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Assessing the Academic Performance of Undergraduate Students with Special Entry Qualifications in a University in Jamaica

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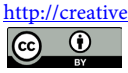

Abstract

The main aim of this study was to assess how well the students who enrolled through the special entry request performed in the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Education programmes at an institution in Jamaica. Two research questions guided the study, and these questions were answered using an ex post facto research design. The data for 171 in two academic programmes were purposefully identified and included in the study because they were admitted through special entry requirements. Data collection included students' documents (admissions records, personal profiles, & academic performance records) and existing literature. The results revealed that nine students were admitted through special entry, and all passed the Oral Communication course with a GPA ranging from 2.67 to 4. For the B.Ed. students, 21 were admitted through special entry; however, 13 students passed the Introduction to Financial Accounting course, with their GPAs ranging from 0.0 to 3.67. The results also showed no difference in the performance of those with and those without the required CSEC grades I to III in Mathematics and English on the two courses (Oral Communication & Introduction to Financial Accounting). The GPAs of B.Ed. students with the required grades in the CSEC Mathematics and English and those without were compared. The Mann-Whitney *U* test also indicated that there was no difference. This may be due to several factors not considered in this study. Recommendation included not making CSEC Mathematics (Grades I to III) compulsory for the B.A. students, but for the B.Ed. students.

Subject Areas

Education and Humanities

Keywords

Academic Performance, Entry Qualification, Prerequisite for Admission, Special Admissions, Student Performance, University Admission

1. Introduction

Increasingly, potential candidates for enrolment into higher education institutions are targeted each year following secondary education graduation. These candidates have many options because different institutions offer competitive programmes and different costs. To be admitted into institutions of higher learning, candidates must possess the prerequisites for enrollment [1] [2]. These prerequisites may differ based on the type of programme, for instance, undergraduate or postgraduate, the kind of certificate to be obtained, the length of the programme, and the nature of the programme. Although entry requirements may be similar, they differ from country to country and from one institution to another. For instance, in some countries and institutions, candidates must pass an entrance examination despite having the correct prerequisites [3]. This practice is used in Nigeria in West Africa, where candidates must pass the university matriculation examination [4], which is not true in Jamaica in the Caribbean. For more on admission practices worldwide, see Helms's [3] report submitted to the World Bank.

There is the notion that with the correct prerequisites, the candidates are likely to succeed academically [2] [5]. However, meeting the correct admission requirements does not guarantee academic success [1] [4]. Prerequisites could focus on cognitive (prior or desired knowledge) and non-cognitive (attitudes & personality traits) qualities. Both cognitive and non-cognitive qualities are considered important (World Bank, 2014, as cited in Mgaya *et al.* [1]. However, studies found that cognitive qualities have a greater effect on academic achievement, as cited in Mgaya *et al.* [4].

One of the prerequisites for college admissions is Mathematics and the English Language. This requirement is beginning to change in countries like India. According to The Hindu paper from New Delhi [6], Mathematics is no longer required for admission to the Bachelor of Commerce degree programme. Charles Egurida [7], the then Head of the National Office of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in Nigeria, shared a similar view. Egurida believed that mathematics should not be compulsory for all programmes, such as for students studying theatre arts and Yoruba language. In cases like this, special admission requests can be made. This study is about the academic performance of undergraduate students in one of the universities in Jamaica who were offered special admissions but did not possess all the prerequisites for Mathematics and the English Language in one sitting.

1.1. Background of the Study

This research study was conducted at an institution in Jamaica. Jamaica's esti-

mated population is 2717.991 **[8]** and it has four formal education levels: early childhood/pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary [8] [9]. The Ministry of Education and Youth [7]. The Ministry of Education is responsible for education in Jamaica. Through its Tertiary Unit, the Ministry monitors and supports public tertiary institutions. However, the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) is responsible for programme and institutional accreditation at the tertiary level. According to the Tertiary Unit of the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth, and Information [10], the tertiary institutions in Jamaica include three universities, one university college, five teachers' colleges, four multidisciplinary colleges, five community colleges, and two polytechnic colleges. In 2015, tertiary education enrollment was 26.41%, which, according to the Global Economy website, was below the world average of 42.7%.

