

Is Access to Higher Education a Sufficient Condition for Social Equity in South Africa? A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT Access to higher education in South Africa has become an urgent imperative after the demise of apartheid in a bid to redress the inequities of the past. This has given rise to the massification of higher education and the phenomenal increase in the number of students participating in higher education. As a direct consequence, debates and discourses in Higher Education (HE) have foregrounded access as a key component of successful higher education transformation. However, critics have argued that debates and discourses in higher education that are only driven by access as measured by rates of participation remain largely ineffective if they do not pay sufficient attention to access as measured by success and graduation rates as well as the quality of graduates produced. This is equal to saying that students of all races and social classes who participate in higher education should have equal chances of success in higher education so as to bring about social equity and equal educational opportunity in society. This paper, therefore, argues that while the issue of access to higher education is a necessary step towards social equity in South Africa, it is however, not sufficient on its own to bring about this noble ideal.