

# QUOTA SYSTEM REGIME AND QUALITY OF NIGERIA TERTIARY EDUCATION

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## Abstract

This paper critically discussed quota system regime and quality of Nigeria tertiary education. The quota system came into being prior to the Nigeria's independence in 1960. It was a policy established by government of Nigeria in a way to give admission to students into Nigeria higher institutions of learning. The implication was that the issue of admission into government institutions became based on quota system rather than merit. In other words, getting admission into government universities which ought to be by merit and competence has been constantly abused. Quota system had created more problems instead of solving the problem of advancement into universities. The policy was established for the benefits of Nigerians but it was not properly managed thereby leading to discrimination of students in their own country by virtue of ethnic identification or state of origin still remains a negative factor. The issue of considering states that educationally backward should be abolish by government because no state is academically backward in this present era. The paper recommended that the students selection process of admission based on quota system should be abolish and there should be a willingness to learn by all Nigerians.

**KEY words:** Quota, System, Regime, quality and education.

## Introduction

Educations is important to individual and the society at large. In the university, education is regarded as the bedrock of human being and total development. At the university level, education serves as the bases on which the needed high level manpower for a nation's development could be nurtured. Odekule (2001)<sup>1</sup> posits that universities prepare future teachers and develop the high level manpower capacities that under pin the economic, social and political growth and development of any given nation. A university according to Odekule<sup>2</sup> is a storehouse of retrievable knowledge and has functions which include authorship and publication of standard texts, self-sustenance, creation of a model community in efficiency, probity and tolerance, honesty, and enlightened commentary on public affairs in

order to impartially educate and to inform. Therefore, the extent to which universities achieve these lofty objectives depends to a very large extent on the quality of candidates offered admission by the National University Commission (NUC). According to National University Commission (2012)<sup>3</sup>, university admission is the legitimate gate way through which qualified citizens get enrolled for university education in Nigeria. Therefore, the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) as a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Education saddled with the responsibility of selecting candidates for university education through their prescribed examination as a basic requirement.

### **Brief History of Quota System in Nigeria**

Quota system policy provided the allocation of certain percentages of admission opportunities into Nigeria universities based on populations, ethnic consideration and states of origin. When Nigeria began to practice federal system in 1954 the idea of Quota System was developed and reflected in the process of giving admissions into federal institutions and other government degree awarding establishments. Borrowing the brilliant ideas of the 1954 as established by federalism the British government thought that quota system was not a much serious political issue then until 1957 when, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa introduced the Quota System fully as a medium for admission of students into government schools, colleges and government degree awarding institutions which has been adopted by successive governments in Nigeria as Kayode stated<sup>4</sup>. The Quota System received a good attention in 1967 when the federal government adopted quota system as a process in filling vacancies into federal owned schools and institutions. According to Okoroma<sup>4</sup> 2008, Quota System policy in respect of education provides for allocation of certain percentages of admission slots into Nigerian Universities based on populations, ethnic considerations and States of origin. Yolo<sup>5</sup> 1989 averred that the Quota System Policy, and other unpleasant policy considerations in education is borne out of reasoned compromise and based on four elements, which are academic merit, educationally disadvantaged state, catchment area and discretion. Part of the arguments for Quota System in Nigeria is that all states need to be represented in the admission process to higher institutions of learning, and special preference should be given to the educationally disadvantaged states which would encourage nurturing and grooming of opportunities for every Nigerian from every community Yolo<sup>6</sup>. The purpose of extending Quota System to education in Nigeria is to ensure that no State is left behind in this sector in promoting educational development in the country. It is not doubtful that the current imbalance in education achievement between the Northern and the Southern part of Nigeria is due to the initial rejection of the western form of education by the North in preference for the Islamic and Qur'anic form of education during the colonial rule whereas the South embraced the western education which had long been practiced and promoted in the Region before the North finally accepted it as imposed on it by the colonialists. The Northern weakness for Islamic education was not unconnected with the contact the Region had with the Islamic Jihadists led by Usman Dan Fodio about hundred years prior to the introduction of western education to Nigeria through evangelization activities of the Christian missionaries in the middle of the 19th century.

### **The Concept of Quota System**

The quota system represents the rationalization of numbers of candidates that should be admitted into the university in one academic year from each state. The Dictionary of contemporary English New Edition defines "Quota" as official limit on the number or amount of something that is allowed in a particular period<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, the Webster's third New International Dictionary defines "Quota" as the share or proportion received, granted or necessary to a person as being one of a certain number assigned to 'party' e.g. an institution with a quoted admission policy<sup>8</sup>. System is an organized set of ideas, method or ways of working. On the other hand, the international Dictionary of Education defines<sup>9</sup> quota system as any selection method for school admission and others whereby a certain set percentage of those selected must be of a given ethnic or racial background of particular sex. However, from which ever dimension one views the policy, two words ring a bell inequity or inequality and equity or equality. The social consequence is that the policy produces conscious or unconscious rejection of specific social groups which are the results of decisions of the policy as to what opportunities are to be offered by the society, to whom they are to be offered, who is selected to fill them and who does the selections. So by implication Nigerians are been constantly discriminated by their ethnic identification or state of origin.