This study was conducted in one of the three universities. The institution's name is protected to comply with the Data Protection Act of 2020 [11], which was recently passed on the island. Therefore, it will be referred to as Institution A. The general undergraduate entry requirements for any academic programme in Institution A are five Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) or General Proficiency GCE O-level subjects, including English Language and Mathematics. These subjects must be at:

General Proficiency grades 1, 2, and 3; (Grade 3 is acceptable from the June 1998 sitting), or GCE O-level passes at Grade A, B, C or equivalent qualifications. Other technical examination qualifications will be assessed on an individual basis ([12]; p. 4).

In addition to the five CSEC subjects mentioned above, the different colleges/faculties may ask for other subjects that were not listed and other qualifications. The study was conducted in a faculty that offers Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Bachelor of Arts (B.A). Therefore, other entry qualifications other than the five CSEC subjects for the B.Ed. include the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE), the National Council on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET), City and Guild, Associate Degree, and Technical Education Diploma or the Post-Diploma in education and training. While for the B.A., it includes CAPE or certification, such as a Diploma from the Creative Production and Training/Media Technology Institute of Jamaica.

In some cases, applicants may not have Grades I, II, or III in Mathematics and/or English Language to get into the programme of their choice; such applicants can also apply for admission through Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). For those opting to go through the PLA option, this process requires the applicant to submit an academic portfolio, which is assessed for relevant work and life experiences [12].

Candidates without Grades I to III in CSEC Mathematics must take the Foundation Mathematics course to be eligible for enrollment into the university. Similarly, candidates without Grades I to III in CSEC English must take the Proficiency Test to be qualified to attend classes. Azkiyaha *et al.* ([13]; p. 33), citing Read's

(2015) definition, stated that a proficiency test determines a student's "ability to do something specific in the language." Students who are required to do the Foundation Mathematics course are still required to take College Mathematics before they can be granted a Bachelor's degree. At the same time, those who take the Developmental English Language course are still required to take two additional academic writing courses (John Doe, Personal Communication, February 13, 2025).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

In institution A, during the 2012/2013 academic year, some applicants did not possess Grades I to III in Mathematics or English for the B.A. and the B.Ed. programmes. A request was made for such applicants to be admitted under special admissions, which was approved by the University Registrar through the Board of Undergraduate Studies, and with the understanding that the required grade (I, II, or III) in the two subjects will be obtained by the applicant within the first one year of the admission into the B.A. and the B.Ed. programmes. These applicants were also required to do the Foundation Mathematics and Developmental English courses as earlier mentioned. However, no formal study was done to determine how well these applicants performed when compared to those that were admitted with the required CSEC subjects.

The main purpose of this study was to assess how well the students who enrolled through the special entry performed in the B.A. and B.Ed. programmes at Institution A in Jamaica. The study was also designed to compare the academic performance of the students offered admission through the special entry and those who met the admission requirements. In this study, academic performance refers to the grade point average (GPA) students obtained in their courses during the 2012/2013 academic year.

1.3. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1) How well did the students offered admission through the special entry request perform in courses that require Mathematics and/or English language skills?

2) To what extent is there a difference in the performance of the students who were offered admission through the special entry request and those who met the admission requirements?

1.4. Delimitations of the Study

The focus of this study is on Mathematics and English, which are compulsory subjects for admissions in the institution. Therefore, other subjects that may be used as a waiver, such as English Literature, Communication Studies, and Applied Mathematics, were not considered. Furthermore, the data for the study were for the 2012/2013 academic year.

