

POLITICS AND POLICY: CATALYST FOR REFORMING UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined politics and policy: as catalyst for reforming University admission into Nigerian Universities. Politics and policy are like Siamese twins. Government makes policy, while policy spells out government plan and actions to the people. As Admission is indispensable for students in the Universities, reforms are sacrosanct to standardized University system in Nigeria. Our university system has been bedeviled and plagued with problems as inconsistent policies numerous social vices such as: politics, lobbying, bribery, corruption, bureaucracy, ethnicity, regionalism, tribalism, and nepotism. Our Educational policies and reforms seem not to correlate with political and economic needs of the people. Government emphasis on education as human rights does not result into increased enrollment of students' at the University level coupled to the proliferation of private Universities all over the country. To achieve the objective of this study, education should be available and affordable to all in the country. The study revealed that students' admission into Universities system should be regularized, standardized and based on merit. It is therefore recommended among other things that, government should not politicize, regionalize or sectionalize admission into public Universities and also, enjoin Private university owners to adhere strictly to current policy reforms in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Politics, Policy, Catalyst, Reform, Admission*

Introduction

Politics seems to be a polymorphic phenomenon that cuts across all sectors of the human life. Politics involve in the educational sector with major instrument of power, influence and authority (Anifowose and Enemu, 1999). Education tends to be conceptualized as culture, reform, socialization and skill acquisition towards the development of nation. There are three levels of

education which include: Primary, Secondary and Tertiary education system. Benedict (2016) opines that higher education is the education given after secondary education in Universities, Colleges of education, Polytechnics and Monotechnics including institutions offering correspondence courses. Such institutions award academic degrees, professional certificates and advanced/higher diploma; and as a further step, Postgraduate programmes such as Masters' and Doctorate degrees. Such institutions are involved in teaching, research and social (community) service activities. The skills and knowledge acquisition which education nurture cannot be actualized without reforming and standardizing the students' admission in our university system. Today, the Nigerian university system seems to be dwindling and devaluing standards requiring an urgent need for reforms and restructuring. Such reforms are required to improve the standard of education in the country.

The critical roles expected of higher education system in the development of Nigeria are succinctly summarized in the National Policy on Education (FNG, 2014 p.15) as follows:

1. To contribute to national development through relevant high-level manpower training.
2. develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of society.
3. promote scholarship, Community Service, national unity and international understanding.

In Nigeria, University admission system observed to be plagued with frequent political crisis, inconsistent policy, lobbying, bribery, bureaucracy, corruption, tribalism, ethnicity and lack of transparency. Ajibola (2008) posited that curriculum is the major problem of Nigerian educational sector and reveals the challenges of incoherence in policy formulation and implementation. The best way of achieving this is to reform our admission system and curriculum process in the area of policy statement and analysis, curriculum objectives, content, evaluation, methodology and implementation. The selection process and criteria for students' admission into university should also be standardized and regularized.

Effect of Politics and Policy on Nigeria's University Admission

Politics involves who get what, when and how in the society through the instrument of power, influence and authority. Politics has a plethora of definitions which has been well articulated by educators and social scientists. Politics presumed that man is by nature a political animal. It is an authoritative allocation of value in the society (Anifowose and Enemu, 2003). Politics refers to

class struggle between the bourgeois and proletarian (Marx cited in Anifowose and Enemu, 1999). Politics means struggle among actors pursuing conflict desire on public issues (Vernon Van Dyke cited in Anifowose and Enemu, 2003).

However, Ogbonnaya (2009), Okeke (2007) and Uchendu (1995) agree that politics is not restricted to political parties but occur in education, banks, markets, military establishments, commercial and industrial sectors of our economy. In essence, politics can be said to be ubiquitous i.e. it is everywhere. Okeke (2007) saw politics as a civilizing agent and a way of ruling in divided societies without violence. Therefore, whether defined in terms of man being a political animal; the art of the possible who gets what, where and how; struggle for power; or the authoritative allocation of resources and values, politics has the state as its centerpiece. Politics and education are intertwined with two dimensions which include: Politics in Education and Politics of Education. Ijaduola, Odunaike and Ajayi (2012) have drawn a distinction between two types of politics in schools. Politics in Education tends to be micro politics played within the school environment or setting. It involves leadership style, administrative strategy, resources utilization, students' enrolment process and school admission strategy. However, Politics of education seems to be macro politics which states how power, authority, influence and policy making are made at district, State and Federal levels in education. Politics of education are macro politics played in educational ministry, professional bodies of education like: TRCN, NUC, UNESCO, Educational Pressure groups such as: NUT, ASUU and ASUP. Owen (2006) noted that "Educational politics, like politics in general, revolves around three entities: people, values and resources". Also, students' admissions have been politicized in Nigeria at any level. It is observed that students from poor background usually do not gain admission into most First generation Universities in Nigeria like the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), University of Lagos (UNILAG), University of Ibadan (UI), Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) and the University of Benin (UNIBEN). The students of the ruling class (Senior citizen) gain admission into high rated Universities in Nigeria while prospective students of ordinary citizen usually often gain admission into low rated Universities in the country where buildings, classrooms, teaching facilities are obsolete, inadequate and poorly funded.

