

Trending Issues in Admission Policy in Nigerian Schools

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Abstract

The paper looks at the current trends and issues in admission policy in Nigeria's institutions. The trends treated in this paper include: Quota system, Catchment area, JAMB cut-off point, WAEC requirement, under-aged students, religious affiliation and gender issues. Education is regarded as an instrument in achieving national development. As a result of this, Countries in the world are investing heavily on education to position it on sound pedestal to achieve their national goals and through available human and material resource. Education is important to the development of human resources, impartation of appropriate skills, knowledge and attitude. It is the basis for transformation, industrialization and a high way to wealth creation. However, the government has often conceived and implemented policies to enhance the admission and enrolment of students into the Nigerian Educational system. A policy serves the purpose of ensuring that every official action of the government has a basis or a backing. Unfortunately in Nigeria, most of the policies in place are working against the improvement of education in Nigeria. The paper concluded that policy reforms on admission of students into educational institutions by the government or educational administrators should be properly addressed to reduce the rising wave of mediocrity in the country. It was recommended amongst others that the admission policy should be reviewed so as to allow more youths to be admitted into the educational institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Policy, Trend, Issues, Quota system, Catchment area, admission

Introduction

Education has become one of the most powerful weapons known for reducing poverty and inequality in modern societies. It is also used for laying the foundation for a sustainable growth and development of any nation. However, the appetite for higher education in the world's most populous black nation like Nigeria is huge. But existing policies and political realities are becoming obstacles for the hundreds of thousands of the country's youth. (Barnboye et al 2001)

More than ever before, though the country will likely witness the highest number of aspiring youths who are denied entry into these institutions because of the country's failure to adequately address basic perennial issues that have plagued education for decades. (FRN 2004) For the country to address the issues of poverty, insecurity and economic backwardness, the nation's education system must be repositioned to allow more youths gain access to education (FGN 2003). One of the ways of achieving this is by reviewing admission guidelines and policies in the nation's educational institutions.

Trending issues such as age, catchment area, quota system, WAEC requirement, JAMB cut-off point and religious affiliation to mention few should be reviewed to allow more youth's access to institution of their choice to study their chosen discipline. In view of the degrading system of education in Nigeria, which is believed to have been the cause of the

high level of poverty, insecurity and economic backwardness facing the Nigeria today, this paper seeks to suggest possible solution to one of the problems facing the education system in Nigeria today, which is the admission policy.

The study is conducted with the following objectives.

- i. To investigate the role of government policy on the rate of students being admitted into the public or private education institution at various levels in Nigeria.
- ii. To identify the challenges of students admission into educational institutions in Nigeria.
- iii. To examine the effect the effect of age, gender, catchment area, quota system, WAEC requirement, religious affiliation and JAMB cut-off point, on admission.

The Concept of Policy

Policy is a deliberate system of principles to guide decisions and achieve rational outcome. A policy is a statement of intent and is implemented as a procedure or protocol (Delion et al 2001). Policies are generally adopted by a governmental body within an organization. Policies can assist in both subjective and objective decision making. Policies used in subjective decision making usually assist senior management with decisions that must be based on the relative merits of a number of factors and as a result are often hard to test objectively, e.g, work-life-balance policy. In contrast, policies to assist in objective decision making are usually operational in nature and can be objectively tested. The term, policy may apply to government public sector organizations, groups as well as individuals, presidential and executive orders, corporate privacy policies and parliamentary rules of order are all examples of policy. Policy differs rules or laws, while law can compel or prohibit behaviours (e.g. law requiring the payment of taxes or income), policy merely guides actions towards those that are most likely to achieve a desired outcome. (Voican, M. 2008).

Policy or policy study may also refer to the process of making important organizational decisions, including the identification of different alternatives such as programs or spending priorities and choosing among them on the basis of the impact they will have. Policy can be understood as political, managerial, financial and administrative mechanism arranged to reach explicit goals in public corporations (Deleon & Toddi 2001). The intended effects of a policy vary widely according to the organization and the context in which they are made. Broadly, policies are typically instituted to avoid some negative effect that has been noticed in the organization or to seek some positive benefit (Office Publication, "what is policy" Sydney.edu.au. retrieved 10;05:2021).

Trends and Issues in Admission

The issue of admitting under-age students/pupils to school

The issue of under-age has been one of the major issues hindering the Nigerian youth from gaining admission into any of the Nigerian Educational institutions. Recently, 15 years old Franklin Ekene was celebrated for emerging as the highest scorer in the 2019 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination having scored 347 out of 400 points obtainable. Unfortunately, his university of choice, University of Lagos, insisted it could not offer him admission on account of his age, cutting official regulation of a minimum of 16 years for

prospective applicants. This expectedly, has generated diverse reactions from stakeholders, many who see such regulation as limiting and not in tune with modern realities.

However, as noted by Enobakhare (2019), it is not unusual to see children obtaining university degrees long before attaining the age of 20 years. Indeed recently, Daniel Obaji, a Nigerian youngster, graduated from the New York University, at the age of 18 years. The question is; what is the fate of the likes of Daniel Obaji and other precious children in Nigeria being tied down by limiting regulations at a time the age of knowledge explosion is reducing steadily (Abdulkareem, 2007).

Today, every candidate seeking university admission must sit for and pass the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), and JAMB stipulates clearly in its brochure the rules and regulations guiding the admission process, among which is the 16 years minimum age qualification. JAMB insists that a candidate for admission must have attained the age of 16 or will do so on the first day of October in the year of candidature, among other conditions. On the other hand, another trending issue is the admission of under-age pupils and students into primary and secondary schools respectively. A child is supposed to be psychologically mature to fit into a particular level of learning, for instance, eight and nine years old students whereas in Nigeria's 6-3-3-4 education policy are admitted into Nigeria secondary schools and national curriculum, a child is expected to be in primary one at age five, spend six years in school. That effectively puts the age of such a child at eleven years. Some even jump a class or two to a higher class (Adeleke, 2001).

