

Analysis of Factors Influencing Enrollment Rate of Students in Postgraduate Programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed factors influencing enrollment rate of students in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria. The study was guided by four research questions while four hypotheses were tested. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population consisted of 8,254 students undertaking postgraduate programmes across all the faculties and centers in Ambrose Alli University. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 students and a questionnaire titled Factors Influencing Post Graduate Enrolment Questionnaire (FIPGEQ) was used to gather data for the study. The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Planning in the Department of Educational Foundations and Management, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma and the test-retest reliability technique was adopted. The data obtained were analyzed using the Chi-Square statistical tool. The study revealed that the encouragement students get from their parents, their desire to acquire more knowledge and become experts in their various fields and the high rate of unemployment in the country are the main driving forces of students' high rate of enrolment in Ambrose Alli University Postgraduate Programmes. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that, parents should desist from the habit of influencing their children's interest in postgraduate programmes as such parents are forcing their wards to accomplish their failed dreams.

Keywords: Factors Influencing Enrolment Rate, Students, Postgraduate programmes, Unemployment, Interest

INTRODUCTION

Education for any Nation is believed to be the most effective tool for the development of any nation. This is so because of the active and effective roles it plays in enhancing social, political and economic development of society. Education improves the individual, the family and makes society a better place to live and education is achieved within a formal institution which is known as school. A school is defined as an organized environment where educational curricular are interpreted. It is a formal organization which serves as a transitional stage in life between family and society. A school is also known as a place where the child is prepared to function as an adult in society. This preparation of the child takes place in the three main levels of schools in Nigeria, which are primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions. Tertiary education, which is the main focus of this study is described as the education beyond the secondary school level of education.

As stated in the World Bank document released in 2017, tertiary education refers to third-level, third-stage or post-secondary education. It is the educational level following the completion of secondary education. World Bank (2017) also explained that tertiary education refers to all post-secondary education, including both public and private universities, colleges, technical training institutes, and vocational schools and tertiary education generally culminates in the receipt of certificates, diplomas, or academic degrees. Tertiary education is

instrumental in fostering growth, reducing poverty and boosting shared prosperity. A highly skilled workforce, with a solid post-secondary education, is a prerequisite for innovation and growth.

A university is described as an institution of higher education and research that awards academic degrees in various academic disciplines. As explained in the 11th edition of Encyclopedia Britannica, the word “university” is derived from the Latin *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, which roughly means "community of teachers and scholars". Lewis (1966) stated that the original Latin word *universitas* refers in general to "a number of persons associated into one body, a society, company, community, guild, corporation, etc. University education is taken to include undergraduate and postgraduate education. On this note it is to be noted that universities typically provide training in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Postgraduate programmes are undertaken by students who have successfully completed their undergraduate degree programmes in recognized universities and are undertaking further studies at advanced level. The post graduate degree programme covers Post graduate diploma, master's degree, MBA and Ph.D. A postgraduate diploma, postgraduate degree or Master's degree offer the students an advanced level of education in their chosen area of study. The course content is designed to build on the knowledge obtained at undergraduate degree level. Often the course content is more practical in nature to better prepare the students with the skills they will need in the workplace. Completing postgraduate studies help students further their career prospects and deepen their understanding of their area of study.

Over the years, there has been an increase in students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes. In global perspective, Beall (2012) reported that global postgraduate enrolments were approximately 65 million in 1990, so have increased by 160 per cent in 20 years or on average by five per cent per annum and the world's 18-22 age population over the same period grew by one per cent per annum, implying a significant rise in the global gross postgraduate enrolment ratio. Arjun, Paul, Damiano and Nafulad (nd) asserted that in particular, increases in the expected returns from attending school (directly or through provision of better school inputs) are likely to increase the probability of school enrolment. The increase in students' enrolment in post graduate programmes over the years has been linked to many factors such as students parental encouragement and support, desire for self-development/educational aspirations of students, employers demand for higher certificates, high rate of unemployment, societal expectations, technological advancements, higher earning potentials, the need for professional developments, online learning platform opportunities, scholarships and financial aids, economic downturns, research and innovation opportunities, international mobility, among others. However, this paper focused on factors: parental support and encouragement, desire for self-development, employers' demand for higher certificates and high rate of unemployment rate.

