

SELECTION INTO NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: STUDENT'S ASSESSMENT OF POST UNIVERSITY MATRICULATION EXAMINATION

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Abstract

The joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in 1978 conducted its first selection into Nigerian universities. It normally offers admission to prospective candidates on the recommendations of universities following approved guidelines. However, complaints from different quarters including the universities have been made against JAMB in the recent years. Government after much hue and cry approved that universities could conduct their own selection examinations after the release of JAMB examination results. This examination, styled post university matriculation examination (PUME) is normally opened to candidates who obtained a minimum score which is university dependent. The program would soon be its fourth year and evaluative statements made on its efficacy may not have been based on sound research approaches and they have been from the perspective of different university managements. This study looked at PUME from the students' perspective. It examines the use, interpretation and confidence vis-à-vis the JAMB examination. The population comprised all students in Government universities in former Bendel State of Nigeria who took the PUME. A questionnaire was designed to explore the issues. Analysis was conducted using factor analysis descriptive statistics and interpretative norms and t-test of difference between independent means. As anticipated, a majority of the respondents showed a wide acceptance of PUME. Recommendations would accordingly be made. It is suggested that the PUME should stay as a selection avenue for quality entrants in universities in Nigeria. However, the system must be protected from the misconducts associated with JAMB examinations to increase credibility of its promise.

Introduction

In Nigeria, university education is a cherished commodity. It is the aspiration of potential secondary school graduates to get admitted into the university to pursue a degree. One major problem facing university system in Nigeria is that associated with selection and placement of students. This problem is not new and what the education system has tried to do over the years is to sort out these applicants with potential to benefit from education provided within the universities. Unfortunately, the number of applicants outweighs the number of available spaces. This has for a long time been the case.

In the early years of tertiary education in Nigeria, selection may not have been a very serious problem. Before independence, there was only one university, the University of Ibadan, Ibadan. By 1973, there were six universities. By this time, admission had become very competitive, the number of applicants rose greatly. The result was that many applicants had to apply for admission in more than one university. There was therefore the problem of multiple applications, examinations and acceptance. According to Salim (1997) the general untidiness of this uncoordinated system of admissions, and the attendant problems had assumed new proportions with the establishment of the new universities, polytechnics and colleges of education “(P.1)”. The establishment of the Joint Admissions Matriculation Board (JAMB) was therefore a welcome development. It conducted its first examination in 1978. Its main mandate is to select candidates for admission into Nigerian tertiary institutions and the belief is that it has tried to do this through screening those who would benefit from the available places in the nation’s universities, polytechnics and colleges of education.

The act setting up the board and subsequent amendments outline the functions of the board as ‘Conducting entrance examination into tertiary institutions in Nigeria, placing suitably qualified candidates in the institutions among others’ (Salim, 1997). In executing the selection mandate JAMB tries to apply uniformity in selection procedures and therefore operates within stipulated rules and guidelines. These include

specification with respect to quality of scores, vacancies, performance of applicants in entrance examination, subject combination for courses among others. The places available in tertiary educational institution are not limitless. The aspiration of almost all Nigerian secondary school graduates is to get admitted into a tertiary institution especially a university. These factors in addition to the general societal attitude towards meritocracy has created a situation where examination malpractice is an albatross on the neck of JAMB and indeed all public examination bodies in Nigeria. These bodies have not relented in the battle against this scourge but its effects can still be felt. One area this problem has manifested itself is in the quality of university entrants and consequently their products. Many people now see the products of universities as requiring retraining if they are to be able to do good quality jobs more so that they believe that their quality is low. When the issue of quality is raised, blames are laid at the doorsteps of JAMB. Unfortunately, very few people realize that the predicament of JAMB is a carry over effect from lower of the educational system. At those levels, teaching does not seem to be done properly and therefore the quality of many of their products is below standard. This is more so as “miracle centres” have mushroomed all over the country. The consequence is that applicants for admission go to any extent to ensure that they pass. At the university level, lecturers get caught in a web and therefore many unwholesome things happen. The result is that so many people obtain high grades in JAMB and do not have commensurate performance in university conducted examination, many university students have many carry over courses at the end of the session and employers of labour complain that university graduates have no functional skills.

