

Access to Higher Education in Nigeria: The University of Calabar Pre-Degree Program Experience

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Abstract—The pre-degree program of the University of Calabar was introduced to help increase access to tertiary Education in science related courses. Its main objective was to provide access to candidates from educationally less developed states (ELDS) and states within its catchment area. An impact evaluation of the program was conducted, from where the aspect of providing access to University Education was reported here. Two research questions were formulated; ex-post-facto research design and purposive sampling technique were adopted for the study. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics in terms of frequencies and percentages. The result of data analysis showed that the pre-degree program of the University of Calabar has provided educational access to Nigerians especially those from educationally less developed states in science related courses. It was therefore recommended that the program be sustained and further be improved upon to facilitate its continued provision of access to University Education in Nigeria.

Keywords—Educationally Less Developed States, Higher Education, Pre-Degree program, University of Calabar,

I. INTRODUCTION

EDUCATION, in contemporary times has become an imperative for growth, development, self-actualization and national progress. Reference [1] observed that Education is indispensable for human progress and empowerment of human beings to be able to survive and to develop their full capacities. Education counts in other areas of human endeavor such as the ability to live and work with dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning [1]. This may have prompted the 1948 declaration of human rights by the United Nations to include the right of everyone to Education.

It has been reckoned that University Education represents the zenith of educational attainment in today's world. In this regard, [2], which represents the stance of the Federal Government on educational matters states that University Education shall make optimum contribution to National Development. Jibowu in [3], states that a nation's Gross National Product (GNP) per capita depends to a large extent on the level of development of its human resources. Thus he emphasized the need for rapid, adequate, but rational development of the country's University Education.

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Given the premium placed on University Education in Nigeria, access to it is quite an issue. Reference [4] observed that in the past, ignorance prevented many people from sending their children to school, but today, the reverse is the case. In the present dispensation, there are not enough spaces for those seeking admission into Universities in Nigeria. An instance could be cited from [5], who lamented the poor situation of the supply of University Education between 1990 and 1998. They showed that 84.6 percent in 1990, 83.29 percent in 1991, 85.27 percent in 1997 and 91.25 percent in 1998 of candidates who passed the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination were denied admission.

Commenting on the need to provide access to University Education, [6] observed that Nigeria as a developing country should make access to University Education for all citizens a priority. He however, expressed displeasure that many Nigerians could not have access to University Education due probably to admission policies like, quota system, Post University Matriculation Examination (UME) screening, lack of facilities, fewness of Universities, among others. Lamenting the situation further, [7], stated that more and more people were desirous of getting admission into Universities while available vacancies were limited. This is confirmed by [8], who pointed out that 527,000 candidates out of 867,000 who had 180 marks or above in the 2010 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) will be admitted. According to him, although they have met the required cut-off points as set by JAMB, the remaining 340,000 candidates would not be placed because of unavailability of spaces. This is not to talk of those who did not meet up the 180 marks cut-off point. This foregoing scenario reinforces the fact of the difficulty of access to tertiary Education. [9], identified quota system of admission as being detrimental to candidates' access to University Education. According to them, quota system was introduced as an attempt to provide equal opportunity for candidates to be admitted into the University, but regrettably, the system has been greatly abused. Using quota system as put by [9] to guide and regulate access to University Education has an inequitable effect and academic merit is being sacrificed on the alteration of mediocrity.

On the other hand, identified poor funding is a major factor militating against good access to University Education [10]. According to him, this is true because poor funding tends to lead to inadequate provision of human and material resources and students' admission is usually based on the availability of

these resources. According to [11], about 70.2% Nigerians are poor and by implication, cannot afford to send their children to school. It is therefore clear that poverty is an important factor that militates against meaningful access to University Education [12].

In Nigeria, given that unavailability of space being no doubt the constraint to access, accounted for the introduction of the pre-degree program of the University of Calabar in the 1977/78 academic session, then called Remedial Science program.

Reference [13] carried out an Impact Evaluation of the pre-NCE program in Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa (1990 – 1997). The result of findings revealed that students' enrolment into the pre – NCE program increased over the years with a declining rate of increase.

Access to University Education makes it possible for everyone who is qualified and willing to receive University Education to do so. Reference [4], defines access to University Education in line with UNESCO'S prescription that there should be equitable access to tertiary institutions based on merit, capacity, effort and perseverance. Equity on the other hand signifies the provision of equal opportunities for those who are qualified to receive University (or any other) Education without regard to differences in sex, religion, social standing, environment and so no. This implies that all sections of the society should have a fair share of success to University (or whatever) educational opportunities that are available.

The University of Calabar, established substantively in 1975 was a creation in order for access and equity in University Education to be enjoyed by the people of Cross River State and its catchment states primarily, and for the same purpose for all Nigerians in general. In the 1977/78 academic year, the Remedial Science program, now known as the Pre-Degree program was introduced with the aim of catering for students from Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) among which Cross River State was categorized. Reference [14] has observed that since its inception, the program has contributed in the provision of access to University Education to this category of students.