1.5. Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study warrant acknowledgement. First, the researchers only

focused on students in two academic programmes; therefore, the study's results cannot be generalised to all students in the faculty. Second, data were collected for one academic year. Therefore, there is a lack of longitudinal data to compare students' performance throughout their studies. Third, no primary data were collected. Finally, although there were several studies on college enrolment and academic performance, and students' enrolment and experiences, there was limited and current literature on the academic performance of students admitted through special admissions.

1.6. Organisation of the Paper

The rest of this paper is organised into the following sections: literature review, methods, results, and conclusions. The paper ends with some implications and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

The literature review was conducted using Google Scholar and databases like EBSCO Host, ERIC and ProQuest. The keywords used for the search were academic performance, entry qualification, prerequisites for admission, prior learning, university admission, and university entry qualifications. The review is presented under two main themes: University Entry Requirements, Entry Requirements and Academic Performance, and College Students' Performance in Mathematics.

2.1. University Entry Requirements

Studies on college admission requirements have been conducted over the years. For instance, the article by Beale **[14]**, *The Evolution of College Admission Requirements*, was initially published in 1970. In this article, Beale, citing the work of Broome, stated that in the 17th and 18th centuries, candidates seeking admission into American higher education institutions had to be assessed for the following: "character, background, and demonstrated proficiency in Latin and Greek" (p. 21). However, this changed towards the end of the 18th century when "a working knowledge of arithmetic, was added to Latin and Greek as a required subject for admission to college" ([14]; p. 21). These requirements changed over time as collaborative efforts were made by different organisations and agencies in the US to streamline college entrance requirements [14].

Several studies have shown that during the 1940s and 1950s, there were fairly uniform college entrance requirements as many institutions used the following criteria: "1) high-school graduation, 2) a minimum number of prescribed units in designated subjects, 3) rank in graduating class, 4) recommendation of the principal, 5) personal interview, and 6) aptitude and achievement-test scores" ([14]; p. 21).

However, presently, many institutions have specific entry requirements for their programmes, and different methods are used, such as prior experience. According to Beale [14], using different methods helps to ensure that candidates with

varied talents are offered admission. Fox [15] acknowledged the use of prior knowledge, as adult learners can transfer life experiences. Griffiths *et al.* [16] added that such adult learners are assessed through the submission of the following: "professional and educational curriculum vitae evaluation (through analysis of the CV) motivation evaluation (through analysis of the letter of application); a written examination in an area related to the degree" (p. 87).

2.2. Entry Requirements and Academic Performance

Many studies have been done on entry qualifications in tertiary institutions to determine if there is any association between students' mode of entry and their academic performance (Mgaya *et al.* [1], Ogbonnaya *et al.* [2], Salami *et al.* [4], Abdullah & Mirza [17], Adeyemi [18], Alias & Zain [19], Asiklia [20], Newman-Ford *et al.* [21], Olaoluniyi *et al.* [22], Sulphey *et al.* [23], Vincent & Idahosa [24], Wambugu & Emeke [25], Yusuf & Onifade [26]). Many of the studies were correlational and predictive in nature, and others focused on the success of college students with standard admission requirements or factors that affect students' academic achievement. The study by Vincent and Idahosa [24] was one of the few that examined the achievement of students in a South African University without meeting the university entry requirement. Vincent and Idahosa [24] interviewed 33 participants. Their study found that "Despite not meeting standard university entry requirements, these students succeeded at university, completing their degrees in the minimum time available and going on to higher degrees" ([24]; p. 1433). This indicated that selecting students mainly by meeting entry requirements may not be the only indicator for admission. They suggested that institutions should instead focus on what hinders students' academic identities, which may impact their performance. A similar study by Wambugu and Emeke [25] examined the relationship between entry qualification and the academic performance of 181 students (131 on-campus & 20 distance learning) in undergraduate science courses at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. The study showed a significant positive relationship between entry qualification and student academic performance in Biology and Chemistry, but no relationship in Physics. They concluded that entry qualification was not the best predictor of academic performance but should not be ignored when considering applicants for admission [25].

