Cost Of Education In The U.S. Increasing Over The Years

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Introduction

Education in the U.S. is an important economic pillar that allows the country to develop talent that can drive economic growth. Despite the growing need for education to improve the economy, its cost continues to rise because of several factors. American society has put much emphasis on the importance of education beyond high school, yet the cost of advancing education to undergraduate levels is fast rising beyond that of inflation. Education stakeholders have found out that the cost of education has stopped close to 48% of students who qualify to be enrolled in tertiary colleges from joining institutions of higher learning. The current system has forced students to accumulate debts through student loans to be able to complete degree programs. The prospect motivates the loans so that upon completing their education, they can secure employment and be able to repay the loans. The cost of education has risen in the last decade due to inflation, the financial crisis, and the rising cost of learning resources. The cost in the U.S. is quite different from the cost in European countries. European countries such as Denmark and Germany have moved to subsidize the cost with the aim of allowing more students to access education. As the cost rises, ethical issues arise in regard to how such a system could curtail learners from accessing quality education. Many brains are being lost due to these high costs, which eventually have a long-term impact on the economy. Despite this challenge, the government is still doing little to address the issue. Various policies, such as merit-based admissions, have been introduced to solve the problem, but the implementation of the same has failed. As the cost continues to rise, the future of access to quality education among low-income earners remains bleak.

How Cost Has Increased Over The Years

Investing in education, notably higher education, is almost losing sense among parents and students. The cost of education has been on the rise, and no one seems to care about what to do to prevent a further surge in the cost. In 1973, the average cost of education at a non-profit college was $10,783. The same cost has tripled over the last three decades to $30,094. The sharp increase in the cost of education equates to 25% (Selingo 4). The cost is usually determined by colleges since the federal government has failed to regulate the cost of education.

The increase in federal funding regarding aid granted to students has seen colleges raising the cost of education. Students can now access funding from the government and other lenders, which has provided the opportunity for various colleges to tap into the resources. These loans are continuously increasing, and since the government guarantees the loans, the institutions end up capitalizing on the existing system. There have been changes in the teaching patterns in colleges, which has additionally increased the cost of education. A study by the Higher Education Research Institute noted that there had been a significant drop in the hours taught by faculty members. There has been a reduction in teaching hours from 63.4 percent to 43.6 percent between 1991 and 2011 (Schoen 2). As the teaching hours have been reduced, the compensation issued to lecturers and faculty members has been on the rise, which has led to an increase in cost.

Compensation programs in institutions of higher learning have additionally increased over time. Universities now provide a platform for students to practice leadership by vying for top positions in student leadership. These positions attract higher pay compared to those of top CEOs in the country. A survey by the Chronicle of Higher Education indicated that student leaders earned $50 in 2004, which has risen to over $500,000 by 2011 (Keenan 7). These payments are obtained from student coffers, which means that the cost of education has to be raised to fund the extravagant lifestyle of student leaders. Institutions have moved to improve the amenities to attract students. These amenities are run at a higher cost. New structures with state-of-the-art equipment and recreational facilities are being developed to improve the welfare of students. Despite such developments, students continue to support such programs through school fees. Institutions incur many costs in hiring staff to run and maintain these facilities, and the payments are generated through the various fees paid by students.

Inflation is another area that has led to an increase in the cost of education. Over the years, the American economy has been faced with the challenge of inflation in all sectors. In the education sector, inflation is being witnessed, and tuition and other fees are rising significantly. Salaries paid to instructors are also increasing due to inflation. What was paid ten years ago has been increased due to the rising cost of living. It is through the inflationary tendencies in the economy that the cost of education is rising. The demand for education has additionally been on the rise, which has helped to push the cost of education. Excessive need for education results in an increase in cost to deter potential students from joining the faculty. There are some courses, such as technology, medicine, and engineering, whose demand is high and the cost is vastly rising. The demand factor for education is also to blame for the rising cost (Campos 8).

