16	66
	%	75.8	24.2	19.7
Bahir Dar University	Count	43	14	57
	%	75.4	24.6	17.0
Jimma University	Count	50	18	68
	%	73.5	26.5	20.3
Mekelle University	Count	53	21	74
	%	71.6	28.4	22.1
Total	Count	254	79	333
	%	76.3	23.7	99.4
Two students did not indicate their institutions (0.6%) Grand total 100%				

Data Collection Instruments

This study used a structured questionnaire as the major primary data collection tool. The questionnaire consists of background variables, the relevance of service and facility-related questions, and satisfaction-related questions. Besides, secondary data such as the Education Statistics Annual Abstract of the Ministry of Education were reviewed and documented as a means of gathering relevant data.

Methods of Data Analysis

The primary data collected from the students using the questionnaire were entered into SPSS and analyzed. Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were used. Besides, a chi-square test was used to analyze the relationship between gender and various categorical variables.

Review of Related Literature

The definition of social justice is associated with the principles of human rights, fairness, and equality. According to Miller (1979), social justice is defined in terms of distributive justice. When one is disadvantaged due to lack of basic necessities or is denied deserved reward following his/her performance, and or when citizens are not treated as equals in terms of social ideals then there is aviolation of human rights. The principle of distributive justice recommends that such rights be equally distributed among citezens.

Other researchers criticized Miller's conception of social justice as incomplete since it focuses on the distribution of material goods and services. Young (1990) argues that institutional contexts such as social structures that determine how goods and services are distributed need to be given more weight in understanding social justice.

Gale (2000, p. 256) discusses two additional perspectives of social justice in addition to Miller's distributive justice. Retributive social justice refers to "fairness around competition for social goods and materials". Whereas distributive justice is focusing on the proportional distribution of goods and services, retributive justice focuses on open competitive and protective rights and properties. The third perspective is recognitive justice which is defined as "recognizing differences and commonality amongst cultural groups." P. 259

When discussing social justice in higher education, there are five themes that need to be addressed: self-determination, access, equity, participation and rights (Karen, *et al*, 2012). First, self-determination is one form of recognitive justice. Freedom from social domination and operation is a major characteristic of social justice through self-determination. Second, equity is a form of distributive justice where access to resources and opportunities are created and barriers to inclusion of the disadvantaged groups are removed. Third, social justice is defined when citizens have access to social, cultural, political

and economic resources. Fourth, social justice is defined in terms of participation of citizens where equality of opportunities is the central theme that emanates from a recognitive perspective of social justice. Finally, social justice, as protection of human rights from any violations and punishment for those who violate these rights, emanates from the perspective of retributive justice. From the literature on social justice, these five principles emerge (James, 2008 in AGOL, 2012). Defining a set of social justice principles may serve as an important foundation for sector guidelines and assist in determining practices (Nicole, 2007).

These principles can be applied to specific initiatives undertaken in the higher education sector that focuses on safeguarding student learning engagement. As has been mentioned earlier from the perspectives shown, social justice in education has many aspects: distributive, retributive and recognitive. If all these are fairly implemented, this would be a good reason for students to benefit greatly from their education. Very often, however, this does not seem to be implemented adequately perhaps because of many factors including paucity of resources, ineffective management and unhealthy attitude towards some cultures of those involved. This often can be a cause for a lack of satisfaction of students with the program.

The Ethiopian government recognized the benefits of higher education in particular and committed itself to the expansion of education and training at all levels. In a multi-cultural society like Ethiopia, education and training must be accessible to all regardless of their background or gender. Within the current context of Ethiopian higher education, one cannot fully assert that all college-age children have equal access to higher education. Access to higher education can be constrained due to an individual's background such as socio-economic status (SES), gender, place of birth (geographic location), culture, etc.

