

Appraisal of Production Function of Nigerian Universities: Admission Disparity in a Deregulated Context

Don Omoike and Oyaziwo Aluede

*Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Faculty of Education,
Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma 310001, Edo State, Nigeria
E-mail: oyaziwoaluede@yahoo.com*

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ABSTRACT This study focused on the role of privatization and deregulation of university education in increasing university graduates' production for the Nigerian labour market. Authors hold that there would be a continuous increase in the number/expansion of universities in Nigeria, but that the expected increase in the cost of university education will engender less demand. The opportunity costs that will set in for parents/students will not favour both the already Educationally Less Advantaged States and the females in Nigeria. It was, however, recommended that through commercialization of university education in Nigeria, governments' continued involvement in the funding and management of university education in Nigeria, the goal of increasing university graduates' production for the Nigerian labour market will be realized.

The University prides itself as the highest citadel of learning for the production of high-level human resource for the labour market. The Federal Government of Nigeria in recognition of this took appropriate steps to ensure equity with regard to access to university education. It equally foresaw the role of (higher) education in perpetuating national unity. Soon after the civil war (1966-1970), the Federal Government sought to establish an enduring national unity. One way to achieve this was the full regulation of the education system. This was done through the taking over of all schools with respect to ownership, funding and management. And to rectify what it described in the Third National Development Plan of 1975 as "differential standards among the various schools in the country," full regulation of the education system was completed with the taking over of the existing six universities in Nigeria in 1975 (Omoike and Gbinigie, 2005).

This unitarization of universities was further strengthened with the creation of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) by Act (No. 2 of 1978) of the Federal Military Government (Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board, 2004). The main aim for the establishment of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) was to provide an opportunity for eligible Nigerians to have access to university education, and to diversify the intakes, and achieve a high rate of national spread in the placement of applicants into universities in Nigeria (JAMB,

2004). In addition, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) was to place suitably qualified candidates into the existing tertiary institutions after taking into account the vacancies available in each tertiary institution. Placement was to be done on the basis of merit, catchment area, and with a special focus on females and the Educational Less Advantaged States. Emphatically, paragraph 40 (b) of the National Policy on Education states that financial consideration alone will not be the conclusive bar to access to higher education for any one who can benefit from it (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). To ensure this was achieved, it is also emphasized in the policy that university education will continue to be free and that a combination of scholarships and loans will continue to be used to assist indigent but bright students to gain access to higher education.

In the recent past, attempts have been made to partially deregulate university education in Nigeria by involving state governments, private individuals and organizations in the establishment, funding and management of universities in Nigeria. This has no doubt brought about unprecedented expansion of university education in Nigeria. For instance, the number of universities that was only six in 1975 rose to 47 in 2003. Out of this number were seven privately owned, 15 of them were State Government owned and the remaining 25 universities were owned by the Federal Government

Today, there are about 70 universities in Nigeria, out of which 25 are Federal government owned, 20 of them are owned by the State Government and the remaining 25 are private universities. The import of this paper, therefore, is to ascertain the following: high level human resource production in Nigerian universities; disparity in the placement of applicants into the universities in Nigeria with respect to Educationally Less Advantaged States; the disparity in placement of applicants with respect to sex; and the place of full deregulation of education in ensuring the maintenance of the status quo.

HIGH LEVEL HUMAN RESOURCE PRODUCTION IN NIGERIA UNIVERSITIES

The University in Nigeria is the highest educational institution that produces high-level human resource for the Nigerian labour market. Since the establishment of the first university in Nigeria in 1948, there has been a tremendous increase in the production of university graduate manpower for the various sectors of the economy and the social systems as well as governance. Okebukola (2002) reports that the graduate output from Nigerian universities rose to 60, 000 in the 1997/98 session alone. The female constituted 30% of the graduates. Though this figure looks large, it is nevertheless insignificant when compared with the percentage of applicants

for admission into universities in Nigeria in recent time.

Trend in Application/Placement of Candidates into Universities

The trend in requests for placement by applicants through the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) shows a marked increase in a five-year period as shown in Table 1.