Ogbonnaya *et al.* [2] investigated the entry qualifications of 390 students from two basic nursing schools in Nigeria and concluded that entry qualification positively correlates with academic performance. Similarly, Opoko *et al.* [27] discovered no association between architecture students' entry requirements and academic achievement. In an ex-post facto research study conducted by Adeyemi [18], the performance of 1370 final-year Bachelor of Education degree students in two universities in Nigeria. In the study, Adeyemi [18] compared the students' final year Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) in a Bachelor of Education programme with their entry requirements from three different examination bodies in Nigeria, namely, the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC), the Na-

tional Examinations Council (NECO), and the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB). The results showed that the West African Examination Council entry qualification was better used in predicting students' success in the two universities. Adeyemi [18] concluded that WAEC should be used as the entry requirement instead of NECO and NABTEB.

2.3. College Students' Performance in Mathematics

According to the Ministry of Education (MOE) report [28], "Mathematics is a well-established discipline, universally accepted as a core subject, occupying a central place in education" (p. 9). For this reason, in Jamaica, for example, the national comprehensive numeracy programme was established to support Mathematics teaching to students from early childhood to primary school level. This programme was designed to provide the foundation for students "to develop the skills and competencies needed to succeed in Mathematics" (MOE, [28]; p. 2). Despite this effort, student performance in CSEC Mathematics remained problematic. For instance, a newspaper article by Poyser [29] showed a 14% decline and, therefore, the need for changes to the National Mathematics Programme.

At the tertiary education level, students' performance in Mathematics is no different. This is because students experience difficulties due to various factors, such as teaching and learning styles, class attendance, and attitude towards Mathematics (Leal *et al.* [30]). Other factors noted by other authors were "lack of dedication to the study of course topics, poor study habits, deficiencies in necessary background knowledge, prioritisation of other courses that a student was enrolled in, and lack of interest in studying" (Castillo-Sanchez *et al.* [31]; p. 219). In a study done in Kenya by Gitaari [32], they discovered that factors that contributed to poor performance in Mathematics in public secondary schools in Kenya included "inadequate teaching force, students, absenteeism, poor entry marks, poor assessment techniques, and poor teaching methods" ([32]; p. 93). In another study by Mbugua *et al.* [33], they identified factors that contributed to poor Mathematics performance as "inadequate teaching/learning materials, lack of motivation, poor attitudes by both teachers and students and retrogressive practices" (p. 87). It is worth noting that other factors contribute not only to students' poor performance in Mathematics but also to their general performance, such as course load and time constraints. For instance, in a study by Huntington-Klein and Gill [34], they investigated semester course loading and student performance and noted that high course loading may negatively impact struggling students' performance. Students may not have enough time to invest in each course they registered for. Phipps and Amaya [35] also shared this view in their study, which examined the time students spent on studying. Although the literature shows mixed results on course loading, it is worth noting because students in the institution used in this study are required to take five to seven courses per semester, which could be, at times, too heavy for some of them, especially if they had a problem learning Mathematics. Leal *et al.* [30] studied students' performance in Mathematics at Univer-

sidad Francisco de Paula Santander of the Municipality of Cúcuta, Norte de Santander, Colombia. They found that despite the challenges of learning mathematics, 73.3% of the students passed the pre-test, and there was a relationship between beliefs about Mathematics and academic performance.

Mathematical and statistical skills are essential for university curricula of many disciplines (Hodgen *et al.* [36]), especially for disciplines such as Business and Management, to name a few. Cottee *et al.* [37] noted that Business and Management programmes require quantitative methods and many students lack the skills to cope with the mathematical content in their academic programmes. Cottee *et al.* [37] also noted that the literature shows that admission requirements in business-related disciplines in the United Kingdom (UK) are vary. This view was also shared by Darlington and Bowyer [38], who listed Business Studies, Mathematics, Economics, Psychology, General Studies, History, Geography, English Literature, Media Studies, and Sociology as the most popular A Level subjects for students in Business and Administrative Studies. These subjects are similar to the ones students have in Jamaica, although Mathematics and English are compulsory.

