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UNIVERSITY SIZE AND EDUCATIONAL FUNDING AS PREDICTORS OF STUDENTS' ENROLMENT IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Students' enrolment remains an important indicator of educational access and institutional development, particularly in public universities where differences in institutional capacity and financial resources may influence enrolment patterns. This study examined university size and educational funding as predictors of students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 23,651 staff members of public universities in Southwest Nigeria, from which a sample of 818 respondents was selected using purposive and proportionate stratified random sampling techniques. Data were collected using the University Size Questionnaire (USQ), Educational Funding Questionnaire (EFQ) and Students' Enrolment Data Capture Form (SEDCF). The questionnaires yielded reliability coefficients of 0.75 and 0.79, respectively. Data were analysed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation at .05 level of significance. Findings revealed a positive significant relationship between university size and students' enrolment ($r = .791$, $p < .05$), and a positive significant relationship between educational funding and students' enrolment ($r = .260$, $p < .05$). The study concluded that university size and educational funding were significantly associated with students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria, with university size demonstrating a stronger relationship. It was recommended that the National Universities Commission should periodically review and approve expansion plans, and legislate a fixed minimum of 15% of annual education budgets for public universities.

Keywords: University Size, Educational Funding, Students' Enrolment, Public Universities, Southwest Nigeria.

Introduction

Students' enrolment remains an important indicator of educational development, reflecting the extent to which individuals gain access to learning opportunities within an education system. Across the world, increasing recognition of the role of university education in human capital development, knowledge acquisition and socioeconomic advancement has continued to shape the demand for higher education. Students' enrolment refers to the number of prospective students who were eventually admitted and registered in tertiary institutions especially public universities in Southwest Nigeria, within a specific timeframe. The pattern of enrolment

provides useful information for assessing educational access, institutional growth and the capacity of universities to accommodate students. Enrolment patterns are, however, influenced by several factors, including institutional characteristics, admission requirements, availability of academic programmes, educational costs, geographical location and socioeconomic conditions.

In Nigeria, students' enrolment in universities has remained an important concern in educational planning, particularly regarding the capacity of institutions to accommodate prospective students and provide the resources required for effective teaching and learning. Differences in the size, infrastructure and academic offerings of universities may create variations in their ability to admit and retain students. Imoh (2025), in a study of admission trends into Educational Management programmes across Nigerian universities between 2017 and 2022, identified fluctuations in annual admissions and considerable disparities across geopolitical zones. The findings revealed uneven patterns of access to university education, raising important concerns about institutional capacity and the distribution of educational opportunities. These differences suggest the need to examine whether university size contributes to variations in students' enrolment.

Educational funding is equally important in sustaining university operations and expanding access to higher education. The provision of adequate financial resources enables universities to develop infrastructure, recruit qualified personnel, provide instructional facilities and maintain an environment conducive to academic activities. Amadi and Nwogu (2023) identified inadequate educational funding as a major challenge confronting educational development in Nigeria, particularly in relation to infrastructure, learning resources and access to education. Although educational institutions receive financial support through government allocations, internally generated revenue, donations, partnerships and intervention agencies such as the Tertiary Education Trust Fund, the availability and adequacy of these resources remain important considerations in institutional planning and development.

The challenges associated with educational funding have implications for the capacity of universities to respond to increasing educational demands. Sheyin and Imoh (2025) identified inadequate funding, infrastructural deficiencies and institutional resource constraints among the challenges affecting university accreditation in Nigeria. They emphasised the importance of improved financial investment and resource provision in strengthening institutional effectiveness. Where funding is inadequate, universities may experience difficulties in expanding academic facilities, maintaining instructional resources and accommodating additional students. On the other hand, adequate funding may support institutional expansion and improve the capacity to provide educational opportunities.

Ileuma (2019) found a positive correlation between school buildings and student enrolment, identifying the availability and condition of educational facilities, including libraries, classrooms and laboratories, as important factors associated with enrolment. Akinyemi and

Gbenu, (2020) established that student enrolment in public universities in Lagos State, Nigeria, have moderately and positively influenced academic staff productivity. They further noted that the management of public universities must adopt policies to control enrolment ratios on both academic staff and material resources so that lecturers' productivity in public universities is not negatively influenced by increased enrolment. Regarding educational funding, Ogunode et al. (2023) maintained that adequate financial investment in tertiary education could strengthen infrastructural development, facilitate the recruitment of qualified academic personnel, improve staff welfare, support research activities and minimise disruptions to academic programmes. These findings suggest that university size and educational funding are important institutional considerations that may influence admission capacity and enrolment opportunities.

This study is hinged on the Consumer Choice Theory by George Stigler in 1971.The theory explains how individuals make choices among available alternatives based on their preferences, perceived benefits, costs and available resources. It assumes that consumers seek to obtain maximum satisfaction from their choices while considering the benefits and financial implications of available options. In the context of university education, students and their parents may consider factors such as institutional size, availability of academic programmes, quality of infrastructure, tuition fees, learning facilities and financial support when deciding which university to attend. The theory is relevant to the present study on university size and educational funding as predictors of students' enrolment because it provides an explanation of how institutional characteristics and financial considerations may influence students' choice of universities. University size may affect enrolment through the availability of academic programmes, infrastructural facilities and learning opportunities, while educational funding may influence enrolment through the provision of adequate facilities, improved educational services and financial assistance to students. The theory therefore provides a basis for understanding how university size and educational funding may influence students' preferences and decisions, thereby contributing to variations in enrolment among universities.

