

QUOTA SYSTEM OF ADMISSION POLICY IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM: IMPLICATIONS FOR QUALITY AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the implications of quota system of admission for the quality and global competitiveness of the Nigerian university educational system. Efforts by the Nigerian government to address the social inequalities in the country culminated into the introduction of quota system of admission into the Nigerian education sector. However, critical evaluation of the quota system in the light of quality University education revealed that quota system of admission has been counterproductive to quality university education in Nigeria. It has been hotly criticized for corroding the standard of Nigerian education because of its emphasis on state of origin as the main criteria for admission rather than on merit based on high scores in entrance examinations. This paved way to mediocrity where brilliant youths are denied admission while intellectually dull ones are offered admission. They graduate, lacking in requisite skills and knowledge and because they have acquired the paper certificate, they are subsequently employed or elected to run the Nigerian economy and the polity. The resultant effect of this is the general fall in the standard, quality and global competitiveness of the Nigerian university education. Hence, these authors concluded that there is no justification for the continued operation of quota system in admission into Nigerian schools. They further recommended that federal government should abolish quota system of *admission and devise means to ensure that admission into Nigerian schools is exclusively based on high scores in the entrance examinations*. This will help the youth to find faith in the system and strong hope for the country and also, State governments, especially those of the educationally less developed areas should create and develop remedial intellectual development programs for their citizens to prepare them for the competitive university admissions.

Introduction

The massive universal recognition of education as a veritable instrument for human capital development has made education a worldwide unifying factor bringing all countries of the world into a united village. Ikoro and Ezeanyim (2017) rightly stated that education is a prime agent through which the consciousness of the world as a single entity or being a relevant part of the global system could be inculcated in the minds of citizens. That is to say, the global relevance of a country is the product of its educational system. The quality of education of a country hence determines her level of competitiveness among the comity of nations. This is the reason why countries with higher quality education system have over the years been placed at a vantage position over those whose educational system fall below expected standards. Njoku, Dim and Igbokwe (2021) defined global competitiveness as the ability of a country to produce quality and superior utility that meets the prevailing global benchmark for standard products and even preferred when compared to those of other nation's outputs. A country can be said to be operating a high quality education when her educational system can attract recognition, patronage and national income to their home country from the global labour/output market otherwise, such a country will be rated low in the global standard of educational system rankings. It is therefore suicidal for any country not to place quality education on her topmost priority list.

It is based on the above fact that every country of the world strives to maintain a high quality standard of educational system, especially at the university level. University Education is given premium in matters of a nation's educational system not just because it is the highest arm of every nation's educational system but because the university education level is responsible for producing the needed high level manpower for the economic, social and political growth of a nation Odigwe and Swem (2016). Similarly, Thom-otuya and Inko-tariah (2016) averred that it is the job of the university to mould the general behaviour of an individual by impacting positively on their character and learning by which such an individual is equipped to transform the society. The university has also be recognized as Ivory Tower and centre for excellence where skills and knowledge (a public good), ideas and ideals are disseminated and acquired; future leaders are developed and high level technical human capacity that ensures economic growth and development are made through lecturing/ teaching, learning, research, internship, and practicum (Otonko, 2012; Okerulo, 2010). Consequently, the quality of a nation's university system to a large extent affects the quality of the nation's educational products and hence the nation's global competitiveness. To ensure quality university system, the university admission process is an important factor to be considered. Studies have shown that when students are admitted into the university by merit based on high scores in entrance examinations, high standard education will be guaranteed but when the entrance standard is lowered for any reason, the quality of the education will definitely fall bellow standard (Abiogu, 2009; Anonaba, 2015).

