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What Has Driven Increased Demand for Higher Education in West Africa Economic and Monetary Union Countries Between the 1990s and the Turn of the 2000s?

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Abstract

Literature cumulated evidence indicating an increased demand for higher education over the period 1990s and at the turn of 2000s in West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) countries, questioning the mainstream assumption that increased costs of higher education coupled with low revenues of students' families, through providing deterrence to prospective students, results in decreased demand in higher education. It becomes, therefore, puzzling to observe that despite existence of such barriers as increased enrolment costs and low student family revenues, these countries have, nonetheless, experienced increased demand for higher education. This observation prompted the question: What has driven increased demand for higher education in West Africa Economic and Monetary Union countries between the 1990s and the turn of the 2000s? The paper use Process Tracing to investigate higher education institutions supply, accessibility, and affordability, and downplays the relevance of mainstream rational choice theories, as they are too often pressed into service as providing the relevant frameworks for explaining demand for higher education, while advocating the relevance of the public policy-driven model as the conceptual framework accounting for the observed increase.

Keywords: *Institutions' Supply; Institutions' Accessibility; Costs' Affordability; Demand Drivers; Higher Education; Increased Demand; Public Policy; WAEMU*

Introduction

'Higher education can be broadly defined as any form of post-secondary education or training. It includes public and private post-secondary vocational and university education, as well as science and technology research[1]. Higher education in Africa, patterned after the European model (Altbach & Selvaratnam,1989; Fomunyam, 2022), has long been a laggard in terms of demand. The picture always depicted of higher education, starting from the independence periods to the beginning of the 1990s was one of luxury (AUC, 2016: Doh, 2012), and, therefore, as an unaffordable domain reserved for the most privileged households (Banya & Elu, 2001; World Bank,1999) of the post-colonial ruling elite (Tefera, 2016). This trend is, however, changing as the continent and, especially, the francophone West Africa, has undergone, decades ago, some policy reforms resulting in structural changes, suggesting that some dynamics are underlying the often perceived stalemate in demand for higher education. The regional organization bringing together francophone west African countries is West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU). The treaty establishing the WAEMU was born on January 10, 1994 in Dakar. The Union is made up of eight countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo and Guinea-Bissau) which covers an area of 3,506,126 km2, and has 123.6 million inhabitants (WAEMU, 2022). Of the eight member countries, only Guinea-Bissau is not a francophone but a Lusophony country. Over the same period the costs of enrolment at higher education institutions rose to unprecedented levels, becoming thereby, a potential barrier for students contemplating the perspective of pursuing higher education.

Academic scholarship as well as studies have come up with findings indicating as well lively as growing an interest in higher education, as gross enrolment ratios(GER) established new and unprecedented records, negating current narrative about its unaffordability. Some evidence from scholarships and studies seem to suggest that the end of the 20th century and the turn of the 21rst century marked an important disruption of the formerly observed trend and the starting point of a new one in the trajectory of the demand for higher education in francophone West Africa. According to UNESCO (2010), there has been improved access to education in Africa, and an increase of 80% has been observed at the higher education level. Evidence indicate an increase demand for higher education in many countries in Africa. This trend in demand for higher education has been identified and documented by academics and scholars from various disciplines, among them Economics (Bloom, Canning, Chan & Lee 2014; Adeniyi, & Adedeji, 2020), Political Sciences (Mngomezulu, 2014) and Demography (Agboola & Ofoegbu, 2010; Salihu, & Jamil, 2015). More and more students, they pointed out, are applying for university degree programs in a way that is unprecedented in the recorded historical trend in demand for higher education in these countries. Several academics and scholars sought, therefore, to investigate the drivers of this higher education demand. This paper joins the efforts by academics and scholars at investigating the drivers of this trend, and asks the following question: What has driven increased demand for higher education in West Africa Economic and Monetary Union countries between the 1990s and the turn of the 2000s? The paper, by focusing on highlighting WAEMU level policies and their supporting measures, seeks to account for the observed growth in demand for higher education in terms of supply, accessibility and affordability. The paper, while addressing this question, is organized into four sections: section 1 briefly presents the statement of the problem, section 2 reviews the state-of-the art research and the theoretical frameworks, section 3 presents the Research design, and section 4 the results and discussion.