From the fore going, it is noticed that the ugly and pitiable situation of higher education was concern to most important stake holders: parents, public and institutional management. There was therefore a call for each government university to conduct its own section examination. This was however protested by JAMB. Despite the protestation, the federal gave the universities the go ahead to further screen applicants for admission in the 2005/2007 session. Government however did not give guidelines as to how this was to be done. Therefore the post university matriculation examination (PUME) was born as a child of circumstance, expected to heal ills in university admission procedures. To do this effectively one expects the PUME to have good

perception in terms of use and interpretation which are validity questions (Nitko, 1999). The confidence is also important (Nwana, 1997; Afemikhe, 2005). One thing common to all government universities is that applicants must obtain a specified absolute minimum. For first generation federal universities, this is generally 200 marks. In addition, some universities administer another selection test on which the admission is fully based. Some others combine the marks obtained by candidates in the JAMB examination and its own examination or scores assigned to grades in the school certification examination.

Since the inception of PUME, many university administrators see it as a panacea to most problems associated with students such as cultism, radicalism and attitude towards academic work. In short some administrators see PUME as an educational reform government which if given an opportunity to run full cycle would lead to standard improvement. Within campus, failure rates are beginning to thin and students involved in examination malpractice, cultism are hardly found among students admitted through PUME.

These things are good, but what are the perceptions of students who are beneficiary of PUME? How do they see the use of PUME, the interpretation of scores obtained from PUME and confidence that they have on PUME? Therefore the research questions addressed in this study are:

1. How do students perceive the PUME programme generally?
2. How do they perceive the use interpretation and confidence on PUME related activities?
3. Are there differences in students' perception of the use, interpretation and confidence on PUME related activities in the state and federal universities used?

This study is significant on different grounds. First and foremost, JAMB as an important stakeholder in university selection process is well disposed towards PUME. It has not relented its attempt to get PUME abolished. Therefore result from this study should show the disposition of applicants for admission towards PUME so as to give it greater credibility when the good stories of university management are considered. Secondly, a consideration of emergent salient components of PUME should show areas in which in JAMB activities need to be improved. In addition the benefits which the university

system is presently gaining from admission, through PUME, particularly improved performance may be allowed to filter down the lower rungs of the educational system.

Methodology

This study was carried in the former Bendel state of Nigeria (Delta and Edo states). These states are populated by people who value western formal education. The number of applicants for university admission is usually very high. There are presently eight government approved universities in these states. Two are federal government owned, two are state universities and four are privately owned universities. One of the universities has just been approved and would admit its first batch of students in the 2008/2009 session. The population for this study is all students in the three remaining federal and state universities who have been exposed to PUME. The sample was however drawn from one state and one federal university. The expectation was to select 300 subjects from each university giving a sample size of six hundred. The returned useable questionnaires were three hundred and ninety three giving a return rate of 65.5%.

Data collection was effected through a questionnaire titled post university matriculation questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first part requested for such information as name of university, faculty and year of study otherwise called level. The second contained thirty items and respondents were requested to respond on a five-point scale of strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. For purposes of scoring positive items, strongly agree taken as 5, agree 4, undecided 3, disagree 2 and strongly disagree 1. The scoring of the negative items was a reversal of that used for positive items. On a rational basis, the item could be categorized into those dealing with use, interpretation and confidence. A factor analysis was conducted and this confirmed the existence of these three factors. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.707 for the scores. The analysis was executed using means and standard deviation. In particular for each positive item mean values greater or equal to 3.50 are indicative of agreement with the statement. Otherwise there is disagreement. The aggregate scores for the components were compared by carrying out a t-test of independent groups at 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of results

The first section of the analysis was a consideration of the components of the PUME perception scale. This involved the use of principal component analysis, involving a varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization. Initial analysis showed 9 components with eigen values greater than 1 and an observation of the scree plot showed an elbow appearing at the third component. Consequent upon this, 3 maximum components were therefore requested along with the rotation.

Using loadings of ± 0.30 to assign items to components, and examining the rotated component matrix, it is found that seven items which were not factorially pure. The factor loadings of these factors have been highlighted in table 1. The items distributions across components after removal of those that load heavily on more than one component are as follows: Component 1 has 12 items, component 2 has 7 items and component 3 has 4 items. Component 1 deals with credibility, component 2 focuses on the use and component 3 deals with interpretation of PUME scores.