In most Western societies, it was assumed that an individual's educational and occupational attainment could be determined by ascriptive characters (i.e., class of origin, gender, ethnicity, etc.),

achievement characters, or a combination of both (Boyd, *et.al.* 1985). An individual's ascriptive characters are usually determined by birth and seem to affect one's social position in life. At the same time, it was acknowledged that an individual's determination and effort affect his/her educational and occupational attainment (Miffelen, *et.al.*, 1982).

According to Gottfried and Ream (n.d), SES is typically considered as a three-part construct used to group people with similar economic, educational, and occupational characteristics. A study done by Eliophotou and Pashourtidou (2017) indicates that the link between access to higher education and the SES of the family remains strong. Furthermore, based on the analysis of data from more than ten countries, Thomas and Quinn (2007) found strong links between parental education and access to higher education.

In reference to the relationship between socio-economic status and tertiary level education, Bishop (1989) indicated that:

The most deep-rooted and widespread inequalities in education, especially in higher education, in both developing and developed countries are those arising from socio-economic status (SES). Children of parents who are high on the educational, occupational and social scale have a far better statistical chance of getting into a good secondary school and from there into one of the better or best colleges or universities than equally bright children of ordinary workers or farmers (p. 43-44).

The Ethiopian society is an amalgamation of many ethnic and religious groups. The majority of the population (more than 80%) lives in rural areas. Furthermore, Ethiopia is an agrarian society and aspires to be an agriculture-led industrial society. Thus, people with high skills are needed to move the country forward. In view of this, the participation of youth (from different backgrounds) in the institutions of higher learning

is extremely essential. The analysis that follows will attempt to address the issues of access and equity taking into account the students' SES.

The educational system in countries of the world is that training institutions are vertically arranged mainly into primary, secondary and tertiary. Each of these levels has cycles and levels within it that facilitate specific functions entrusted to it by society. This study deals with higher education institutions at an undergraduate level, and therefore, we pay more attention to this level and its duties and responsibilities along with its degree of accomplishments. These responsibilities, generally, include the following: "Tertiary education is a key factor in a nation's effort to develop a highly-skilled workforce for competing in the global economy. There are important benefits to those participating in tertiary education (World Bank, 2000: 2)." Higher education tends to care about student satisfaction because of its potential impact on student motivation, retention, recruitment efforts, and fundraising....it is difficult to argue that student satisfaction can be legitimately subordinated to any other education outcome" (Astin, 1977 in Schreiner, 2009:1).

Normally universities as higher education institutions exist to perform the following three functions: teaching, researching, and community services. To be able to carry out these functions competently, a given university should have the following imperatives: Personnel, curriculum, facilities, and finance. As can be observed and should be understood, all these must be of good quality and at a desirable level. For instance, personnel consists of teachers, students, and administrative staff. All three groups must have profiles appropriate for their respective roles. The curriculum in each of the higher education units must be relevant to the area it is planned for. It must have courses appropriate for the field it is prepared for and with course contents which are to the standard for the modern condition. Facilities and finance are closely related to each other as both are facilities of a slightly different nature. If both are put to function adequately and at a desirable level, they, in turn, would help the other accompanying

services to accomplish their respective mission efficiently. The significance of these elements for higher education instructions is expressed in the following manner (Dafubi, 1988): No education system can be better than the quality of its teachers.

The nature of university education in the past was that it used the enlightenment values of the liberal education model. This model, once the dominant philosophy in universities across the world, was gradually supplanted by a consumerist ideology (Furedi, 2011 in Burgess, (2017). Among the elements mentioned above, the literature available explains that “They found ... a significant relationship between satisfied students and the quality of the teaching with a mediating role for institutional reputation” (Burgess, 2017: 2). Moreover Alves and Raposo (2007: 2) “found that institutional reputation was actually a more influential predictor of student satisfaction than teaching quality. So, it would seem that students are satisfied if they receive good teaching at a reputable institute. The benefit of student satisfaction to the institution is quite obvious. Students as future graduates would be loyal to the university if they complete their program with satisfaction because of good teaching staff in a reputable college/university. This loyalty would result in a good alumni group which would give assistance to the university.