[1] African Development Fund, Multinational, Support for Higher Education in WAEMU countries Appraisal, Report Department of Social Development, Central and West Regions, MAY 2006

I- Statement of the Problem

With the higher education gross enrolment rate (GER) reaching 8.6% each year between 1970 and 2008, there is, analysts observed, a growing pressure on higher education. Projections anticipate that more and more students will be eligible for higher education, while less of them will, however, be likely to be successful in accessing to it. Sub-Saharan Africa, it is projected, will experience a unique demographic transition, which might, according to UNESCO, result in an "explosive growth" to which African universities must be prepared to cope with. While public universities have, it is noticed, doubled from roughly 100 to nearly 200 between 1990 and 2007, and private higher institutions increased in number over the same period, from a few to about 4688, African universities are unable to absorb the increasing demand for tertiary education. Despite the rapid growth, only 6% of the tertiary education age cohort was enrolled in higher institutions in 2008, compared to the global average of 26%. However, the region has come a long way since 1970, when the GER was less than 1%[2]. While there were fewer than 200,000 higher education students enrolled in the region in 1970, this number soared to over 4.5 million in 2008 – a more than 20-fold increase. The number of students in the seven Francophone countries rose from 77,744 in 1990 to 254,279 in 2001, representing a 250% growth rate between 1980 and 1990[3]. In that period, Guinea-Bissau did not yet have a university, and most of its officials were educated abroad. In 2004, the number of students in the eight countries stood at 315,591, representing a growth rate of 24.11 % between 2001 and 2004. Demographic pressure from a young population and greater access at the primary and the secondary levels, it is held, placed increased social demand in higher education. Expenditures on social assistance is regressive, and comprises scholarships, lodging, food, transportation, health coverage for students. Demand excess coupled with underfunding compounded the situation of higher education, as reports are emphatic about overcrowded classrooms, limited access to equipment, deterioration of facilities. In Francophone West African countries, the concept of affordability in higher education is often framed by the low registration fees and public funding of institutions. For example, the 2000 study on higher education in WAEMU countries revealed that the average annual expenditure per student was only CFAF 278 000 in Benin, CFAF 664 000 in Côte d'Ivoire, CFAF 798000 in Senegal, compared with CFAF 990 000 in Sub-Saharan Africa. There is, evidence indicate, a continued growth of number of students enrolled in private institutions, and there are wide gaps between countries in terms of access to higher education[4].

Claim is recurrent in neo-liberal economics that the sole or overwhelmingly primary purpose of higher education is to provide individuals with a benefit in the form of higher earnings. Demand for education is, then, related to existence of a labour market. And, it becomes, therefore, compulsory to examine what is this labour market like that requires job seekers to acquire job skills through higher education (Shultz 1961). Though Africa has been a laggard, in the 1980s and 1990s, by comparison to other regions in enjoying economic growth, the continent emerged as a developing part of the word, enjoying economic growth higher than any developing part of the world, with some countries in West Africa registering nearing double-digit growth (Mbaye & Gueye, 2018). The African economy whose growth is mostly driven by such core sectors as agriculture, oil, and mining, has low productivity of agriculture, with inherently capital intensive mining and mineral industries. It employs little local labour, with only a marginal share of the revenues generated left behind. The performance of this economy in creating decent employment was poor (Mbaye & Gueye, 2018). Despite the current upward trend observed in the working-age population, the level of labor force participation does not increase. Serious obstacles are still hindering the employability of job seekers, with younger ones being the most adversely affected.

[2] Trends in Tertiary Education: Sub-Saharan Africa UIS Fact Sheet, December 2010, No 10

[3] African Development Fund, Multinational, Support for Higher Education in WAEMU countries Appraisal, Report Department of Social Development, Central and West Regions, MAY 2006

[4] African Development Fund, Multinational, Support for Higher Education in WAEMU countries Appraisal, Report Department of Social Development, Central and West Regions, MAY 2006

In addition, over this period of surge in demand for higher education, many countries in francophone West Africa, conducted policy reforms and implemented some programs. Policy reforms addressed supply, accessibility and affordability issues associated with higher education, through privatization of tertiary education (Varghese 2004, Altback 1999), promoting, thereby, private ownership and operation of higher education institutions, and supporting measures were designed and implemented that aimed at offering more public training institutions (universities, colleges), while expanding existing facilities and infrastructures. The report by Francophone University Agency (AUF) provides us with insight into the number of public and private institutions (universities and colleges) in WAEMU countries currently offering higher education. Benin has 3, Burkina Faso has 9, Côte d'Ivoire has 12, Mali has 7, Niger has 4, Senegal has 17 and Togo has 5 higher education institutions (AUF). Between 1970, and 2008, the period covered by the study, most west African countries had one or two state-owned and state-operated training institutions in the form of universities or colleges. These institutions built in the 1970s, for most of them, had students' ratios in excess of their capacities of receiving and training students. Overcrowding and class cancelation due to lack of classroom were common place in these institutions[5]. Private institutions offering higher education scarcely exist in these countries. These factors compounded in shortage in higher education institutions' supply for prospective students. And, wherever privately-owned institutions offering higher education exist, the affordability issue raises barrier to enrolment, for in difference to the state-owned and state-operated institutions, the tuition fees charged by these institutions for training were higher, excluding, then, those prospective students from poor socio-economic backgrounds. For those students from low-income families, the affordability presents a barrier to enrolment at higher education institutions (Benjamin et al. 2011). And, there is evidence to the fact that the costs of enrolment at higher education institutions in terms of tuition fees and ancillaries increased over time. In 2004, in the WAEMU eight countries, the highest number of students per 100,000 inhabitants was 744 in Côte d'Ivoire, and the lowest was 96 in Niger, with the rest falling between this two ends of the spectrum[6].

