

Challenges to Reaching Higher Education in Developing Countries

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Abstract : Introduction In developing countries, the access to higher education for the lower socioeconomic strata is very poor at less than 0.05%. The challenges faced by prospective students in these circumstances to pursue higher education have been explored through direct interaction with them and their families in urban slums of New Delhi. This study included evaluation of the demographics, social indices, expectations and perceptions of selected communities. Results The results show that the poor life expectancy, low exposure to technology, lack of social infrastructure and poor sanitary conditions have reduced their drive for academic achievements. This is despite a good level of intelligence and critical thinking skills among these students. The perception of the community including parents shows that despite their desire to excel, there are too many roadblocks to achieving a fruitful professional life for the next generation. Discussion The prerequisites of higher education may have to be revisited to be more inclusive of socially handicapped students. The knowledge, skills and attributes required for higher education system should form the baseline for creating a roadmap for higher secondary education suited for local needs. Conventional parameters like marks and grading have to be re-looked so that life skills and vocational training form part of the core curriculum. Essential skills should be incorporated at an earlier age, providing an alternative pathway for such students to join higher education. Conclusion: There is a need to bridge the disconnect that exists between higher education planning, the needs of the concerned cohorts and the existing higher secondary education. The variables that contribute to making such a decision have to be examined further. Keywords: prerequisites of higher education, social mobility, society expectations, access to higher education

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