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LEVEL OF QUOTA SYSTEM POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCESS TO FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

Abstract:

The paper examined the impact of quota system policy implementation on access to selected federal universities in Nigeria. The need to investigate alleged poor implementation of the quota system in policy prompted the study that was guided by two (2) research questions. A total of 7 out of the 74 public universities (which represent 10 percent) that have the 36 federating units as their catchment areas were purposively selected to constitute the study sample. Similarly, 10 percent of Heads of Academic Departments in the affected universities were randomly chosen to serve as respondents. Documentary evidences and a questionnaire titled: Quota System Policy Implementation and Access to University Education Questionnaire (QUOSIAQUE) were used to collect data for the study. The data collected were descriptively analysed using means and percentages. Based on the results of analysis, it was recommended among others that university management should be effectively supervised to ensure that the quota system policy be adopted in the processes of admission. This will ensure that applicants from all parts of the federating units are admitted in federal universities.

Keywords:

Impact, Policy Implementation, Access, University Education, Quota System.

JEL Classification: I24, I23

Introduction

Prior to the amalgamation of the northern and southern regions of Nigeria by the British colonial government in 1914, the two regions existed independently and communally. The two regions though not formally recognized as nation States enjoyed cohesion and developed at their own pace. Soon after amalgamating the regions, problems started with the stronger region attempting to dominate the weaker one in political governance, civil service, commerce and education. This has remained the bane of unending restiveness, suspicion and fear that characterize the state of the Nigerian State till date¹. The heterogeneous configuration of the Nigerian state since that time of amalgamation according to Scholars generated series of issues that have continued to engage the attention of government to invent ways of preserving national unity². Accordingly, the issues have divided the country along ethnic, religious, majority-minority, advantaged-disadvantaged lines³. The three-year civil war that profligated the country between 1967-1970 including the worsening communal clashes ravaging the different parts of the country are evidences of weak cohesion amongst the people living in Nigeria. The federal character principle is therefore a government deliberate policy to intervene and mitigate the distrust and fears that fan the embers of disunity in the country Nigerian federal society.

The federal character principle, also known as the quota system officially became a constitutional matter after its inclusion in the 1979 constitution ^{4, 5 & 6}. The constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria states it very clearly:

The composition of the federal government or any part of its agencies and the conduct of their affairs shall be carried in such manner as to recognize the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and to command national loyalty. Accordingly, the predominance in that government or its agencies of persons from a few ethnic or other sectional groups shall be avoided.

¹Ojo, E. (2009). Federalism and the search for national integration in Nigeria. African journal of political science and international relations 3(9), 384-395.

²Offorma, G.C. (2018). Access to higher education in Nigeria: Challenges for sustainable development. Journal of emerging trends in educational research and policy studies, 7(1), 202-216.

³Omebe, S.E. & Omebe, C.A. (2014). Impediments towards enlarging access to qualitative tertiary education in Nigeria. Journal of emerging trends in educational research and policy studies, 5(3), 306-310.

⁴Adeosun, A.B. (2011). Federal character principle and national integration: A critical appraisal. International journal of politics and good governance. 2(24), 1-13.

⁵Bello, M.L. (2012). Federal character as a recipe for national integration: The Nigerian paradox. International journal of politics and good governance. 3(3) 1-17.

⁶Okobia, S.O. (2002). The educational imbalance between the northern and southern states of Nigeria: A re-direction of educational policies. 23rd Inaugural Lecture Series. Delta State University, Abraka.

It is clear from the above provision that the federal character principle is structured to address the challenges of imbalance and discrimination in the country. In this regard, many scholars see the federal character principle as a practice where every nationality is represented in all government owned institutions^{7, 8 & 9}. They posit that the federal character is designed to ensure equity, fair play and order among different ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria in the distribution of resources so as to promote national cohesion. It is the attempt to give effect to this constitutional provision that the government formulated quota system policy to guide equitable distribution of social services. Unfortunately, one sector that has suffered untold imbalance in terms of equitable distribution of resources is education, particularly at the university level. Presently, a total of 74 public universities are available to develop the professional manpower needs of the nation with a federal political structure. The number of universities may be relatively inadequate, the reason government continuously review admission policies to expand the access of Nigerian from different federating units to the available universities¹⁰.

Access from the fore-going narrative simply means liberalizing opportunities for every Nigerian to have equal opportunities to attend universities. Access to education at whatever level remains an entitlement of everyone irrespective of age, sex, location, culture and religion^{11 & 12}. By this, government all over the world make it an obligation to make school education available to all citizens. Interestingly, the Nigerian government encapsulates this sense of obligation in section 1 paragraph 4c of the National Policy on Education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria documented this responsibility very clearly:

....every Nigerian child should have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities and each learning according to his or her ability¹³.