While increasing number of higher education institutions, as reforms promoted private ownership (Varghese 2004c), along their geographical distribution, may reflects the expanding supply of higher education, social assistance provided to students by governments is regressive, and students rely more on their families' revenues to fund their studies. At the same time tuitions fees charged by universities increased. Furthermore, tuition fees charged by private higher education institutions are unaffordable for students from low income socio-economic backgrounds. Though no information on supply of higher education institutions (HEIs) per regions or provinces exist for WAEMU countries over the period covered by our research paper, we nonetheless know that private institutions are supplied not only in the capital cities and other large cities as from the time of independences, but also elsewhere in the countries. So, even though expansion of higher education is occurring, in part, through supply of institutions by private investors, with a change in their geographic distribution, regressive social assistance expenditures for students coupled with higher tuition fees, might water down any prospect of heightening higher education demand. These observed trends in higher education might, based on some assumptions, present a financial barrier to higher education enrolment. Reports on gross enrolment rates (GER) in higher education, in WAEMU countries, meanwhile, indicate a growing trend, questioning the current assumption that increasing costs of higher education coupled with low revenues of students' families, through providing deterrence to prospective students, drives down higher education gross enrolment rate (GER). In becomes, therefore, puzzling to observe that, despite these observed barriers, the WAEMU countries have experienced increased demand for higher education, as expressed in increased gross enrolment rate from 1970 to 2004. Arise from this observation the following questions: (i)Is demand for higher education labour-markets' policies-driven? (ii)Is demand for higher education shaped by public

[5] *Study on higher education in WAEMU countries* PHASE 1 SUMMARY AND SUPPORT OPTIONS for a new vision of higher education: Integration, Relevance and Quality Final report November 2004

[6] *Study on higher education in WAEMU countries* PHASE 1 SUMMARY AND SUPPORT OPTIONS for a new vision of higher education: Integration, Relevance and Quality Final report November 2004

policies? (iii) What is the nexus between public policies and demand for higher education, that accounts for observed surge in demand?

II- State of the Art Literature

Mainstream scholarly literature on demand for higher education have apparently focused on the nexus between, on the one hand, the sector-specific-and job-specific skills to be gained through investing in higher education, and, on the other, economic and social benefits to be derived in labour-market, to account for the demand for higher education (Schultz 1963; Becker 1965; Oketch 2006). As a consequence, a large body of scholarly literature grew around the subject of labour market-driven demand for higher education (Malhotra, 2008; L. Mathis, Robert & H. Jackson, 2011). Pioneered by such famous advocates of rational choice theories as Amartya Sen and Gary Becker, who made a ground-breaking work in the field of education economics, this school of thought developed theoretical frameworks to investigate why students actually place demand on higher education. The resulting large body of knowledge comprises research papers and study reports approaching demand for education, and particularly, demand for higher education through the lenses of a profit-maximizing student seeking to invest in higher education as a way of intertemporal transference of benefits. The student in higher education, these advocates assume, in exchange for securing more valuable economic returns expected to be delivered in the neoliberalist labour-market through acquiring higher sector-specific-and job-specific skills, relinquishes the right to enjoy their economic resources to be applied towards tuition fees and ancillary costs, and postpones enjoying financial earnings from a current job, (Thomas et al., 2003). Building on this core rational choice theoretical assumption, scholarship using Capabilies' theory by Amartya Sen, and the Human capital theory by Gary Becker became paramount. Aligning their works with these pioneers are several papers that posit, in these rational choice theoretical frameworks, that thorough understanding and persistent examination of the complex settings in which students' learning takes place is relevant to explaining demand for higher education (Kruss, McGrath, Petersen & Gastrow, 2015).

Education as investment in human capital: Human Capital theory by Gary Becker

The Human Capital theory posits that human beings can increase their productive capacity through greater education and skills training. Human Capital is a term loosely used to refer to the educational attainment, knowledge, experience, and skills of an employee. This theory holds that companies have an incentive to seek productive human capital, and to add to the human capital of their existing employees. Put another way, human capital is the concept that recognizes that labour capital is not homogeneous. This theory posits that a prospective student of higher education approaches education much in the same ways as a businessperson approaches acquisition of physical elements such as equipment and buildings, for he uses the same construct as does a businessperson approaching the physical capital (Brunello & Comi, 2004). The individual, this theory, assumes, invests in higher education with an expectation that the investment will provide a benefit in the form of higher earnings (Becker, 1995; Browne,2010). Broadly based on the assumption that individuals take actions that will likely increase their future earnings and overall well-being, its contention is premised on some theoretical underpinnings. As the investment might involve such direct costs as tuition fees for school as well as such indirect costs as foregone earnings during the period spent in school, it should be expected to deliver some expected future benefits. And, benefits might include, mainly, a higher wage and, subsidiary, anything that the individual values, say better working conditions or a longer life. Forming the basis for most work in the economics of education, this theory offers numerous useful insights and testable hypotheses about human behaviour as far as investing in education is concerned. And these comprise explanations of, and insights into, such diverse topics as discrimination, inequality, unemployment, fertility, marriage, markets, immigration, and productivity.