Policy and Reforms in Nigeria's University Admission System

Policy is presumed to be a statement of actions intended by government or policy makers in the society. Policy brings changes and innovations to existing programmes. Our educational system is based on the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1977 (revised in 1981, 1990 and 2014). The policy document i.e. the National policy on Education has been revised to ensure that policies address perceived needs of the government in power and to tries ensure that the education sector is supportive of government development goals. Following recent political changes, The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) acknowledged the need to revise and update the National Policy on Education to ensure that the educational system meets the yearnings of the Nigerian people. The education sector has continued to expand though there are substantial economic setbacks. The economic crisis has had negative impact on the education system and played a major role in the decline of the quality of education offered. New policies have to address, *inter alia*, issues of equity, access, funding, quality and management of the educational system (Toboho, 2010).

Recently, The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination body fixed minimum cut off marks for admissions into Universities in Nigeria at 120, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education were pegged at 100, while that of innovative enterprising institutes was pegged at 110 (Lasisi, 2018). Lasisi further posited that 414,696 candidates, out of 1,603,181 that sat for the 2018 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination, scored above 200. The figure, according to him, translates to 25.09 percent. This is against the 465,025 (27.00) percent of the 1,606,374 who scored above 200 in 2017. The official report from JAMB (2018) explained that 558,673 candidates scored above 190; 739,490 above 180 and 956,937 above the 170 score line.

However, the leadership of ASUU described the development as a “sad policy decision,” adding that it was in tandem “with the dream of the present government to destroy public universities in the country.” According to Omole (2017), ‘Scoring 120 out of 400 marks is 30 per cent. Even in those days, 40 per cent was graded as pass. But now JAMB said with F9 which is scoring 30 per cent you can be admitted. “They deliberately want to destroy education. Even for polytechnic, 100 marks is 25 per cent. It is sad. And that is where we are in Nigeria. They want to destroy

public education at all costs. This is not setting standards for education in Nigeria. It is purely lowering standards and digging a grave for the future of Nigerians.

Unfortunately, the Federal Government has just increased the pass mark from 40 to 45 in Universities. What that means is that you must score at least 45 for you to pass any course. We have enough candidates and yes you may try to increase access but tertiary education should be for those who have the capability (Alese, 2017). Again, JAMB (2017) argues that it is a known fact that millions of Nigerians are out there schooling in mushroom institutions and will at the end come back with all sorts of degrees and certificates that we cannot explain their content. “Our Naira is continually devalued as a result of reasons unknown including pressure to pay school fees i.e. tuition fees. It’s also a known fact that for you to study a course, say Hausa in a Nigerian Universities, you will need a credit in Mathematics; however, when you go outside like London, all you will need is a credit in Hausa and English, no Mathematics (Premium Times, 2017).

However, reform seems to be a process of restructuring, repositioning and revitalization of the existing structure of things. It presupposes to be change and innovation of policy in the society. If not well planned and handled can lead to greater inefficiency or even system collapse. As change is a slogan of Buhari administration in Nigeria, reform is sacrosanct and indispensable to University admission in Nigeria. The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari has declared education as one of its priorities (Alese, 2017). The FGN sees change as opportunity to reform, restructure, revitalizing and change University system in Nigeria. Reforms could be positive or negative in nature. Positive reforms seem to be the act of improving and adding value to existing structure or system. While negative reform tends to be the act of dwindling and declining the existing structure or system. Restructuring is the agent of change and reformation. According to Epiphany (2017), restructuring in the main, is to change to a large extent what is currently in place. Restructuring is the process of increasing or decreasing the number of component parts the entire system performs more efficiently (Steven, 2017).

