

Variability in Regional Access to Higher Education in Nigeria: Implication for Equity and Even Development among the Niger Delta States

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ABSTRACT This research examined regional disparity in the establishment and distribution of higher educational institutions in Nigeria, and the implications for access and even development, as it relates to states in the Niger Delta Region of the South-South Geopolitical zone of Southern Nigeria. Adopting the ex post facto design, an analysis of current existing data on the distribution of universities in the Southern states of Nigeria was done. Findings from data analyzed show clear variability in regional distribution of universities, consequently occasioning disparity in regional access to university education. It was accordingly recommended that the principle of equity should also be constitutionally sustained, and its provisions upheld, in the distribution of higher educational institutions in Nigeria, as is currently done under the "quota admissions and employment" provisions.

INTRODUCTION

Regional clamor for university education, which led to the establishment of four additional universities, to University College, Ibadan, immediately after political independence, has, in the last four decades, grown stronger, and the competition among the states even keener. States in the Niger Delta region, of the South-South geopolitical zone, have also been keen contestants, in the quest for establishment of universities, for quality high caliber manpower. But, political, economic and socio-historical constraints appear to have, however hindered, the Niger Delta region from recording any impressive success (Fagbami 1999; Ikoya 2002).

It is strongly alleged, that the number of universities in the Niger Delta region, is proportionately lower than other comparable zones of the federation, therefore, candidates from the zone suffer unimaginable hardship, in admissions into universities. The scenario is believed to have led to current inadequacy in high caliber manpower availability and probably occasioned poor development of the region (Abdulkareem 2001; Vanguard 2006).

Since the age of rationalism, men have come to realize that only investment in human capital appreciates, while other forms of investments depreciate (Ulich 1962). If adequate care is not exercised even all other investments are shredded by undeveloped human minds in most system,

as is witnessed today in the Niger Delta where structures are blown up with dynamite bomb; and pipelines are vandalized (Amaize and Omonobi 2006; Oyadongha 2006). Thus, it is, expedient to ensure even development of human capital in all the regions and zones of the federation, in accordance with the democratic tenets of regional equality and opportunity for all. The question therefore is, whether or not there are regional disparities in access to higher education, particularly universities for even development in Nigeria. Attempt is therefore made in this study to examine regional variability in students' access to university education among the states of the federation, and the implication for even development of the Niger Delta region.

Theoretical Link

Several theories (Fafunwa 1999; Adewale 1999) lend credence to the problem of access to higher education for development, as it affects the Niger Delta region of the south-south zone of Nigeria. However, equitability (Akinpelu 1981; Glenester 1979) and Equity, Bereday (1960) theories were deemed more proximal. The study was however anchored on the equity theory as propounded by Mann (1957) and upheld by the works of (Rawls 1971; Sheppard 1992). Equitability is based on fairness. That organizational resources should be evenly distributed among subsystems and organs of a system based on the

peculiar needs of these organs and subsystems. The current quota admission system, enshrined in almost all our legal provisions is based on equitability. Indeed, since the celebrated court decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, equalization concept has become difficult to uphold. Equality of educational opportunity is easier legislated than enforced. Equity however demands that the peculiar needs of the different federating units are taken into consideration in the distribution of resources, in this case universities. Has equitability theory or the theory of equity been adhered to in the establishment of universities in the different zones of Nigeria, to enhance even development of human capital? A summary of historical events in the development of universities in Nigeria is presented below.

Historical Background

The University of Ibadan, established as University College in 1948, was the first Nigerian university, and it was sited in the south west region of Nigeria. By 1962, four additional universities were established at Nsukka in the south east; Ife, in the south west; Zaria, in north central and Lagos, in south west. None was established in the Niger Delta or the south-south zone. Regional analysis of universities and other degree awarding institutions in Nigeria today (JAMB 2006)

Reveal clear disparity in regional distribution of universities and other institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Our computation also revealed that more than 50 percent of available degrees awarding higher institutions in southern Nigeria are located in south west zone. And of the total number of higher institutions in southern Nigeria, 28 percent are cited in the south east zone while 20 percent are found in the south-south geopolitical zone.