Human Capital theory, which originated in economics of education, has fed for many decades, as it has in other countries, elsewhere, economic policies in African countries. Economists, in their own right, helped to formulate education policies by serving as expert on programs or coordinating education planning boards. As Blaug,1985 puts it so emphatically, at this time, no self-respecting Minister of Education would speak on education policy without an economist as his or her right hand. It is, therefore, not surprising that education policy in these countries built their systems and programs as investment for achieving development. One of the backbones of economic development for a country, the contention is rife in ministry staff with the backing of economists, is to increase education of the human workforce (Fallows & Steven,2000). And, investment in human capital, this contention continues, garners employability of degree recipients. At the core of the conceptual framework of such policies is the assumption that expanded access to education improves literacy, and that the general increase in educational attainment would foster economic growth and address social inequalities (Forojalla, 1993).

Education as creation of minimal capabilities: The capabilities theory by Amartya Sen

Another approach to education policy that is also rooted in economics is what is referred to as 'capabilities approach'. Developed and introduced in education economics by Amartya Sen, it is used in interdisciplinary evaluative framework. It describes a capability as, “a person’s ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being and functioning as achievements. And 'capability' is, thus, a set of vectors of functioning, reflecting the person’s freedom to lead one type of life or another” (Sen, 1987). This approach is currently used in both theoretical and empirical research in social and human sciences (Ajake et al., 2011). In the context of distribution of economic resources such as income and wealth, the need for individual capability to transform resources into behaviours so as to function adequately to benefit from these resources, this theory holds, drives demand for schooling. As mere ownership of resources does not necessarily imply an increase in utility, since a person might be unable to benefit from the additional economic resources, it assumes, being able to read, calculate and process information can be thought as a functioning necessity for conducting a normal social life (Haigh & Clifford, 2011; Rossi, 2014). And, here is a list of ordinary life acts that require some education in order to be performed successfully: using public transportation, finding a street address, checking a bill in a restaurant, signing a check, enrolling your child at school, reading the instructions on an electric appliance, and so on. The capabilities’ perspective which focuses on, inter alia, the individual's abilities to exercise agency, to provide insight into a relationship "between […the] capability approach and education” (Saito 2003), has recently gained increased interest in research and evaluation in education, as being literate, knowledgeable and “having access to an education that allows a person to flourish is generally argued to be a valuable capability” (Robeyns 2005a; Unterhalter 2003; Menges & Austin, 2001). The 2002 UNESCO Report “Education for all” is an endorsement of the capability perspective in education. This approach to education not only recognizes for many reasons that education is intrinsically valuable as an end in itself, but also, goes further, in comparison to other approaches, to clarify the diverse reasons for education’s importance. Human capabilities approach does not assess policies in terms of their impact on incomes, as it provides a conceptual framework with theoretical, empirical and normative implications, allowing to examine issues in education. Capabilities’ theory provides insights into demand for schooling as a way of becoming functional, so as to be able to maximize additional benefits from economic resources and wealth.

Public policy as explanation for demand for tertiary education

Even though several studies highlighted as various determinants as personal and situational factors in demand for higher education (Atarah & Peprah, 2014; Mbawuni & Nimako, 2015), at the core this research paper stands the contention that increased demand for higher education is built on supply, accessibility and affordability. The supply side policies account for the observed surge as a public policy-driven demand for higher education. For demand for higher education to be generated, we argue, there need to be an incentive-giving environment. Two assumptions underlie this argument. First, mere

existence of a higher education institution, we assume, is not enough to generate demand for higher education, as the location of the institution may, through requiring a prospective student to relocate to a different city, or province (travel, rent a residence, etc.), become a hurdle that provides deterrence to demand. Second, while relocating to a different city, which is home to the institution, may not provide deterrence to demand as mentioned above, it may, through the prohibitive tuition fees charged for curriculum program, do so, as some protective students may come from poor socio-economic backgrounds (Haveman & Wolfe, 1995; Segbenya, Oduro, Peniana & Ghansah,2019). Supplying institution, making them accessible, and making education costs affordable creates, therefore, an incentive-giving environment, with a potential to spur on a protective student to place demand on higher education (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka 2015). Once public policies supply higher education institutions and made them accessible, and their costs affordable, we contend, an opportunity for demand by prospective students is then generated. This contention provides, then, a framework for reviewing the WAEMU countries higher education policies as creating an incentive-giving environment, so as to spur on prospective students to place demand on higher education, resulting in the observed trend in demand.