Evaluations of programs in higher education institutions are of various kinds. Among them, one of the most common procedures in some countries is to obtain the perceptions of students of their study program, facilities and their satisfaction with universities (Hussain *et.al.*, 2014). The satisfaction of students is divided into four categories: program effectiveness, program characteristics, students’ satisfaction, and their outcomes.

Student satisfaction in higher education has a far-reaching experience, especially if it is accompanied by positive faculty-student interactions. Hussain *et.al.*, (2014, p. 4344) reiterate “... student-faculty interaction positively affects students’ satisfaction. It is, therefore, recommended

that faculty play a major role in the satisfaction of students. The students are almost satisfied with overall university experience if they are satisfied with faculty.” With regard to other services provided by universities (Mai, 2010, p. 4344) identified some important educational services like “teachers’ expertise, transport facilities, library facility, exam system, learning environment, hostel facility and medical facility which can affect student satisfaction with the quality of education offered...”

Higher education is a relatively new phenomenon in Ethiopia . It was in the mid 20th century (1950) that the first tertiary education institution was founded in the country under the name of “University College of Addis Ababa’ (Desalegn, n.d.). It was taken as a goodwill gesture of the late Emperor Haile Selassie I, as the need for education at that level was not pressing in the country at that time. After this higher education was opened with students as few as 33, there was no other tertiary level institution for many years that followed. As Desalegn (n.d) states, Addis Ababa University was the first and only university founded in 1950 with some colleges such as Gondar Health College and Alemaya Agricultural College. Others were affiliated to it until these, too, grew to the University level in 1999 along with some others to form a second-generation group of universities in the country.

The time gap between the opening of the first university and that of the second generation universities was about 50 years (1950 –1999). Considering Ethiopia has a long history as an independent nation, founding the first university as recently as 1950 is surprising. Even more surprising is the fact that the country stayed with only one university for 50 years. At this juncture, it seems quite logical to ask the question of why the government did not open another university during these 50 years.

To get a definitive answer to this question, all we can do is to go through the literature to see if we get a plausible reason why additional universities were not established during the period under question. No

definitive answer seems to surface in this regard. What has the trend been since 1999? In the years that followed, a number of universities opened. For example, in 1999 additional 7 public universities were opened. In 2006 and 2011, 13 and 10 other universities, respectively started operation. By 2011 a total of 31 universities were in operation. At the moment, there are 45 public universities in Ethiopia. Of course, for a country of Ethiopia's size, 45 universities by then would not be taken as "enough", especially when we know that college students in modern times would need a relatively huge number of universities from which they can comfortably identify areas of their interest in order to be academically satisfied.

The literature in this area (Loughborough University, 2010) recommends the following quality dimensions as instrument for student satisfaction: administrative and student services, computer equipment, courses, library, lectures, lecture theatres, refectory/cafeteria, relevance of teaching to practice, reputation, school placements, support from lecturers, presentation of information, university buildings, and atmosphere among students.

Expecting universities in Ethiopia in earlier years to be capable of working towards significant students' satisfaction would not be feasible as they could not offer a selection of adequate types of disciplines. Even with this condition, there are some universities which are at a fairly desired level (Daniel, *et al.*, 2017; Tadesse, *et al.*, 2013).

Analysis of Results

Background Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents were 335 undergraduate students sampled from five universities and their demographic characteristics are described in Table 2.