For the students in the B.Ed. programme in Jamaica, the knowledge of Mathematics is even more crucial, because these students must do courses such as Financial Accounting and Microeconomics, which require mathematical skills. According to Xie and Hu (2019) [39], accounting is related to Mathematics, and Liu (2016) [40] stated: "Mathematics can really solve many problems occurring in accounting" (p. 1568). Darlington and Bowyer [38] noted that studies on the impact of mathematical background on undergraduate student performance are mixed. To support this statement, they cited the study conducted by Rowbottom (2013), which found that there was "no relationship between pre-university numeracy and performance at any point in their Accounting degree" (Darlington & Bowyer [38]; p. 10). Darlington and Bowyer [38] also cited another study conducted by Gammie *et al.* (2003), which also did not find any impact of secondary school Mathematics performance on students' performance in Accounting. However, Darlington and Bowyer [38] also cited studies conducted by Guney (2009), Brookshire and Palocsay (2005), and Zandi, Shahabi, and Bagheri (2012) that showed that students with better Mathematics grades performed better in Accounting. Although some of these studies were conducted several years ago, they still point to the fact that Mathematics is essential for Business Studies.

2.4. College Students' Proficiency in the English Language

Several higher education institutions use English proficiency tests to determine potential students' ability to use the language if offered admission, and many authors have researched language proficiency and academic performance. This may be because English is the language of instruction for many institutions. In a meta-analysis study by Permatasari *et al.* [41], they concluded that measuring English competency can be complex, but preparing for the English test is crucial since students could be affected psychologically, which can impact their performance.

In the literature, mixed results have been reported in studies on students' proficiency in the English language (Ruegg *et al.* [42]). For instance, a study conducted by Ruegg *et al.* [42] examined the relationship between the English language proficiency of international undergraduate students in a university in New Zealand and their academic success after gaining admission, using their GPA. The results, among other things, showed that the students' language proficiency had a significant effect on their academic performance. Similar outcomes were observed by Miley and Farmer [43], Addow *et al.* [44], and Morales [45], who concluded that students who performed better academically had higher English proficiency. Furthermore, a recent study by Johnson and Tweedie [46] revealed that the standardised proficiency tests were weak predictors of student achievement; however, they reported that pre-enrollment programmes showed a moderate association and were better predictors of student academic performance. Barkaoui's [47] study showed that students with lower scores on the English Language test had lower GPAs over time. Barkaoui [47] stressed the importance of continued support for students with lower proficiency scores during their studentship. In contrast, the studies conducted by Oliver *et al.* [48] and Bridgement *et al.* [49] reported weak to no relationship between academic performance and the English language proficiency tests.

Different authors (Coote [50], Montoya-Stemann [51]) have written about two forms of language in Jamaica – the Jamaican Creole and the Standard English, and the impact of these languages on student performance. In a study conducted in Jamaica, Coote [50] investigated students' perceptions of their performance in the English Language, and the results revealed among other things, that some of the students in the schools studied had high self-concept and the hopes about performing well in the CSEC English language examination, despite some challenges such as their use of the Jamaican Creole language, which is spoken in Jamaica. Coote [50], citing other studies, highlighted several factors that can impact student performance. These include the teaching-learning strategies used by the instructors, fear of making mistakes, anxiety, environment (classroom setting, home, & community), inability to express self, transferability skills from one language to another, lack of reading ability, and distractions from other students. Montoya-Stemann [51] on the other, investigated high school students' confidence, sociolinguistic background, and oral performance in the English language, and found similar findings such as inability to transfer skills from one language to the other, environment (rural/urban), among others.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

The researchers used an ex post facto research design to compare how well the students who enrolled through the special entry request performed compared to those who obtained the required grades for admission into the B.A. and B.Ed. and B.A. programmes at Institution A in Jamaica in the 2012/2013 academic year. The

data used in the study were students' GPAs in two courses during that academic year. The GPAs were purposefully identified and included in the study based on their entry requirements. Apart from the GPAs, other data collection methods used were students' documents (admissions records, & personal profiles). Furthermore, the existing literature on the topic was obtained from searching for publications in databases, such as Google Scholar and EBSCOhost. These methods were used because the study's main purpose was to compare the performance of the students who enrolled through the special entry and those admitted through the regular requirements during the 2012/2013 academic year.