Higher Education Institutional Framework

There is, in the WAEMU area, a diversity of institutional frameworks, as far as higher education is concerned. The sector falls, depending on the country concerned, under a ministry department, with a particular denomination, so that there appears, within the union, a plethora of name-giving. A glance at the list shows the following: The Ministry of National Education (Mali), the Ministry of Education (Senegal), the Ministry of Secondary, Higher Education and Scientific Research (Burkina Faso), the Ministry of Higher Education (Benin), the Ministry of National and Higher Education (Guinea Bissau), and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (Côte d'Ivoire, Togo). There is, however, in each country, a Directorate of Higher Education (DHE) whose main responsibilities includes, inter alia, the coordination and the regulation of sector activities. And the higher education system comprises, in addition to country universities, such inter-state schools as the African school of architecture and town planning professions (EAMAU) in Lomé (Togo) and the Interstate school of rural equipment engineers (EIER) in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). And the institutional architecture of higher education governance is made up of consultative or supervisory regional support organizations, such as the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES), the Conference of Presidents of French-speaking universities in West, Central and Indian Ocean Africa (CRUFAOCI) and the Conference of ministers responsible for higher education and scientific research in West Africa (CMESAO). There is, in addition, such other consultative bodies as the Network for Higher Education Excellence in West Africa (REESAO), created in 2005 at the initiative of West African universities[7].

WAEMU Policy-making

Article 4d of the WAEMU Treaty states that the Commission may institute the coordination of national sectoral policies through the implementation of joint actions and, ultimately, of joint policies in several areas, among them human resources. The Social Development Department is, within WAEMU, responsible for higher education. And, its competences comprise, inter alia, preparing, coordinating and monitoring common sectoral policies, common action plans in the several areas, including higher education and vocational training. Through this Department, the Union as being able, by implementing joint actions, to coordinate national sectoral policies, and to achieve some objectives. Governments in WAEMU countries have sought to promote higher education enrolment by adopting policies that affect its supply, accessibility and affordability.

[7] African Development Fund, Multinational, Support for Higher Education in WAEMU countries Appraisal, Report Department of Social Development, Central and West Regions, MAY 2006

For Higher education, joint actions advocated involve:

(i) adopting a single sub-regional baccalaureate,
(ii) creating short and vocational training courses;
(iii) identifying, developing and promoting regional centres of excellence aimed at meeting relevant priority development needs,
(iv) introducing merit-based scholarships for sectors identified as priorities by member states;
(v) adopting a preferential system for girls;
(vi) creating databases that are likely to showcase the skills of teachers and researchers from union member countries.

This joint actions' program includes the following accompanying measures:

(i) the involvement of development partners in carrying out the missions and roles of universities;
(ii) the adoption of measures that will further motivate teachers and researchers;
(iii) the mobility of teachers, researchers and students with a view to maintaining and intensifying inter-university exchanges;
(iv) the promotion of private higher education;
(v) the mobilization of resources to support actions geared to human resources development;
(vi) the design of a mechanism to monitor and implement the common sectoral policies adopted;
(vii) the need for each higher education institution to have a strategic planning and forward-looking analytical service; and
(viii) the promotion of peace, freedom, and mutual tolerance in the sub-region.[8]

Our contention, in this paper, is, then, that the public policy efforts consented by governments drove the observed surge in demand for higher education in WAEMU countries. Decision to enrol at a higher education institution depend on it being supplied, accessible and affordable, which work together to shape demand by prospective students.

III- Research Design

Research hypothesis

Proximity of higher education institution matters to students, as those living close to a university are, based on research evidence, more likely to attend a college located near home. Proximity of a higher education institution to home is an essential factor in student predisposition to attend college (Kohn et al. 1976). Hossler and Gallagher (1990) state that proximity to a college campus indeed influences college attendance rates. Servier (1986) points out that research evidence is consistent with the assertion that a college or a university's location can be a significant factor for potential student's decision to apply and enrol. Absher & Crawford (1996) and Servier (1986) state that both convenience and accessibility remain as the main reasons why some students may opt for colleges that are close to their homes or workplaces. Our first and second hypotheses build on these findings.

Hypothesis 1: Opening higher education sector to private investors enabled the supply of higher education institutions in various locations throughout the countries while offering convenience.

Hypothesis 2: Construction of new higher education institutions, and expansion of the facilities of the existing ones offered convenience, and expanded the capacity of higher education institutions for potentially higher gross enrolment rate (GER).

[8] African Development Fund, Multinational, Support for Higher Education in WAEMU countries Appraisal, Report Department of Social Development, Central and West Regions, MAY 2006

Chaubey et al. (2011) find that vital information regarding the course of studies, financial affordability considerations and the institution's infrastructure and facilities were the most influential factors when students make a choice of higher institution of learning in Asia. Low-cost, nearby college remains an essential influencer of an applicant's decision to go to college or university. Our third hypothesis builds on these findings regarding affordability.

