

# **The Gap between the Demand for and Supply of University Education in Nigeria (1979-2002)**

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This study investigated into the factors responsible for the wide demand-supply gap in university admissions and funding in Nigeria between 1979 and 2002. Data were gathered from published records from the National Universities' Commission (NUC), university records, journals, research reports and texts. The data were analysed using percentages and ratios. It was found that a wide demand-supply gap was recurrent during the period studied because of: applicants' prioritisation of university education over attending non-university higher education institutions; inadequate funding; the explosion created by the graduates of universal basic education applying for university education and poor education planning. It was recommended that government sustains the policy of deregulation of higher education. Also, suggestions included increased funding, better planning and ensuring effective open and distance learning systems.



The problem of rising demand for higher education in Nigeria deserves attention because of the mounting number of qualified applicants that are not admitted since the 1990s. Presently, there are over 80 universities in Nigeria. This is the largest concentration in Africa. As well, there has been establishment of satellite campuses, over the last decade, due to the inability of the existing universities to meet the demands created by the 'over-supply' of applicants from the lower levels of education. Nevertheless, these campuses have been outlawed, to protect standards. According to the Federal Government of Nigeria (1992), for the 40,000 student places that were available in the universities in the country in 1992, there were over 400,000 applicants. Consequently, universities characteristically admit students in excess of their capacity to offer quality education. Even then, Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) statistics indicate that majority of the students applying for university admission are not admitted.

#### The Problem.

According to Oluchukwu (2000), primary school enrolment increased from 8.26 million in 1976 to 14.8 million in 1996. As well, secondary school enrolment increased from 0.75 million in 1976 to 4.45 million in 1995. In higher education, enrolment tripled from 0.14 million in 1980 to 0.45 million in 1995. Since universities' capacity to enrol students did not expand proportionately, many applicants who are qualified for professional study programmes are forced to take single-honour programmes, which is why there is an increasing number of reluctant students and disenchanted graduates who specialize in areas where they have the least interest. Furthermore, Adesanya (2001) notes that bottlenecks in accessing university education have increased repeaters and malpractice of/in University Matriculation Examinations, as students endeavour to attain university admission. That is why there was need to investigate the gap between the demand for and supply of university education, to identify the factors responsible for it and possible solutions.

**Method**

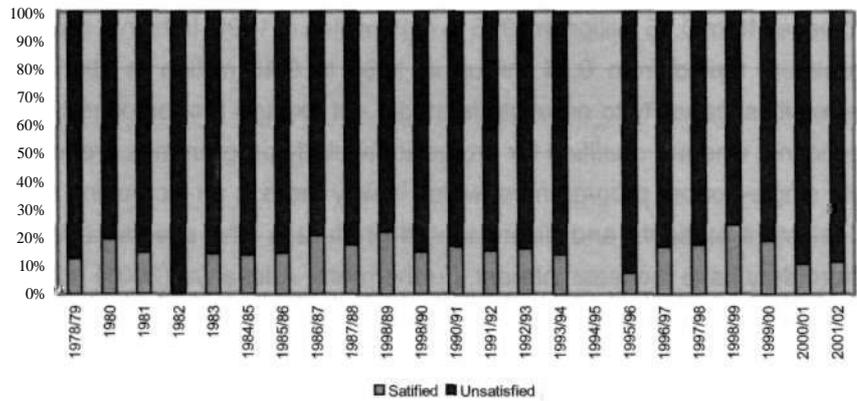
The study covered the university system in Nigeria. The data collected included records of applications and admissions for the years 1978 to 2002; and male/female enrollment ratios (1996-2002). The pattern of funding higher education in the country between 1978 and 2002 was also studied and the gaps between the demand for and supply of university education analysed—using ratios and percentages—and presented in tables and diagrams.

**Findings**

The Demand-Supply Gap: How wide is it?

To gain insight into the extent of unsatisfied demand for university education in the country, data were collected on the number of applicants for university admission and the students admitted over the period of study interest. The findings are summarised in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Satisfied and Unsatisfied Demand for University Education in Nigeria (1978-2002)**



Note: Applications were not processed for the 1994/95 session because of the prolonged ASUU strike of 1994.

Source: JAMB, Munzali (1999), Oluchukwu (2000) and Jegede (2000)

Figure 1 indicates that, for all the years of study interest, less than 30% of the applicants for university admission were admitted. Moreover, in some of the years, 1995/96 for example, less than 10% of the applicants were admitted, which was despite the advent of private universities to compliment the federal government's efforts to provide university education.

#### The Gender Gap.

Since consideration of university enrolments may be insufficient if it is incognisant of the gender dimension of university enrolments, inquiry was made into the demand for and supply of university places vis-a-vis the gender of the applicants. The findings are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Percentage of Applicants Admitted to Universities by Gender (1996-2002)**

| ACADEMIC YEAR | 1996/97 | 1998/99 | 1999/2000 | 2000/2001 | 2001/2002 |
|---------------|---------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| % Admitted    | 15.1    | 25.2    | 19.5      | 16.6      | 16.6      |
| <b>Male</b>   |         |         |           |           |           |
| Gap=(100-x)   | 84.9    | 74.8    | 80.5      | 83.4      | 83.4      |
| % Admitted    | 14.5    | 23.3    | 17.8      | 17.1      | 10.7      |
| <b>Female</b> |         |         |           |           |           |
| Gap=(100-x)   | 85.5    | 76.7    | 82.2      | 82.9      | 89.3      |

Table 1 shows that, during the years 1996 to 2002, the demand-supply gap was wider in the case of female applicants. This means that, comparatively, female applicants were particularly under represented even though many of the male applicants were not admitted too.