Table 2: Background characteristics of respondents

Characteristics	Gender			
	Male	Female	Total	
Age	18-23	175	62	237 (73.4%)
	24-29	52	8	60 (18.6%)
	30-37	15	5	20 (6.2%)
	Over 37	6		6 (1.8%)
	Sub-total	248	75	323 (100%)
	Missing	11		
Total	259	75	334	
Location of parents' residence	Urban	91 (61.9%)	56 (38%)	147 (46.7%)
	Rural	148 (88.1%)	20 (11.9%)	168 (53.3%)
	Total	239 (75.9%)	76 (24.1%)	315 (94.0%)
Perceived Socio-Economic Status (SES) of parents	Better than most people in my community	45 (15.3%)	11 (14.56%)	56 (17.4%)
	Same as most people in my community	181 (73.6%)	61 (80.3%)	242 (75.2%)
	Worse than most people in my community	20 (8.1%)	4 (5.3%)	24 (7.5%)
	Total	246 (76.4%)	76 (23.6%)	322 (96.1%)
Year level	Year – I	30 (12.0%)	14 (17.7%)	44 (13.4%)
	Year –II	61 (24.49%)	25 (31.6%)	86 (26.1%)
	Year –III	74 (29.6%)	17 (21.5%)	91 (27.7%)
	Year –IV and above	85 (34.0%)	23 (29.1%)	108 (32.8%)
	Total	250 (76.0%)	79 (24.0%)	329 (98.2%)
Area of specialization	Engineering	123 (48.4%)	35 (44.9%)	158 (47.6%)
	Applied Sciences	24 (9.4%)	6 (7.7%)	30 (9%)
	Agriculture and health sciences	29 (11.4%)	7 (9.0%)	36 (10.8%)
	Business and Economics	64 (25.2%)	21 (26.9%)	85 (25.6%)
	Social Science and Education	14 (5.5%)	9 (11.5%)	23 (6.9%)
	Total	254 (76.5%)	78 (23.5%)	332 (100%)

In terms of age, the majority of the respondents (73.4%) were between 18 and 23 years old while those between the ages of 24 and 29 accounted for 18.6%. Twenty students (6.2%) indicated they were between the ages of 30 and 37. Very few (1.8%) were above the age of 37.

Male and female students who reported their parents lived in urban areas respectively constituted 61.9% and 38.1% of the respondents. On the contrary, those who reported their parents lived in rural areas respectively made 88.1% and 11.9%. This means, more male university students had parents in rural areas while more female university students had parents from urban areas. The association between the gender of respondents and the urban-rural location of their parents was statistically significant ($X^2=29.38$, $df=1$, $p<.05$). This result implies that the number of female students from rural location is limited in having access to higher education.

We know that the majority of the Ethiopian population (80%) lives in rural communities. About 20% of them live in urban areas. Based on this assumption students were asked to indicate whether they completed their preparatory secondary schools in urban or rural communities. The result of this study shows that almost 78% completed their preparatory secondary schools in urban communities, but only 19.1% come from rural preparatory secondary schools. Even then, the sampled university students whose parents still reside in the rural areas constitute 53.3% which shows that students are travelling to towns and cities for their secondary school education. The implication of this is that secondary education still gives less access for rural people.

Concerning perceived socio-economic status, about 17.4% of the respondents said they were economically better than most people in their community, while 7.5% admitted they were from the lowest socio-economic family background. The majority of the respondents (75.2%),

reported they were economically the same as most people in their community.

Perceived Justice in Higher Education Institutions

Table 3: Perceived fairness of university services by gender

Characteristics			Gender			X ² (df), p-value
			Male	Female	Total	
Type of services received from the university	Only food services		12 (4.8%)	5 (6.8%)	17 (5.25%)	53.39 (3), P<.05
	Only boarding services		11 (4.4%)	23 (31.5%)	34 (10.5%)	
	Both food and boarding services		199 (79.3%)	31 (42.5%)	230 (70.9%)	
	None of these services		29 (11.6%)	14 (19.2%)	43 (13.3%)	
Total			251 (77.5%)	73 (22.6%)	324 (97.9%)	
Were you assigned to your department based on your first choice?	No		54 (21.8%)	14 (17.9%)	68 (20.9%)	0.53 (1), p>.05
	Yes		194 (78.2%)	64 (82.1%)	258 (79.1%)	
	Total		248 (76.1%)	78 (23.9%)	326 (97.3%)	
Was your first choice based on your grade?	No		48 (22.0%)	8 (11.8%)	56 (19.6%)	3.46 (1), p>.05
	Yes		170 (78.0%)	60 (88.2%)	230 (80.4%)	
	Total		218 (76.2%)	68 (23.8%)	286 (85.4%)	

The Exploration of type of services received from university indicates that the majority of the respondents (70.9%) used both food and boarding services. On the other hand, only 5.25% of them received food service only while 10.5% received boarding service only. Those who received no services at all accounted for 13.3%. In light of the association between the type of services used and the respondents' gender, it was found out that there was a statistically significant association between the variables ($X^2=53.39$, $df=3$, $p<.05$), where more female (31.5%) than male (4.4%) students used only boarding service.