Delta and Bayelsa States have only one State University each. It is significant to note that while Delta with a population of over 2.6 millions has no federal university, and only one state university, Ogun state with a population of about 2.3 million people has a total of 9 universities. The implications of these findings could be interpreted to mean that while over 50 percent of Ogun state candidates have access to university education, going by the ratio of facilities available, only about 20 percent of all the candidates from the south-south geo-political

zone have access to university education opportunity.

The disparity in access to university education as shown by higher education availability index (HEAIX) is also very high.

The observed disparity in the availability and distribution of institutions of higher learning no doubt requires urgent attention, for even regional development in Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

There is a high probability that regional accessibility to university education in Nigeria varies with university availability. But many argue that the standing provision of catchments areas for university admission moderates existing anomalies in regional distributions of universities and other degree awarding institutions. No empirical data however, are available to substantiate or refute any of these diverse claims. Attempt therefore is made in this study to examine regional disparity in students' access to higher education through analysis of regional variability to university education in Nigeria. The study is delimited to the southern states of Nigeria.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided the study.

Research Question 1. What regional disparities exist in the number of applicants into universities in southern Nigeria?

Research Question 2. Is there regional variability in the number of candidates admitted into universities in the three geopolitical zones of southern Nigeria?

Research Question 3. What are the annual regional differences between the number of applicants and the number admitted into universities in southern Nigeria?

Research Question 4. What are the regional accessibility indices for universities, in southern Nigeria?

Study Objectives

The objectives of this study are manifold. First, it examined regional location of higher institutional facilities with a view to determining equitability in the distribution of universities. The study further did annual regional analysis and differentials of the population of applicants and admittance into universities in Southern Nigeria,

between 1996 and 2001. Then, building on the application – admission differentials for the five year study period, the authors computed regional accessibility indices for the three southern geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODS

Employing the ex post facto design, the researchers used existing Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), National Universities Commission (NUC), and relevant individual university records to gather related data for analysis. A follow-up survey of key stakeholders in higher education from the Ministry of Education, the universities, political office holders and relevant opinion leaders was done, following Patton's (1990) interpretive theoretical framework. The national universities commission is responsible for the accreditation of universities programs while the joint admission and matriculation board admits candidates into universities. Thus these bodies collect data on admissions on annual basis. The bulk of the data for this study was collected from these data banks over a five year period.

Participants

The 78 participants that were administered research instrument were drawn from the cohort of previously mentioned stakeholders from southern Nigeria. Adequate precaution was taken to ensure proper representation of the zones therefore; diverse groups from rural, urban and suburban areas were sampled.

Instrument

The instrument was a check list on higher institutional availability in participants' locality.

Information from these subjects was compared with available records from NUC, JAMB and the Ministries of Education, or Higher Education, in the regions. Answers were also provided to open ended questions on the distribution of universities in southern Nigeria. The primary data sources were however records obtained from JAMB, NUC and the Ministries of Education. The views of sampled participants were however used to throw additional light on observed existing documented records for data validity.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Results of data analyzed in response to research questions raised are presented in table 1. Table 1 presents the analysis of the number of applicants, the number admitted and the annual ratio of admissions for the period 1996/97 to 2000/2001.

Results presented in table 1 again show disparity between the three study zones of southern Nigeria. The data revealed that while accessibility ratios for the south east zone is 0.164, and for the southwest, 0.150, indicating high admission ratios, and therefore better opportunities to university education, for candidates from these zones, the accessibility ratio for the south- south zone was 0.144, showing a relatively lower access opportunity to university education for its candidates.