Scholarships are the other reason behind the continued rise in the cost of education. Scholarships are usually awarded to top-performing students to reward their efforts and promote special talent. Most institutions provide scholarship programs, which are entirely catered by the institution. The funding is usually provided through the student kitty, which other students contribute to through their school fees. Funding of scholarships through the fees paid by other students has led to a surge in the cost of education. There is also an increased demand by students for improved services within the college. Services such as sporting activities and meals have forced institutions to raise the cost of education to cater to the rising demands of the students. These demands change with changes in society, and as such, institutions should be on the lookout to raise fees from time to time. These factors, when combined, have seen the cost of education increase over time. Despite the efforts by the federal government to subsidize education, the increasing demands continue to force various management to raise fees paid by students (Campos 8).

The High Cost Of Books

The high cost of textbooks is the other reason why the cost of education continues to rise in the U.S. According to data provided by the Government Accountability Office, the cost of college textbooks has risen by 82% between 2002 and 2013. It is estimated that the students spend an average of $1,200 per year o textbooks with a book costing an average of $200. The Principles of Economics textbook by Greg Mankiw is sold at $292.17 on Amazon, which is quite expensive for a student (Lippy 2). These costs have surged high, and since institutions leave the burden of shouldering the cost of books to students, the overall cost often rises, making it hard to afford education.

The reason behind the rising cost of textbooks is the ignorance of professors about the cost of a book used in class. Since they do not buy the books, they care less about the cost and force the students to acquire the books without minding the hustle the students go through to get the books. Some of the books proposed by the professors have been authored by themselves, and they usually recommend the use of books to make a kill for themselves. Authoring and using the same book in class provides a platform for professors to gain from the sale of books. Over the years, the cost of producing books has risen due to the high cost of paper and government policies banning the use of paper. The high cost of production is then pushed to consumers, who eventually see the cost as going beyond manageable levels. Even in the digital era, where books can be accessed electronically, the prices remain high (Lippy 5). The policies to protect against copyrighting have also made it harder for students to access cheaper books.

Student Debts

The rising cost of education has seen students plunge into high debts. In the U.S., education is primarily funded through student loans. The government and other financial institutions offer credit facilities to students to support their studies. For individuals coming from average-income families, getting loans has become a necessity. Funding college education has become a considerable challenge, and these students are forced to seek funding to be able to complete their education. The fact that the funding system is flexible means that students can easily get the funding if they can prove that they are in college and they need the loans to meet the higher cost of education. The loans are to be paid by students once they complete their studies at a small interest. It is expected that the students get employment opportunities and repay the loans promptly (Campos 6).

Student debts are on the rise because of poor policies put in place by the government. It is estimated that the cost of student debt stands at around $104 trillion. As long as education remains unregulated, college fees will continue to rise, creating the need for students to acquire loans. The high demand for education in the U.S. has led to a rise in the demand for loans. Financial institutions are additionally finding new avenues to make profits by offering loans, which are insured by the government. The rising rate of unemployment means that students will find it hard to repay loans due to a lack of jobs, and those available provide limited pay. These factors have led to the rise of student debt beyond manageable levels (Campos 10).

Cost Of Education In The U.S. Vs. Europe

The cost of education in the U.S. varies a lot with that in Europe. In the U.S., education is regarded to be expensive compared to countries such as Germany and Denmark. Education in the U.S. has been structured to favor locals, with students in a state paying around $20,090 per year and those outside the state paying around $34,220 for the same kind of education (Hess 2). Tuition is mandatory, and students must pay to be enrolled. However, this is not the case in Denmark and Germany. The government meets all the costs of tuition in these countries. Tuition is free in most countries in Europe, which indicates the government's commitment to support education. College education in Denmark has been made more affordable, which provides immense opportunities for students. The government in Denmark has established a program where students receive $900 monthly to meet the cost of living and improve their welfare while studying (Hess 2).

In Europe, student debts are minimal or do not exist at all. The fact that the government provides tuition fees means that education is affordable for middle-income families. In Europe, most classes have a high number of students, which reduces the cost of education. In the U.S., most classes have an average number of students, which means that more fees should be paid to cater to the rising demands to teach such classes. The difference between Europe and America places European countries in a better position to provide affordable education.