Hypothesis 3: Offering financial assistance to students in the form of scholarships or fellowships reduces for students the overall costs of attending higher education programs, making, thereby, higher education affordable.

Method

This research paper applies Process Tracing to identify and highlight the links between, on the one hand, the programs implemented by WAMUE member countries and, on the other, the observed surge in demand for higher education. As a qualitative case-based research method, Process Tracing enables to unravel pathways that derive a particular outcome. Described by Beach & Pedersen (2019) as a technique for 'tracing causal mechanisms, this method provides, through examining the evidence that connects variables, a means of ascertaining causal relationship. Its ability to elucidate causal mechanisms make it a valuable tool for explanatory analysis (Pickering, 2022). Developed and used first in cognitive and behavioural sciences, Process Tracing has been used and gained recognition for decades in political science (Thomas et al., 2024), for providing for understanding the relationship between political decisions and their subsequent outcomes, typically at a macro-level (e.g. Beach, 2016; Smeets & Beach, 2023). Our research paper applies Process Tracing as a tool for exploring the nexus between, on the one hand, policy-making in higher education by WAEMU member's countries and, on the other, the observed surge in demand for higher education in these countries.

Data, source and analysis

The data sources of this paper are documents, anything pertaining to higher education: conference reports, policy documents, study reports, program evaluation reports, etc. We identify and analyse these documents to (i) uncover policies enacted and programs implemented, (ii) uncover pathways underlying the observed surge in demand for tertiary education, (iii) identify connections between, on one hand, policies and programs, and, on the other, the observed surge in demand for higher education.

The research started with the analysis of the previous work and documents on higher education in WAEMU countries. The documents of analysis are policy reports, programs evaluation reports, study reports, project documents, and scholarly works on WAEMU countries' higher education. Our analysis focused mainly on policy reports, programs evaluation reports on higher education. In fact, we traced policies formulated and programs implemented to the observed surge in demand for higher education, as expressed by the gross enrolment rate (GER), highlighting how these policies and programs addressed issues of supply, accessibility, and affordability.

Variables and measurement

Decision to enrol in a higher education institution depends on it being supplied, accessible, and affordable. Approaching the subject of demand requires, then, an examination of such variables as mentioned above: supply, accessibility and affordability. Demand becomes, then, a depend variable as it is shaped by the three other variables, that are, therefore, considered independent variables.

Dependent variable

Demand: Rates of enrolment in higher education programs, expressed in per 100.000 inhabitants.

Independent variables

Supply: assesses the actual tangible existence of higher education institution.

Accessibility: assesses tangible existence of higher education institution along with its geographic distribution in a given country.

Affordability: assess the low or high costs incurred by a prospective student for attending higher education institution. But, in francophone Africa, it is framed by the low registration fees and public funding as well as social assistance, as these might result in reduced costs of higher education. So supply of state-funded institution coupled with provision of social assistance may be considered affordability indicator.

IV- Results and Discussion

Results

To elicit information required to answer the question the paper examines reports on joint actions and measures implemented.

(iv) the promotion of private higher education

The higher education system, in all WAEMU countries, comprises universities and specialized institutions. In 2005/2006, there were fifteen public universities in WAEMU member countries; with some of them, Cheik Anta Diop in Dakar or Cocody in Abidjan, for instance, having regional reputations. When considering country-specific higher education institutions, the picture is quite different. Guinea Bissau, for instance has two universities, one of which is public (Amilcar Cabral) and the other private (Colinas de Boé), While Senegal has more than the double. As they all faced a growing demand and the need to diversify higher education offerings, with some country-specific characteristics, they moved to creating new public universities in other locations, while expanding the facilities of existing ones. They also moved to promoting, through policy reforms, privatization of higher education, allowing, thereby, the creation of private universities. Focusing mostly on offering training in such disciplines as management, accounting, commercial computing, and secretarial work, most of the private institutions are located in large cities.

As regard enrolment at these institutions, data collected enable as the present the picture below. In 2004, the number of students in the eight countries stood at 315,591, representing a growth rate of 24.11 percent between 2001 and 2004. In 2003/2004, of the 315,591 students in all countries of the Union, approximately 72,840, or 23.08 % of the total student population, were enrolled in private institutions. The total enrolment of students in private higher education institutions for this academic year was, in Benin 12 294, in Côte d'Ivoire 32 000, and in Senegal 7 000; what amounted to one third of enrolment at public higher education institutions for the same academic year. There is a continued growth in the number of students enrolled in private institutions, evidence indicate existence of wide gaps between countries in terms of access to higher education. This percentage shows that the private sector is an important element of current higher education systems in WAEMU countries.

Opening the higher education sector to private investments resulted in, we can argue, an increased supply of high education institutions. These private institutions enabled the higher education sector to increase the number of students' enrolment per year, taking, thereby, their share of demand for tertiary education.