3.2. Data Analysis

The researchers analysed the students' admissions, personal profiles, and academic performance records using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency & percentages), as well as inferential statistics (Mann-Whitney *U* test). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) programme was used.

3.3. Ethical Issues

Given the nature of the study, approval was granted to access students' documents, and the data was anonymous because the data did not contain identifying information on the students to answer the research questions. Individual consent was not obtained because the students had graduated from the programmes several years ago. Pseudonyms were used to protect the name of the institution and the programmes (Data Protection Act [11], Tripathy [52]).

4. Results

The data used for the students in the 2012/2013 academic year showed 171 students in the B.A. and B.Ed. programmes. There were more female students (70.2%) than males (29.8%) in both programmes (see **Table 1**). A majority (41.4%) of the females were in the B.Ed. programme.

Table 1. Distribution of students by gender and programme.

Gender	Programme		Total
	B.A.	B.Ed.	
Male	19 (11.1%)	32 (18.7%)	51 (29.8%)
Female	39 (22.8%)	81 (47.4%)	120 (70.2%)
Total	58 (33.9%)	113 (66.1%)	171 (100%)

The B.A. students' age at admission ranged from 30 to 38 years (M = 32.4 years, SD = 1.87), while for the B.Ed. students, their age ranged from 30 to 55 years (M = 34.9 years, SD = 5.11). A majority (70, 40.9%) of the students in the B.A. and the B.Ed. programmes were between 31 and 32 years.

Of the 171, 30 (17.5%) students in both programmes were admitted through

special entry because they did not obtain Grades I to III in Mathematics and/or English at the CSCE level (see Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of students by admission requirements and programme.

Admission Requirements	Programme		Total
	B.A	B.Ed.	
Met Requirements	49 (28.7%)	92 (53.8%)	140 (82.5%)
Special Entry	9 (5.3%)	21 (12.3%)	30 (17.5%)
Total	58 (34%)	113 (66%)	171 (100%)

All the students in both programmes had CSEC subjects at different grades upon entry. However, a few came in with three subjects, while others had as many as nine or more subjects. It is worth noting that CSEC was not the only entry qualification that these students had. For instance, in the B.A. programme, 14 students had CAPE subjects, and 2 had GCE O Levels, while in the B.Ed. programme, the students also had CAPE subjects, 6 had GCE O Levels, and 4 had other qualifications such as the City and Guilds (1 student), the National Council of Technical and Vocational Education (NCTVET) (3 students) and a Diploma (2 students). See Table 3 for the number of CSEC subjects obtained by the students in both programmes.

Table 3. Number of CSEC subjects obtained by students.

Number of CSEC Subjects	**Programme**		**Total**
	Number of Students in B.A.	**Number of Students in B.Ed.**	
3	-	2 (1.2%)	2 (1.2%)
4	2 (1.2%)	10 (5.8%)	12 (7.0%)
5	6 (3.5%)	9 (5.3%)	15 (8.8%)
6	11 (6.4%)	35 (20.5%)	46 (26.9%)
7	18 (10.5%)	20 (11.6%)	38 (22.2%)
8	16 (9.4%)	25 (14.6%)	41 (23.9%)
9	3 (1.8%)	7 (4.1%)	10 (5.8%)
10	1 (0.6%)	4 (2.3%)	5 (2.9%)
11	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	2 (1.2%)
Total	58 (34%)	113 (66%)	171 (100%)

Aside from Mathematics and English language, which are required, the popular CSCE subjects were: Information Technology, Social Studies, Principles of Accounting, Principles of Business, Office Administration, Biology, Geography, and Integrated Science. For the students with CAPE subjects, the popular ones are So-

ciology, Economics, Communication Studies, Caribbean Studies, Computer Science, and Accounting. Some of these subjects were noted by Darlington and Bowyer [38], who listed, among other things, Business Studies, Mathematics, Economics, Psychology, General Studies, History, Geography, English Literature, Media Studies, and Sociology as the most popular A Level subjects for students in Business and Administrative Studies.