Although the growth in enrolment seems impressive, its pattern is observed to skew in favour of the males as against the percentage of females applying for admission that remained relatively constant over the years. While the disparity between male and female is not too wide (Table 1), the same cannot be said of the significant disparity between Educationally Advantaged States (EAS) and Educationally Less Advantaged States (ELAS) in the placement of candidates into Nigerian universities (Table 2).

For purpose of clarity, it may be pertinent to conceptualize Educationally Advantaged States (EAS) and Educationally Less Advantaged States (ELAS). Educationally Advantaged States are six States (Anambra, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ogun and Ondo) in Nigeria that had early contact with western education and as a result have advanced educationally more than the other states that make up Nigeria; while Educationally Less Advantaged States are the six States (Jigawa, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Taraba and Yobe) recognized by

Table 1: UME applications for admissions / placement of candidates into universities in Nigeria 1997-2001

Session /Year	Applications			Placement		
	Male(%)	Female(%)	Total	Male(%)	Female(%)	Total
1996/7	221212(58)	155788(42)	376000	33130(59)	22925(41)	56055
1997/8	198369(58)	141750 (42)	340177			NA
1998/9	251876(58)	196399(42)	417773	47170(60)	31380(40)	78559
1999/00	265149(57)	196399(43)	461548			NA
2000/01	457419(59)	318481 (41)	775900	31271(62)	19006(38)	50277

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (2004). *University Matriculation Examination Admission Statistics*. Abuja, Nigeria: Author

Table 2: Placement of candidates into universities in Nigeria by States.

Session	EAS (%)	ELAS (%)	Others (%)	Total
1996/1997	31671(56.5)	1138(2.03)	23246(41.47)	56055
1997/1998	NA	NA	NA	NA
1998/1999	37158(47.3)	1257(1.6)	40144(51.1)	78559
1999/2000	NA	NA	NA	NA
2000/2001	20010(39.8)	1307(2.6)	28960(57.6)	50277

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (2004). *University Matriculation Examination Admission Statistics*. Abuja, Nigeria: Author

government as those that had late contact with western education and presently have the least number of candidates in schools in Nigeria.

While the six Educationally Advantaged States together have 56.5% of placement in the 1996/97 admission, only 2.03 was admitted from the six Educationally Less Advantaged States. There is a similar wide margin for 1998/99 and 2000/2001 respectively. There is reason, therefore, to agree that the policies put in place have not sufficiently or effectively addressed the equity issue in placement of candidates into the universities in Nigeria. Deregulation of university education does appear to be the alternative that is attractive to government even though it is at variance with existing government proclamations.

Deregulation of University Education for Access Expansion

United Nations Declarations of Human Rights mentions that everyone has the right to education, and higher education shall equally be made accessible to all on the basis of merit. It is noteworthy to state that ability to pay for higher education was not a condition for access. In the *National Policy on Education*, the Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) indicated that education shall be provided for qualified and eligible Nigerians. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) chapter 2, paragraph 18 also emphasized the equality of access to (university) education. So also, the admission policy of Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), which is equally emphatic on access to university education.

The current intention of government to divest its hold on university education has grown from the issue of giving autonomy to universities through privatization or deregulation. Government now wants to dismantle the legal and governmental restrictions in the operation of higher education (Worika, 2003; Education Commission of the States, 1997). By the intended privatization and deregulation of university education by the Federal Government of Nigeria, it is likely that government's regulatory agencies such as Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and National Universities Commission (NUC) may become irrelevant. Government seems to agree with the submission of Morgan (2000), that through deregulation of universities in Nigeria, government intends to decrease its

oversight of industry in order to create more competitive markets that provide better services at lower costs to customers. The current deregulation drive in the petroleum and telecommunication sectors in Nigeria does seem to reflect a negation of apparent benefit. It is true for instance that fuel has been made available but the prohibitive cost seems to have reduced the rate of purchase of the commodity. Buyers now prefer to reduce fuel usage and buy in lesser quantity.