The objective of this policy statement is to among other things provide equal access to university education to all citizens. The most commendable policy initiatives taken by

⁷Ojo, E. (2009). Federalism and the search for national integration in Nigeria. *African journal of political science and international relations* 3(9), 384-395.

⁸ Adeosun, A.B. (2011). Federal character principle and national integration: A critical appraisal. *International journal of politics and good governance*. 2(24), 1-13.

⁹Bello, M.L. (2012). Federal character as a recipe for national integration: The Nigerian paradox. *International journal of politics and good governance*. 3(3) 1-17

¹⁰ Omebe, S.E. & Omebe, C.A. (2014). Impediments towards enlarging access to qualitative tertiary education in Nigeria. *Journal of emerging trends in educational research and policy studies*, 5(3), 306-310.

¹¹ Tomasevski, K. (2003). *Education denied: Costs and remedies*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

¹² Williams, M.S. (2004). Access to public universities: Addressing systemic inequalities. A paper Presented at the Conference on Taking Public Universities Seriously. University of Toronto, Canada.

¹³ Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). *National policy on education*. Abuja: Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council.

government that have increased access to university education in Nigeria are the privatization policy of university ownership; re-introduction of the Open University of Nigeria and of late, the policy of establishing at least one federal university in each of the 36 States of the federation. Additionally, government through the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) directs that the quota system policy be implemented in the placement of university. Towards this end, admission of Nigerians into available university spaces is guided by the formula of Merit 45% Catchment Area 35%, Disadvantaged Area 20% and Discretion 10 percent¹⁴.

In addition to the above interventions, government delineated 7 out of the available 74 public universities as special universities to serve as catchment areas to all Nigerians irrespective of state of origin. These special universities are the university of Abuja (UNIABUJA) located in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja; University of Ibadan (UI); Universities of Agriculture located in Umudike, Makurdi and Abeokuta; University of Port Harcourt (PHC) and; the Federal University of Petroleum Resources (FUPRE) located in Effurun, Delta State. These efforts notwithstanding, some regions in the country have reportedly alleged that their indigenes are discriminated against in the university admission processes^{15,16 & 17}. It is imperative that the allegation be investigated with a view to identifying imbalance (if any) in the distribution of university spaces among the federating units in the country^{18,19 & 20}. It is therefore the intention of this paper to investigate the extent to which the implementation of quota system policy in public universities has influenced equity in the distribution of university spaces amongst applicants from the different parts of the country. To achieve the purpose of study, the following two (2) research questions will guide investigation:

1. To what extent is the quota system policy implemented in federal universities in Nigeria?
2. What proportion of applicants from the federating units in Nigeria have access to federal universities?

¹⁴ Ukertor, G.M. (2010). *The challenges of access to university education in Nigeria DSM business review* 2(1), 17-31.

¹⁵ Oduwaiye, R.O. (2008). Access and equity in Nigerian universities: The challenges and way forward. *International journal of educational management*, 5(6), 66-74.

¹⁶ Ojo, E. (2009). Federalism and the search for national integration in Nigeria. *African journal of political science and international relations* 3(9), 384-395

¹⁷ Adeosun, A.B. (2011). Federal character principle and national integration: A critical appraisal. *International journal of politics and good governance*. 2(24), 1-13

¹⁸ Adeyemi, J.K. (2001). Equality of access and catchment area factor in university admission in Nigeria." *Higher education*. 2(4), 18-28

¹⁹ Obielumani, O.I. (2008). Quota system and educational reforms in Nigeria. *Journal of research in national development*, 6(1), 67-78.

²⁰ Okobia, S.O. (2002). The educational imbalance between the northern and southern states of Nigeria: A re-direction of educational policies. *23rd Inaugural Lecture Series*. Delta State University, Abraka.

Method

This study was descriptive, hence the adoption of the survey research design to observe and describe the influence of quota system policy implementation on access of Nigerians from the different federating units to public universities. All the 74 public universities available in the country according to Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB)²¹ constituted the population of study. The 7 universities that have all the federating States as catchment areas to all Nigerians were deliberately chosen to constitute the study sample (which represented 10 percent of the population). From the selected universities, 10 percent of Heads of Academic Departments were randomly selected to serve as respondents for the study.