4.1. Special Entry Students' Performance

Research Question 1: How well did the students offered admission through the special entry request perform in courses that require Mathematics and/or English language skills?

To answer this research question, students' grades in two courses (Oral Communication for B.A. students that require English language skills) and (Introduction to Financial Accounting for the B.Ed. students that require mathematical skills) were used. It is worth noting that these two courses are required for these students in their respective programmes.

B.A. Student Performance. The academic records revealed that nine students were admitted through special entry because none obtained Grades I to III in their CSEC, and one student did not get the required grade in Mathematics. The records also showed that all nine students (6 males & 3 females) passed the Oral Communication course (see **Table 4**). Their grades ranged from B- to A (*i.e.*, with the GPA ranging from 2.67 to 4). This course focuses on verbal skills, and students with English language skills will be at an advantage. Therefore, it is surprising that all nine students who did not have the required Grades I to III in the English Language passed the Oral Communication course. This may be due to factors that were not considered in this study. However, it should be restated that students without Grades I to III, as required by the university, are required to enrol in the Developmental English course and other English-related courses. Ruegg *et al.* [42], students' language proficiency affects their academic performance. Miley and Farmer [43], Addow *et al.* [44], and Morales [45], who concluded that students who performed better academically had higher English proficiency. Similar outcomes were observed by Miley and Farmer [43], Addow *et al.* [44], and Morales [45], who concluded that students who performed better academically had higher English proficiency.

Table 4. The performance of special admission students.

Programme	Performance		Total
	Pass	Fail	
B.A. (*Oral Com.)	9 (30.0%)	-	9 (30.0%)
B.Ed. (*Fin. Acct.	13 (43.3%)	8 (26.7%)	21 (70.0%)
Total	22 (73.3%)	8 (26.7%)	30 (100%)

*Note: Oral communication; Introduction to financial accounting.

B.Ed. Student Performance. The academic records revealed that 21 students (6 males & 15 females) were admitted through special entry into the B.Ed. programme. Nineteen of these students did not obtain Grades I to III in their CSEC Mathematics, while two did not have the required grade in CSEC English. The records also showed that 13 students (3 males & 10 females) passed the Introduction to Financial Accounting course (see Table 4). Their grades ranged from U to A- (*i.e.*, with the GPA ranging from 0.0 to 3.67). This course has a lot of calculations, and students with mathematical skills will be at an advantage. This result seems consistent with Vincent and Idahosa's [24] study, which found that students who did not meet the standard university entry requirement had academic success at a university in South Africa. Furthermore, it is also worth noting that many factors may influence student performance which were not considered in this study. As stated earlier, there may be other factors that may have impacted their performance that were not considered in this study. It is unclear if the Foundation Mathematics course and other Mathematics-related courses, depending on the programme requirements, played a role in the performance of those who passed the Introduction to Financial Accounting course. This is because Darlington and Bowyer (2016) [38], citing other studies, stated that students with better Mathematics grades performed better in Accounting.

From the above findings, students' performance was encouraging, given that they were admitted through special considerations and may not have had some of the general undergraduate entry requirements (CSEC at passes at the General Proficiency Grades 1, 2, & 3, or the GCE O Level) [12].

4.2. Differences in Academic Performance

Research Question 2: To what extent is there a difference in the performance of the students who were offered admission through the special entry request and those who met the admission requirements?

