

## Research Article

# School Enrolment Growth and Carrying Capacity of Universities in Imo State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study examined the impact of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria. Three research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted the descriptive survey design with a population of 2,929 academic staff in the two public universities in Imo State. The sample size was 352 representing 12% of the population drawn using stratified random sampling technique. An instrument titled 'School Enrolment Growth and Carrying Capacity of Universities Questionnaire (SEGCCUQ)', structured on the 4 point scale, validated by experts and with reliability index of 0.84 was used for data generation. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level. Among others, the study revealed that factors such as natural increase of population, influx of migrants, enforcement of compulsory education, raising of school-leaving age, increased enrolment of girls and so on influence school enrolment growth that bear on the carrying capacity of universities. It was recommended among others that the factors should help the governments and institutions to forecast enrollment more effectively likewise permit them to make adjustments to meet current or future enrolment.

**Keywords:** School Enrolment Growth, Carrying Capacity, Universities.

## Introduction

Universities are citadels of learning for the development of expertise and high level manpower necessary for technological and sustainable development. This is to say that universities are the forces that mould skilled competent and high quality manpower needed to meet the needs of the society. These intellectual climates are the industries for the production and reproduction of knowledge among people with the aim of preserving and maintaining the social structure that will be able to guarantee social order and changes in the society. In other words, university institutions are saddled with knowledge production, exchange and dissemination for the development of mankind and society. It then implies that universities as fountains of knowledge are expected to be centers of excellence and sources of quality education provision. No wonder, Ukaigwe and Wariwei (2016) quipped that university institutions are designed to provide high quality education for citizens of the society for which they are established. In order to maintain quality and standard of university education in Nigeria, the policy of carrying capacity was adopted.

Carrying capacity is the population size that a certain environment can sustain, or carry. It defines the appropriate size of a population an environment can support. This mechanism was adopted into education by the National Universities Commission (NUC) to control the enrolment of students in Nigerian universities in order to deliver quality education. In the education parlance, Akpan (2014) viewed carrying capacity as the maximum number of students that an institution can sustain for

qualitative education based on available human and material resources. This entails that the total number of students a university should admit in a year should be on the basis of available facilities, staff and other resources. In this respect, there is limit to students' intake in relation to available resources and staff strength. In line with the above view, Adewale (2014) stated that the policy of carrying capacity introduced by NUC tells us how many students each and every university can take based on available resources. One factor that distorts the carrying capacity of institutions is school enrolment growth.

School enrolment refers to the number of students enrolled in the school. This entails the total number of students properly registered and/or attending classes at a school. According to UNESCO (2002), school enrolment refers to as the number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age. School enrolment is a dynamic factor that is to say it can grow as well as dwindle. The growth or decrease of school enrolment depends on the situations on ground. Student enrolment also varies across the educational systems owing to the availability of infrastructural and required manpower. To this end, Onasanya and Adegbiya as cited in Ileuma (2015) opined that the availability of the school buildings and other plans contributes to good school enrolment as they enhance effective teaching-learning activities. The school enrolments are rapidly expanding in the situation where equipment, facilities and manpower are difficult to supply in adequate proportions.

Universities in Nigeria are experiencing the challenge of school enrolment growth which has exceeded their carrying capacities. The picture of scholars and researchers about the quantum enrolment of students in Nigerian universities speaks volume. In his study Akpochafo (2011) found that both the federal and state universities (public universities) are seriously guilty of over-enrolment while most private universities have under-enrolment. Another fact that emerged from his study is that all the over-crowded universities over shot their carrying capacities by at least ten thousand students and five universities did so by at least fifteen thousand students while two exceeded their limits by at least twenty thousand students. Varrella (2020) submitted that in 2017, Nigerian universities counted 1.7 million undergraduate students and 234 thousand postgraduate students. NUC (2020) in Agency Report disclosed that as at present there is a total population enrollment of slightly over two million in the entire university system, which spells a very serious problem. The figure is a little higher than what it was in 2017, where the number was put at 1.7 million undergraduate students and 234 thousand postgraduate students. The profile of tertiary enrolment in Nigeria reveals that tertiary enrolment has relatively been increasing over the years. This is a worrisome situation taking cognizance of the carrying capacities of the universities. The above scenario poised the researchers to examine the influence of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The carrying capacity is a strategy initiated by the NUC to control the enrolment of students in Nigerian universities in order to deliver quality education. The NUC in 2004 officially introduced and adopted the policy of carrying capacity. The policy states the total number of students a university should admit in a year on the basis of available facilities, staff and other resources. With the introduction of the carrying capacity, the enrolment of students is greatly controlled to a manageable limit. This is to ensure that the universities offer high-quality education. However, the researcher observed that many universities have over-enrolled their carrying capacities in view of giving education access to prospective students. It is worth noting that a university with a negative deviation from its carrying capacity has over-enrolled and this could have a negative impact on the quality of university education. This does not augur well for the training of high class manpower for the development of the country. This state of affairs has called for an empirical study to find out the factors influencing school enrolment growth, the effects of school enrolment growth and the measures to ameliorate the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the following:

- 1) The factors influencing school enrolment growth that bear on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria?
- 2) The effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria?
- 3) The measures to ameliorate the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria?