It is the intention of this study therefore to find out the extent to which the program has contributed to the provision of access to University Education to the educationally less developed states and the states within its catchment area.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Part of Nigeria's overall aim of equalizing educational access among the various sections of the country, the University of Calabar was founded. The problem tended to be that even with the coming into being of the University, substantively in the 1975/76 academic year, indigenes of Cross River State were not able to fill their admission quota, especially in the science programs of the University of Calabar. This led to the introduction of the pre-degree program then called the Remedial Science Program in the 1977/78 academic year.

The problem of the study is hinged around the questions, has the enrolment trend of students in the Pre-Degree program

at any given period justified its existence in line with its objectives? Also, to what extent has the University of Calabar Pre-Degree program supplied students to the regular University degree program to ameliorate the ELDS status of Cross River State while giving the students more access to University Education?

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the University of Calabar Pre-Degree program has been able to provide access to higher Education among students from ELDS, and those within its catchment area. Specifically, the study examined the enrolment trend of students in the Pre-Degree program between 2008 and 2012. And the extent to which the program supplied students to the regular degree program in line with the program's objective of catering for students from educationally less developed states (ELDS).

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions have been formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the enrolment trend of students in the Pre-Degree program between 2008 and 2012?
2. To what extent has the University of Calabar Pre-Degree program supplied students to the regular University degree program in line with the program's objective of catering for students from educationally less developed states (ELDS)?

V. METHODOLOGY

A. Design and Sample

The research design adopted for this research was the ex-post-facto research design. The population of this study consisted of all pre-degree students in the University of Calabar between 2008 and 2012. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in the sampling of students for the study since all the students in the population were considered for the study.

Data on the student's enrolment and placement of students after the program was obtained from records in the faculty of science.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics in terms of frequencies and percentages were used for data analysis. Result of data analysis in respect of the two research questions are presented in Tables I-III.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Question 1

What is the enrolment trend of students in the pre-degree program between 2008 and 2012?

The data for this research question is presented in Table I.

TABLE I
PRE-DEGREE STUDENTS' ENROLMENT BETWEEN 2008 AND 2012

Session	No of students enrolled		Total	Increase	Percentage increase
	Male	Female			
2008/2009	1099	1043	2142	-	-
2009/2010	1312	909	2221	79	37.0
2010/2011	1351	1224	2575	354	16.0
2011/2012	1351	1267	2618	43	16.7
Total	5113	4443	9556	-	-

Source: Faculty of Science, UNICAL

Results in Table I indicate that pre-degree students' enrolment increased steadily over the years from 2008 to 2012. However, the rate of increase within the period under study fluctuated. There was an initial decrease from 37.0% in 2009/2010 to 16.0 % in 2010/2011 and further increased to 16.7 % in 2011/2012.

Some factors may have been responsible for the fluctuating rate of increase in enrolment within the period under study. One of the factors may have been the interest of most school leavers in the arts than in the sciences. This may be responsible for the continuous decrease in the rate of increase in the enrolment. Another factor may be the University's admission policy aimed at matching the number of students to the facilities available. This may have led to the reduction of the number of students considered for admission in to the pre-degree program which is responsible for the observed irregular rate of increase in enrolment.

However, since the enrolment increased over the years, it was an indication that the pre-degree program actually enhanced educational access, especially for the fact that its admission policy was such that candidates who could not make the cut-off point for admission in to science based courses in the University were given opportunity to remedy their deficiencies and have opportunity to offer such courses.

B. Research Question 2

To what extent has the University of Calabar Pre-degree Program supplied students to the regular University degree program in line with the program's objective of catering for

TABLE III
PLACEMENT OF STUDENTS INTO THE DEGREE PROGRAM ON FACULTY BASIS

Session	Placement of Students in Faculties														
	Science					Agriculture					Science Education				
	Pre-Degree.	Percentage	UTME	Percentage	Total	Pre-Degree	Percentage	UTME	Percentage	Total	Pre-Degree	Percentage	UTME	Percentage	Total
2008/2009	612	48	663	52	1275	110	48	119	52	229	39	47.6	43	52.4	82
2009/2010	733	73.7	261	26.3	994	100	45	122	55	222	47	61	30	39	77
2010/2011	618	68.9	279	31.1	897	100	54.3	84	45.7	184	52	66.7	26	33.3	78
2011/2012	664	62.5	399	37.5	1063	118	59.6	80	40.4	198	64	72.7	24	27.3	88

Source: Faculty of Science, UNICAL

By these results, it is concluded that the University of Calabar pre-degree program has supplied students to the University degree program in line with the program objective

of catering for students from Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) such as Cross River State.

Data for this research question is presented in Tables II and III.

