

JAMB AND THE POLITICS OF UNIVERSITY ADMISSION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Admission into Nigerian universities has been imbued with policy inconsistencies over the years that a time creates confusion for the University administrators and even the prospective students themselves. In the 1970s, the Federal Government of Nigeria created the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) to harmonise and administer admissions into all tertiary institutions in the country including Universities. The reason for the creation of JAMB is to prevent the then situation where prospective students has to apply directly to many universities, a times travelling long distances to submit the application and appear for interviews as well as the multiple admission that blocks the chances for others. It was felt that a central body that organizes a unified entrance with the possibility of issuing the admissions will eliminates some of the challenges. However over the years political consideration has been at the bane of the admission process, with policies such as catchment area, educational disadvantaged states designed to favour people from certain regions of the country. Those policies has endured but the emergence of privately owned universities purely set up by their proprietors for profit purposes has consistently attempted to assert their independence in the admission process. That has set some of these universities against JAMB which has insisted that the law governing admission into higher Universities in Nigeria gives JAMB the exclusive authority. As if that is not enough, public universities in Nigeria in the recent past came up with ideas of Post-University Matriculation Examination whereby after the JAMB entrance examination, the universities still conducts another internal examination before selecting candidates. This ideas which was soon embraced by most of the universities who uses it as a way of generating funds tended to make JAMB irrelevant in admission process. However the emergence of General Buhari a northerner as the president after the 2015 presidential elections and appointment of Adamu Adamu as Education Minister seem to have given JAMB a respite with his directive abolishing the Post-UME examinations conducted by Universities. What were the motives behind the directive to reverse to the old order? How has the Universities taking the directive? What are the roles of JAMB in the process? What does the future hold for university admission and education in Nigeria? This paper examined these issues. Data was gathered mainly through secondary material and analyzed using descriptive analysis.

Keywords: JAMB, Politics of Admission, Universities, Nigeria, Post-UME.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nigerian political life has been riddled with politics in almost every aspect of life including access to education. Where these have played out even to the detriment of the country's development is in the area of admission into Nigerian universities. Since the establishment of universities in Nigeria in the 1940s issues of access or admissions is riddled with policy inconsistencies over the years that a times creates confusion for the University administrators and even the prospective students themselves. In the 1970s, the Federal Government of Nigeria created the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) to harmonise and administer admissions into all tertiary institutions in the country including Universities. The reason for the creation of JAMB was to prevent the then situation where prospective students has to apply directly to many universities, a times travelling long distances to submit the application and appearing for interviews as well as the multiple admission that blocks the chances for others. It was felt that a central body that organizes a unified entrance with the possibility of issuing the admissions will eliminates some of the challenges (Admin, n.d). However over the years political consideration has been the bane of the admission process, with policies such as catchment area, educational disadvantaged states designed to favour people from certain regions of the country (Latestupdate, 2016). Those policies has endured but the emergence of privately owned universities purely set up by their proprietors for profit purposes has consistently attempted to assert their independence in the admission process (Omuta,2010). That has set some of these universities against JAMB which has insisted that the law governing admission into universities in Nigeria gives JAMB the exclusive authority (Daily Trust, 2016). As if that is not enough, public universities in Nigeria

in the recent past came up with ideas of Post-University Matriculation Examination whereby after the JAMB entrance examination, the universities still conducts another internal examination before selecting candidates. This ideas which was soon embraced by most of the universities who uses it as a way of generating funds tended to make JAMB irrelevant in admission process (Latestupdate, 2016). However the emergence of General Buhari a northerner as the president after the 2015 presidential elections and appointment of Adamu Adamu as Education Minister seem to have given JAMB a respite with his directive abolishing the Post-UME examinations conducted by universities (Ameh, 2016). What were the motives behind the directive to reverse to the old order? How has the Universities taking the directive? What are the roles of JAMB in the process? What does the future hold for university admission and education in Nigeria? This paper examined these issues. Data was gathered mainly through secondary material and descriptive analysis was used to answer the questions raised.