Statement of the Problem

Students' enrolment is an important indicator of access to university education and institutional development. However, the ability of universities to accommodate prospective students remains a concern, particularly in Nigeria, where institutions differ in their physical capacity, academic resources and financial strength. While some universities possess relatively extensive infrastructure, diverse academic programmes and sufficient facilities to accommodate large numbers of students, others operate with limited resources that may restrict their admission capacity. These differences raise concerns about the extent to which university size contributes to variations in students' enrolment. Educational funding presents another concern, as universities require adequate financial resources to develop infrastructure, recruit academic personnel,

maintain facilities and expand academic programmes. Despite the existence of various funding sources, some universities continue to experience financial constraints that may limit their ability to respond to the demand for higher education. Although increased funding may support institutional expansion and improve admission opportunities, the extent to which educational funding predicts students' enrolment remains uncertain. It is against this background that the study seeks to examine university size and educational funding as predictors of students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate the influence of university size and educational funding on students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to examine the:

1. relationship between university size and students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria;
2. relationship between educational funding and students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study at .05 level of significance:

Ho_1 There is no significant relationship between university size and students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Ho_2 There is no significant relationship between educational funding and students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Methodology

A descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted in this study. The population of this study comprised 23,651 staff members in public universities in Southwest Nigeria, with a sample of 818 non-academic staff members and directors selected through purposive sampling technique for the first four established federal and state. While, proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select 10% from the selected universities. Data were collected using; the University Size Questionnaire (USQ), Educational Funding Questionnaire (EFQ), and Students' Enrolment Data Capture Form (SEDCF) with reliability coefficients of α= .75, and .79 for USQ and EFQ respectively. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to analyse and test hypotheses all at .05 level of significance.

Results

Ho_1: There is no significant relationship between university size and students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Table 1: *Pearson's Correlation between University Size and Students' Enrolment*

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	Std.	df	r	Sig (p)	Remark
Students' Enrollment	802	42.00	4.164	800	.791	.000	Significant
University Size		31.81	3.426				

As shown in Table 1, there was a positive significant relationship between university size and students' enrolment, $r = .791$, $p < .05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho_1) was rejected. This indicates larger university size is associated with higher students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Table 2: *Pearson's Correlation between Educational Funding and Students' Enrolment*

Variables	N	$\overline{X}$	Std.	df	R	Sig (p)	Remark
Students' Enrollment	802	42.00	4.164	800		.000	Significant
Educational Funding		20.78	3.977		.260		

As presented in Table 2, there was a positive significant relationship between educational funding and students' enrolment, $r = .260$, $p < .05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho_2) was rejected. This indicates that higher educational funding is associated with higher students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The result of hypothesis 1 revealed a significant relationship between university size and students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. This implies that an increase in university size is likely to result in higher students' enrolment in public universities. This finding aligns with Ileuma (2019), who reported that university size, often reflected in class size and total student population, has a significant and largely positive impact on student enrolment. However, Ileuma further noted that while larger universities may provide more diverse academic and infrastructural resources, they also encounter difficulties in sustaining high-quality, personalized instruction, which may negatively affect student outcomes and satisfaction. Similarly, Akinyemi and Gbenu (2020) established a positive correlation between university size and student enrolment but observed that academic performance tends to decline as class sizes increase. Taken together, these studies suggest that although expansion in university size can attract more students, it must be strategically managed to prevent a decline in instructional quality and student satisfaction.

The result of Hypothesis 2 revealed a significant relationship between educational funding and students' enrolment in public universities in Southwest Nigeria. This indicates that the level of funding allocated to public universities is a critical factor influencing students' enrolment decisions. This finding corroborates Ogunode et al. (2024), who established that university educational funding has a direct and significant impact on student enrolment by serving as a primary driver of accessibility, institutional capacity, and education quality. They further noted that increased funding generally boosts enrolment by improving facilities and reducing financial barriers, whereas underfunding leads to declining enrolment, higher dropout rates, and restricted access, particularly for students from low-income households. Consequently, the present finding affirms

that adequate and timely educational funding does more than sustain university operations; it directly shapes enrolment trends by determining the institution's capacity to absorb students and the affordability of higher education for the target population.

Conclusion

Students' enrolment remains an important consideration in university planning and development, particularly in relation to institutional capacity and the availability of financial resources. University size and educational funding represent two institutional factors that may contribute to differences in enrolment patterns. While university size reflects the capacity of institutions to provide academic programmes, infrastructure and learning facilities, educational funding supports the acquisition, development and maintenance of the resources required for university operations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The National Universities Commission should periodically review and approve expansion plans for public universities based on demonstrated capacity, ensuring that physical growth is matched with corresponding increases in academic staff, facilities, and student support services before new programmes or campuses are added.
2. The Federal and State Governments should legislate a fixed minimum of 15% of annual education budgets for public universities, with disbursements tied to enrolment projections and released quarterly to prevent delays in operational and capital expenditures.

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