#### The Funding Gap.

The demand for and supply of financial resources to university education was also investigated, to generate information

was computed to provide a proxy in terms of which to consider the sufficiency of university funding. The findings are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Capital and Recurrent Grants to Federal Universities (N '000)**

| YEAR | CAPITAL   | RECURRENT | EQUIPMENT  | TOTAL      | ENROLLMENT | N PER STUDENT YEAR |
|------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|--------------------|
| 1988 | 56,704    | 332,434   | 529,789    | 918,927    | 174,133    | 5.28               |
| 1989 | 71,366    | 268,370   | 602,521    | 942,257    | 179,488    | 5.25               |
| 1990 | 467,155   | 222,336   | 647,121    | 1,336,612  | 200,774    | 6.66               |
| 1991 | 220,936   | 206,706   | 679,055    | 1,106,697  | 232,482    | 4.76               |
| 1992 | 673,961   | 440,463   | 2,091,946  | 3,206,370  | 264,684    | 12.11              |
| 1993 | 538,550   | 409,281   | 3,055,122  | 4,002,953  | 292,097    | 13.70              |
| 1994 | 974,054   | 275,218   | 3,225,973  | 4,475,245  | 292,097    | 15.32              |
| 1995 | 980,034   | 203,420   | 4,121,468  | 5,304,922  | 335,790    | 15.80              |
| 1996 | 1,203,026 | 162,242   | 4,248,936  | 5,614,204  | 345,699    | 16.24              |
| 1997 | 1,208,598 | 164,047   | 4,651,242  | 6,023,887  | 376,492    | 16.00              |
| 1998 | 1,901,451 | 195,775   | 6,120,717  | 8,217,943  | 399,812    | 20.55              |
| 1999 | 1,684,096 | 289,290   | 9,642,598  | 11,615,984 | 448,230    | 25.92              |
| 2000 | 1,873,169 | 382,805   | 11,615,984 | 14,052,182 | 492,202    | 28.55              |
| 2001 | 2,033,401 | 476,320   | 14,052,182 | 16,801,607 | 526,780    | 31.89              |
| 2002 | 2,193,633 | 569,835   | 19,551,032 | 19,551,032 | 561,358    | 34.83              |

In Table 2, it is apparent that disbursement towards university education has been inadequate, especially when looked at from the point of view of the student unit cost. It is to be noted that even though the gross allocation to universities has kept rising, these increases have been outstripped by the decline in the value of the Naira due to high inflation. Undoubtedly, this has incapacitated universities from expanding opportunities for students' access to their study programmes hence, the demand-supply gaps highlighted above.

### Discussion

#### Causes of the Wide Demand- Supply Gap.

According to Salim (2003), university education is the choice destination of secondary school leavers in Nigeria. Subsequently, non-university higher

education institutions are relegated, which has led to oversubscription to the few universities in the country. For instance, Munzali (1999) reports that while enrolment in colleges of education and polytechnics respectively stood at a minimal 14% and 30% of the total higher education enrolment, university enrolment was 411,347 (accounting for 56%). Secondly, mass primary and secondary education, offered starting 1980, churned out very many graduates for whose admission the universities were not prepared. Needless to mention, is the university education funding gap (Table 2), consequent upon which the universities have not been able to expand their facilities to meet the ever-increasing demand for student places. Moreover, Oyebade (2005) reports that approved grants to universities are lower than the universities' proposals and, even then, remittances are less than the approved grants. Educational planning is also clearly blameable for the demand-supply gap in university education. The fact that universities were not well prepared to absorb the products of mass pre-university education affirms that the diagnosis and projection of enrolments was erratic.

Expansion of opportunities for access to university education in Nigeria, therefore, deserves policy attention. Other than the findings of this study, the urgency of the need to expand opportunities for access to university education is confirmed by the National Population Commission, which projects that there will be 22 million Nigerians of university-going age by 2010. Referring to Japan's success story, however, Akinwumiju and Agabi (1986) recommended that Nigeria should provide quality, rural primary education and vocationally-oriented secondary and higher/non-formal education for the over 80% of the students who unsuccessfully leave the formal education system. This means that on top of expanding the opportunities for access to university education, there may be need to restructure the education system to ensure that applicants for whom places cannot be found in universities enrol in the non-university higher education institutions.

### **Recommendations**

The Nigerian philosophy of education is based on the desire to provide equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at all levels both inside

and outside the formal system (National Policy on Education, 1998). In light of this aspiration and the foregoing discussion, therefore, the following recommendations, for closing the wide supply-demand gap in university education in the country, are made.

#### Increased funding.

There is need to improve on the percentage of the National Budget allocated to the education sector, especially if the national government intends to maintain the current level of central control, which limits the universities' capacity to expand access through the enrolment of fee-paying students.

#### Better Educational Planning.

Efforts should be made to appropriately diagnose and project enrolments at all levels of the education system. In addition, the country should provide sound rural primary education and vocationally-oriented secondary and higher non-formal education. This will reduce the number of applicants seeking university admission let alone increase the returns to universal basic education.

#### Expansion of Distance Learning and Private Participation in University Education.

Nigeria should pursue distance learning and the use of information and communication technology in supplying and accessing university education. This would widen access to university education without compromising quality, since it would only improve the utilisation of available teaching resources whilst allowing more flexible study programmes for the students. Hence, the National Open University of Nigeria, which is exploiting ICTs and books to communicate to off-campus lecturers and students, should be supported in strengthening this effort.

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