2 OVERVIEW OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

Nigeria's diversity has turned out to be a major impediment to national development. Since the conquest of hitherto disparate communities and the eventual amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates by British Colonialists in 1914, Nigeria's multi-ethnic nature has always culminated in competitions among its numerous ethnic groups (Duruji, 2010). This competitive ethnicity has immensely contributed to the developments in the nation-state; be it in political, social and economic (Duruji, 2008). Unfortunately, education, which is meant to be the base for national development, is also badly hit by this scourge, as the various ethnic groups fight for its heart, so as to advance above the others for progress and development (Ike, 1976). However, in an attempt to dismiss this sense of disunity and promote a sense of equality in the country, policies such as quota system and federal character principle were adopted by the Federal Government (Obielumani, 2008). This policy has reflected in the application of these principles to university admission process, appointment of university staff and the siting of university facilities. For instance, Obielumani (2008) posit that academic imbalance in the system, resulting in the deprivation of university education to qualified candidates, even, the appointment of unqualified persons to leadership positions in the universities; the under-utilization and in some cases over-utilization of university facilities. This claim was supported by the report of the Somade Committee of 1970 which was mandated to explore the extent of the imbalance in the Nigerian educational system (Nduka, 1974). In the report, it was revealed that a wide gap exist between the northern and southern parts of Nigeria. Obielumani (2008) see this gap as resulting of the different history and religious experiences both regions had before independence.

The Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 made Nigeria a full-fledged federal state, creating the huge development gap between the north and south in Nigeria. To correct and bridge the gap policies like quota system was adopted in 1958 (Fafunwa, 1976). The quota system used in admission and even recruitment in Nigeria, was meant to ensure equal representation of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria (Anyanwu, 2010; ; Tonwe and Oghator, 2009; Gberevbie and Ibietan, 2013). It was hoped that the adoption of quota system in admission process of Nigerian universities, will in the future close up the educational gap between the regions. Quota system became imperative in the 1950s, when Northerners started solicited for a system that would help their indigenes secure admissions into the University College, Ibadan (Fafunwa, 1976). Even though this demand was rejected by the British colonial masters, who argued that admission must be based on merit, but at independence, this position of merit over quota in the education sector was introduced by the 1962 Federal Government white paper on the Ashby Commission report (Anyanwu, 2010). This had further widened the gap and exacerbated distrust, suspicion, fear and conflict, until it spread like wild fire and consumed the entire structure of the Nigerian State in a civil war in 1969 (Anyanwu, 2010). After the Civil War, Gen. Yakubu Gowon's regime began to take decisive steps to forge national unity by closing the gap in university education. Revelations by the then Federal Commissioner of Education, Chief A.Y. Eke, indicated the extent of imbalance in the system: for every student in a post-secondary institution in the North there are six in the South" (Anyanwu, 2010). Also, the statistics of undergraduate enrolment into the then six universities in existence (one university in the North, while the remaining five in the south) by the National Universities Commission reported that "out of 14,468 students enrolled in all the universities in 1970, students from the South, constituted more than 75.6 per cent of the total population" (Anyanwu, 2010). However, in a bid to closing this gap, and to address the backlog of university applications due to the disruption of education caused by the Civil War, Gowon implored the universities to assume a national outlook in their admission policies, and recommended a massive

expansion of the institutions, in size and in number (Ibadan, 1970). Furthermore, flagging off of the Second National Development Plan (NDP) in 1970 reflects Gowon's awareness of the pivot of university education on national development. According to Anyanwu (2010).