Deregulating education is most likely to create a situation whereby education is no longer regarded as a public good. Those who need university education would have to pay for it. The essence of deregulation is competition and hence expectation of high yields, dividends or profits from investment (Worika, 2002). Deregulation of education means the sale of knowledge to the highest bidder (Worika, 2002). Thus, those striving to operate private universities are in the business, not of producing manpower but of making money. The sale of knowledge would probably result in lowering of standards for the attraction of customers. Such lowering of standards may result in arbitrary award of high marks and reduction of the period required for programme completion. Just as in petroleum and communication industries, deregulation may result in tremendous increase in the number of universities in Nigeria. This is because deregulation is likely going to lead to the removal of the bar/restriction by government in the establishment of universities by private individuals and organizations. For instance, by 1999, 51 years after the establishment of the first university in Nigeria, there were 42 universities. But within six years (1999-2005) of the introduction of privatization of university education in Nigeria (which is an aspect of deregulation) about 38 universities, mainly private, have so far been established in Nigeria.

It is most likely that deregulation will also lead to tremendous increase in cost of university education (Kaplan, 2003). For instance, the total average unit cost for Science-based disciplines is N239, 408.00 while that of Arts-based disciplines is N186, 505.00. A student's expense was said to constitute 44.8%, while government's contribution stood at 55.2%. This government contribution covered academic cost, administrative cost, building and equipment cost (Okebukola, 2002). With deregulation, the total

unit cost of training the student in any university in Nigeria will be transferred to the student just as is currently being done in private universities in Nigeria. The result is that such high cost on the student/parent will engender less demand.

Implications of Deregulating University Education for University Graduate Production

Increase in graduate production in universities in Nigeria, especially females, is to a large extent determined by the level of access (of females) to university education (Suara, 1999). Increase in cost of university education will tend to result in inability of parents to send their children to school. The current trend in admission into Federal Universities and (high fee paying) private universities in Nigeria gives credence to the above fear of reduced demand for university education.

There is a wide disparity in placement of candidates between public and private universities in Nigeria. According to Okebukola (2002), this disparity may be attributable not mainly to the size of the university, but to high fees payable in these private universities. Okebukola's assertion is further strengthened by Ita (2004) that stakeholders, other than government, rejected the idea of deregulating or granting autonomy to federal/state universities in Nigeria. Their fear is that deregulating or granting autonomy to these universities would cause the removal of government subsidy and this will lead to increase in fees payable by students.

With regard to disparity in female students' enrolment and females being an endangered specie with regard to a deregulated university education, Baikie (1999) maintained that suburban and rural parents in a competitive situation tend to choose the male child in place of the female for further or higher education; as parents' preference to send males to higher school is because they remain with their family while the females will be married into other families (Akanbi, 1999). The result may be a far more intensive tendency to marry out females at their early ages possibly to gather money for educating the males. As deregulating or privatizing these universities at a time when private universities are already being established will mean that the ordinary people have no where from which they can get help.

Commercialization of University Education as Alternative to Deregulation

Deregulation may be admirable in profit maximizing organizations but not in education. It cannot guarantee an enhanced quality, neither can it assure increased and equitable access to university education especially of the females. Higher education must remain a public good because among other benefits, higher education is an important instrument for high-level manpower for the nation's economy.

Deregulation cannot thus widen access to higher education for all applicants especially in the Educationally Less Advantaged States. Rather, it will increase the already skewed production of university graduates that favours the Educationally Advantaged States and males (Okebukola, 2002). Commercialization rather than deregulation and privatization of universities would seem to be the alternative, since this will not make government divest its hold on university education. Commercialization will allow private individuals, organizations, government and students to contribute substantially to the funding of university education. Okebukola (2002) in assessing the unit cost of university education itemized the various areas of government spending. These include academic cost, administrative cost, building and equipment cost. Through commercialization of university education in Nigeria, government would be able to reduce her spending especially on academic cost and transferring the cost to students/parents. In addition, prevailing private rates could be charged on the usage of infrastructures such as hostels, halls and libraries. All these would result in the reduction of government funding of university education in Nigeria from 55.2 percent to about 30-40 percent (Omoike and Aigbe, 2001). This should, no doubt, be acceptable to a government that prides itself in ensuring the production of high-level human resources.

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