### **Quota System in the Educational Sector**

At present, the most widely recognized gap and the most politically sensitive talking point in Nigeria is the educational imbalance between the Southern, Eastern and Northern states of the country Nduka, 1974 observed<sup>10</sup> that the Southern states which had been historically more responsive to Western Christian influences and education have made more educational progress than the predominantly Moslem Northern States, where the Christian influence was to a large extent rejected. The effect of this rejection can be noticeable in the imbalance which is not only reflected in the primary level of education but also both secondary and tertiary levels of education. A university is different from other academic institutions because its preoccupation is not only in the diffusion of knowledge but its extension. The university yearns for truth and subjects existing body of knowledge to critical examination and analysis to see if it needs revision. As centre for excellence universities are also expected to set the pace for the large society in the efficient and effective management of human and material resources. The problem of admissions into Nigerian universities and the maintenance of adequate standard have been associated with some unpopular policies adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria to address the inadequacy in the number of admission places in the university system. In a bid to correct the educational imbalance between the two Regions several education policies were developed over the years by successive governments in Nigeria. Some of these policies are very popular while some are unpopular polices which include:

### **Unpopular Policies**

- i. Backwardness factor that ensured a certain percentage of admission chances was reserved for the states considered to be educationally disadvantaged or backward.
- ii. Catchment area policy provided that a certain percentage of admission places must be reserved for the indigenes of the areas in which universities are located.

iii. Quota system policy provided the allocation of certain percentages of admission places into Nigerian universities based on populations, ethnic consideration and states of origin.

iv. Discriminatory fees policy provided for lower fees to be paid by the indigenes of the localities where universities are established. Akani, 1996 posits<sup>11</sup> that the above policies resulted in the reduction of admission standards and this allowed poorly qualified candidates to be admitted into Nigerian Universities. This is because the policy conferred on the various categories of persons the right of admission whether qualified or not. Akani, further noted<sup>12</sup> that the quality of university education in Nigeria has consequently been lowered as a result of the federal Government admission policies which apparently de-emphasize quality. Oduwaiye, 2011 warned<sup>13</sup> that much as it is good that the educationally disadvantaged area is being encouraged, it should not be at the detriment of others in a situation where a candidate does not gain access just because of his birth place which is not too good. Enemuo, 2004 argued<sup>14</sup> that the policy encourages social discrimination of one group against the other. He maintained that the quota system in all its ramifications is the practice of favouring some candidates at the expense of others in the university admission on the basis of state of origin, local government area, tribe, nepotism or choice of course of study. Enemuo, further pointed<sup>15</sup> out that the application of the quota system to students' admission denies meritorious candidates admission into the universities. The quota admission system portrays that a candidate from the Southern state with university matriculation examination scores of 300 out of 400 may not get admission into the university but his/her counterpart from the North with a lower scores of 180 or 190 may be admitted. Similarly a candidate with 280 score out of 400 from educationally advanced states may not get admission but his/her counterpart from educationally disadvantaged state with lower scores of 160 or 170 may be admitted. Thus quota system has created highly inequality in the provision of university education and equity has been sacrificed on the alter of quota system of admission. Some candidates with better scores are denied admission on grounds of indigene and non-indigene dichotomy. Too bad to bear because the harm is more pronounced than the relevance. A candidate for admission should not be made to suffer greater burden than the other simply because of his place of birth and locality.

### **Popular Policies**

- A.** The take-over of schools and colleges from the missionary schools and other bodies.
- B.** The creation of the National Universities Commission to regulate admissions to the nation's Universities and other institutions.
- C.** The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board(JAMB) was established;
- D.** Quota admission to Federal Unity Schools in the country.
- E.** Quota admission to Navy, Army and Air-force schools.
- F.** Quota admission to the "Gifted school", the Suleja Academy.
- G.** Establishment of nomadic education for migrants,

**H.** Establishment of National Teachers' Institute, Kaduna to accelerate the training of Grade II teachers.

**I.** Special grants to "disadvantaged" states in order to provide additional facilities for various levels of educational institutions;

**J.** The 1976 Universal Primary Education Scheme (UPE)

**K.** The setting up of the National Primary School Education Commission in 1988 that recommended grants to states for children not registered in school along with those registered in schools;