The Second NDP not only sought to restore facilities and services damaged or disrupted by the civil war, it also desired to develop and expand education at various levels in order to attain higher enrollment ratios while at the same time reducing the educational gap in the country. Expressing distrust and dissatisfaction toward government, Northern leaders continued to push for an approval that will allow states establish their own universities and also the use of quota system in admission process. However, this push has been condemned by many, arguing that it will render government's attempts for peace and unity of the country futile. But being concerned about the ability of Northern states to ensure sustainable academic quality and stable financial commitment to the proposed universities, Gen. Yakubu Gowon expressed his opposition by amending the constitution in 1972 to relocate higher education to the exclusive list from the concurrent list. By this, sole right was given to the federal government to establish universities and to legislate over all its matters (Anyanwu, 2010). As university admission got more cumbersome due to increase in population, among others, and the attempt to bridge the educational gap between the regions, the Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo led Federal Government established the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and the School of Preliminary Studies in April 1977. The former was to determine matriculation requirements into the first degree programmes of all Nigerian universities, conduct a joint matriculation examination to test candidates into these universities, and determine suitable placing of qualified candidates within the universities, while the latter was to specifically assist Northern students gain access into northern universities (Adamu, n.d.). By 1979, northern students staged a violent protest which caused the short down of all northern universities after the government abolished the School of Preliminary Studies for admissions to be solely determined by JAMB. The northern students accused the Federal Government and the south of conspiring against them, and attempting to maintain the obvious gap between the regions (Adamu, n.d.). To resolve the crisis and to finally bridge the gap between them educationally, government introduced the long expected quota system into Nigeria's university system (Adamu, n.d.). This quota system provides a formula for admission into federal universities: "merit 40 percent, states quota 30 per cent, catchment zone 20 per cent and discretion 10 per cent" (Nwagwu, 1997; Adamu, n.d.). Federal Character and University Education in Nigeria Shortly before Gen Olusegun Obasanjo handed the affairs of government over to a civilian elected president in 1979; he drafted a new constitution where the principle of federal character was introduced. This was designed to consolidate the gains of quota system (Ekeh, 1989). Ekeh (1989) explains that the "federal character principle sought to give opportunities in education and employment, usually at the point of entry, to disadvantaged groups and areas to enable them compete and catch up with more advanced areas and sectors of the nation" (Gberevbie and Ibietan, 2013: 47). Though scholars like Ekundayo and Adedokun (2009) have confused quota system to be the same as federal character principle, others like Eke (1989) and Gberevbie and Ibietan (2013) have attempted to draw a difference between them. To Ekeh (1989: 38), federal character do not just create opportunities for disadvantaged states or region like the quota system, it goes steps further to provide soft landings for them. That is, it relaxes the criteria for disadvantaged groups. The Federal Character Commission (Okoroma, 2008) describes it as "lowering of entry and promotion qualifications". Gberevbie and Ibietan (2013: 47) elucidated more that "federal character principle in a legal weapon put in place to regulate appointments, promotions, security of tenure and severance in every government department". Also, Okoroma (2008) documented that federal character means: that public authorities, semi-government agencies, institutions of learning and even the private sector should ensure fair and effective representation of states or local government in areas or ethnic groups in positions of power, authority, placement in enrollment in schools and so on. Gboyega (1989) makes it a lot more direct, without mincing words. He states; "special consideration should be given to candidates from the Northern provinces and other areas where educational facilities were more backward than elsewhere". Therefore, we can construe that though quota system and federal character seem alike; the latter covers wider scope than the former. To consolidate this claim is the address of Prof. Shuaibu Oba Abdulraheen, documented by Okoli (2012) and Nnabugwu (2012), to the university administrators during a workshop organised by the Federal Character Commission (FCC). He urged them to observe the federal character principles in staff recruitment and appointments at both the management and senior officers' levels at their universities. The Commission expounds the purpose of the principle as to "ensure a strong, virile and indivisible nation based on fairness, equity, justice with a view to promoting national loyalty and fostering a sense of belonging among all Nigerians" (Okoli, 2012).

3 NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES AND ADMISSION POLICY

Before the advent of western education in Nigeria, individuals and communities sent people abroad to acquire education so as to participate in the new administrative system brought by colonialism (Ike, 1976). When the University College Ibadan was established in 1948, the admission was purely based on merit which was scaled against people from the northern region specifically. Even the Ashby Commission that recommended the establishment of more in administrative areas within the country to encourage wider access by individuals from all part of the country, yet the north was disadvantaged (Anyanwu,2010).

The advantage the south enjoyed tilted clerical and administrative positions in the colonial government in their favour of southerners to the dislike of northern leaders. As such the northern leaders were stoutly opposed to the independence agenda of Nigeria as championed by southern leaders because they felt that the north with the huge disadvantage educationally would be dominated by the south. Thus when the north got their self-rule in 1957, the leaders boldly came out with northernisation policy which aims to have northerners occupy position in the northern administrative system which was hitherto occupied by southerners,

This policy was the fulcrum that later reflected in the educational policy of the central government which was controlled by the political power that promoted the northernisation policy in the northern region (Daily Trust, 2016).