(i) the involvement of development partners in carrying out the missions and roles of universities;

(v) the mobilization of resources to support actions geared to human resources development;

By examining documents, we came up with the following findings. Over the period under consideration, higher education benefited from bilateral and multilateral donors, though their increased interest in higher education is recent. These donors, by and large, support to higher education in WAEMU is not adequate enough to enable the countries to properly respond to the prevailing crisis situation they were going through. Lack of systematic information collection on contributions by various donors, make it impossible to give a pictures of country-specific benefits. Whatever information is available indicate that bilateral partners or foreign universities contributed, one way or the other, to higher education.

The report of a study[9] provides information on the contributions of some partners. The African Development Bank has funded a component of the human resources development program in Côte d'Ivoire since 1999. This operation seeks to improve labour force productivity and work capacity in order to boost economic productivity. It includes one major action to promote higher education, namely capacity building in educational engineering, documentary and maintenance services. Through a US$26.5 million International Development Association (IDA) credit, the World Bank funded in 1996 the project to improve higher education, which allowed the construction, equipment and operation of the new central library at Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar(Senegal). The IDA is also involved in higher education in Côte d'Ivoire through the Education Training Sector Support Project (Education sector support project Training -PASEF). The French Cooperation Agency, for historical reasons, remains the main higher education donor in all WAEMU countries. Many countries were, as the information available supports, able to tap into the potential of development partnerships as a way of raising financial resources complementary to national domestic resources in funding higher education.

(ii) the adoption of measures that will further motivate teachers and researchers;

(iii) the mobility of teachers, researchers and students with a view to maintaining and intensifying inter-university exchanges;

The report AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT FUND 2006 gives insight into achievements as far as the above-mentioned policy measures are concerned. It presents technical and financial partners Francophone University Agency (AUF), Italy, Switzerland, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, Holland, Canada, as contributors to higher education. Their contributions comprised interventions in sectoral programs for the development of education or in specific areas such as institutional support, training or research scholarships, language teaching, distance learning, online courses, procurement of computer and specialized equipment. French universities, in addition to its traditional cooperation, provided under inter-university agreements, the expertise of their teachers and researchers to universities, notably for organizing the schooling of students, implementing and managing virtual universities, and migrating towards the Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) system. In December 2005, member states of the Union adopted Guideline N° 01/2005/CM/UEMOA to facilitate student mobility by introducing the principle of equal treatment of WAEMU students regarding access to higher education public institutions in the Union.

Discussion

We formulated three hypotheses to investigate drivers of the observed surge in demand for higher education. And, evidence allow us to make some inferences regarding the hypotheses we formulated in this paper. Upon examining the documents, WAEMU policy making provides, we can ascertain, a convergence in programs and other interventions in member countries' higher education. And, evidence

[9] African Development Fund, Multinational, Support for Higher Education in WAEMU countries Appraisal, Report Department of Social Development, Central and West Regions, MAY 2006

from the documents indicate that programs were implemented in various countries with mixt achievements. What evidence we found there allow to test our research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Opening higher education sector to private investors enabled the supply of higher education institutions in various locations throughout the countries while offering convenience.

Hypothesis 2: Construction of new higher education institutions, and expansion of the facilities of the existing ones, offered convenience, and expanded the capacity of higher education institutions for potentially higher gross enrolment rate (GER).

There is a growing trend in the number of students' enrolment in private higher education institutions in all countries for whom data are available. The total number of students' enrolment amounted to one third of enrolment in public higher education institutions for the same academic year. This percentage shows that the private sector is, in WAEMU countries, an important element of current higher education systems. Opening the higher education sector to private investment resulted, therefore, in an increase in supply of high education institutions. These private institutions enabled, by taking their share of demand for higher education, to contribute to increased students' enrolment per year. This evidence is consistent with the assertion that many countries were able to tap into the potential of development partnerships as a way of raising financial resources complementary to countries' domestic resources in funding higher education.

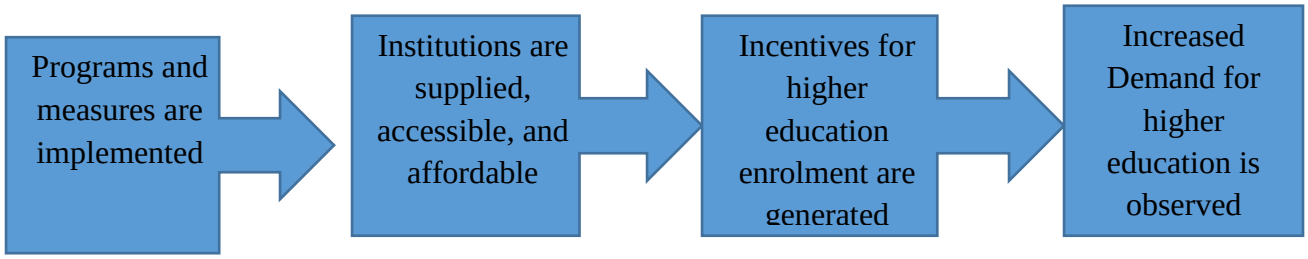
Hypothesis 3: Offering financial assistance to students in the form of scholarships or fellowships reduces for students the overall costs of attending higher education programs, making, thereby, higher education affordable.

