

SOCIAL DEMAND FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND INTELLECTUAL ABILITY: UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the rate at which candidates who apply for university education possess the required abilities. University of Calabar experience was studied. A sample of 3,598 candidates made up of 1,947 males and 1,645 females was drawn from the admission list sent by the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) for the 1999/2000 session. It was found that almost half of the candidates did not possess the required aptitude for their chosen disciplines. The implications of this for social demand for University education in Nigeria were discussed, such as provision of educational opportunities.

KEYWORDS:

INTRODUCTION

The desire for University education has been increasing over the years. One can recall when entrance examinations were conducted in a few centres for the few available Universities. Today, the story is different, as virtually every town in Nigeria has become an examination town with a number of centres each for a large number of candidates. This trend appears healthy since there is a positive education – GNP (Gross Domestic Product) correlation, suggesting that education is an important consumer good requiring every country to spend more on it as the GNP rises (Bowen, 1977). This could be as a result of the link education provides between man and his work. Education is not merely a consumer good since the G.N.P rises as the level of education increases. So education increases a person's potential productivity as well as having consumption and cultural components in its contributions.

Without doubt, education provides the basis for entry into work and job upgrading especially as technology has made constant job upgrading a necessity for accelerating higher educational skills (Venn, 1977). Denison and Poullier (1977) argue that a better-educated labour force is more effective in learning and utilization of the available most efficient production practice.

Sheehan (1973) considers meeting consumers' wants as more important at the general second-level education and such others. This demand often orientated towards a consumption approach to education...is known as the 'Social Demand' approach" (p. 23). Sheehan reports further that within such a policy in Britain, courses in higher education were to be made available for all those who were qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them if they were willing to do so. Such a demand was to be anticipated by the government to ensure that no qualified citizen was denied that right. The relevant questions for the enforcement and attendance at school, for this policy, were not economic but legal and demographic.

Social demand forecasts therefore, attempt to ascertain future needs for educational facilities with the hope of dealing with the possible influence of demographic, policy and general economic trends on voluntary and compulsory enrolment in institutions of learning. Individuals' demand for education, whether initiated by the parents or the individual, constitutes the voluntary enrolments, which may have no link with education as an investment good or being vocationally oriented. The compulsory enrolment element is political and a governmental channel to enforcing certain minimal standards to guide against ignorance and irresponsibility. This policy assumes a rational choice of educational decisions by the applicants, bearing in mind the trends in the labour market.

Such rational decisions would eliminate surpluses and shortage of skills.

The Nigerian government that is embarking on compulsory enrolment up to junior secondary school level adds that this policy could prepare individuals for "useful living within the society" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998 P. 17). This social demand policy appears to have been vigorously pursued in Nigeria with the increasing educational opportunities to match the demands. The various universities have mounted various programmes and courses apart from the astronomical increase in their number. Yet every year only a small proportion of the applicants is admitted. The questions are therefore, whether the opportunities should continue to increase and whether all those applicants really possess the required abilities.

As could be noted, the emphasis in the social demand policy is on opportunity and ability (Sheehan, 1973). The Federal Republic of Nigeria (1998) National Policy on Education also emphasized ability. It emphasized the need for functional education through "school programmes that needed to be relevant, practical and comprehensive, while interest and ability should determine individuals' direction in education" (p. 7). It also states that transition from Junior Secondary School will be based on test to determine academic ability, aptitude and vocational interest for the senior secondary school, the technical college, vocation training centre, and the apprenticeship scheme. Venn (1977) advises that special education programmes should be planned for those in need of more general education, special knowledge, and new occupational skills (if they lack the complex abilities). Majority of these youths require two-year type vocational and technical education for preparation for entry into jobs.

Some studies show that intellectual ability differs among individuals. (Vernon, 1960; Cattell, 1963, 1971; Guilford, 1988). In his theory of multiple intelligence, Gardner (1985, 1991, 1993) identified seven intelligences. These were linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, and personal, made up of interpersonal and intrapersonal. On the other hand, Sternberg's (1985, 1986, 1988) triarchic model of intelligence comprised of the following sub theories: componential (including metacomponents, performance components and knowledge acquisition components); contextual, and the experiential. However, a general intelligence exists which permeates forms of intellectual functioning (Vasta, Haith & Miller, 1995; Walsh & Betze, 1985). Bee (1995) reports that IQ can be used to measure specific range of skills for success in school, but not appropriate for skills in creativity, insight and other cognitive tasks. It is the aptitude tests that do this (Walsh & Betze, 1985).