The policy of using the obnoxious policies such as quota system, catchment area and educationally disadvantage to determine access to university education in Nigeria effectively came following the advent of the military into the politics of the country when elements from the north who believed in the northernisation policy of the northern leaders in the first republic seized power at the centre (Adelamo, 2001). The idea of the policy is to create the environment for the north to catch up with the rest of the country in terms of manpower production (Fafunw, 1976). These policies were implemented amidst complaints by the recipients or prospective students from the south who are denied access to universities year in year out in favour of northerners who scored lower in the entrance examination conducted by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board. In response to the complaints and the effects of huge number of eligible southerners not having access, most states government in the south established states owned universities to cater for these categories of people. However, these efforts seem not to have adequately ameliorated the situation given rise to agitation for the participation of private operators who were allowed to come in effectively in the democratic dispensation of the fourth Republic which kicked in in 1999 (Omuta, 2010). Though the coming of private universities has opened up avenues for individuals denied access to public universities to gain admission, but the exorbitant school fees charged by these universities limits the access.

4 ESTABLISHMENT OF JAMB AND UNIVERSITY ADMISSION IN NIGERIA

The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) were established by military decree in 1978 to harmonise admission into higher institutions in Nigeria. The reason for the creation of JAMB is to prevent the then situation where prospective students has to apply directly to universities, a times travelling long distances to submit the application and appear for interviews as well as the multiple admission that blocks the chances for others (Ojiako,1981). The admission system the universities were uncoordinated, untidy and wasteful. Consequently, the Military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo felt concerned and so appointed a committee headed by Mr M.S Angulu with the task of consider the possibility of setting up a Joint Matriculation Board. At the end of their sitting, the committee recommended the setting up of two bodies, namely the Central Admissions Board and the Joint Matriculation Board (Admin, n.d). However, the Federal Military government only accepted some of the recommendations of the committee and set up the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board. This body was put into effect via decree no. 2 of 1978. Decree 33 of 1989 amended the law establishing JAMB by empowering the Board to extend the conduct of matriculation examinations to polytechnics and colleges of education across the country. They are also empowered to place suitably qualified candidates in the available places in these institutions (Admin, n.d).

However over the years political consideration has been at the bane of the admission process, which is based on the three pillars of merit (45%) catchment area (35 %), educationally less developed states (10%) and discretion (10%). This criterion which is backed by law tended to reward indolence given the fact that only four out of every ten persons admitted into Nigerian universities using these parameters is based on merit (Daily Trust, 2016).

In the process of administering this for the purpose of admission into universities particularly federal universities, the Universities based on their number of subscription for each course and the vacancies existing gives their own cut off marks for merit in which any candidate fallen within that bracket would be selected, the cut off mark for catchment area is lower than that of merit, whereas another lower mark is used to fill the quota for educationally less developed states. The last is Vice Chancellors list which is indiscriminate in the sense that any applicant can be used to fill that quota no matter the score in the entrance examination (Daily Trust, 2016).

5 THE ADVENT OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES AND JAMB ADMISSION

Though the advent of private university can be traced to the 2nd Republic when Dr Basil Nnanna Ukaegbu established the Imo Technical School amidst judicial challenge from the government in which the Supreme Court gave a favourable ruling that private individual has a right to do so, that ruling which created the environment for the emergence of twenty-six private universities(Omuta, 2013, Enahoro and Adeyinka, 2015). The military government of General Buhari that overthrew the democratic regime proscribed all the private universities. However in the botched Third Republic, Dr Chinwoke Ezeife signed a bill passed by the Anambra state Assembly establishing Madonna University Okija as the first private University in Nigeria. This effort was not left unchallenged by the Federal government which insisted that only the government at the center has the authority to grant such licences to private operators to establish universities.(Omuta, 2013) That effort blossomed. In 1999 when the country transitioned to the Fourth Republic democratic dispensation under General Obasanjo in 1999, witnessed the formal licensing of some operators to commence operation of private universities. Beside Madonna University, other earliest private universities in Nigeria include, Igbinedion University, Bowen University, Babcock University and Covenant University. Currently there are over forty private universities' in Nigeria. (Omuta, 2013).