DISCUSSION

Current reform policies in the Nigerian education sector is witnessing a significant transfer of establishment, management, and funding of higher education to the private sector (Alabi 2005; Fagbamiye 2005; Nwadiani and Igbineweka 2005). This could be reason why for over a decade now, no new federal university has been established

Table 1: Variability in regional access to education

Regional Zone	South-East			South-West			South-South			National		
	No. of appli-ccants	No. of admit- ted	Access index	No. of appli-ccants	No. of admit- ted	Access index	No. of appli-ccants	No. of admit- ted	Access index	No. of appli-ccants	No. of admit- ted	Access index
1996/97	68800	11483	.167	57094	8416	.147	71908	8497	.118	376000	56055	.149
1997/98	12570	13268	.212	45244	8348	.185	43937	9129	.208	340177	65386	.192
1998/99	78480	15413	.196	56149	10614	.189	59325	11139	.188	417773	78550	.188
1999/00	90250	13803	.153	87464	10573	.184	70761	11259	.159	461548	76899	.167
2000/01	137654	12372	.092	87447	3789	.043	120579	5623	.047	775900	50040	.064
$\bar{x}$	86951	13268	.164	60680	8348	.150	73302	9129	.144	464280	65386	.152

in any of the 36 states in Nigeria. The implication is that only regions already adequately equipped with universities, particularly Federal and State universities, or States with individuals sufficiently empowered to establish private universities will be able to effectively compete in the present globalised economy, for the much desired even development policy of the Federal Government.

Provisions for even development may be legislated but can only be actualized when all the regions in the country are sufficiently empowered through the establishment and proper funding of not only primary and post-primary institutions, but also higher institutions for the training of all cadres of manpower that can sufficiently drive the wheel of progress and development. The Niger Delta region in the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria has, for more than four decades been making representation to the national government to facilitate the establishment of universities, or the expansions of the existing few ones, for effective competition with other regions of the nation. The question is, does the Niger Delta region have a genuine case? Has the region suffered some form of economic and developmental discriminations arising from the inequitable distribution of universities in the country?

In our quest to find answers to these questions this research examined the distribution of higher institutions in Nigeria and did a comparative analysis of higher institutions' distribution in the 3 geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Secondly an analysis of candidates access to university education was done for the three zones to find out which of the three zones has the highest opportunity for access to university education and which has the lowest.

Findings from data analyzed revealed that of the three study zones of southern Nigeria, the southwest geopolitical zone has the highest number of universities while the south-south zone has the lowest number. While the south west zone controls almost 53 percent of all higher institutions in southern Nigeria, the south east zone has 28 percent while the south-south has about 20 percent.

The second logical question in the study was to determine to what extent has existing distribution of universities affected students' access to university education in the different regions? Answer to this question was provided by the analysis of university admission index for

the regions of study in southern Nigeria. Again, data analyzed revealed that opportunity for access to university education, through our computation of accessibility index, shows that the south-south zone has the lowest index and therefore the poorest access to higher education.

While accessibility index for candidate from the south west and south east zones are 0.150 and 0.164 respectively, accessibility index for south-south was only 0.144. Consequently, more than 85 percent of candidates seeking admission from the zone are denied admission every year. Figure 2 shows the annual admissions as well as admissions denials for the south-south zone into universities.

Data presented in figure 3 shows that in 2000 and 2001, over 84 and 95 percent of qualified candidates respectively could not gain access to universities in the south-south, region probably because of fewer universities in the zone. Findings from the study have very practical implications for the establishment and distribution of universities in Nigeria. For instance two of the states in the Niger Delta, Bayelsa, and Delta, both have no federal universities: Compare such findings with Ogun State with 1 federal, 2 state and 6 private universities.

Equal education opportunity at the tertiary level demands equal regional distribution of higher institutional facilities, or at worst, near equal availability of these facilities, for the proposed even regional development of Nigeria. The disparity in the number of universities established in Ogun state with a population of 2,333,726, having 9 universities, while Delta State with a population 2,500,000 is having only one university appears, to say the least, very wide.