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

- 1) What are the factors influencing school enrolment growth that bear on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria?
- 2) What are the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria?
- 3) What are the measures to ameliorate the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level:

- 1) There is no significant difference between the mean values of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the factors influencing school enrolment growth that bear on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria.
- 2) There is no significant difference between the mean scores of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria.
- 3) There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the measures to ameliorate the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

The expanding rate of school population world over and in particular Nigeria is a major issue today confronting every educational system. School enrolment growth has continued to rise at an exponential rate. In his study on determinants of enrolment in Nigerian Universities, Satope (2014) found expansion of both primary and secondary education, high rate of unemployment in Nigeria, the demographic trends in Nigeria, the history of enrolment, historical performance of the institution and human resource needs as determinants of enrolment in Nigerian universities. Olaniyan (2011) argued that this increase in the enrolment of students could partially be traced to the high rate of population increase in Nigeria coupled with an increased awareness of the positive benefits of education. Obasi and Ohia (2015) highlighted that the growth rate of Nigeria's population has been significantly high with the corresponding increase in the demand for places in her universities; imbalance in the educational attainment among the different regions of the country coupled with some other socio-cultural and religious factors; and universalization of basic education obviously have exacerbated the demand for higher education. In Ghana the President's Committee on review of education as cited in Yelkpieri, *et al.*, (2012) opined that the main factors that account for the phenomenal increase in enrolment in tertiary institutions in Africa include: the rapid growth of population, expansion in pre-tertiary education and the continuous increase of students' quest for tertiary education.

School enrolment growth goes with its negative impact on the carrying capacity of universities. Many of the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria in such condition have come under severe strain. Terhile, *et al.*, (2013) in their study found that explosive students' population presents the problem of overstretched use of limited facilities and acute shortage of instructional materials,

teachers are made to be ineffective, class management becomes difficult for the teachers, students suffer from poor sanitary conditions and performance of students is not good enough as the desired attention is not given as regards to assessments on work covered. Arnette (2018) identified the following effects of population growth on the education system: teachers are overburdened with the ever increasing number of students, school overcrowding which can cause negative feelings among the students, lack of control of students due to inadequate teachers, and lack of funding and insufficient funds to provide enrichment activities to the students. Nwokolo (2017) asserted that academic staff of higher institutions in Nigeria are faced with increasing academic workload as the number of students enrolment is swelling, coupled with increasing number of courses and academic programmes being introduced. The study of Iwu and Iwu (2013) revealed that high number of enrolment put pressure on meager school facilities while heads of schools, teachers and pupils are affected by general lack facilities. Yelkpieri, *et al.*, (2012) opined that large class size makes it impossible for the lecturers to manage and teach effectively, since some students neither pay attention to nor participate in class activities, but only add to the number. Jimoh (as cited in Akpochafo, 2011) averred that large class size leads to consequences such as increase in the teachers' work load, inadequacy of learning facilities, lack of adequate space, high level of indiscipline and their resultant psychological and physiological effects on students' achievement. Ugwulashi (2017) quipped that school population increase inflates the issue of mismanagement of school resources.

Ameliorating the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities is a necessity to cater for the huge number of students in the universities. Many of the institutions of higher learning with over enrollment world over are now coping with the expansion in student numbers through different measures. Yelkpieri, *et al.*, (2012) found the following as the solutions to the problem of large class size: to provide quality public address system to enhance lecture delivery; to employ teaching assistants to organize tutorials in small groups for students; to build more lecture halls to enable departments to break large classes into smaller ones; to appoint more lecturers to reduce student-lecturer ratio; to place emphasis on internet and radio lecture; to encourage and strengthen distance education; to give group work and select students at random from the group to do the presentation and also answer questions.

Akpochafo (2011) in his study recommended that universities must engage more qualified lecturers, put up more lecture halls, laboratories, workshops, libraries with internet facilities, and create more conducive learning environments to ameliorate the effects of over-enrolment on curriculum implementation. Ugwulashi (2017) stated that there is great need for more expansion and upgrading of educational facilities to accommodate completely the increasing school population in a safe manner in this 21<sup>st</sup> century for quality education service delivery. Yelkpieri, *et al.*, (2012) asserted that naturally, in order to mitigate the effects of rapid population growth, there is the need to expand access of higher education through increasing funding. Enaohwo (2017) submitted that through these measures, it is expected that we can overcome the challenge of enrolment growth, without denying children the right to education.