Data needed to ascertain the proportion of applicants from the different federating units that have access to federal universities were collated from JAMB documentary evidences of admissions while data to determine the level of quota system policy implementation were collected using a validated questionnaire. The questionnaire titled: Quota System Policy Implementation and Access to University Education Questionnaire (QUOSIAQUE) had two (2) sections A and B. Section “A” collected demographic information on both the universities and respondents while “B” contained 20 quota system policy factors that the respondents accessed level of implementation on a 4-Point rating scale ranging from “Very Good” with 4 points to “Very Poor” with 1 point. The questionnaire was and pilot-tested on Heads of Departments in Universities that were not part of the sample (N=15, r=.84) and administered on the respondents by the Registrars of the affected universities that served as research assistants. Data collected were descriptively analysed using percentages, standard deviation, means with 2.50 set as decision mean while polygons were used to illustrate patterns and rates of policy implementation and access.

Analysis

Research Question 1

To what extent is the quota system policy implemented in federal universities in Nigeria?

The federal government's quota system policy states among others that 30 percent of the carrying capacity of federal universities be reserved for university applicants from each of the federating States including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). To answer research question one therefore, Heads of Academic Departments in the sample universities were requested to access the extent to which universities comply with the policy provision on a 4-Point rating scale. Their responses were descriptively analysed using means standard deviation and results presented in Table 1.

²¹ Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) is a government department with a mandate to conduct entrance examinations into all tertiary institutions in Nigeria and also offer admission to qualified candidates.

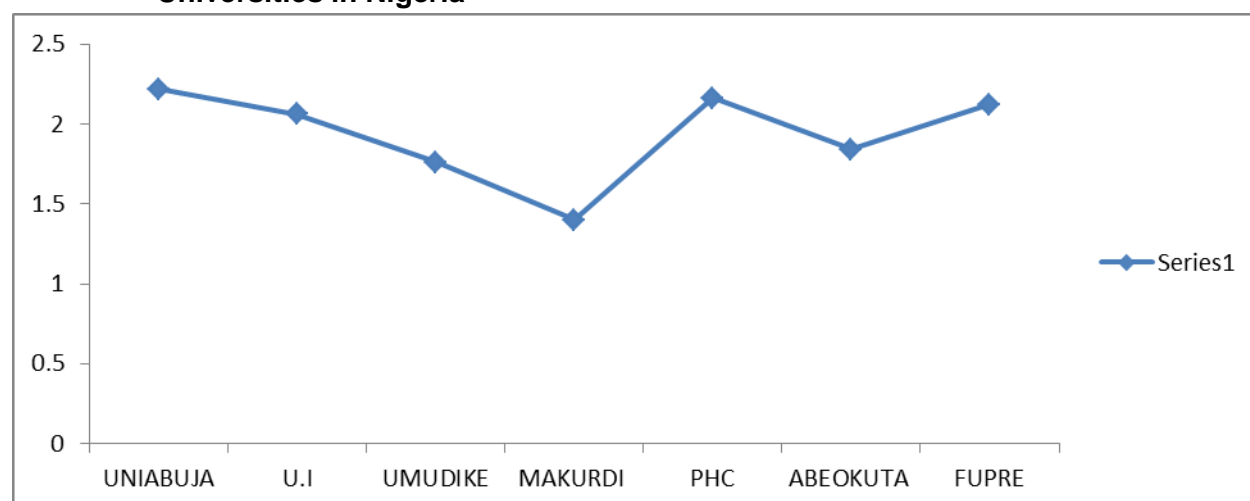
Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Quota System Policy Implementation in Nigerian Public Universities

Federal universities	N	\bar{X}	S.D	Remarks
University of Abuja	09	2.22	.461	Poor
University of Ibadan	24	2.06	.532	Poor
University of Agriculture, Umudike	07	1.76	.590	Poor
University of Agriculture, Makurdi	05	1.40	.642	Poor
University of Port Harcourt	11	2.16	.522	Poor
University of Agriculture, Abeokuta	08	1.84	.504	Poor
Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun	08	2.12	.445	Poor
Total	72	1.94	.533	Poor

Decision Mean = 2.50

Source: The table was collated and analyzed by author

As shown in Table 1, the extent of quota system policy implementation in federal universities is poor with a mean value of 1.94 (SD = .531). Although it is poor in all the universities, the situation is worse in the universities of Agriculture in Makurdi (1.40), Umudike (1.76) and Abeokuta (1.84). Surprisingly, the situation in the University of Ibadan, the foremost premier university in Nigeria is worse than the other conventional universities in Abuja (2.22) and Port Harcourt (2.16). A similar situation is observed in the only Federal University of Petroleum Resources (FUPRE) located in Effurun area of Delta State (2.12). The extent to which quota system is implemented in federal universities is illustrated with the polygon in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Polygon showing extent of Quota System Policy Implementation in Federal Universities in Nigeria*Source: The graph was plotted by author*

Research Question 2

What proportion of applicants from the different federating units have access to federal universities in Nigeria?