Respondents were also asked if they were assigned to their departments based on their first choice. About 79.1% said they were assigned based on their preference and grades while the remaining 20.9% were not. There was no statistically significant association between the gender of respondents and the choice of the department ($X^2=0.53$, $DF=1$, $p>.05$).

Table 4: Adequacy of university services by gender

Adequacy of services		Gender			X ² (df), p-value
Items	Response	Male	Female	Total	
To what extent are you satisfied with the overall services delivered by your university?	Dissatisfied	90 (76.3%)	28 (24.7%)	118 (36.1%)	0.002 (1), p>.05
	Satisfied	159 (76.1%)	50 (23.9%)	209 (63.9%)	
	Total	249 (76.1%)	78 (23.9%)	327 (97.6%)	
Have you attended an orientation program before starting your first class as a student at the university?	No	74 (71.8%)	29 (28.2%)	103 (32.1%)	1.45 (1), p>.05
	Yes	170 (78.0%)	48 (22.0%)	218 (67.9%)	
	Total	244 (76.0%)	77 (24.0%)	321 (95.8%)	
How do you rate the relevance of your program of study to your interest?	Not relevant	14 (70.0%)	6 (30.0%)	20 (6.2%)	3.59 (2), p>.05
	I'm not sure	32 (66.7%)	16 (33.3%)	48 (14.8%)	
	Relevant	201 (78.5%)	55 (21.5%)	256 (79.0%)	
How do you rate the relationship among the students coming from different backgrounds?	Total	247 (76.2%)	77 (23.8%)	324 (96.7%)	0.39 (2), p>.05
	Good	199 (77.4%)	58 (22.6%)	257 (79.8%)	
	Neither good nor bad	36 (73.5%)	13 (26.5%)	49 (15.2%)	
	Bad	12 (75.0%)	4 (25.0%)	16 (5.0%)	
	Total	247 (76.7%)	75 (23.3%)	322 (96.1%)	

As indicated in Table 4, about 63.9% of the respondents said they were satisfied with the overall services of the university, with no statistically significant difference between the proportion of males and females ($X^2=.002$, $df=1$, $p>.05$).

Students were also asked if they had an orientation before starting their first classes. About 68% indicated that they had orientation while the remaining 32% said they did not. In terms of the relevance of the program of the study to the respondent's interests, the majority of the respondents (79%) said the fields of study were relevant but had no statistically significant association with gender ($X^2=3.59$, $df=2$, $p>.05$).

Regarding the relationship among students who come from different background, the majority of the respondents (79.8%) said it was good. Furthermore, 15.2% said the relationship was neither good nor bad. Only 5% said the relationship was bad. There was no statistically significant association between gender and their responses with diverse groups ($X^2=0.39$ (2), $p>.05$).

