

Access to Higher Education in Nigeria:

The University of Calabar at a Glance

L'ACCÈS À L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR AU NIGÉRIA:

UN COUP D'OEIL SUR L'UNIVERSITÉ DE CALABAR

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Abstract: The need for meaningful access to university education has recently become indispensable in Nigeria as a result of population increase and volume of awareness of the role of the university education in the development of the individual and the nation at large. Admission policies of Nigerian universities of recent has been so dissatisfactory to Nigerian public as many applicants are subjected to rigorous texts and expenditures for non-existing spaces in the universities. This paper therefore, examined the University of Calabar in order to identify the factors that militate against candidates access to higher education. Five research hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. 200 respondents were used as the population for the study. 75 lecturers and 125 students were used. Findings revealed among others, that; Post UME screening is not favourable to most candidates seeking access to university education in Nigeria. That quota system policy of university admission is not favourable to non—indigenes of the state. Based on the findings few recommendations were proffered, among which is, that Nigerian government should formulate admission policies that would give every Nigerian candidate access to university education.

Key words: Access; Higher Education; University; Calabar and Glance

Résumé La nécessité d'un accès significatif à l'enseignement universitaire est devenu récemment indispensable au Nigéria en raison de la croissance démographique et la prise de conscience du rôle de la formation universitaire dans le développement de l'individu et de la nation dans son ensemble. Les politiques d'admission des universités nigériennes de ces dernières années ont été si insatisfaisantes aux yeux du public nigérien que beaucoup de candidats sont soumis à des textes rigoureux et devraient payer pour les espaces non-existants dans les universités. Cet article a donc examiné l'Université de Calabar dans le but d'identifier les facteurs qui militent contre l'accès des candidats à l'enseignement supérieur. Cinq hypothèses de recherche ont été testées à un niveau de signification de 0,05 degré 200 répondants ont été enquêtés comme les sujets de l'étude, dont 75 professeurs et 125 étudiants. Les résultats ont révélé entre autres, que le post UME d'aptitude n'est pas favorable à la plupart des candidats qui cherchent à accéder à l'enseignement universitaire au Nigéria. Cette politique du système de quotas d'admission à l'université n'est pas favorable aux non-indigènes de l'état. Sur la base des conclusions, quelques recommandations ont été présentées, parmi lesquelles, on voit que le gouvernement nigérien devrait formuler des politiques d'admission qui donneraient accès à tous les candidats du Nigéria à l'enseignement universitaire.

Mots clés: Accès; Enseignement supérieur; Université Coup d'oeuil sur Calabar

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INTRODUCTION

Education has been seen as a strong weapon for social, political and economic development of every nation. For a developing country like Nigeria to have such development, it is necessary to develop her human resources that can be

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utilized, especially for economic development. This would help to boost the nation's Gross National Product (GNP) per capita. Jibowu in Lokbut (2007) stated that a nation's Gross National Product (GNP) per capita depends, to a large extent, on the level of development of its human resources. Based on this, there is need for rapid, adequate, but rational development of the country's university education.

One would therefore expect Nigeria as a developing country to make access to university education for all citizens a priority. But it is surprising that many Nigerians could not have access to university education due probably to admission policies like, quota system, Post – University Matriculations Examination (UME) Screening, lack of facilities, fewness of universities, among others. This paper therefore, attempted to ascertain those factors that tend to militate against Nigerians access to university education using University of Calabar as a study area.

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Nigerians have come to realize the importance of university education in one's life as a means for social mobility, self-development and self-actualization (Ene, 2007), Federal government of Nigeria (2003) explained that access to implies making it possible for everyone who is entitled to education to education receive it. Based on this, it is imperative that enough universities be established to accommodate the yearning candidates in Nigeria.

Universities in Nigeria have faced serious under funding for many years now as a result of increase in population and high demand for university education. Poor funding is one of the major factors that militates against access to university education in Nigeria. Many Nigerians are desirous to have university education but the available means of achieving this in the country is limited. Several attempts have been made to remedy these problems. One such attempt was the establishment of National Open University System to cater for the educational need of the people aspiring for university education. But the question is, do all these efforts provide meaningful access to university education in Nigeria?

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The major purpose of the study is to determine the access to university education in Nigeria.

Specifically, the study ascertained:

- (1) The Post-UME Screening as it affects candidates access to university education in Nigeria.
- (2) Quota system in admission as it affects candidates access to university education in Nigeria.
- (3) Funding of universities and its effects on candidates access to university education in Nigeria.
- (4) Socio-economic background of candidates as it affects their access to university education in Nigeria.
- (5) Gender discrimination and its effects on candidates university education in Nigeria.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of the study would benefit the teachers and students of higher education as they would find in it valuable literature for academic work.