Individuals also differ in creativity, which is the invention and discovery of new ideas (Dacey & Travers, 1996). Gifted people are "with exceptional specific talents such as in musical, or artistic skills, or specific mathematical or spatial ability, as well as those with high IQs" (Bee, 1995 p. 427). Individuals' eminent contributions are usually limited to one or two areas (Sieglar & Kotovsky, 1992). Sieglar and Kotovsky report that giftedness, which is not simply intellectual, involves task commitment, high self-concept and creativity.

Gender differences equally exist in abilities (Vasta et al. 1995). Male adolescents tend to do better at higher levels of abilities such as in mathematics due to better strategies they adopt (Byrnes & Takahira, 1993; Benbow & Lubinsk; 1993) and in spatial abilities (Feingold, 1993; Benbow & Lubinsk; 1993; Bee, 1995), especially in mental rotation (Halpern, 1992). The females may be better in verbal abilities (Kail & Siegal, 1977).

Iheanacho (2002) found that many people do not consider their abilities in their choice of career, especially the females in law and medicine. Iheanacho found that 40% (males) and 51% (females) scored below 200 in law, while it was 40% (males) and 52% (females) in medicine. This does not tally with the desire of people beginning a career. Such people usually need to learn if they have the skill and strength to contribute to the organization. These they achieve when the organization provides them challenge to ascertain their skills and recognize their talents (Schein, 1990). They also evaluate other aspects of the organization including the job and the setting (Greenberg & Baron, 1993). This provides job satisfaction, which includes cognitive, affective and evaluative reactions of the person to his job. These attitudes enhance performance and productivity (Baron & Byrne, 1995). Consistency of attitudes with values is enhanced through social judgement (White, 1982).

Since opportunities and abilities are central to the social demand policy, it is necessary to know if the rising demand for education in Nigeria is from those who possess the required abilities. Such knowledge will enable the government to know whether to keep increasing the available opportunities or not. Therefore, the questions for this investigation are: (1) To what extent were the candidates applying for admission deficient in their specific abilities or aptitudes? (2) To what extent were the applicants deficient in the ability for their chosen disciplines? (3) To what extent were male and female applicants deficient in their specific abilities?

METHOD

Participants

All the candidates who applied for admission into four fields of specialization in the University of Calabar for the 1999/2000 session constituted the sample. The four fields of specialization were law, medicine, accounting and teaching. The candidates were 3,589 in number made up of 1,947 males and 1,645 females, aged 15 to 49 years.

Procedure

The data for the study were collected from the admission list sent to the University of Calabar from Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB). The candidates' intellectual abilities were judged from their score. Score of 200 was adopted as the minimum adequate ability since it was half of the possible or maximum score of 400, and was the minimum usually required in this university. This minimum is far below the cut-off point, which is usually above 240. It is necessary to differentiate the JAMB score, which is the aptitude test score (for the sciences, social sciences and arts), from the general ability score derived from the General Certificate of Education (GCE) or its equivalent. It is the aptitude test score that is relevant for this study since it measures the individual's ability in the different disciplines.

Consequently, the social demand for university education becomes the total number of applicants that possess the aptitude for their proposed disciplines. This constitutes the effective demand, which is different from the others applying based on mere desire or hoping to be admitted based on other considerations than aptitude.

Method of Data Analysis

The simple percentages were used for analyzing the data. The percentages were considered more appropriate as the study was restricted to research questions.

RESULTS

The data were analyzed for each research question. The results are presented in the tables that follow. Table 1 shows the total percentage of candidates that were deficient in their ability.

Table 1: Total number of deficient candidates in their specific ability

No. of candidates	Score		Below 200	
	200+	%	N	%
3,589	1899	52.9	1690	47.1

The table 1 shows that almost half of the candidates (47.1%) scored below 200. That means virtually half of the candidates were deficient in their abilities, and so were not qualified for university education in their proposed disciplines.

The extent the candidates were deficient in their chosen disciplines are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Deficiency of candidates by disciplines

Disciplines	200+		Score	
	200+	%	Below	200
	N	%	N	%
Law	706	53.5	616	46.5
Medicine	834	54.5	696	45.5
Accounting	337	48.7	355	51.3
Teaching	22	46.8	25	53.2

Table 2 shows that the highest percentage of candidates who were deficient in their abilities were in teaching (53.2) followed by accounting (51.3) and law (46.5). Generally all the disciplines recorded high percentage of candidates who were not qualified for university education in their proposed disciplines.