To answer this research question, students' GPAs in two courses (Oral Communication for all B.A. students) and (Introduction to Financial Accounting for all B.Ed. students) were used. The mean GPA for the B.A. students was 2.93, with a standard deviation of 1.08. Twenty eight (48.3%) of the B.A. students had between 3.33 and 3.67 GPA. For the B.Ed. students, their mean GPA was 1.84, with a standard deviation of 1.14. Thirty-six (31.9%) of the B.Ed. students had between 2.33 and 3.00 GPA. The findings showed a slightly higher GPA for the B.A. students, although the courses differ.

The Mann-Whitney U test was used to test for differences in performance for the students in the two programmes since the data sets did not meet the normality test. See Table 5 for the findings for the B.A. students.

The GPAs of the B.A. students with the required grades in the CSEC Mathematics and English and those without were compared. The Mann-Whitney U test indicated that the difference was not statistically significant, $U(N_{\text{with}} = 49, N_{\text{without}} = 9) = 155.50$, $p = 0.156$. Similar analyses were done for the B.Ed. students. See Table 6.

Table 5. Mann-Whitney *U* test results for B.A. students.

	Group	N	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks
GPA	With Math/English	49	28.17	1380.50
	Without Math/English	9	36.72	330.50

Table 6. Mann-Whitney *U* test results for B.Ed. students.

	Group	N	Mean Ranks	Sum of Ranks
GPA	With Math/English	92	58.73	5403.50
	Without Math/English	21	49.40	1037.50

The GPAs of B.Ed. students with the required grades in the CSEC Mathematics and English and those without were compared. The Mann-Whitney *U* test indicated that the difference was not statistically significant, U (N_{with} = 92, N_{without} = 21) = 806.50, p = 0.236. No study was found to support these findings. No study was found to support these results. However, it is worth noting that several factors can influence student performance in general and in Mathematics and the English language. In the case of Mathematics, the factors as observed in the literature include teaching and learning styles, class attendance, and attitude towards Mathematics, students' poor study habits, inadequate knowledge, prioritisation of other courses, lack of interest in studying, inadequate teaching, absenteeism, poor entry knowledge, assessment techniques, inadequate teaching/learning material, lack of motivation, attitudes by both teachers and students, course loading [30]-[34].

In the case of the English Language, studies also showed that several factors influenced student performance. For instance, students' language proficiency had a significant effect on their academic performance [42]-[49]. Other factors such as Jamaican Creole language versus the Standard English, teaching – learning strategies, fear of making mistakes, anxiety, environment, inability to express self, transferability skills from one language to another, lack of reading ability, and distractions from other students [50] [51]. These factors were not considered in this study since primary data were not collected.

5. Conclusions

This study assessed how well the students who enrolled through the special entry request performed in the B.A. and B.Ed. programmes at Institution A in Jamaica. The academic performance of the students offered admission through the special entry and those who met the admission requirements were compared using two courses in the 2012/2013 academic year.

Nine students were admitted through special entry, and all of them passed the Oral Communication course with a GPA ranging from 2.67 to 4. For the B.Ed. students, 21 were admitted through special entry. Thirteen students passed the Introduction to Financial Accounting course, with their GPAs ranging from 0.0 to 3.67. The GPAs of the B.A. students with the required grades in the CSEC Math-

ematics and English and those without were compared. The Mann-Whitney *U* test indicated that there was no difference. The GPAs of B.Ed. students with the required grades in the CSEC Mathematics and English and those without were compared. The Mann-Whitney *U* test also indicated that there was no difference. This may be due to several factors that were not considered in this study.

6. Recommendations

Due to the nature of the B.A. programme, there is no need to make CSEC Grades I to III in Mathematics compulsory for students. However, the required grades should be for English since it is the language of instruction; therefore, all the students need to be proficient in the English language. For the B.Ed. students, they need mathematical skills for some of their courses; therefore, they need to possess Grades I to III more than the B.A. students.

It is recommended that further studies be done with more courses by the students, and a longitudinal approach be considered. Finally, it is also recommended that primary data be collected to shed more light on the factors that influence student performance.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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