One of the factors which is believed to have significant influence on the enrolment rate of postgraduate students in their various programmes is parental support and encouragement. According to Chicana (2004), postgraduate students' aspiration for a higher education is firmly based on parental support and their educational resiliency. He further stated that positive encouragement and moral support from parents, the use of life experiences to promote a desire for a better life and resiliency even against socio-economic factors encourages students to enroll in postgraduate programmes and help them become successful in their quest to attaining a higher education.

Ceja (2004) stated that positive encouragement by parents, the use of life experiences to promote a desire for a better life, and resiliency even against socio-economic factors help them become successful in their quest to attain a higher education. Ceja further stated that parental encouragement and motivation to receive a higher education and avoid living a marginalized existence is a huge incentive for youths who want to surpass their current situations. While some parents lacked the education, socio economic status, and knowledge of the school system, their ability and interest in providing their ward with stories of lived experiences serves as a warning while urging their children to reach greater success and educational attainment (Ceja, 2004).

In a study conducted by Ceja (2004), the study revealed that parents gave their children full support and encouragement while reminding them of the many obstacles they faced to provide them with a better life due to their lack of education. The researcher also reported that the parents' strong desire to have their daughters transcend the poverty line, oppression, and discrimination is based on the belief that these things can be

obtained through an education. Yesenia, Lori and Marie-Anne (2016) carried out a study on factors influencing enrollment in higher education: A comparison of first- and second-generation Hispanic students. The study found no significant relationship between parental support and students' enrolment in educational programmes but rather, students' enrolment was influenced by their peers. Mehboob, Shah, and Bhutto (2012) examined the factors influencing student's enrollment decisions in selection of higher education institutions. The findings recognized that guardians, family and friends role played critical roles in influencing students' student decision in higher education enrolment.

Another factor which is believed to influence postgraduate students' enrolment is the desire for self-development and educational aspirations of students. It is believed that students' zeal and interest in developing their intellectual capability to a very great extent influences their enrolment in the postgraduate programmes which will assist them in broadening their knowledge and becoming expertise in their various fields of endeavour. According to Kerka (2000) enrolment in higher education is influenced by multiple factors including personality, interests, self-concept, cultural identity, globalization, socialization, role model, parental grooming, social support and available resources such as information and financial strengths. On this note, Chapman (1981) was on the view that personal aspiration is one of the greatest factors which influence student the choice of graduate courses. Reddy and Rajaram (2015) were also on the view that students' enrolment in higher education mainly depends on student's interest, domain acquaintance, perceptions and aspirations.

Over the years, various factors which authors described as personal factors are believed to have significant influence on students' enrolment in post graduate programmes. These factors are personal aspiration, performance at school and external factors contribute more to college choice (Hossler and Gallagher 1987;Borus 1993).In a study conducted by Ariffin et' al (2008), the study revealed that student educational aspirations were found positively related with college attendance choice. The student's own ability and aptitude also reported as one of the important contributors in selection of colleges (Manski and Wise 1983; Hossler, 1984).Mehboob, Shah and Bhutt Bhutto (2012) examined factors influencing student's enrollment decisions in selection of higher education institutions. The study revealed that aspiration, aptitude and career are responsible for students' enrolment in higher education, but the factor Career has been found as the most preferred one for students to pursue in HEI's.

In a study carried out by Dunham (2002), the study revealed that students' educational aspirations have a positive relationship with Higher Educational Institutions' programmes. Cantabella, Martínez-España, Ayuso, Yáñez, and Muñoz (2019) examined the analysis of student behavior in learning management systems through a big data framework. The findings of the study showed that the specialties and students are the factors that affect students' enrolment in higher programmes.