Table 5: Perceived fair treatment by gender

Perceived fair treatment Items	Response	Gender			X ² (df), p-value
		Male	Female	Total	
Do you think that male and female students are treated equally by your instructors?	No	68 (28.0%)	9 (11.7%)	77 (24.1%)	8.50 (1), p<.05
	Yes	175 (72.0%)	68 (88.3%)	243 (75.9%)	
	Total	243 (75.9%)	77 (24.1%)	320 (95.5%)	
Did any of your instructors favor some students and gave them undeserved good grades?	No	123 (50.4%)	46 (61.3%)	169 (53.0%)	2.75 (1), p>.05
	Yes	121 (49.6%)	29 (38.7%)	150 (47%)	
	Total	244 (76.5%)	75 (23.5%)	319 (95.2%)	
Did any of your instructors disfavor some students and gave them undeserved bad grades?	No	119 (49.40%)	44 (60.3%)	163 (51.9%)	2.67 (1), p>.05
	Yes	122 (50.6%)	29 (39.7%)	151 (48.1%)	
	Total	241 (76.8%)	73 (23.2%)	314 (93.7%)	
Did any of your instructors favor and gave you undeserved good grades in his/her course?	No	167 (69.9%)	52 (68.4%)	219 (69.5%)	2.86 (1), p>.05
	Yes	72 (30.1%)	24 (31.5%)	96 (30.5%)	
	Total	239 (75.9%)	76 (24.1%)	315 (94.0%)	
Do you feel free to express your views in the classroom when it seems necessary?	free	184 (75.4%)	48 (63.2%)	232 (72.5%)	4.36 (1), p<.05
	not free	60 (24.6%)	28 (36.8%)	88 (27.5%)	
	Total	244 (76.3%)	76 (23.7%)	320 (95.5%)	

Although the majority of the respondents (75.9%) said that both male and female students were treated equally by their instructors, 24.1% reported they were not equally treated. More males (28%) than females (11.7%) seemed to complain in this regard ($X^2=8.50$, $df=1$, $p>.05$). (See Table 5).

Concerning unfairly grading their academic performances, a large number of students (47%) said their instructors favored some students and gave them undeservedly good grades while 48.1% indicated that some disfavored students got undeservedly bad grades. There was no statistically significant association between male and female respondents in this regard. Similarly, about 30.5% admitted their instructors gave them undeservedly good grades in his/her course. This also showed no statistically significant association with the gender of respondents ($X^2=2.86$, $df=1$, $p>.05$).

Respondents were also asked whether they felt free to express their views in the classroom when it seemed necessary. Only 27.5% said they never felt free. A significantly higher proportion of female students (36.8%) than males (24.6%) reported that they did not feel free to express their views.

Table 6: Students’ overall satisfaction with University service delivery by age and sex

Level of satisfaction	Age range (in years)		Total	X^2 (df), p-value
	18-23	24-52		
Dissatisfied	93 (39.6%)	22 (26.2%)	115 (36.1%)	4.81 (1), $p<.05$
Satisfied	142 (60.4%)	62 (73.8%)	204 (63.9%)	
Total	235 (73.7%)	84 (26.3%)	319 (95.2%)	
Gender				
	Male	Female	Total	
Dissatisfied	90(36.1%)	28(35.9%)	118(36.1%)	.002 (1), $p>.05$
Satisfied	159(63.9)	50(64.1)	209(63.9%)	
Total	249(76.1%)	78(23.9%)	327(97.6%)	

In Table 6, we can see that about 64% of the students were satisfied with university services while 36.1%, were not. The dissatisfaction was statistically significant and higher among young age respondents (i.e., 18-23) than the older ones ($X^2=4.81$, $df=1$, $p>.05$). On the other hand, the dissatisfaction was not statistically significant with regard to the gender of respondents ($X^2=.002$, $df=1$, $p>.05$).

Table 7: Students' satisfaction with university services by the urban and rural location

Level of satisfaction	Location of respondents' parents		Total	X ² (df), p-value
	Rural	Urban		
Dissatisfied	51 (30.7%)	60 (41.1%)	111 (35.6%)	3.65 (1), p<.056
Satisfied	115 (69.3%)	86 (58.9%)	201 (64.4%)	
Total	166 (53.2%)	146 (46.8%)	312 (93.1%)	

Table 7 shows the level of students' satisfaction with overall service provided by the university. Most of the students were satisfied with the services they received from their respective universities. The level of satisfaction was relatively lower (58.9%) for students whose parents lived in urban areas than for those whose parents lived in rural areas(69.3%). It can thus be concluded that students whose parents lived in rural areas were more satisfied with the university services than those whose parents lived in urban areas.