Table 1: Rotated Component Matrix of PUME Questionnaire

	component		
Statement	1	2	3
PUME has made applicants for admission to compete on a level playing ground	.308	.211	.004
Without PUME my dreams of admission would not have been realized.	.204	.439	.208
There is no need for PUME; JAMB is just enough.	-.273	-.579	.211
Content for JAMB and PUME examinations are the same.	.209	-.0055	.303
Through PUME, I got admitted into my programme of choice.	.348	.343	.0063
Many students admitted through PUME have an adequate preparation for university education.	.405	.410	.148
I have confidence in the quality of students admitted through PUME.	.494	.415	.157
If JAMB alone were used, many students admitted through PUME would never have been admitted.	.437	.0041	-.199
Through PUME many students end up in courses for which they have no interest.	-.0061	-.476	-.0097
Merit does not seem to have been applied in selection	-.0070	-.558	-.0029

through PUME.			
PUME reduces the competition as only good quality applicants get selected.	.427	.175	.269
PUME is an easier examination than JAMB.	.0023	-.0008	.316
A combination of PUME and JAMB scores would be better for admission.	-.0038	.104	.648
A good mark in the PUME guarantees an admission.	.460	.142	.105
Cheating hardly takes place in PUME.	.442	.123	.238
JAMB scores do not reflect the applicants' level of knowledge.	.399	.126	-.221
Anybody who passes the PUME is sure to be admitted.	.573	.009	.232
PUME has increased the publics' confidence in University Admission process.	.644	.225	.0023
Students admitted through PUME are not easily swayed to 'block' lecturers.	.546	.209	.311
PUME has led to the selection of students who take their studies seriously.	.641	.365	.130
PUME is seen as an anti-dote to falling standards of university education.	.374	-.0025	.0091
Use of PUME scores alone is inadequate for admission.	-.277	-.0052	.523
The confidence of students admitted through PUME is high.	.447	.338	-.108
PUME is of no use.	-.0063	-.708	.262
With PUME only students who can benefit from university education get admitted.	.522	.0038	.414
PUME has reduced admission racketeering.	.600	.0086	-.0046
PUME will not instill sanity in university admission processes	-.154	-.594	.103
Universities use PUME as an avenue to make more money	-.105	-.598	-.217
Students admitted through PUME know the value of university education and would therefore not be lured into cult groups	.402	.161	.541
Through PUME sanity is brought to bear in the admission process.	.664	.267	.0084

The means and standard deviation of items which loaded significantly on more than one component are presented in table 2. Using the interpretative norm at item level it is noticed that all but two of the mean values fall in agreement region of the interpretative norm. The items on which there was no agreement are 'Students admitted through PUME are not easily swayed to 'block' lecturers' and 'Students admitted through PUME know the value of university education and would therefore not be lured into cult groups'.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of items that loaded across components

Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
Through PUME, I got admitted into my programme of choice.	3.737	1.44	Agree
Many students admitted through PUME have an adequate preparation for university education.	3.788	1.19	Agree
I have confidence in the quality of students admitted through PUME.	3.622	1.29	Agree
Students admitted through PUME are not easily swayed to 'block' lecturers.	2.863	1.402	Disagree
PUME has led to the selection of students who take their studies seriously.	3.600	1.232	Agree
The confidence of students admitted through PUME is high.	3.737	1.152	Agree
Students admitted through PUME know the value of university education and would therefore not be lured into cult groups	2.748	1.397	Disagree

This is understandable as 'blocking' appears to be a systemic problem within Nigerian higher education institutions and membership of cult related groups could happen through many ways other than willingness.

Table3 contains the mean and standard deviation of responses to items dealing with credibility of PUME. Items for which students disagree include 'PUME reduces the competition as only good quality applicants get selected', 'Cheating hardly takes place in PUME', 'Anybody who passes the PUME is sure to be admitted', 'PUME is seen as an anti-dote to falling standards of university education'. A cursory examination of these items would indicate that examination malpractice eradication is not usually very easy, and all applicants for admission cannot be admitted otherwise more effective methods would not be called for.