**L.** The re-launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE).

**M.** The Al-Majiri education scheme established by the Federal Government in the Northern part of the country. In tackling the mirage, perhaps problems aimed to be solved by Quota System in education sector Okobia, 2002 suggests<sup>16</sup> that there is a compelling need to apply the positive and preventive measure of remediating the imbalance between the two Regions by increasing primary schools enrolments in the Northern Region "instead of the curative educational policies of federal quota system of admissions into secondary and tertiary educational institutions." The admission policy into federal tertiary institutions requires positive consideration of certain percentage of applicants from Educational Disadvantaged States (EDS) for less strict admission requirements. In other words, the applicants seeking admission into federal institutions are not subjected to the same stringent conditions compared to the applicants from the educationally advanced states in Nigeria. This situation creates inequality and injustice on personal basis where someone who scores better grade is denied admission because he or she comes from an educationally advanced region whereas a person who has a lesser grade is privileged to be admitted because he is from an EDS. Regardless of the state where the prospective student actually grew up or sat for the examination preference is being given only based on his state of origin. This approach undoubtedly has a negative toll on the preserved right of individuals to education. Moreover, Okoroma 2008 posited that<sup>17</sup> Quota System admission policy may be responsible for fall in the standard of university education in Nigeria. In the same vein, Akani 1996 stated that Quota System policy in education is responsible for the reduction in admission standards and this allowed for poorly qualified candidates to be admitted into the universities whereas good candidates have no place<sup>18</sup>.

Application of Quota System in admission into public institution has a reflection of inequality of treatment, inequity, injustice and a policy summersault which sacrifices individual quality to regional balance based on quantity. The Quota System policy in admission process in Nigeria will now be considered vis-à-vis equal right of everybody to education with the aim of taking a legal approach or consideration of this policy.

### **Effects of Quota System on the Quality of Nigeria Tertiary Education**

University is not a place for basic education where everyone is expected to go. It is a place for specialties. Therefore common sense dictates that whoever thinks of going to the University must demonstrate ability and competence in order to be there. If 'quota system' can be

tolerated anywhere, it is not in the University where research and excellence are emphasized. The practice of 'quota system' has actually killed the competition needed to get into our institutions of learning. Thus Osuagwu in Onwuka 1997 stated that:

*Meritocracy has for long been weakened in this country through the quota system syndrome. The arrogance and craftiness of our policy maker, who support and implement this policy is exposed in their inability to bring up this downhearted as a phase in the WAI crusade. This willful omission is a serious indictment of those public officers who peddle ingenuity in the knowledge of the problems of Nigeria<sup>19</sup>*

In the light of this, Ngoka in Onwuka 1997 posited that "the quota system of admission into Nigerian Universities is a serious abuse of the law of academic excellence<sup>20</sup>". If mediocre are admitted into schools in the uncontrolled bid to represent federal character, the products of such schools are bound to be mediocre. Our education system therefore calls for urgent over-haul. Common sense demands that in a matter like education upon which the future development of the nation depends, merit should be given priority in admitting pupils into the school system. Any society like ours that scorns merit and accepts mediocre may at the end lose all her competent scholars and geniuses. Hence Okafor in Onwuka 1997 scholarly maintained that education in Africa especially Nigeria is obviously dwindling. It has ceased to be an instrument for human development and has turned to be an instrument for achieving nothing, he warned: In spite of the African hurry for education and development, care must be taken not to allow for any reduction of standards and quality<sup>21</sup>. Africans cannot afford to institutionalize mediocrity in the public school system. He pointed out what happened in some non-African countries and advised to adopt policies that would be scholastically possible. The tradition of stringent requirements for moving from one academic level to another must be maintained. It is not through the concept of "Federal Character" or "quota system" whose aim is to assemble mediocre in our institutions of learning that we can improve the quality of the end-product of education. There is need to recruit potential scholars and not potential mercenaries. To do this, giving merit its proper place in our society does the job. It should not be done by way of equal number of bringing children from all the states of the federation before we can make effort to support fully the talented children who in future will make this country proud. Quota system' when practiced is considered bad because people must suffer from it. Those at the borderlines are always affected seriously. This is so, because they find themselves being rejected by virtue of coming from advantaged states'. For example, if a cut-off point in admission is 270 based on merit in the faculty of Medicine, Somebody who scored 269 may be rejected cause he is from 'advantaged' state while someone with 250 will be accepted because he is from 'educationally disadvantaged' state. This is unfair because merit is not accorded acceptance. In a study carried out by Onwuka, 1988 it was discovered that many students were admitted in our secondary and post secondary institutions first on basis of quota irrespective of their performance at the common entrance examination<sup>22</sup>. This practice will no doubt, reduce the predictive validity of selection measures. The question then

arises: what is the need pending much money conducting entrance examination and Joint Matriculation Examinations, only to use some other criteria not directly related in admitting people into institutions of learning? The answer is any person's guess. But bearing in mind that University institutions are first and foremost set up for academic excellence, it is wise that Universities get involved fully in admission of candidates into the Universities in order to enable them select only those who are academically fit. Buttressing this point, Briggs in Ukwu, 1987 maintained that:

*The Universities and whatever central organization that may be set up for the purpose of determining the national minimum standards would have to agree upon the relative proportions of candidates that should be admitted on the basis of academic excellence. This is important in order to ensure that the best of candidates most qualified for university education are screened on the basis of individual merit.*<sup>23</sup>

In the light of this therefore, it stands to reason that there is no short-cut to excellence. Rather than the enthronement of mediocrity and an emasculation of meritocracy among Nigerian students through these obnoxious policies as 'quota system' 'educationally disadvantaged' federal character etc. there is need to use stringent measures in admitting candidates in our institutions of higher learning.

### **Challenges and Problems Caused by the Quota System in Nigeria.**

Admission into institutions should be strictly based on merit instead of on the idea of balancing imbalances in education at the expense of merit. This cardinal objective of balancing national imbalances has conferred some challenges on the quota system: These include:

1. Merit is sacrificed on the altar of federal character and ethnic balancing. The implication is clear. Mediocre are offered admission into Universities.
2. It has political intentions more than educational intentions.
3. Well qualified students are deprived the opportunity to have education, all in the name of the quota system.
4. It has made the institutions become more of center of ethnic patronage than of academic excellence.
5. It created the ugly impression that a particular section of the country must stop or slow down educational pursuit for the other section to catch up with her or even surpass her. This is a dangerous trend in a supposedly egalitarian society where no one should be oppressed or suppressed.
6. The general public has also suffered from the effect of quota system. This is because the public are aware that the government of Nigeria both state and federal use quota system in admission into schools and employment opportunities and from the records it has never go down well with Nigerians looking for admission into institutions of learning because the government never-do-well under the umbrella of quota find.

6. The quota system of education does not expose learners to different social, cultural and geographic environments this may give rise to a closed society. Socializing and working in different environments brings harmony.
7. The quota system limits cultural diversity. It does not fully break ethnic and cultural barriers in that people are not able to interact at early ages limiting the degree intermarriages and the degree of mutual existence.
8. It does not remove stereotyping amongst learners of different communities for example, a notion that people from a particular geo political region are academically backward. Interaction enables people understand that human beings are individuals, and that the way a person behaves is not necessarily reflective of a community.

### **Possible Ways of Ensuring the Quota System Regime Enhances National Unity**

1. The issue of state with academically or educationally disadvantage should be review because no state is backward educationally in present era.
2. The government to absorb some of the costs associated with students learning in some areas or overseas. These include; transport cost and school fees. This is to facilitate their settling down quickly and to motivate students to move to distant schools.
3. Government and all the bodies in charge of admission should consider the choice and the interest, merit and excellent performance of learners to offer him or her admission into Nigeria institutions.
4. The lecturers and schools Teachers should have a higher population of workers coming from different parts of the country.
5. Governments to ensure resources are evenly distributed so as to reduce the degree of learners refusing to go to particular areas.
6. All Universities and schools should to be treated as national schools not federal or state and to be able to admit majority of the students from all over the country.
7. Schools structures and buildings should be made of a higher quality with capacity to accommodate large numbers of students.
8. Strike action should not be parts of Universities and schools programs or calendar so as avoid delay in graduation of students.

### **Conclusion**

It not doubts that the demand for university education in Nigeria is very high with over 180 million in population cannot measure up to the available universities and its capacities and resources, therefore the struggle for the limited available spaces is eminent. However, the Quota system policy in education has greatly eroded and endangered the fundamental rights of individuals to education, which makes such policy unconstitutional, and also creates discriminatory standards for admission into tertiary institutions. Preventing prospective students from gaining admission into higher institution of learning on the basis of unbalanced policy of Quota System can have demoralizing effect on such admission seekers. Moreover, if academically better candidates are not given the opportunity to have tertiary education it will have a negative significant effect on the society and which can adversely affect the development of the country and education.



## Recommendations

After a thorough analysis of the theme, the following recommendations were made to various stakeholders concerning the influence of the quota system regime and quality of Nigeria Tertiary institutions.

- a. Students selection during Admission: The student's selection process needs to be structured such that there is a deliberate reflection of diversity in all learning institutions which can be implemented during the student's selection or during admission process.
- b. Students should be willing to learn in any parts of the country:
- c. The quota system policy should be abolished. This is because it does not expose learners to different social, cultural and geographic environments this may give rise to a closed society.
- d. Admission into tertiary institutions should be aims at promoting national unity. Any effort to promote national unity should be the sole aim of any institutions in Nigeria.

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