The study would benefit the higher education planners as it would help them to formulate proper policies for higher education. The findings on funding would enable the government to recognize the importance of funding higher education in the country.

4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following research hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance:

- (1) There is no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and students on the effects of Post-UME Screening on candidates access to university education in Nigeria.
- (2) There is no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and students on the effects of quota system on candidates access to university education in Nigeria.
- (3) There is no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and students on the effects of funding on candidates access to university education in Nigeria.
- (4) There is no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and students on the effects of socio-economic background on candidates access to university education in Nigeria.

- (5) There is no significant difference in the mean responses of lecturers and students on the effects of gender discrimination on candidates access to university education in Nigeria.

5. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Certain factors militate against access to university education in Nigeria. Literatures related to these issues are reviewed in this study. The federal character policy is a means to ensure fair and equal representation in various components of the units and communal groups in the country's educational institutions, agencies, status and influence, and positions of power. According to (FRN, 1996), it involves lowering the entry and promotional qualifications of states considered disadvantaged in educational opportunity.

Federal character policy which is associated with the quota system of admission has been detrimental to candidates access to university education (Akpan and Undie, 2007). According to them quota system was introduced in an attempt to provide equal opportunity for candidates to be admitted into the university, but regrettably, the system has been greatly abused. The federal character policy has gradually been described by Nigerians as indigene and non-indigene dichotomy. Using quota system as put by Akpan and Undie (2007) to guide and regulate access to university education has an inequitable effect and academic merit is being scarified on the altar of mediocrity.

Funding of universities in Nigeria has been a serious problems affecting the growth of university education. According to Dada (2004), rather than a progressive movement toward the minimum standard of 26% that every developing country of the world should allocate the education annually what is experienced is a systematic reduction of the allocation to education. To him, poor funding is a major factor militating against good access to university education. This is true because poor funding tends to lead to inadequate provision of human and material resources and students admission is usually based on the availability of these resources.

The socio-economic background of Nigerians being so low tends to deny them access to university education. According to Ehiamezor (2005), about 70.2% Nigerians are poor and by implication cannot afford to send their children to school. Akpan and Undie (2007) revealed that, the socio-economic hardship deprive many qualified but less privileged candidates of the opportunity to enter into the university. It is therefore, clear that poverty is an important factor that militates against meaningful access to university education (Ene, 2007).

Gender discrimination tends to hinder candidates access to university education Ehiamezor in Ene (2007) revealed that the number of females who took 204 Universities Matriculation Examinations (UME) was 353.84 compared to 438.703 in 2003, this showed a drop of about 19.5%. By implication, out of 838.051 applicants for UME in 2004, females represented 42.2%. This is unexpected of country that perhaps has more females than male population (Akpan and Undie, 2007).

6. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. This is because the study sought for the facts and opinions of the respondents.

The University of Calabar, Nigeria was used as the area of the study. University of Calabar is one of the Federal Universities in Nigeria. It is in Cross River State of Nigeria.

The population for the study comprised of 75 staff and 125 students of the university. The entire population was used for the study.

A structured questionnaire was used for data collection.

The instrument was subjected to a face validation by two experts from the University of Calabar.

Cronbach Alpha reliability test was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. Reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained which was high enough to confirm the reliability of the instrument.

The five null hypotheses were analysed using independent t-test at .05 level of significance.

7. ANALYSIS OF DATA AND RESULTS

The 5 null hypotheses tested at .05 level of significance are presented in tables below to determine whether differences exist between the responses of lecturers and students of the university on the factors that hinder candidates access to university education in Nigeria.

Table 1: T-test of Difference between the Mean Responses of Lecturers and Students on the Effects of Post-UME Screening on Candidates Access to University Education

Group	\bar{x}	SD	N	df	tc	tv	Decision
Lecturers	63.73	5.59	125	198	43.73	1.98	Rejected
Students	32.68	4.92	75				

Key: \bar{x} =mean, SD=Standard deviation, tc=t-calculated, tv=t-table value, df=degree of freedom, N=Number of respondents

From the analysis in Table 1, the calculated t-value of 43.73 is greater than the null hypothesis of no significance is rejected. In other words there is significant effect of Post-UME Screening on candidates access to university education in Nigeria.