To answer research question 2, the numbers of university applicants and those offered admissions were collated from JAMB admission records for five (5) years, 2014 to 2018. The proportion of the applicants that gained access to the universities was expressed as a fraction of those who applied and results presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Access Rate of University Applicants from Different Federating Units

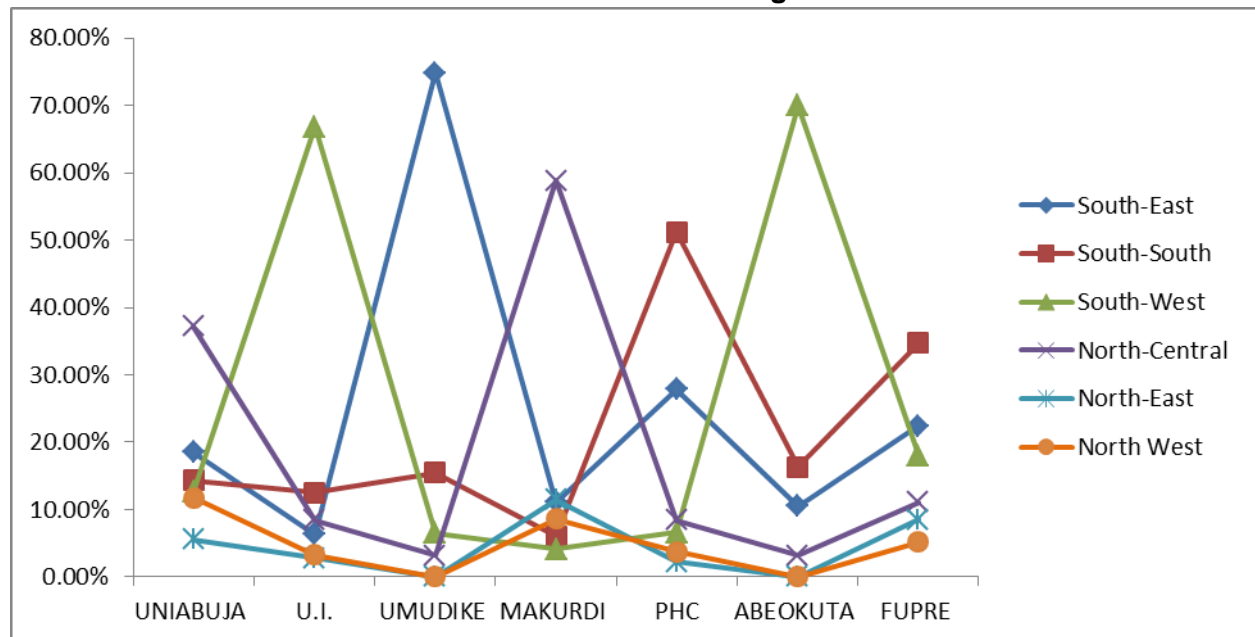
Federating Units	Applications/Access to Universities							TOTAL
	UNIABUJA	U.I.	UMUDIKE	MAKURDI	PHC	ABEOKUTA	FUPRE	
South-East	2289 (423) 18.5%	3990 (254) 6.36%	6068 (4541) 74.84%	1345 (149) 11.06%	7751 (2157) 27.83%	1837 (193) 10.5%	2822 (632) 22.4%	26102 (8349) 32%
South-South	1176 (169) 14.35%	5670 (712) 12.55%	1641 (254) 15.50%	1131 (68) 6%	12606 (6457) 51.22%	1303 (213) 16.35%	4746 (1650) 34.76%	28273 (9523) 33.68%
South-West	2962 (374) 12.64%	29095 (19447) 66.84%	714 (46) 6.49%	584 (24) 4.12%	2280 (150) 6.56%	8412 (5888) 70%	1209 (218) 18%	45256 (26147) 57.8%
North-Central	7818 (2908) 37.2%	2979 (250) 8.40%	391 (12) 3.17%	3566 (2097) 58.8%	2372 (200) 8.44%	560 (18) 3.15%	616 (68) 11.12%	18302 (5553) 30%
North-East	1593 (88) 5.55%	2041 (57) 2.80%	Nil	511 (58) 11.42%	948 (21) 2.20%	27 (.0) 0.00%	459 (39) 8.5%	5579 (263) 4.71%
North West	2246 (264) 11.76%	2626 (85) 3.25%	Nil	161 (14) 8.64%	1152 (43) 3.75%	Nil (0.00) 0%	513 (27) 5.22%	6698 (433) 6.46%
Total	18086 (4226) 23.4%	46404 (20805) 44.8%	8814 (4863) 55.1%	7298 (2410) 33.02%	27111 (9028) 33.3%	12141 (6312) 52%	10261 (2634) 25.67%	130,210 (50268) 38.61%