Admission into the Nigeria University for Undergraduate Studies requires a minimum of senior secondary School examination Certificate or General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level with minimum of 6 Credits including English Language and Mathematics at a maximum of two sittings. The requirements also include a Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) Entrance Examination score of 180 and above (IOM, 2014). These standards are

established to maintain high quality university education in Nigeria. In addition to the above requirements, the quota system of admission is also used as a benchmark for admission into Nigerian university. The quota system principle was instituted by federal government of Nigeria as an effort primarily to address educational imbalances that placed some regions over and above others. Consequently, quota system was applied to students' admission into federal government owned schools that is, unity secondary schools and the tertiary schools with the aim of creating equality in the access of educational services among all the geopolitical zones of the country. Ever since the regime of the quota system of admission in the Nigerian educational system, there has been an improvement in the consciousness for education and literacy rate in the country, especially in the regions regarded as educationally less developed areas. However, its impact on the quality of education in Nigeria is such that leaves much substance to be desired. Thom-otuya and Inko-tariah (2016) in their work averred that it is a common view that the quality of education in Nigeria has fallen drastically over the years as a result of some policies that laid emphasis on quantity rather than quality. Quota system of admission in its nature emphasizes number of students from different zones of the country that are admitted into the Nigerian schools in a year while ignoring the quality of education such students have been exposed to. The impact of this error on the international image of Nigeria and its educational system has become quite worrisome. The aim of this paper is to examine the implications of quota system of admission for the quality and global competitiveness of the Nigerian university educational system.

What is quota system?

It is difficult to talk about quota system in Nigeria without talking about the Federal Character Principle. Not because they are the same but because quota system has often been misrepresented by some authors. Some project it as an offshoot of the Nigerian Federal Character Principle (Adeosun, 2011; Onwe, Okpata & Duru, 2011) others see it as another term for federal character (Chafe, 1994; Ekundayo & Adedokun, 2009; Duruji, Joshua, Olanrewaju, Oviasogie, Ajayi & Ejiro, 2014). Although both policies are aimed at same objective of national integration and unity, they differ in their operations and origin. Joshua, Loromeke, and Olanrewaju (2014) distinguished the two concepts when they averred that while the quota system creates opportunities for disadvantaged states, the federal character principle in addition to the added advantage creates soft landing for them. In addition to that, federal character considers academic qualifications in its zonal selections but quota system mostly considers zones and states of origin. While Federal character principle is the product of the Constitution Drafting Committee set up by the General Murtala's military regime in 1975, quota system has already been operational during the colonial rule in Nigeria far before 1960 but resurfaced in post-colonial Nigeria as part of the product of the 1975 constitution drafting committee of Murtala Mohammed regime. (Onwuka, 1997). According to Leila, Arnim and Ukoha (2020), both policies are constitutional innovation introduced to manage and curtail horizontal inequalities in the Nigerian political sphere.

Quota system in the Nigerian context is the sharing formula for national resources and opportunities. The term 'Quota' has been described in various ways by different scholars. The third edition of Webster New international Dictionary defines Quota as the share or proportion received, granted or necessary to an individual, a group of individuals, a system or an institution

as being a part of certain number assigned to groups. Toeing the part of the above description, one can rightly define quota system as a sharing formula of opportunities such as employment or admission into schools where a specified percentage of individuals are chosen based on a specific characteristic such as ethnicity, state of origin, geopolitical zone or gender.

Quota system of admission for that reason means the number of candidates that should be admitted into the university in one academic year from each state of the federation. According to Odigwe and Swem (2016), quota system of admission into the Nigerian universities or unity schools simply entails admitting certain number of candidates from each state of the country into the schools in one academic year. Similarly, Abdu and Joshua (2019) viewed quota system of admission as a process of allocating certain percentage of admission opportunities into federal schools in Nigeria to different groups of admission seekers mostly based on state of origin. This means that the principle of quota system places state of origin of a candidate over other forms of admission criteria such as entrance examination scores. Ogoke, Onwuka and Enemuoh (2019), observed that the basis for admitting these applicants under quota system is not solely on merit but on other criteria like state and/or local government of origin. Hence, in terms of admission into federal government owned schools, state of origin of an admission seeker plays an important role regarding whether the candidate will be admitted or not. In other words, representation of various states in the distribution of opportunities for education is to be given important consideration under the quota system of admission. To this effect, the thirty-six states of the federation have been divided into two groups, namely: educationally less developed states and educationally developed states otherwise called educationally disadvantaged states and educationally advantaged states respectively. The educationally disadvantaged states comprise of Adamawa, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Borno, Cross River, Ebonyi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Rivers, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara states. The other 13 states are hence considered educationally advantaged states.