Similarly, employers' demand for higher qualifications is another major reason why people strive for higher degrees. Over the years, there has been continuously increasing demand for competent, effective and efficient human resources by the corporate sectors and private employers. This therefore induces more pressure on higher education institution to produce highly acclaimed professional who can perform at their optimum level and this also influences students to acquire more knowledge and be awarded higher certificates to qualify them for higher positions (Mehboob et al, 2012).Houston (2008) believed that there are interested parties which are believed to have an impact on students' choice in participating in higher education programmes. These he categorized as economic factors, including employers and industries. He went further to note that society which entails families, potential students and community organizations along with educational providers also influence students' enrolment in higher education programmes. As a lecturer in the university for example, you can't be promoted to the rank of Senior Lecturer without a Ph.D no matter the number of publications you have. In some other parastatals, having a higher degree places one an edge above others when it comes to certain positions. People strive, therefore, to acquire higher degrees hoping it will place them on better steads/advantages.

High rate of unemployment is one of the reasons for the increasing rate of students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes. In Nigeria as well as other developing nations, finding a job had become a central issue for graduates and their family recently. The decision of enrollment to specific education institution was affected by many factors related to the employment, and employment opportunities are a stronger predictor of

enrollment decisions (Jain, 2014; Robb, Moody and Abdel-Ghany, 2012). Paulson (1981) examined the impact of employment opportunity and its relation with college enrolment decisions and found that employment opportunities are the stronger predictor of enrollment decisions. In another study, Garma and Moy (2003) also identified and reported a significant association between employment rate of graduates in determining college attendance decisions. Dutta (2008) while examining attitude of students in primary schools towards school infrastructure and its relationship with school effectiveness in West Bengal reported that students' perception play important roles in school attendance motivation.

One of the main benefits of acquiring education is the expected role played by education in enhancing employment and wage prospects. Contrarily, the increase in postgraduate programmes enrolment is believed to be influenced by the unavailability of jobs among Nigerian graduates. Based on this, it is therefore believed that the reduced employment prospects of educated individuals Nigeria and the reduction in formal sector employment may have played a role in increasing the incentive to acquire education. Furthermore, students in the postgraduate programmes are believed to have enrolled to get themselves engaged and not to remain idle in the absence of white-collar jobs. One other factor which is believed to have influence on post graduate students' enrolment is employers demand for higher certificates. Nicola, Murray and Tia (2009) noted that the probability of finding employment as well as the fact that tertiary study itself provides an option, for those with the financial resources, to delay entry into a less-than-optimal youth labour market. Beal (2012) was on the view that students' enrolment in post graduate programmes is believed to have serious impact on the probability of finding employment, both formal and self-employment.

Sedahmed and Noureldien (2019) examined the factors influencing students decisions to enrollment in Sudanese higher Loren and Naltan (2014) examined the determinant factors contributing to student choice in selecting a university. The study revealed that job prospects and high rate of graduates being employed are the determinant education institutions. The study revealed among other things that employment related factors influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes. Beall (2012) in his study reported that student's enrolment in higher education intuitions enable them have higher certificates and boost their chances of employment in formal establishments. It is important to ascertain therefore factors influencing students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, there have been global concerns on the increasing rate of enrolment in higher education courses and of which tertiary institutions in Nigeria as well as Ambrose Alli University are not exempted. In line with this, Statistics South Africa(2012) raised some concerns that as at 2000, the gross enrolment rate in higher education institutions regardless of age as a proportion of 20–24 years old in the population was discovered to be 12.9%. Therefore, by 2001 the National Policy for Higher Education which provided the implementation framework for transforming the higher education system set the participation rate target at 20% over a 10 to 15 years period (Ministry of Education, 2001). Between 2000 and 2006, higher education enrolment and also increased by 16.3% in 2007 (Mpho, Wilson and Sathiya, 2016).

Available documents in School of Post Graduate Studies, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma showed that in 2006/2007 academic session, a total of 218 students enrolled in Ph.D, Masters and Postgraduate Diploma programmes, in 2007/2008, there was a total of 199 students enrolled in the three postgraduate programmes, in 2008/2009, a total of 395 also enrolled in the three postgraduate programmes. In 2009/2010, a total of 474 enrolments were recorded in the three postgraduate programmes while in 2010/2011 only 49 students enrolled in the Ph.D, Masters and Postgraduate diploma programmes. The records further showed that as at 2012/2013 academic session there was explosion in the enrolment in the three postgraduate programmes stated above where a total of 601 enrolments were recorded. Also in 2013/2014 academic session, 619 students enrolled. In 2015/2016, a total of 764 students also enrolled in the programmes mentioned above and in 2016/2017 a total of 649 students enrolled in Ambrose Alli University Postgraduate degree programmes. The record further indicated that in 2017/2018, 673 students enrolled in the programmes mentioned above (School of Postgraduate Studies, Ambrose Alli University, 2024). Personal observation of the researchers showed that before the commencement of 2012/2013 academic session, the enrolment into the postgraduate degree

programmes was low and there was explosion of students' enrolment in Ambrose Alli University postgraduate degree programmes.

