
Free Education In Australia

Introduction

University and tertiary education is a very fundamental aspect not only to the individual but to the society at large (Pages & Stampini, 2009). If university education is carried as an profit motive industry then it will not produce the best results. In reality, tertiary and university education is important in shaping the career paths of individuals by instilling professional skills to suit their careers. However, it is very unfortunate that university education has been carried out as an industry that is aimed at producing profits. This is witnessed by the large amounts of fees paid at the university institutions. Most qualified candidates are unable to meet the financial requirements and are therefore left with no hope of attaining the university education. On the other hand, unqualified students who are from wealthy families can find their way to the universities simply because they can afford the fees. This will create a generation of professionals who were not fully qualified. For instance, in today's world, a student carrying below the university selection rank, can easily pursue a course in education by paying a given amount of fee while a student with qualified points cannot simply because of not meeting the financial standards. This reduces the chances of a country having the best professional by focusing on financial ability rather than the educational qualification. As a result, many people end up losing opportunities. University education and payment has been a critical issue in many countries, Australia being inclusive. Focusing on university education in Australia, there is a need for university education to be made free.

Education History In Australia

Looking at the history of university education in Australia, this has begun by the famous golden era of free higher education which was implemented in 1974. This era was founded on Whitlam's famous quote that students merit rather than parents wealth should be the determining factor as to who should benefit from financial commitments from society to higher education. This was aimed at promoting an equality based university system. However, this of acquiring education through merit still implied that higher education was a commodity. Unfortunately, the university system in Australia shifted back to a fee-based program in 1989. The main reason was that the population of the university increased and the government could not afford to cater for the expenses of all the students. In the same year, labor established HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme) that was aimed at promoting tertiary education regardless of the financial situation of an individual. This theory was found on 'learn now, pay later' notion where Australians were encouraged to invest in a professional skill with an assurance that their future job would pay. The main disadvantage with this theory was that it did not focus on the labor economy that was unstable and the effects are seen in individuals who invest in university education and get a job that pays money that cannot be compared to the money they invested hence leaving them in debts and poor state.

It is for this reason that university education strategies have to be looked into especially when it comes to fees. Some countries like Germany have succeeded in managing fee-free based universities. Therefore, Australian universities should adopt the same system in running their universities. As we will discuss, running free university education will have great effects on the

individual and to the society at large.

Reasons For Free University Education In Australia

Free university education increases more skilled workers, promotes equality, promotes positive externalities of education, increases specialization of work and is also a merit good. These reasons reflect the benefits the free university education will have on the individual and on the society at large as discussed below. First and foremost, university education is accompanied by positive externalities of education. The main purpose of higher education is to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to fit in the workforce. Therefore, with a free university education, many individuals will enroll in university education hence a large number of people will acquire professional skills. Free university education will lead to a high number of educated and productive people. High levels of innovation and productivity are evident in countries where there are high rates of university education (Asadullah & Rahman, 2009). For instance, in most cases, people travel to other countries to seek medical treatments from professionals. These professionals go through higher education to achieve their professional and hence they become competent. As people seek for their services, the whole country benefits from revenues earned from such services. Similarly, individuals travel to Australia to pursue their professional career after which they return back to their countries to apply their skills and knowledge learned. A country with professionals develops in all aspects.

On the other hand, the acquisition of professional skills is not only beneficial to the country but to an individual. These skills help one to fit in the job market where one will earn money to cater for daily needs and meet the living standards (Wantchekon, Klasnja & Novta, 2014). In addition, these skills help one to exploit one's full potential in the workforce which leads to innovation and invention.

Secondly, free university education in Australia will promote equality. It will promote equality in terms of opportunities and in terms of education. It is evident that financial instability denies many people to join universities. An individual may be qualified for higher education but lacks the funds for this education. Therefore with a free university education, individuals will be able to have access to higher education without any financial hindrance (Barr et al., 2008). This will ensure that even individuals from poor families will have access to this education.

On the other hand, free university education will ensure equality in opportunities. Before one gets a job, the employer puts certain factors into consideration. Among these factors includes higher education certificates and others go to the extent of considering the institution attended for this tertiary education. Some universities are highly esteemed than others, with matters to do with fees being the determining factors. Therefore with a free university education, these universities will be free to be attended by anyone provided they are qualified. This will reduce disparities when it comes to employment opportunities (Corak, 2013).

Equality in higher education can be highly promoted by ensuring the selection criterion is merit but not wealth or health. Some disadvantaged and minority groups of people in the community face discrimination when it comes to higher education. With a free university education, inequality issues will be done away with. This will create an environment where every individual has equal access to university education and has equal access to job opportunities.

Thirdly, free university education will increase the specialization of work. This means that Australia will be able to focus on specific industries for income generation. For example, the United Kingdom is well known for its production and exportation of optical and surgical instruments, pharmaceuticals and organic chemicals. This requires highly skilled professionals to fit in this workforce. With a free university education, many people will be able to acquire skills in specific areas which may be profitable for the whole economy. This implies that the country will be in a position to profit the high tech industries due to the high number of skilled people.