Obviously, this trend is often observed as a breach, even by JAMB itself, some have argued that if the examination body is serious about the policy, it wouldn't have allowed candidate below the specified age to sit for its examination. According to Oyebola et al (2000), a child is expected to reach some level of development psychologically. Developmental psychology is an aspect psychology which deals with the developmental growth and behavior on human beings right from the time of conception to the period of adolescence when most of the functions of the body become matured to facilitate learning. A review of the policy of age in admission will allow more youths of school age to access admission into any educational institution in Nigeria (Bakwaph, 2013).

Gender

Although every child has the right to education in Nigeria, the ratio of male and female students shows a significant bias favouring boys, with the rate of disparity being lower in primary school than in secondary and tertiary institutions. This suggests that Nigeria has a retention problem with regard to girls progressing from primary to secondary or tertiary education. To examine why this may be so, some scholars discuss gender inequality in Nigeria educational systems, the goals of universal basic education (UBE), a scheme launched by Federal Government of Nigeria in 1999 and the gender challenges that have arisen in UBE, before suggesting recommendations to close the gender gap in secondary schools enrolment. The basic premise of UBE is that of "education for all". The implication of the programme is that every child in Nigeria must stay in school for a minimum of nine years (Kale, 2004).

Eventually, men are regarded as bread winners of the family, while women are expected to do low or unpaid work such as household chores, Agricultural work, among others. These expectations are then passed on to boys and girls, with access to education

prioritize by parents accordingly. Lack of resources also exacerbates the above point where families have limited resources. It is more often than not boys who are invested in, while families will often have more children in attempts to beget boys, thus reducing the amount of resources to invest in girls even further.

WAEC Requirement

There are many reasons why students miss admission every year. Many people might think that the university management is not fair and transparent in the admission procedures. But the truth is, every institution has its admission requirements and criteria. Candidates seeking admission into a tertiary institution in Nigeria will either use his/her WAEC, NECO result or combination of both. However, there have been questions on whether some university accepts a combination of WAEC and NECO result. Some schools like the University of Lagos accept one O'level result from its admission candidate. Candidate choosing a school like this for admission are expected to use one O'level result. Also wrong O'level subjects' combination has been identified as one of the reasons many students are denied admission. So a candidate has to know the O'level subjects combination the school of his/her choice wants (Abdulkareem, 2007)

Quota System and Catchment Area

The quota system and catchment areas are federal government policies formulated to bridge the gap between the educationally developed states and the educationally less developed states. Sequel to the enactment of these policies, government established several universities across the country to create equal opportunities for all candidates. In spite of the astronomical growth of the universities in Nigeria, both the federal and the state government have not been able to contend with the surging demand for the university education, hence the adoption of the quota system and catchment area policies. (FRN 2004)

Serious concerns were expressed by relevant stakeholders on their perceived impact of quota system and the catchment area on admission into its institution in Nigeria. The federal government guidelines for admission into institution of higher learning are based on source elements such as academic merit determined by the UTME scores and 45% of students' admission are allotted to it. Educationally less developed areas are given 20% catchment areas have 25% and 10% to the discretion of the head of the institution. In actual sense, quota system and catchment area have denied many Nigerian youth the opportunity to gain admission into any institution of their choice and should be abolished.

The Influence of Religion in Admission

The role that religion plays in determining who gains admission to university is another point of concern among college applicants. Some non-admitted students believed they were denied admission simply because their names reflected the faith in which they believed. And the fact that they did not share the same faith with those in charge of admission was enough to deny them admission. Religion plays a role in determining who gets admission and in which department (FGN 2003).

It has been observed that, in some schools in Nigeria, a department that has a particular religion as majority in the administration tended to have more students of the same faith in that department in Nigeria, religious intolerance is a problem as their stakeholders have influenced admission in their domain (FRN 2004).

JAMB Cut-off Point

Jamb cut-off mark has become a little controversial as the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) recently lowered the cut-off mark for universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. Some stakeholders in education have argued that JAMB has no business in fixing the cut-off mark for candidates seeking admission into any of the tertiary institutions. The stakeholders maintained that institutions should set their admission cut-off mark based on what they want and the number of students they want to admit.

Conclusion

The Nigerian educational system has undergone several policy reforms over the years such as admission policy reforms particularly at the higher educational level. This arises from the adoption of education as the instrument for national development, and the ultimate need to make higher education relevant and responsive to the needs of the society. More specially, the reasons for these reforms ranges from the need to expand educational access, equip students with quality education and the relevant knowledge needed for their individual and national growth; prepare the citizenry to face the challenges of globalization, and to set assurance mechanism in the higher education institution.

It is therefore concluded that policy reforms on admission of students into educational institutions by the government or educational administrators should be properly guided to reduce the rising wave of mediocrity in the country to allow more youth to be admitted into educational institutions in Nigeria.

Suggestions

To address the trending issues in admission into institutions in Nigeria, the following suggestions are made:

1. The education policies regarding admission should be reviewed so as to allow more youth to be admitted in the educational institution in Nigeria.
2. Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) should avoid the controversies that exist in the cut-off points for admission.
3. A geopolitical region should boycott the issue of “quota system” and “catchment area” in admission.
4. Parents/guardians of pupils and students should desist from presenting under-aged children for admission in schools.
5. Schools administrators should reject under-aged students that are brought to their schools for admission.
6. Gender bias should be ruled out in the admission policy of the nation’s institution.

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