Again, the past three decades have witnessed significant reforms within the University system in Nigeria. Notable among such changes is the exponential increase in the number of Universities and programmes offered in these institutions (Alese, 2017). By the end of 2002 there were over two thousand programmes across Universities in Nigeria, with staff strength of 25,000

(Okebukola). However, by far the greatest change has been the explosion in student populations and in the number of aspirants seeking University admission by the day. The total student enrolment in all Nigerian Universities grew from just over 2,000 in 1962 to over 500,000 in 2002 (Okebukola 2003). Data from the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and the Universities confirmed that over one million candidates sat for the University Matriculation Examination in 2002. Of this number the entire 52 Universities in the country at that time could only admit 150,000 or 15 percent. Education system in Nigeria today, needs a total of overhauling and restructuring, this reform is required to improve the performance of higher education in the country (Odia and Omofonmwan, 2007).

In the area of students' admission into the University level, many private schools woo students with desperation and dish out souvenirs after attempting Post-UTME examination-Screening to other public University most time unsuccessfully in order to give them for admission. Private Universities owners are usually aggressive in their marketing drive. Apart from this, private schools woo parents by promising their wards scholarship and generous discounts on fees, including tuition waiver for the best-performing pupils in entrance examinations (Adebayo, 2017). However, Nelson cited by Adebayo (2017) posits that, schools are only exploiting the absence of regulations in admission process into universities. Adebayo (2017) noted that the trend can be abused if government fails to act. Moreso, it is called guerrilla marketing because of the intense competition for enrolment.

Policy Implication

The University system in Nigeria is faulty with irregularities and malpractices in students' admission and enrolment procedures. As a result, political promises are often made in a number of areas such as free tuition fees, education policy, curriculum development and admission procedure. For example, government policy has devalued admission standard to 30 percent for new intakes into the university level. Admission process is endangered with irregularities as: politics, bureaucracy, bribery, corruption, ethnicity and tribalism in favour of senior citizen's candidates to the detriment of the 'have not' candidates. This position is in line with Oloyede cited in Lasisi (2018) that in Universities admission quota system, the University of Ilorin admissions quota has been partial skewed in selecting candidates from where lecturers hail from. The study further revealed that candidates with certificate from Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Part-time and Sandwich courses will now go through JAMB. This revelation and reform has led to the

training and growing of mediocre since politics began to play more of a role than concerns about high quality academic standards. The opinion of Oloyede cited in Lasisi (2018) is in consonance with Oghiagbephan (2015) who posited that, there is great increase in student's enrolment in our educational institutions without corresponding increase in facilities to match the population. Most of the educational institutions are admitting far beyond their carrying capacities.

However, since education is designed to provide solutions to economic, social, political and technological problems, then, a good educational system with functional curriculum must be structured in line with global standards to actualize its goals, aims and objective. Oghiagbephan (2015) further asserted that as Nigeria and other developing nations depend upon education to provide solutions to their problems, especially economic problems, there is need for a good educational framework with functional curriculum that must be developed for such a goal to be achieved.

Conclusion

Politics is indispensable to education. The political, social and economic development of a nation is impossible without periodic reforms and revitalizing of the existing educational policy in Nigeria. The major task ahead for educational planner and administrator in Nigeria are numerous and daunting. It is obvious that reformation in the Nigerian education sector in the area of University admission is not a simple task due to political interference, tribalism, ethnicity, favouritism, nepotism, lobbying, influence and bureaucracy that has endangered the system. In conclusion, JAMB should implement Integrated Brochures and Syllabus System (IBASS) and thus take over the admission process of Candidates of ODL, Part-time and Sandwich programmes to ensure quality assurance. All stakeholders in the education enterprise including government, policy makers, educationists, school administrators, parents, teachers and students should be joint collaborators in reforming and restructure University system, with the government playing a leading role in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In order to have positive restructuring on student admission in Nigeria, the following recommendations are hereby suggested:

1. Government should design a uniform standard for student's admission in primary, secondary and tertiary institution.

2. Government should implement JAMB Integrated Brochure and Syllabus System (IBASS) and take over the admission process of Candidates of distance learning, part-time and sandwich.
3. Qualitative education and formal admission be made available for all qualified students.
4. Government should always appoint technocrat with educational qualification to oversee the affairs of Universities admission process.
5. Government should retrained and orientate all stakeholders in education to jettison politics, ethnicity and favouritism as criteria for universities admission.
6. Government should reform universities admission process on periodic interval of 5 years in line with global standard.
7. Government should establish law that will regulate universities admission process for Private universities in Nigeria.

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