Table 8: Selection of field of studies and level of satisfaction

To what extent are you satisfied with the overall services delivered by your university?	Were you assigned to the current department according to your first choice of field of study?		Total	X ² (df), p-value
	No	Yes		
Dissatisfied	33 (49.3%)	85 (32.9%)	118 (36.3%)	6.12 (1), p<.05
Satisfied	34 (50.7%)	173 (67.1%)	207 (63.7%)	
Total	67 (20.6%)	258 (79.4%)	325 (97.0%)	

Whether or not respondents joined their field of studies by choice was cross-tabulated with their level of satisfaction on the overall university services. As indicated in Table 8, majority of the students were placed according to their first choice. Among those who were satisfied by the university overall services, the majority (67.1%) said they were placed according to their first choice. On the other hand, from among those

who were dissatisfied with the overall services of the university, 49.3% said they were assigned to a field of study other than their first choice. This means that those who complained about the inadequacy of the university services were more likely to have poorer academic performance since grade point average is the most important criterion for securing or joining a preferred field of study.

Table 9: Qualification of Ethiopian staff members teaching in public institutions of higher learning (MoE,2016/17)

Qualification	Male	Female	Sub-Total	%
BA/Bsc.	6974	1682	8656	30
M.D/D.V.M.	1643	314	1957	6.8
Masters	13019	1593	14612	50.8
PhD	2641	219	2860	9.9
Specialty	403	45	448	1.6
Sub-Specialty	26	2	28	0.3
Others	151	49	200	0.6
Total	24857	3904	28761	100.0

In Table 9, we can see that those with BA/BSc accounted for 30% of the teaching staff while those with MA/MSc made the majority (about 51%) during the 2016/17 academic year. PhD. degree holders were about 10% (2860) and of these only 7.7 % (219) were females. Out of a total of 28761 staff members, females accounted for only 13.6%. This is extremely low when the total population of women in this country is taken into consideration. Thus, we can say that there is a huge gender gap among the teaching staff in the institutes of higher education.

In order to deliver quality education at the institutions of higher learning, the educational level and experience of the academic staff is extremely crucial. Thus, there is still a long way to go to get to adequacy in terms of quality of the teaching staff.

Gender Parity in Higher Education Institutions

In the academic year of 2016/17, the majority (91.59%) of students enrolled in higher education in Ethiopia were at the undergraduate

program level. Total enrollment in both government and non-government institutions of higher learning during the year was 788,033. Among these, female students' enrollment was 35.71%. Compared to the 20.36% female enrollment of 2003/04, this showed an incremental trend (MOE, 2016/17). Similarly, female graduates from the undergraduate programs for the academic year 2016/17 was 33.29% (of the total of 141,700).

In light of enrollment and graduation, one can see that gender parity at higher education institutions is not yet attained although there is a growing trend of female students' enrollment and graduation over the past nearly two decades. The trend is shown in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Girls' enrollment at public higher education institutions (Undergraduate Regular Programs)

Academic Year	Male	Female	Total	Female in %
2016/17	255,657	137,131	392,788	34.9
2015/16	252,716	126,673	379,389	33.4
2014/15	243,955	124,359	368,314	33.8
2013/14	220,453	88,136	308,589	28.6
2012/13	212,056	82,301	294,357	27.9

Source: Ministry of Education: Education Statistics Annual Abstract 2012/13 – 2016/17

Discussion

The main purpose of this research was to examine the practice of social justice in public higher education institutions in Ethiopia with a focus on gender, socio-economic status, and student satisfaction. Higher education institutions are meant to develop the human capital of a given country which is the process of enhancing the knowledge, skills, and capacity of the people. For any country to make progress in terms of social, economic and political endeavour, developed human capital is a prerequisite. Thus, the main role of higher education is to develop

human capital. In view of this, all individuals who have the aspiration and talent should have access to pursue higher education.