Personal observation of the researchers also showed that most of the students in these programmes are majorly youths who could have been gainfully employed in government parastatals to contribute their own quota to the development of the nation's economy. This enrolment explosion and youth participation in these programmes has been a major concern to some education stakeholders and also the researchers as to what might instigate the students' interest in postgraduate degree programmes. Some stakeholders have blamed the government for not providing white collar jobs for Nigerian graduates while some stakeholders blamed tertiary institutions for churning out half-baked graduates who could not contribute to the development of the nation. It is worrisome that some parents in quest to achieve their failed ambitions push and force their children to enroll in postgraduate degree programmes while some other students are alleged to have enrolled in the programmes as a result of their interest in better paid jobs and those seeking promotion in their place of work. This ugly situation being experienced in our tertiary institutions, if not averted, may create a vacuum in the public sector as more students who are supposed to be in this sector will keep applying for higher degrees. It is therefore the interest of this paper to analyze the factors influencing enrollment rate of students in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of this paper are to:

- a. ascertain if parental encouragement/support influences students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria
- b. ascertain if the desire for self-development/higher educational aspirations influences students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria
- c. ascertain if employers' demand for higher certificates influences students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria
- d. ascertain if high unemployment rate among the youths influences students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- a. Do parental encouragement/support influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria?
- b. Do the desire for self-development/higher educational aspirations influence students enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria?
- c. Do employers demand for higher certificates influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria?
- d. Does high unemployment rate among the youths, influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- a. Parental encouragement/support do not influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria
- b. The desire for self-development/higher educational aspirations of students do not influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria
- c. Employers demand for higher certificates do not influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria
- d. High unemployment rate among the youths do not influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive research design. A questionnaire titled Factors Influencing Post Graduate Enrolment Questionnaire (FIPGEQ) was the instrument used to gather data for the study. The population consisted of all the 1,254 students undertaking postgraduate programmes across all the faculties and centers in Ambrose Alli University. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 300 students to respond to the research instrument. The instrument was validated by experts in educational planning in the department of educational foundations and management, Ambrose Alli University, Edo State. The test-retest reliability technique was adopted to test the reliability of the instrument. The instrument was trial tested on a group of 40 postgraduate students in University of Benin, Benin City. After two weeks, the instrument was re-administered to the same set of students and the two sets of scores were correlated using Pearson Moment Reliability Technique and a score of 0.69 was obtained. With this high coefficient value, the instrument was considered reliable. The research instrument was administered directly to the respondents and the copies were retrieved the same day to enhance high rate of return. The data obtained were analyzed using the Chi-Square statistical tool.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One: Parental encouragement/support do not influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria.

Table 1: Analysis of Parental encouragement/support and students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes

Test Statistics		
	Parental Encouragement/Support	Students Enrolment in Postgraduate Programmes
Chi-Square	2.400 ^a	1.09 ^b
Df	2	3
Asymp. Sig.	.031	.031

Table 1 showed the Chi-Square analysis of parental encouragement/support and students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes. The results showed a significant influence at .05 level of significance because the calculated value of 2.400 was greater than the criterion value. Meanwhile, the P-value (.031) was less than .05 ($P < .05$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected and the alternative retained. This meant that parental encouragement/support influenced students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two: The desire for self-development/educational aspirations of students do not influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria

Table 2: Desire for self-development/educational aspirations of students and enrolment in postgraduate programmes

Test Statistics		
	The Desire for Self-Development/Educational Aspirations	Students Enrolment in Postgraduate Programmes
Chi-Square	1.600 ^a	1.54 ^b
Df	2	1
Asymp. Sig.	.002	.002