## **Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive survey design with a population of 2,929 academic staff in the two public universities in Imo State. The sample size was 352 representing 12% of the population drawn using stratified random sampling technique. An instrument titled 'School Enrolment Growth and Carrying Capacity of Universities Questionnaire (SEGCCUQ)', structured on the 4 point scale, validated by experts and with reliability index of 0.84 was used for data generation. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level.

## **Presentation of Results**

**Research Question One:** What are the factors influencing school enrolment growth that bear on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria?

**Table 1. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on the Factors influencing School Enrolment Growth that bear on the Carrying Capacity of Universities in Imo State, Nigeria.**

S. No	Factors Variables	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1	Natural increase of population	3.09	0.51	Agreed
2	Influx of migrants	2.82	0.43	Agreed
3	Enforcement of compulsory education	3.04	0.57	Agreed
4	Raising of school-leaving age	2.80	1.01	Agreed
5	Increased enrolment of girls	2.98	0.64	Agreed
6	Development of rural schools	2.79	0.72	Agreed
7	Reduction of drop-outs	2.49	1.03	Disagreed
8	Elimination of non-promotion	2.44	1.10	Disagreed
9	Economic value of education	3.10	0.87	Agreed

Table 1 reveals that except for items 7 and 8 with mean scores of 2.49 and 2.44 respectively which are below the criterion mean of 2.50, the other items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 9 have mean scores above the criterion mean. The data showed that items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 9 are the factors influencing school enrolment growth that bear on the carrying capacity of universities.

**Research Question Two:** What are the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria?

**Table 2. Mean values and standard deviations on the Effects of School Enrolment Growth on the Carrying Capacity of Universities in Imo State, Nigeria.**

S. No	Effects Variables	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
10	Adequacy of teaching staff in the school becomes a nagging problem.	3.09	0.41	Agreed
11	Overburdening of lecturers with academic work overload.	3.07	0.48	Agreed
12	High level of teacher-student ratio making teaching and learning ineffective.	3.08	0.50	Agreed
13	Shortage of school buildings and related facilities.	2.89	0.69	Agreed
14	Overcrowded student hostel and other facilities leading to congestion.	2.92	0.86	Agreed
15	Undue Pressure on the limited facilities.	3.00	0.66	Agreed
16	Class management becomes difficult for the lecturers.	3.05	0.59	Agreed
17	Students suffer from poor sanitary conditions.	3.03	0.63	Agreed

Table 2 indicates that all the items 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17 have mean values of 3.09, 3.07, 3.08, 2.89, 2.92, 3.00, 3.05 and 3.03 respectively.

The mean values are above the criterion mean of 2.50. The data revealed that all the identified items are the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities.

**Research Question Three:** What are the measures to ameliorate the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria?

**Table 3. Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations on the Measures to ameliorate the Effects of School Enrolment Growth on the Carrying Capacity of Universities in Imo State, Nigeria.**

S. No	Measures Variables	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
18	Recruitment of adequate quality teaching staff to reduce student-lecturer ratio.	3.14	0.45	Agreed
19	Conducting of double sessions in the school for effective teaching and learning.	3.06	0.57	Agreed
20	Use of buildings unsuitable for school purposes for lectures	2.87	0.71	Agreed
21	Build more hostel accommodation to decongest the students for healthy living.	3.00	1.01	Agreed
22	Full equipping of schools to meet the needs of teachers and students.	3.10	0.47	Agreed
23	Build more lecture halls to enable departments to break large classes into smaller ones.	3.01	0.58	Agreed
24	Introducing of internet and radio lecture	2.46	1.06	Disagreed
25	Provision of quality public address system to enhance lecture delivery	2.91	0.64	Agreed

Table 3 shows that except for item 24 with mean rating of 2.46 which is below the criterion mean of 2.50, the other items 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 25 have mean ratings above the criterion mean.

The data indicated items 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 25 as the measures to ameliorate the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities.

### Hypotheses

**HO<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean values of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the factors influencing school enrolment growth that bear on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria.

**Table 4. Summary of z-test Analysis on the Mean Values of FUTO and IMSU Academic Staff on the Factors influencing School Enrolment Growth that bear on the Carrying Capacity of Universities in Imo State, Nigeria.**

Respondents	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
FUTO Academic Staff	225	2.90	0.75	350	1.23	1.96	NS
IMSU Academic Staff	127	2.78	0.78				

Table 4 shows that at 350 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance the calculated z-value is 1.23. Since the calculated z-value of 1.23 is less than the table value of 1.96, the study therefore failed to reject the null hypothesis, and concludes that there is no significant difference between the mean values of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the factors influencing school enrolment growth that bear on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State.