Educationally disadvantaged states are those states in which the percentage of citizens who have received formal education at all levels is comparatively lower than what is obtainable in the states regarded as educationally advantaged. This inequality in educational attainment that necessitated the quota system of admission was caused by the initial rejection of western education by some zones in Nigeria. Although both the Northern and Southern people of Nigeria rejected the western education when it was originally introduced by the Christian missionaries between 1842 and 1882, it was eventually embraced by the South as it became a symbol of progress and prestige and a partway to becoming clerks, teachers, letter writers, interpreters and court workers. However, owing to the fact that Christian missionaries pioneered western education using church buildings as classrooms, the Muslim North which already had Islamic schools were adamant in their rejection of western education for the fear that their children could be converted to Christianity through this form of education. Olibie, Eziudo and Enueme (2013) averred that this inequality in educational attainment between Northern and Southern Nigeria has over time, resulted to uneven socioeconomic development in the country. With the advent of globalization that promoted industrialization with its associated scientific and technological advancements, the Northern Muslim elites realized the importance of western education in driving socioeconomic development of their people and region and how far they are lagging behind their southern

counterparts who now have more educational institutions as well as more number of teachers, graduates and so on. Consequently, there arose agitations and calls for equal access to educational opportunities. Such agitations took different dimensions and became a threat to the national integration and unity. Given that the northerners could not compete favorably with the southerners in educational pursuits, the quota system of admission was instituted by the federal government to slow down the southerners (educationally advantaged states) to allow the northerners (the educationally disadvantaged states) to meet-up. It was expected that this arrangement will gradually address the issue of educational and socio-economic inequality in Nigeria.

Educationally less developed states are given concessions for school admissions at different levels as a way of ensuring that more applicants from those states are given more opportunities for admission into schools. Consequently, the cut-off marks for admissions into unity schools are far lower for the educationally less developed states than their counterparts. The following has been the cut-off marks for admission into unity schools for different states in recent years as recorded by Onyekwelu (2020): Abia-130; Adamawa-62; Akwa-Ibom -123; Anambra -139; Bauchi -35; Bayelsa -72; Benue -111; Borno-45; Cross River-97; Delta -131; Ebonyi -112; Edo-127; Ekiti -119; Enugu - 134; Gombe -58; Imo -138; Jigawa - 44; Kaduna -91; Kano - 67; Katsina - 60; Kebbi - 9 (male) 20 (female); Kogi -119; Kwara -123; Lagos -133; Nasarawa -58; Niger - 93; Ogun -131; Ondo -126; Osun -127; Oyo -127; Plateau - 97; Rivers -118; Sokoto - 9 (male) 13 (female); Taraba - 3 (male) 11 (female); Yobe - 2 (male) 27 (female); Zamfara - 4 (male) 2 (female) and FCT Abuja 90. This reveals that a candidate of Anambra origin who scored 138 in the entrance examination could be denied admission whereas a candidate from Zamfara who scored just 02 will be offered admission. Also, gender quota structure exists in states like Kebbi, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara. While males from Kebbi and sokoto are expected to score at least 9, those from Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara must score at least 3, 2 and 4 respectively, their females must score at least 20, 13, 11, 27 and 2 respectively.

For admission into the tertiary schools, the quota principle stipulates thus: admission into the 6 first generation universities comprising of the University of Ibadan, the University of Nigeria Nsukka, the University of Lagos, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, and the University of Benin should be based on 40% on merit from all states of the federation, 30% from catchment areas, 20% for students from educationally less developed states and 10% at the discretion of the university concerned. For admission into the Second generation universities namely: University of Ilorin, University of Port Harcourt, University of Calabar, Uthman Danfodiyo University, Bayero University, and University of Maiduguri: 30% should be given on merit, 30% from catchment regions, 30% for the educationally disadvantaged states and 10% at the university's discretion and for the third generation universities comprising of all Federal universities of technology: 20% should come from the catchment areas and 80% at the discretion of the university.