Table 2 showed the Chi-Square analysis of desire for self-development/educational aspirations of students and enrolment in postgraduate programmes. The results showed a significant influence at .05 level of significance

because the calculated value of 1.600 was greater than the criterion value. Meanwhile, the P-value (.002) was less than .05 ($P < .05$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This meant that the desire for self-development/educational aspirations of students influenced students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Three: Employers demand for higher certificates do not influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria

Table 3: Employers demand for higher certificates and enrolment in postgraduate programmes

Test Statistics		
	Employers Demand for Higher Certificates	Students Enrolment in Postgraduate Programmes
Chi-Square	1.320 ^a	1.69 ^b
Df	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.64	.64

Table 3 showed the Chi-Square analysis of employers' demand for higher certificates and enrolment in postgraduate programmes. The results showed a significant influence at .05 level of significance because the calculated value of 1.320 was greater than the criterion value. Meanwhile, the P-value (.064) was less than .05 ($P < .05$) and the null hypothesis was accepted. This meant that employers demand for higher certificates do not influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Four: High rate of unemployment among the youths do not influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria

Table 4: High rate of unemployment among the youths and enrolment in postgraduate programmes

Test Statistics		
	High Rate of Unemployment	Students Enrolment in Postgraduate Programmes
Chi-Square	1.421 ^a	1.539 ^b
Df	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.001	.001

Table 3 showed the Chi-Square analysis of high rate of unemployment among the youths and enrolment in postgraduate programmes. The results showed a significant influence at .05 level of significance because the calculated value of 1.421 was greater than the criterion value. Meanwhile, the P-value (.001) was less than .05 ($P < .05$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implied that high rate of unemployment among the youths influenced students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of findings was discussed as follows:

The finding of this study showed that parental encouragement/support influenced students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria. The finding of this study supports the findings of Ceja (2004) whose study revealed that parents gave their children full support and encouragement while reminding them of the many obstacles they faced to provide them with a better life due to their lack of education. The finding of this study is in agreement with the findings of Mehboob, Shah, and

Bhutto (2012) who reported that guardians, family and friends role played critical roles in influencing students' student decision in higher education enrolment. However, the finding of this study contradicts that of Yesenia, Lori and Marie-Anne (2016) whose study found no significant relationship between parental support and students' enrolment in educational programmes.

This study revealed that the desire for self-development/educational aspirations of students influenced students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria. This finding supports that of Mehboob, Shah and Bhutt Bhutto (2012) who found out that aspiration, aptitude and career are responsible for students' enrolment in higher education, but the factor career has been found as the most preferred one for students to pursue in HEI's. The finding of this study corroborates that of Dunham (2002) who reported that student educational aspirations have positively related with Higher Educational Institutions programmes.

This study found out that employers' demand for higher certificates do not influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria. The finding of this study contradicts that of Loren and Naltan (2014) whose study revealed that job prospects and high rate of graduates being employed are the determinant factors contributing to student choice of enrolment. This finding is not in agreement with the findings of Sedahmed and Noureldien (2019) whose study revealed among other things that employment related factors influence students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes.

This study showed that high rate of unemployment among the youths influenced students' enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria. The finding of this study is in agreement with the findings of Paulson (1981) who found out that lack of employment opportunities are the stronger predictor of enrollment decisions. The finding of this study corroborates that of Garma and Moy (2003) who reported that there is a significant association between employment rates of graduates in determining the college attendance decisions.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the encouragement students' get from their parents, their desire to acquire more knowledge and become experts in their various fields and the high rate of unemployment in the country are the main driving forces of students' high rate of enrolment in Ambrose Alli University Postgraduate Programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- a. Parents should desist from the habit of influencing their children's interest in postgraduate programmes as such parents are forcing their wards to accomplish their failed dreams.
- b. Students are encouraged to be genuine and develop high morale towards the actualization of their desire for self-development/educational aspirations.
- c. Employers should always ask for a higher degree certificate to sustain the high enrolment rates in postgraduate programmes as this has been seen to encourage enrolment in higher degree programmes.
- d. The government at all levels should be active in the creation of employment opportunities for the teaming youth population as this will keep them busy and prevent them from enrolling in postgraduate programmes, they do not have genuine interest in.

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