The percentages of male and female candidates who were deficient in their abilities are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Percentage of deficient candidates by gender

Gender	200+		Score	
	200+	%	Below	200
	N	%	N	%
Males	1094	56.2	850	43.7
Females	805	48.9	840	51.0

Table 3 shows more females (51%) were deficient in their abilities than males (43.7%). This means that there were more female candidates who were not qualified for university education with respect to their proposed disciplines.

DISCUSSION

The result of this study has shown that almost half of the candidates, who applied for admission into University of Calabar, did not have the aptitude for their chosen discipline since they scored less than 200. Therefore, they did not possess the required ability as implied in the social demand

policy (Sheehan, 1973) and demanded by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1998) National Policy on Education. The continuous increase in the demand for university education is a false signal if what is happening in the University of Calabar is also the trend in the other universities. It is therefore a waste of resources to continue to increase opportunities for more candidates in these disciplines, in the universities. The wrong signal will be worse when one discounts for the apparently large proportion that score above 200 through the rampant examination malpractices.

What should concern the government now is to map out policies or strategies that will compel the universities to ensure that only the qualified or able candidates are admitted into the universities, while those who gain admission illegally are flushed out within first year, preferably through the ideal rigorous examination procedure. This will make university education unattractive to them. Since education has become a status symbol, the government can embark on special education programmes such as in general education, special knowledge and new occupational skills (Venn, 1977). Products of the senior secondary schools, vocational training centres, the technical colleges, and apprenticeship schemes who are not qualified for university education, merely require one or two year (2) post secondary education as a preparation for entry into jobs.

It is necessary to make parents and the general public to appreciate the fact that university education is not necessary for everybody. It is only the compulsory enrolment element of the social demand policy used by government to guide against ignorance and irresponsibility (Sheehan, 1973), which is achieved at the secondary education level (Venn, 1977; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1998), that is necessary of everybody.

The result of this study that shows that a high percentage of the candidates did not possess the required abilities for their chosen disciplines is an indication that the candidates were ignorant of their abilities, or simply did not want to consider them (Iheanacho, 2002). It would be argued that if some of the candidates choose according to their abilities, they would qualify for university education thereby reducing the ratio of the candidates who are not able, to those who are able such as in accounting that has the highest.

It could be that many parents and applicants do not have access to counsellors and educational psychologists, or simply ignore their counselling on the fact that there are individual differences in ability. It could also be that schools fail to administer IQ and aptitude tests to determine the individuals' abilities.

Administration of IQ and aptitude tests can help individuals to identify their talents. Sticking to such talents could enable the individuals to live useful lives within the society (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1998) and for self-actualization through task commitment (Siegler & Kotovsky, 1992), for job satisfaction (Baron & Byrne, 1995).

The result of this study also shows that more females (51%) were not qualified for university education than males (43.7%). This confirms the findings that males tend to be better at higher level of abilities (Byrnes & Takahira, 1993; Benbow & Lubinski, 1993; Feingold, 1993; Halpern, 1992). Many females might have found the higher levels of abilities involved in university education above their aptitudes, especially as many of them might have applied for courses in law and medicine (requiring logical-mathematical intelligence). Iheanacho (2002) had found that more females scored below 200 in law (51%) than males (42%) and in medicine (52%) than males (40%). It could also be that the males adopted better strategies in their preparation than the females (Byrnes of Takahira, 1993).

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that a high proportion of the

candidates seeking admission into the university do not possess the required aptitude for their chosen disciplines, especially the females. Since the candidates fail to consider their aptitude, certain conclusions are obvious. The increasing number of candidates seeking university education is therefore, a false indicator of social demand for university education, which emphasizes ability (aptitude). It is not necessary but a waste of resources, to keep increasing university education opportunities. It is important for the individuals to appreciate the fact that they can only contribute their best to national development if they recognize and develop their potentialities.

The government should educate the public on the need for individuals to stick to their abilities that can only flourish outside university education. They could become the best inventors through task commitment. Efforts should be made to help individuals identify their abilities early enough through aptitude tests. This will assist in correct appraisal of the social demand for university education.

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