Higher education institutions are expected to practice social justice in terms of providing services to students that come from diversified social and economic backgrounds. No one should be denied access to higher education institutions because of his/her gender, ethnicity, religion, SES, disability, place of residence (urban/rural) or other variables.

Currently, there are about forty-five public universities serving thousands of young people throughout the country. Ethiopia is a multicultural society with a population of over a hundred million. Students joining the existing public universities are also diversified. In order to accommodate diversities among students in institutions of higher learning, the practice of social justice is mandatory. Without this, equity and equality cannot be assured.

Proclamation No.650/2009, higher education objective #9, ensures fairness in the distribution of public higher institutions and access on the basis of need and equity. Equity in education entails two major things: fairness and inclusion (OECD, 2008).

The result of this study pointed out that there still is a lot to be done in the areas of equity and equality in which social justice is expressed. Thus, to achieve true social justice at the institutions of higher learning, all stakeholders need to be involved.

The gender gap at higher education institutions was serious not only around the enrollment ratio of female students but also in terms of the proportion of the teaching workforce at higher education institutions where the number of female instructors was highly limited. The socio-cultural dimension could be considered as a major explanatory factor why the participation of female students was limited in schools in general and in higher education institutions in particular. This implies

that gender parity may not be attained in the short run unless serious measures are taken.

In terms of access to higher education institutions, students from rural areas seem to have got opportunities although far from adequate. In fact, more males than females from rural areas seem to benefit from higher education institutions, which still is not fair for female students.

Conclusions

Public universities in Ethiopia have made slow progress since the 1950s. However, all governments that came to power since the 1950s have contributed in various ways for the expansion of higher education (both public and private). The big expansion came after the introduction of the Education and training policy of 1994. This phenomenon shifted the elitist nature of higher education to mass base education. As a result of this expansion, both male and female students from different socio-economic backgrounds got chances to enroll mainly in public universities. These days, over 800,000 young people are pursuing their education at the institutions of higher learning. These public institutions are expected to serve all students that come from different backgrounds on an equal basis.

Thus, this study was designed to find out whether or not these public universities equally serve students coming from different social backgrounds. In light of the findings of the study the following conclusions were drawn:

- 1) Access to high education has increased over the years although gender parity is not yet attained. Only about one-third of the students in Ethiopian public higher education institutions are female.
- 2) Although the majority of the population resides in the rural areas a higher proportion of university students were from families who

resided in urban settings. However, the current trend indicates that more young people are enrolling from rural areas in public institutions of higher learning.

- 3) Very few students who considered themselves from lower socio-economic status joined the universities indicating that the most disadvantaged groups were not benefiting from university education as expected.
- 4) About a third of the sampled students were not satisfied with the overall service delivery of their universities implying possibilities of violations of students' rights.

Recommendations

Since the introduction of the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (1994), both public and private higher institutions flourished in this country. Currently, close to 800,000 students are attending institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia. This is a commendable achievement. From the perspective of social justice in higher education, there still is more work to be done to make these public higher education institutions more inclusive. All stakeholders need to make extra efforts to mitigate the constraints that affect social justice in the institutions of higher learning. The following specific recommendations are forwarded:

- 1) Make students' voices heard in the academic and administrative program planning, implementation and evaluation phases;
- 2) Address the diverse needs of the student population;
- 3) Continue implementing the programs and services provided by the universities in a better quality and by considering students' demands;
- 4) Universities must focus on improving the quality of their teaching staff as they play important roles;

- 5) Improve teaching facilities which would greatly support the efforts of the teaching staff;
- 6) Establish mechanisms of clear measurements of students' satisfaction with services the universities render;
- 7) Students' complaints related to universities activities must be heeded and timely solutions must be given;
- 8) The concerned universities would be more professionals if they become innovative enough to initiate some projects that contribute to students' satisfaction;
- 9) Make a collaborative effort with other similar universities to improve students' satisfaction as much as possible;
- 10) Further research must be conducted in order to overcome limitations in the study..

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