Catchment area here depicts the locality in which the institution is situated. Federal institutions normally have all the states as their catchment areas, while state-owned institutions have all local government areas of their states as their catchment area (Joshua, Loromeke &

Olanrewaju, 2014). By the above arrangement, a candidate from south-east who scored over 250 in the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB)/ Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) may be denied admission in a southern university, while a northern candidate who scored below 200 may be offered admission. In other words the standard of education is lowered to accommodate those who could not pass entrance examination. If this is not sacrificing quality of education for political satisfaction then, I need to be educated.

What is quality education?

The term quality is characterized by such concepts as standard, value, worth, excellence, eminence or class. Quality is also synonymous to effectiveness, efficiency, efficacy, originality and the likes. It is the degree of excellence, effectiveness, efficiency or efficacy possessed by a product in comparison to its competitors or contemporaries. A product is said to possess quality when it meets expected or pre-established standards or when it is desirable by many due to its worth, value, relevance and ability to satisfy a want. In relationship to education, quality can be said to be, the ability of an education to produce utility to satisfy the needs of the majority of a people. It is the ability of an education to produce valuable human and material resources that can help to enhance the standard of human living. Thom-otuya and Inko-tariah (2016) defined quality education as that which can transform human capital to be creative and become an agent of radical transformation in the society. They further conceptualized quality education as knowledge building and the skilful application of all forms of knowledge by unique individuals who function both independently and in relation to others.

A quality education reflects the dynamic nature of culture and languages, the value of the individual in relation to the larger context, and the importance of living in a way that promotes equality in the present and fosters a sustainable future. According to Obasi (2010) the indicators of quality and globally relevant education include: ability of graduates to perform effectively and efficiently in the society, industries and other related places; graduates' capacity of self, national and international employment; National and International mobility of generated manpower; Market value or demand level of research outputs and other services provided by the educational system; capacity of graduates to gain International admission for higher studies without remedial conditions; High global ranking of educational institutions and their products and so on. A study by Odigwe and Swem (2016) revealed that merit system of admission significantly influences the quality of university education. Hence, if merit is considered paramount in admission process, it will lead to an increase in the quality of education in universities.

To guarantee quality education, the system must set and maintain a high standard, be well organized, funded (to provide necessary learning infrastructures and materials) and supervised; it must be well furnished with quality personnel to handle all aspects of teaching and provision of learning activities capable of developing the intellectual and physical skills of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environment. According to Ekpo (2014), the quality of education can be guaranteed when different stakeholders of education adhere to the standards established for quality. This author is saying that when stakeholders ignore establish standards for quality in the educational processes, quality education could decline. Concern has been raised about the decline in the quality of education which universities offer (Odigwe &

Swem, 2016; Ekpo, 2014). According to Ekpo (2014), the indicators of this fallen standard of education in Nigeria include high poverty level and a high level of unemployment which is staring us glaring in the face as our “educated” youths are involved in all kinds of anti social behaviors due partly to high level of unemployment in the country. This does not say good of the image of Nigerian education in the global hem of affairs. How has the quota system of admission contributed to this menace?

Implications of quota system of admission for quality and global educational competitiveness of the Nigerian university education.

The application of quota system in the admission process into the unity schools and tertiary schools in Nigeria seems to be counterproductive to quality university education in Nigeria. This is because ever since its operation, the standard of education in the country has continued to nose dive. This is so because the quota system instituted mediocrity over merit by placing state of origin over merit based on high score for admission into Nigerian schools. How can quality education be guaranteed in a country where over 50% of the population admitted every year comprises of candidates who scored below 30 over 400 in JAMB? In other words, more brilliant students are left at home while dull brains are admitted to roam aimlessly in our schools. No doubt, this is responsible for the drastic fall in standard and quality of Nigerian education.

Abiogu (2009) asserted that admission of poor performing candidates under quota system in Nigeria has corroded academic excellence and it is fast paving way for mediocrity and academic backwardness. Consequently, the functionality aspect of the Nigerian educational system has gone to the dogs, and the survival of its *educands* and the larger society is on the brink of disaster. The long run effect of this is that it has become difficult for Nigerian university system to produce quality graduates who can compete favourably in the global markets as most of them are not teachable hence, they graduate with mere paper certificates without the requisite knowledge and skills that can impact on the economy. In corroboration, Anonaba (2015) averred that most graduates in Nigeria are half-baked and un-employable in a formal service and can hardly stand a chance in the global labour market and neither can they contribute any solution to global problems.