Table 3: Statistics of items on credibility of PUME

Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
PUME has made applicants for admission to compete on a level playing ground	3.666	1.378	Agree
If JAMB alone were used, many students admitted through PUME would never have been admitted.	3.763	1.389	Agree
PUME reduces the competition as only good quality applicants get selected.	3.468	1.348	Disagree
A good mark in the PUME guarantees an admission.	3.957	1.246	Agree
Cheating hardly takes place in PUME.	3.219	1.444	Disagree
JAMB scores do not reflect the applicants' level of knowledge.	3.784	1.216	Agree
Anybody who passes the PUME is sure to be admitted.	3.363	1.378	Disagree
PUME has increased the publics' confidence in University Admission process.	3.777	1.144	Agree
PUME is seen as an anti-dote to falling standards of university education.	3.090	1.358	Disagree
PUME has reduced admission racketeering.	3.561	1.264	Agree
Through PUME sanity is brought to bear in the admission process.	3.558	1.218	Agree

Table 4 contains the statistics for items in the Use scale. The results indicate that respondents disagree with all the statements. An examination of the items shows that they are all in the negative. Therefore the respondents believe that PUME is not a miracle worker anyway; the individual possibly needs to work hard to get admitted. In addition the respondents are of the opinion that PUME should be conducted alongside JAMB as is presently the case. One useful result here is the fact that the respondents do not see money making as the motive behind the conduct of PUME. This may be because the amount normally charged is pegged for the two universities used for this study.

Table 4: Statistics of items on Use of PUME

Item	Mean	Standard	Decision
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		deviation	
Without PUME my dreams of admission would not have been realized.	2.896	1.551	Disagree
There is no need for PUME; JAMB is just enough.	2.148	1.353	Disagree
Through PUME many students end up in courses for which they have no interest.	3.281	1.292	Disagree
Merit does not seem to have been applied in selection through PUME.	2.838	1.404	Disagree
PUME is of no use.	1.816	1.180	Disagree
PUME will not instill sanity in university admission processes	2.867	1.352	Disagree
Universities use PUME as an avenue to make more money	3.205	1.436	Disagree

Table 5 contains the statistics for items bothering on interpretation of PUME. From the table respondents are of the opinion that the content is not the same, and PUME is not easier than JAMB. An interesting result here is the fact that respondents do not believe that a combination of PUME and JAMB scores would be better for conducting admissions but however are in the affirmative that use of PUME scores would be adequate. These results seem to support the widely held view on campuses which believe that JAMB has lost its glory.

Table 5: Statistics of items on Interpretation of PUME

Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
Content for JAMB and PUME examinations are the same.	2.457	1.284	Disagree
PUME is an easier examination than JAMB.	3.500	1.359	Disagree
A combination of PUME and JAMB scores would be better for admission.	3.389	1.455	Disagree
Use of PUME scores alone is inadequate for admission.	2.770	1.345	Disagree

Table 6 contains the means and standard deviation for the scores of the three components. From the table it is noticed that University of Benin respondents had mean scores of

41.065, 18.921 and 12.544 respectively for confidence, use and interpretation components respectively. At the Ambrose Alli University the mean scores were 38.332, 19.595, and 11.816 for confidence, use and interpretation components respectively.

Table 6: Comparison of mean scores of responses on components of respondents from both universities

Component	University	N	mean	s.d	t	Sig
Confidence	University of Benin	92	41.065	6.62	2.956	0.003
	Ambrose Alli University	238	38.332	7.79		
Use	University of Benin	89	18.921	4.35	-1.293	.197
	Ambrose Alli University	252	19.595	4.18		
Interpretation	University of Benin	103	12.544	3.313	2.036	0.042
	Ambrose Alli University	261	11.816	2.970		

From table 6 it noticed that significant differences were observed between responses of respondents from the two universities in the area of use and interpretation of PUME.

Conclusions

University selection decision is a high stake one in Nigeria. The number of places has since the inception of higher education been few when compared to available number of applicants. This in the early years of led to multiple applications by applicants to ensure they get place in at least one university. Unfortunately this led to multiple admissions with some university places unutilized. Government's reaction to this was the setting up of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board to regulate admissions. Initially the way rendered its stewardship was commended but with time there were hues and cry because of examination misconduct and other related matters which eroded public confidence in its delivering of the mandate assigned to it.

Government's reaction to this was authorization of universities to conduct the PUME. This has been seen as a welcome development which can help to enhance standard of education at all levels. Managements of universities have painted very beautiful pictures of the wonders of PUME but these have not taken cognizance of students' opinion. This was the focus of this study. It examined the use, confidence and interpretation of the

PUME results. The results showed a wide acceptance of PUME even though respondents did not indicate that JAMB should not be used in the process of selection.

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