Offering social assistance to students is widespread practice among union countries, and scholarships is not only made available, based on meeting certain criteria, to students not only by their countries, but also by some foreign countries (e.g. Portugal).

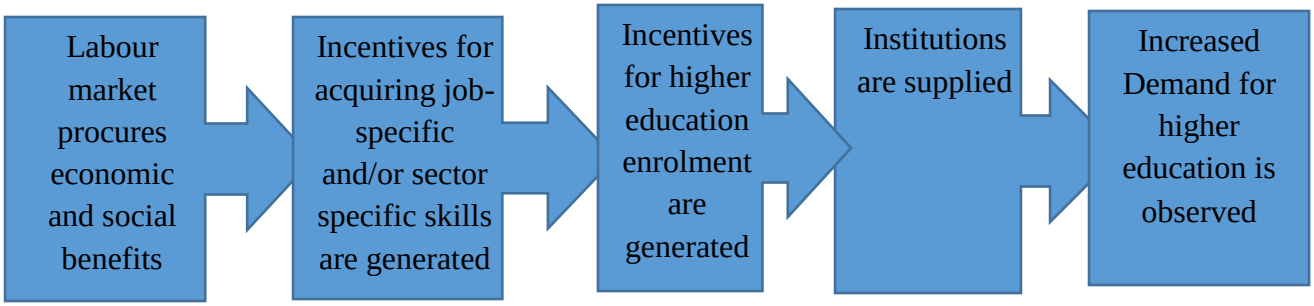
In terms of the process deriving the observed increased demand for higher education, in WAEMU countries, one that depicts it is a combination of supply, accessibility and affordability. As a pathway, it is obvious that the opening of high education sector to private investors enabled, through supply of higher education institutions in various locations throughout the countries, to achieve supply and accessibility. The offer of social assistance to students in the form of scholarships or fellowships reduces for students the overall costs of attending higher education programs, making it, thereby, affordable. Supply, accessibility and affordability, we argue, then, worked together to drive up demand for higher education. The observed growth in demand for higher education is, therefore, public policy-driven.

Two causal chains may exist; one based on rational choice theoretical framework and, the other on public policy- driven approach. Labour market requires individuals to acquires skills in higher education institutions, which, then, results in demand for higher education. And, labour market, in WAEMU countries, was small, and could not, therefore, generate incentives for students to pursue higher education. Furthermore, should the labour market, as the rational choice theories argue, provide incentives for enrolling at higher education institution, higher unemployment rates among young people, should, as a rationale, deter anyone contemplation the prospect of enrolling at higher education institution. But evidence from the study reports indicate that, in spite of widespread unemployment among younger people Mbaye & Gueye, 2018), demand for higher education, nonetheless soared over the considered time.

Causal chain based on public policy-driven demand for higher education



Causal chain based on labour market-driven demand for higher education



Literature cumulated evidence indicating an increased demand for higher education over the period 1990s and at the turn of 2000s in West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) countries, questioning the mainstream assumption that increased costs of higher education coupled with low revenues of students' families, through providing deterrence to prospective students, results in decreased demand for higher education. Arise from this observation the following questions: (i)Is demand for higher education labour-markets' policies-driven? (ii)Is demand for higher education shaped by public policies? (iii) What is the nexus between public policies and demand for higher education, that accounts for the observed surge in demand? With the purpose of contributing to investigate the observed demand for higher education, by focusing on highlighting the programs and their supporting measures, in WAEMU countries, the paper sought to account for the observed growth in demand for higher education in terms of supply, accessibility, and affordability. And, in investigating supply, accessibility and affordability, as factors causing the observed surge in demand, so as to address our research question, we hold that this observed increase in higher education demand is WAEMU public policy-driven. We formulated, to this end, three hypotheses. And, all three hypotheses are supported by evidence. While, within the rational choice theoretical frameworks, it is the labour market that incentivizes students to pursue higher education as an investment in gaining sector-specific and/or job-specific skills for future economic and social benefits to be derived from a labour market, the small labour market in WAEMU countries, is less likely to incentivize students to enrol at higher education institution. The decision by students to enrol at a higher education institution, the causal chain we came up with supports, is premised on existence of an incentive-giving environment, which is a construct of what a student deems to be institutions' supply, accessibility and affordability. Without ruling out the influence of a labour market on students' decision to enrol at an institution, since acquiring a curriculum degree will, afterwards, result in students looking for a job, evidence achieved in our research paper downplays the relevance of rational choice frameworks, as they are premised on labour market and the rationality of student, in providing an explanatory framework for increased demand in higher education, in WAEMU countries, as observed over the period 1990s and 2000s.

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