Source: Collated and Analysed by author

According to the data in Table 2, it is only 38.61 percent of university applicants from the different federating units in Nigeria that have access to federal universities. Analysis according to the different federating units shows that applicants from the South West area of the country made up of the Yoruba people have 57.8 percent access rate to the universities. The South-South area of the country where several minority ethnic groups live has an access rate of 33.68 percent. This means that only about one-third of the applicants are able to access the federal universities in the country. A similar situation is observed in both the South-East (32 percent) and North-Central (30%) regions of the country. The poorest access rate is observed in both North-East (4.71 percent) and North-West (6.46 percent) where the dominant majority ethnic group (Hausa/Fulani) are farmers and animal rearers. Analysis by university shows that the universities of agriculture in Umudike (55 percent) and Abeokuta (52%) admit almost half of the

applicants followed by University of Ibadan (44.8 percent) that admit a little less than half of its admission seekers. The universities of Agriculture Makurdi (33.02 percent) and Port Harcourt (33.3 percent) give one-third of their applicants access while the University of Abuja (23.4 percent) and Federal University of Petroleum Resources (FUPRE) (25.67 percent) manage to give one-quarter of their applicants access to the universities. The access rate of university applicants from the different federating units to the universities is illustrated clearer in the polygon in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Polygons Showing the Proportion of Applicants from the different Federating Units Admitted to Federal Universities in Nigeria



Source: The Graphs were plotted by the author

Discussion

The implementation of quota system policy in Nigerian universities is poor. This does not augur well for a country that has diverse languages, religions and ethnic groups. A situation like this in the fear expressed by scholars could aggravate the vexing situation in the country^{22, 23 & 24}. It is the poor implementation of the policy that has led to the regional imbalance in accessing university education in Nigeria. The imbalance favours the South-

²² Ojo, E. (2009). Federalism and the search for national integration in Nigeria. *African journal of political science and international relations* 3(9), 384-395

²³ Bello, M.L. (2012). Federal character as a recipe for national integration: The Nigerian paradox. *International journal of politics and good governance*. 3(3) 1-17.

²⁴ Offorma, G.C. (2015). Promoting access to internet facilities in tertiary institutions in G.C. Unachukwu (ed.) *Dynamics of access to education in Nigeria*. Awka: The Nigerian Academy of Education, pp. 87-95.

west region more than the other regions which according to literature has negatively imparted on the production of professional manpower to facilitate production processes in the country²⁵. The need to implement quota system policy for equitable distribution of university education in a country with diverse interest groups cannot be over-emphasized. The demand for greater access to university education continues unabated due to its social benefit, especially in the Nigerian society in which social mobility depends largely on the level of education acquired. Added to this fact is that those with university degrees have a better chance of securing plump jobs compared with those without university qualifications. The more regrettable aspect of the emerging situation is that universities in Nigeria are generally incapable of implementing quota system policy or the federal character to equalize access to available universities²⁶.

Conclusion

Federal universities, among other objectives are established to strengthen the bond of cohesion between and among the federating units in Nigeria. It is for this reason the quota system policy was formulated and implemented to foster unity in the country. Sadly, the result of this study has showed that implementation of the laudable policy in all the federal universities is poor. Although the access rate to the universities is generally poor, about half of the applicants from the South-West region of the country are favoured more than the applicants from other regions with the North-east and North-west most disfavoured.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. The implementation of quota system policy in federal universities is poor. To reverse the situation, government, the proprietor of the universities should ensure that university management give account of their stewardship particularly as it concerns quota system policy implementation. This can be done by ensuring that subventions are given only to the universities that show evidences of quota system policy implementation in the universities.
2. University applicants prefer to choose the federal universities located within their regions, a practice that negates the intention of establishing federal universities to foster national unity. It is therefore recommended that all the federal universities be mandated to advertise their admission vacancies in national media and grant special waivers to attract applicants from all the regions in the country.

²⁵ Obielumani, O.I. (2008). Quota system and educational reforms in Nigeria. *Journal of research in national development*, 6(1), 67-78.

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