The ugly consequence of sacrificing quality education on the altar of political sentiments according to Njoku, Dim & Igbokwe (2021) was brought to the fore in 2004 when the first global university ranking was done. The ranking indicated that no Nigerian University was found among the best/ list of first 1000 Universities in the world. The trend continued yearly till in 2019 when University of Ibadan took the 901st position out of the first 1000 best universities of the world. However, in the 2020 ranking, no Nigerian university made the list of the first 1000 world best universities, meaning that it could not retain its 2019 position (Njoku, Dim & Igbokwe, 2021). At the continental level, a similar ranking for African nations in 2010, showed that only four Nigerian Universities were found on the list of first 100 Universities in Africa on the following positions: University of Lagos, 31st, Obafemi Awolowo University 35th, University of Ilorin 37th, University of Ibadan 45th and University of Benin 87th positions, where as South Africa produced the first 4 leading Universities in Africa and the first 7 on the list of the top ten universities in Africa. South Africa has over the years maintained this leading position till the current year 2020 while university of Ibadan has rose up to the 8th position in the list of the best

10 universities in Africa with University of Cape Town, University of Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch University, University of KwaZulu Natal and University of Johannesburg taking 1st to 5th positions respectively; Cairo University and Pretoria University are on the 6th and 7th positions where as Mansoura University and Addis Ababa University are on the 9th and 10th positions respectively. From the ranking, South African universities are the leading universities in Africa while Nigeria, the once acclaimed giant of Africa and intellectual laboratory of Africa can boast of only one university out of the 174 universities registered by NUC (NUC, 2020). The situation is rather getting worst especially with the fake Chicago state university education certificate saga involving the present Nigerian president, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu.

In recent years, and till date Nigeria has been governed by leaders produced by the quota system. The major characteristic of these leaders is that they lack quality education background. This is because, brilliant youths are denied admission in their own country while Nigeria institutions admit dull brains due to quota system. At the end, they graduate with empty brain and because they have acquired the paper certificate, they are subsequently employed or elected to run the Nigerian economy and the polity. This situation has forced so many youths to leave the country to study overseas at very exorbitant costs after which, they stay back in those countries to work where as foreign students avoid coming to Nigeria to study. The Nigeria national image is seriously smeared by this ugly situation as it demonstrates bad leadership and poor national development on the country making the movement of the country towards global relevance delusional and unrealistic.

Conclusion

The quota system in the real sense of it is a democratic approach to facilitate equality. In other words, if properly harnessed, it is capable of instituting a culture of justice, equity and fairness which sustains national peace and unity. However, its application in admission into Nigerian schools has been counterproductive to quality university education. Its application has corroded the standard of Nigerian education because it emphasizes state of origin as the main criteria for admission rather than on merit based on high scores in entrance examinations. This system paved way to mediocrity where brilliant youths are denied admission while intellectually dull ones are admitted due to quota system. At the end, they graduate with empty brain and because they have acquired the paper certificate, they are subsequently employed or elected to run the Nigerian economy and the polity. The resultant effect of this is the general fall in the standard and quality of the Nigerian university education associated with low global competitiveness of the Nigerian university education output. There is therefore, no justification for the continued operation of quota system in admission into Nigerian schools.

Recommendations

1. The federal government should abolish quota system of admission or devise a means to ensure that admission into Nigerian schools is exclusively by merit based on high scores in the entrance examinations. This will help our youth to develop faith in the system and strong hope for the country.
2. The government should liberalize the economy, ie the economy should be versatile so that higher education should not be the only means of self-actualization rather, other sectors that

do not necessarily require intellectual strength such as sports, agriculture, entertainment industry, arts and crafts etc should be made viable to accommodate youths who are not intellectually strong enough to compete favorably in admission into the higher institutions. In that case, each person will become an authority in their choice of career. This will eliminate the agitations against marginalization.

3. State governments, especially those of the educationally less developed areas should create and developed remedial intellectual development programs for their citizens who are going to write national entrance examinations into unity schools or into tertiary institutions in order to prepare them for the competitive university admissions.

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