Reasons Why The Poor Cannot Afford A Decent Education

The current college education has become unaffordable for persons coming from humble backgrounds. Even for middle-income families, the cost of education has become unbearable, which has forced families to spend a significant part of their income funding their children to acquire education. Recent studies show that families with an income of $48,001 to $75,000 spend around 11% to 22% of their income funding education for their children (Finney 6). The ratio of income to education is high, meaning these families have to forego certain necessities to provide the best education for their children. The data reflects average degree programs in college, with the cost rising for programs such as medicine and technology. Parents who wish to enroll their children in programs that are perceived to be in demand on the market have been forced to dig deep into their pockets to support their children in achieving their dreams. These costs are becoming unbearable, making college education unaffordable. As students seek loans to help them fund their education, their debt obligation additionally rises (Finney 3).

The poor have been left at a crossroads when it comes to affording a college education. Individuals who manage to be enrolled in college are forced to seek employment while in college to make an extra income that will support their education. The education programs in the U.S. favor college education, which has provided some form of relief to the students. Despite the opportunity to make income, a college education remains expensive and unaffordable, and families are forced to deny themselves better living standards to fund a college education and ensure that the future economic standards for their children are safeguarded (Campos 7).

The Ethical Aspects Of The Higher Cost Of Education

The issue of higher cost of education calls for an ethical analysis. It is evident that the cost of education has exceeded the ethical limits due to the practices adopted by institutions to have the cost rise. The move by professors to have students purchase the books they have authored goes against the utilitarian ethical theory. Action should be able to guarantee benefits to a greater number of people. This is not the case in college education, where professors gain twice as much from learning activities. The cost of books should be reduced, and the people behind the rising cost should be able to follow the ethical expectations to have the cost reduced significantly (Croucher 12).

The other area that attracts an ethical perspective is the higher remuneration paid to faculty staff. Over the years, there has been a rise in the salaries paid to staff even though their teaching hours have reduced drastically. Even if the issue of inflation is to blame, it does not make sense to raise pay and reduce working hours. It is unethical for students who pay higher fees to see instructors only engage them within a short period. For instructors and education management, ethics should be followed in aligning pay with the effort put into the classroom.

The issue of ethics is also brought to light by the various methods of funding available to students. Students have diverse funding sources, which have seen institutions raise fees to have a kill on the funding provided to students. It is unethical for institutions to capitalize on opportunities granted to students to engage in exploitation. Financial institutions have also moved to exploit students and the government by issuing loans, which are guaranteed by the government (Campos 4). The taxpayers end up paying for these loans through the government.

How Merit-Based Admissions Would Work For

Colleges

Merit education could be the way out to solve the rising cost of education. Even if this system has been tried before, it has not been implemented right to a point where its benefits can be felt. Students should be admitted on merit, with the government meeting tuition fees for such students. Admitting students on merit will provide opportunities for students from humble backgrounds to pursue education. Merit promotes hard work, and as such, students will be encouraged to work hard to enjoy the various opportunities provided by the government. Merit admission will make education affordable, as it will reduce demand for education since students will be forced to go through a competitive process. Eventually, education will be regulated, and costs will be contained. The government would be in a position to help needy students pursue courses that would have otherwise been expensive if individuals were required to pay for them on their own (Hsu 5). Merit will also promote diversity among learners, which will go a long way to promote national cohesion. There is a need for education stakeholders to call for the implementation of a merit-based system to bring equality into the education sector.

Conclusion

The cost of education continues to rise, and education stakeholders are doing nothing to curb the costs. Despite the awareness of the need to reduce the cost of education and make it affordable, several institutions are raising tuition to make a kill. Different factors have contributed to higher costs, including inflation and greed on the side of booksellers and institution management. These factors have combined to push costs higher compared to countries in Europe. The government needs to find a solution to the problem lest more students miss college admissions.

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