TABLE II
PLACEMENT OF POST PRE-DEGREE STUDENTS INTO THE DEGREE PROGRAM BASED ON CATCHMENT AREA

Session	Placement of students			
	Merit	EDLS	Locality	Total
2008/2009	186 (24.4)	472 (62.1)	103 (13.5)	761
2009/2010	227 (25.8)	526 (59.8)	127(14.4)	880
2010/2011	152(19.7)	485(63.0)	133(17.3)	770
2011/2012	211(25)	518(61.2)	117(13.8)	846

Source: Faculty of Science, UNICAL

Note: Numbers in parenthesis are percentages

Result of data presented in Table II indicate that in 2008/2009 session, a total of 761 students who passed the pre-degree program were placed in the faculties of Science, Agriculture and Education. Out of this number, 186 (24.4%) were placed on merit, 472 (62.1%) were considered on the basis of Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) while 103 (13.5%) were placed on the basis of locality. In the 2009/2010 session, out of 880 students placed, 227 (25.8%) were placed on merit, 526 (59.8%) on the basis of ELDS and 127 (14.4%) on the basis of locality. In 2010/2011 session, 770 students were placed, out of which 152(19.7%) were placed on merit, 485 (63%) were placed on the basis of ELDS. While 133 (17.3%) were placed on the basis of locality. In the 2011/2012 session, 846 students were placed, out of this number, 211 (25%) were placed on merit, 518 (61.2%) were placed on the basis of ELDS while 117 (13.8%) were placed on the basis of locality.

From these results, it is observed that even though placement of post pre-degree students was on three criteria of merit, ELDS, and locality, consideration was given mostly to those students from ELDS and so most of them were successful in the placement exercise as reflected in the percentage of those who got placement within the period under study.

Results in Table III indicate that in 2008/2009 session, 48% of the students admitted in to the Faculty of Science were post Pre-Degree students while 52% were through Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). 48% of those admitted in to the Faculty of Agriculture were from the Pre-degree program while 52% were admitted through UTME, and 47.6% of those admitted into Science Education were from the Pre-degree program while 52.4% were from UTME. In the 2009/2010 session, 73.7% of those admitted in to the faculty of Science were from the Pre-degree program while 26.3% were from UTME, 45% of those admitted in to the Faculty of Agriculture were from the Pre-degree program while 55% were from UTME, 61% of those admitted in to Science Education were from Pre-degree program while 39% were from UTME. In the 2010/2011 session, 68.9% of those admitted into the Faculty of Science were from Pre-degree program while 31.1% were from UTME, 54.3% of those admitted into the Faculty of Agriculture were from the Pre-degree program while 45.7% were from UTME, and 66.7% of those admitted into Science Education were from the Pre-degree program while 33.3% were from UTME. In the 2011/2012 session, 62.5% of those admitted into the Faculty of Science were from the Pre-degree program while 37.5% were from UTME, 59.6% of those admitted into the Faculty of Agriculture were from the Pre-degree program while 40.4% were from UTME, 72.7% of those admitted into Science Education were from the Pre-degree program while 27.3% of them were from UTME.

When one considers the percentage of students admitted into the degree program from the Pre-degree program to the Faculties of Science, Agriculture and Science Education compared to the percentage from UTME, it is found that except for 2008/2009 session and 2009/2010 for Faculty of Agriculture, the percentage of students from the Pre-degree program is higher. When considered on this basis, it is concluded that the pre-degree program has actually supplied enough students to the degree program in the Faculties of Science, Agriculture and Science Education.

VIII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of findings on the enrolment trend of the pre-degree students showed that the pre-degree students' enrolment increased steadily over the years from 2008 to 2012. However, the rate of increase within the period under study fluctuated.

Since the enrolment increased over the years, it was an indication that the pre-degree program actually enhanced educational access, especially for the fact that its admission policy was such that candidates who could not make the cut-off point for admission in to science based courses in the University were given opportunity to remedy their deficiencies and have opportunity to offer such courses. This result supports [13], who carried out an Impact Evaluation of the pre-NCE program in Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa (1990 – 1997). The result of findings revealed that students' enrolment into the pre – NCE program increased

over the years which is an indication of provision of access to Education.

The result of findings on the extent to which the University of Calabar Pre-degree Program supplied students to the regular University degree program in line with the program's objective of catering for students from educationally less developed states and increasing access to the study of science based courses revealed that even though placement of post pre-degree students was on three criteria of merit, ELDS, and locality, consideration was given mostly to those students from ELDS and so most of them were successful in the placement exercise as reflected in the percentage of those who got placement within the period under study.

The result also revealed that the percentage of students admitted into the degree program from the Pre-degree program to the Faculties of Science, Agriculture and Science Education compared to the percentage from UTME, was higher. By these results, it is concluded that the University of Calabar pre-degree program has supplied students to the University degree program in line with the program objective of catering for students from Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) such as Cross River State.

IX. CONCLUSION

Considering the findings of this study, it was concluded that the University of Calabar Pre-degree program has provided educational access to Nigerians especially those from educationally less developed states (ELDS) in science related courses.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that

1. The program be sustained and further be improved on to facilitate its continued provision of access to University Education in Nigeria.
2. The University authority should adopt admission policies that will encourage more candidates to be admitted in to the program.

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