Table 2: Independent T-test of the Effect of Quota System on Candidates Access to University Education

Group	\bar{x}	SD	N	df	tc	tv	Decision
Lecturers	64.68	5.61	125	198	36.93	1.98	Rejected
Students	42.88	2.98	75				

Table 2 above showed that the calculated t-value of 36.93 is greater than critical value of 1.98. This is an indication that the null hypothesis of no significance is rejected. Meaning that there is significant effect of quota system on the candidates access to university education.

Table 3: Independent T-test of the Effect of Finding on the Candidates Access to University Education

Group	\bar{x}	SD	N	df	tc	tv	Decision
Lecturers	51.33	4.12	125	198	28.54	1.98	Rejected
Students	27.35	3.22	75				

Table 3 above indicated that the calculated t-value of 28.54 is more than critical value of 1.98. This means that the null hypothesis of no significance is rejected. In other words, there is significant effect of findings on the candidates access to university education.

Table 4: Independent T-test of the Effect of Socio-economic Background on the Candidates Access to University Education

Group	\bar{x}	SD	N	df	tc	tv	Decision
Lecturers	57.84	5.28	125	198	21.03	1.98	Rejected
Students	46.26	3.99	75				

Table 4 showed that the calculated t-value of 21.03 is greater than the critical value of 1.98. This is an indication that there is significant effect of socio-economic background on candidates access to university education in Calabar, Nigeria.

Table 5: Independent T-test of the Effect of Gender Discrimination on the Candidates Access to University Education

Group	\bar{x}	SD	N	df	tc	tv	Decision
Lecturers	62.13	5.28	125	198	33.26	1.98	Rejected
Students	34.42	4.02	75				

The analysis in Table 5 above showed that the calculated t-value of 33.26 is more than the critical value of 1.98. This is an indication that the hypothesis of no significance is not upheld. It means that there is significant effect of gender discrimination on the candidates access to university education.

8. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis in Table 1 showed that there is significant effect of Post-UME Screening on the candidates access to university education. This indicates that second text known as Post-UME screening as entry requirements for university admission is detrimental to some successful candidates in UME examination who may not be opportuned to pass the test again. This is in line with Akpan and Undie (2007) who revealed that some candidates with better scores in UME examination are denied admission in some universities because they could not scale through the screening. Dada (2004) advised that candidates for university admission should not be made to suffer greater burden than the other because of screening.

The finding also indicated that there is significant effect of quota system on the candidates access to university education in Nigeria. Quota system which emanated from the federal character policy was introduced in an attempt to provide equal opportunity for candidates to university education. But regrettably, this system as revealed, is unfavourable to a great number of candidates seeking admission into the university. Supporting this finding Ene (2007) revealed that quota system has created inequality in the provision of university education and equity has been sacrificed on the altar of quota system.

Furthermore, the finding revealed that there is significant effect of funding on the candidates access to university education. This is supported by Dada (2004) who asserted that universities in Nigeria have faced serious under funding for many years. As a result, poor funding is now a major factor that militates against sound access to university education. Ochuba (2000) also stated that as a result of poor funding of universities, only about 21.9% of candidates who applied for university admission are admitted yearly. He further revealed that poor funding of university education contributed to many programmes being derived accreditation in the universities which in turn, led to negative effect candidates access to university education.

The finding also revealed that there is significant effect of socio-economic background on candidates access to university education. This means that low socio-economic background of candidates is an impediment to their access to university education. This finding is consistent with that of Ene (2007) who revealed that poverty is an important factor that militates against meaningful access to university education, that only parents of high socio-economic background can afford to send their children to universities.

Similarly, the findings showed that there is significant effect of gender discrimination on candidates access to university education. Gender discrimination affects candidates access to university education in Nigeria. This finding supports that of Ene (2004) who discovered that gender discrimination is another issue that hinders candidates access to university education, because preference is always given to the education of males by some families.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the study, it is concluded that many factors militate against meaningful access to university education in Nigeria. Such factors include Post-UME screening test, quota system of admission, lack of adequate funding, socio-economic background and gender discrimination. This situation had denied many Nigerian candidates access to university education. In order to remedy this situation the following recommendations were made:

- (1) The federal government should formulate admission policies that would enhance every Nigerian candidate access to university education.
- (2) The Nigerian government should increase the number of universities with adequate funding to enable provision of necessary facilities and access to university education.
- (3) The quota system of admission should be reviewed to accommodate other candidates who merit it. Let all be given equal opportunity for university education.
- (4) Nigeria is ripped enough to introduce free university education to enable poor candidates access to university education.
- (5) Compulsory female education should be introduced in Nigeria to enable females access to university education.

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