In addition to this, the free university of education will promote specialization at an individual level. University education offers a wide variety of courses which students select from. With no restriction of entry, individuals can comfortably choose a line of course in which they are interested in for their career life (Sibbel, 2009). Easy access to higher education is, therefore, an important element in promoting specialization for both the individual and the country at large by improving on one's skills specific professional careers.

Specialization is an important aspect because it enables people to focus and work better hence producing better results. For instance, if a country specializes in pharmaceuticals, then the products are most likely to be of high quality. Similarly, if an individual specializes in producing computer software, then he/she will be very accurate with his work and will create excellent software. This will contribute to the production of high-quality products and services thereby creating a competitive advantage over other producers and service providers (Kemeny & Storper, 2014).

In addition, free university education will promote the existence of skilled people in the country. Knowledge and skills cannot be taken away from someone. On the other and, the lack of knowledge and lack of skills may lead to poverty. In the current system where students pay In order to get to the university, there are a large number of people who opt to stay away from higher education. This is because they end up getting jobs which they do to raise money for university. As a result, they drop out of school and continue working to ensure the ends meet. Once a person earns income, the idea of school does not seem appropriate. Therefore, the high cost of university education may lead to settling in jobs which do not require skills hence dropping out of school or failing to join the school at all. On the other side, this will be a loss to an individual and to the country because an increase in the rate of unskilled workers will lead to a decline in both individual and economic growth (Autor, 2019).

At the individual level, one may not acquire professional jobs that are well paying. Unskilled jobs can be done by anyone hence are not very well paying (Pages & Stampini, 2009). This will lead to an individual living a stagnant life without any innovations and inventions. On a country level, a high rate of unskilled workers means that the economy will deteriorate because the industries that generate income for a country through exports require high levels of literacy and skills. Therefore, a drop in skilled workers will result in a decline in the high tech industries hence a drop in economic growth.

Lastly, education is a merit good. A merit good is a good or service that the government presumes is under-consumed due to prices imposed on them, and this creates the need for the government to subsidize or provide the good and service free of charge. The government plays a role in providing merit goods for three reasons; first to ensure that the positive externalities are achieved, secondly to improve on equity and to instill the belief that consumption of goods and services should not be based on one's ability to pay for the goods and services. Lastly, the

government provides merit goods and services to overcome the wrong information spread about these merit goods (Shah & Shah, 2010).

The characteristics of education as merit include: education is a long term investment with costs being incurred now but the benefits being enjoyed later. In addition, education has positive externalities attached to it and has high chances of reducing unemployment through an increase in occupational mobility. These two characteristics fall under the two broad characteristics of merit goods. First, the benefits merit goods are not achieved during consumption but later in life. Secondly, merit goods have externalities whereby the society benefits from these goods, but still not at the point of consumption (Tilak, 2008).

This reason for free higher education simply emphasizes the fact that the government should implement free higher education. The policy governing merit goods and services is that they should be subsidized or provided for free to ensure there is reduced under consumption. This, therefore, concludes that higher education is a merit good and it is the responsibility of the government to provide it for free.

Although numerous attempts to provide a free-based higher education have proven to be hard, it is possible to do so. Taking an example of Germany, they have succeeded in offering fully free university education. They have achieved this by placing a higher value on vocations and apprenticeships. Their system has been structured in such a way that students at the secondary level are given options to choose on whether to continue with the academic path which leads to university education or whether to follow paths that lead to employment directly. Therefore by placing more value on other vocations, free university education can be made possible.

Moreover, free university education can be achieved if the overheads involved in university life are cut off. The structure of the school fees includes costs that may be unnecessary. According to Andrew Hacker, some of these unnecessary costs include college football and basketball costs. Some of these activities finance for through the school fees are not necessary and they end up wasting the financial resource (Hacker & Dreifus, 2010). Therefore, doing away with them will lead to a significant fall in fees which can then be handled by the government. Similarly, most universities focus a lot on the appearance of the university in order to attract more international students. Maintaining the appearance of the school calls for finances which are included in the student's fees. Universities should focus more on education rather than other miscellaneous activities which consume much money.

Conclusion

Every individual has a right to education and should by no means be denied access to it. The fact that it is a merit good justifies the need for free university education. The only way that university education in Australia can be made free is by first adding value to public universities. The private universities have been overvalued and less value placed on public ones. The taxpayers money can be used to improve the system of public universities hence will be valued.

On the other hand, university education in Australia can be made free if there is a shift of attitude towards higher education. When people cease to see it as a commodity and view it as a public service which can be taken at the opportunity cost of other vocations. Similarly, equality can be a driving force in ensuring that university education is made free.

Finally, with the discussed reasons for free university education in Australia, there is a need for such policy to be implemented. This will ensure people acquire skills and will ensure equality in accessing higher education and in job opportunities. In addition, it will improve the country's productivity as there will be a large number of skilled people in the workforce.