**HO<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria.

**Table 5. Summary of z-test Analysis on the Mean Scores of FUTO and IMSU Academic Staff on the Effects of School Enrolment Growth on the Carrying Capacity of Universities in Imo State, Nigeria.**

Respondents	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
FUTO Academic Staff	225	3.00	0.64	350	0.35	1.96	NS
IMSU Academic Staff	127	3.03	0.57				

Table 5 above indicates that the calculated z-value is 0.35 at 350 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated z-value of 0.35 is less than the table value of 1.96, the null hypothesis is therefore retained and the study concludes that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State.

**HO<sub>3</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the measures to ameliorate the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State, Nigeria.

**Table 6. Summary of z-test Analysis on the Measures to ameliorate the Effects of School Enrolment Growth on the Carrying Capacity of Universities in Imo State, Nigeria.**

Respondents	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
FUTO Academic Staff	225	2.98	0.65	350	0.76	1.96	NS
IMSU Academic Staff	127	2.91	0.72				

Table 6 reveals that at 350 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance the calculated z-value is 0.76. Since the calculated z-value of 0.76 is less than the table value of 1.96, the null hypothesis is therefore upheld and the study concludes that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the measures to ameliorate the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State.

### Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that natural increase of population, influx of migrants, enforcement of compulsory education, raising of school-leaving age, increased enrolment of girls, development of rural schools and economic value of education are the factors that influence school enrolment growth that bear on the carrying capacities of universities. The corresponding test of hypothesis revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean values of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the factors influencing school enrolment growth that bear on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State. The finding complements Satope (2014) who found expansion of both primary and secondary education, high rate of unemployment in Nigeria, the demographic trends in Nigeria, the history of enrolment, historical performance of the institution and human resource needs as determinants of enrolment in Nigerian universities. The finding agrees with Olaniyan (2011), Obasi and Ohia (2015) who in their scholarly expositions established the identified variables as the factors that influence student enrolment growth. The result supports the view of the President's Committee on review of education In Ghana as cited in Yelkper, *et al.*, (2012) that the main factors that account for the phenomenal increase in enrolment in tertiary institutions in Africa include: the rapid growth of population, expansion in pre-tertiary education and the continuous increase of students' quest for tertiary education.

The study also indicated the following as the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities: adequacy of teaching staff in the school becomes a nagging problem, overburdening of lecturers with academic work overload, high level of teacher-student ratio making teaching and learning ineffective, shortage of school buildings and related facilities, overcrowded student hostel and other facilities leading to congestion, undue Pressure on the limited facilities, class management becomes difficult for the lecturers and students suffer from poor sanitary conditions. The test of hypothesis indicated that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State.

The finding complements the effects identified by Arnette (2018) which include: teachers are overburdened with the ever increasing number of students, school overcrowding which can cause negative feelings among the students, lack of control of students due to inadequate teachers, and lack of funding and insufficient funds to provide enrichment activities to the students. The finding is in tandem with Terhile, *et al.*, (2013), Nwokolo (2017), Iwu and Iwu (2013), Yelkpieri, *et al.*, (2012), Jimoh (as cited in Akpochafo, 2011) and Ugwulashi (2017). These scholars and researchers have in their scholarly expositions and studies established and found these variables as the effects of school enrolment growth on the education system.

The study equally showed the following: recruitment of adequate quality teaching staff to reduce student-lecturer ratio, conducting of double sessions in the school for effective teaching and learning, use of buildings unsuitable for school purposes for lectures, build more hostel accommodation to decongest the students for healthy living, full equipping of schools to meet the needs of teachers and students, build more lecture halls to enable departments to break large classes into smaller ones and provision of quality public address system to enhance lecture delivery as the measures to ameliorate the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities. Its corresponding hypothesis showed that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of FUTO and IMSU academic staff on the measures to ameliorate the effects of school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities in Imo State.

The finding is in tandem with the findings of Yelkpieri, *et al.*, (2012). The finding corroborates Akpochafo (2011), Ugwulashi (2017), Yelkpieri, *et al.*, (2012) who in their expositions established some of these variables as the measures to ameliorate the effects of school enrolment growth in the universities. Enaohwo (2017) submitted that through these measures, it is expected that we can overcome the challenge of enrolment growth, without denying children the right to education.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that numerous factors are responsible for the school enrolment growth that bear on the carrying capacity of universities, school enrolment growth bears ripples effects on the carrying capacity of universities and there are cogent measures to ameliorate the effects of the school enrolment growth on the carrying capacity of universities.

## **Recommendations**

The study recommended the following taking cognizance of the findings:

- ✓ The factors should help the government and institutions to forecast enrollment more effectively likewise permit them to make adjustments to meet current or future enrolment.
- ✓ The effects result should aid planners to simulate, forecast and project the future use of resources with precision, thus avoiding the pitfall of resources and wastage.
- ✓ University administrators should adopt the measures to ensure that the effects are ameliorated as well as cater for the huge number of students in the institutions.

## **Conflicts of interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.



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