The existing regional gulf in the establishment and distribution of universities cannot be closed by deregulation and privatization provisions alone. The national government has to do more than creation of OMPADEC or NDDC that is "jack of all trade and master of none". A national policy to address the issue of equity in the distribution of universities should also be developed. If current quota admission provisions that deny children from some states in the south-south geopolitical zone admission into unity schools and federal universities can be constitutionally guaranteed, then statutory provisions should also be enshrined into the constitution to affirm equity in the establishment and distribution of universities in Nigeria.

Privatization may not be able to address current inequity in regional distribution of universities in the country. This is so because, over the past several decades, crude oil exploratory and exploitative activities, with its consequential social, political and economic problems appear to have led to inter-ethnic suspicions, distrust, and violence. These adverse economic activities appear to have rendered the Niger Delta land and its people relatively less economically endowed than their counterparts from other regions and geo-political zones. Over 80 percent of developmental funds and resources accruing to some of the States in the Niger Delta are spent on inter-ethnic conflict resolutions, repairs of vandalized cities and state infrastructure or for the security of foreign expatriates. The result is that funds that would have been used for capital projects such as the establishment of universities or the expansion of the existing ones are used for conflict resolution. While individuals from other southern states can afford to establish and fund private universities for their indigenes, many in the Niger Delta may not be able to establish private universities, probably due to non availability of adequate fund or the need to tackle more pressing problems of regional security in the zone. Similarly while states in other parts of the federation may be able to establish three or more state universities for their citizens the Niger Delta states may not be able to do the same or even expand existing structure due to inadequate funds. This is why it may be necessary to develop a statutory provision to address inadequacy and sometimes non-availability of universities in the Niger Delta region, to enable qualified candidates from the zone have equal access to university education, for even regional development.

Implications

Findings from this study have some far-reaching implications, for effective management of higher education in Nigeria, particularly as it relates to equity and fairness in the distribution of universities. The reported inequitable distribution of universities among states in southern Nigeria may not be able to produce or enhance the desired even development of all regions, zones and states of the country. Current inequalities in the distribution and access to university education should be seen as a national issue and

so addressed. The frequency and intensity of violence in the Niger Delta region could probably be minimized, if youths in the region that are academically qualified for admissions have access to universities and other higher institutions of learning.

Again, maybe when states, individuals and corporate bodies in the Niger Delta are sufficiently empowered, economically, they may be able to build more state and private universities or expand the existing ones, in the region to ameliorate access to university education. These are practical issues yearning for solution in the nation's higher education sector.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research examined regional variability in the distribution of higher education institutions in Nigeria and implications for access to university education in the Niger Delta region of southern Nigeria. Analyzing data from existing records on universities in Nigeria, obtained from the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board, the National Universities Commission, the Federal Ministry of Education, including surveys of stakeholders in higher education in Nigeria, findings revealed disparity in regional distribution of universities in Nigeria. Results further show that the Niger Delta region suffers more limited access to university education when compared with other regions in the southern part of Nigeria.

It was accordingly recommended that more Federal, State, and private universities be established in the south-south zone, particularly the Niger Delta region, in consonance with the principles of equity and even development, to enhance access of local indigenes to university education in the region. Secondly, existing facilities in the identified regions with fewer universities could also be expanded to make room for more accommodation for candidates seeking university admission. Thirdly, current statutory provisions for university admissions into Nigerian universities are unfavorable to the south-south and the Niger Delta regions. Findings from this study lay credence to Adeloye (1999) assertions that the "quota admission formula" be jettisoned. We join these patriotic minds (Fagbemi 1999; Tahir 1999) in calling for a review of the nation's admission policy into universities to make for equity and even development. Equity in educational opportunity

demands a standing legal provision that would guarantee that equal, or at least, near equal regional facilities are equally on ground, for equal or near equal access to university education.

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