Even though the law in Nigeria stipulates that admission into Nigerian universities must pass through JAMB, these private universities who are rarely subscribed by prospective students, to get students throws their admission process open for students who could not make it into the more competitive federal and state universities. To get these students the universities advertises and sells admission forms before conduction internal examination which forms the basis for their admissions which they later harmonizes with JAMB to issue admission letters to these category of candidates(Naij,2016). Even though this practice by private universities negates the prevalent law governing admission into universities in Nigeria, JAMB allowed it given the fact that admission into these universities was negligible.

Incidentally, most of these private universities are faith based, which implied that even though they need prospective students to subscribe to their programmes, they still want to further scrutinize the candidates to ensure that the right kind of students that meets their moral standard are the ones offered admission.

To remain competitive and attract prospective students, the admission criteria that JAMB uses does not apply to these universities whose main objective was to get graduates that are competitive in order to build a reputation that would attract prospective students to their universities, notwithstanding the high cost in terms of the fees. This practice in which the universities sell forms and conduct entrance examination in addition to the University Matriculation Examination (UME) caught the bug with public universities who started it but under the pre-test of what is referred to as Post-UME test that became deep to the extent that the relevance of JAMB was threatened, giving rise to backlash between JAMB and the universities(Premiun Times, 2016).

6 UNIVERSITY ADMISSION AND THE POST-UME SCREENING

The introduction of post-UTME test or screening by public universities in Nigeria can be traced back to 2004 on the premise that undergraduates used to act as mercenaries for UTME candidates, who then parade high scores they did not work for. This practice and other fraudulent means by prospective university candidates was widespread in that o one time Executive Secretary of the National University Commission, Professor Peter Okebukola confirmed that University Vice Chancellors openly confessed to him that students in their universities has formed habit of engaging in this.

Beside this point, it was also discovered in many universities that a great proportion of the candidates admitted with high scores in JAMB UTME do not continue to top their classes in terms of performance,

thereby lending credence that a good numbers of JAMB candidates who eventually get admitted (Latestupdate, 2016).

This made the argument for the introduction of another layer of screening very strong among honest Nigerians and those holding the levers of power. Giving the strong hold of the government on the management and operation of universities, this decision cannot be carried out independently without the support of the federal government.

So having convinced the NUC, it became necessary to get the support of the government and the visit to the National Assembly and the president of NUC and the Vice Chancellors did the magic of convincing the sitting government. Incidentally the presidency and the National Assembly were led by southerners, General Olusegun Obasanjo and Adolphus Wabara where the sentiment on the general admission policy into universities has been negative(Latestupdate, 2016). With a friendly environment, the hidden desire of university administrators to fully control admission process. it was agreed that the post-UTME screening should consist of essay to test candidates written English as well as interview to test their oral English to determine their suitability for admission into the institution. The universities were also allowed to charge modestly for this exercise (N1, 000). This new process became much more institutionalized when Professor Okebukola who was heading the NUC started defending it with factual results in terms of quality graduates that started emerging four years after it was introduced. He also argued that because of the introduction of the post-UTME screening, about 25% of prospective students who had high scores in the JAMB UTME did not show up for the test, lending credence that such candidates did not earn their scores(Latestupdate, 2016).

Though this process has been taken as normal, there were still backlash from certain elements particularly from the section of the country the old system benefited, so with the emergence of General Buhari as president, these elements attempted to roll back this system using the pretext of exploitation by the universities in the practice of charging high fees in addition to the UTME fees that the students pay

7 THE ROLL BACK OF POST-UTME ADMISSION SYSTEM

The institutionalization of post-UTME by Nigerian universities has not been welcome by JAMB, who over the years has grumbled for losing control of admission to the university. Beside, JAMB has been fighting for continuous relevance that gave them favourable policies including the requirement that before graduates shall be mobilized for National Youth Service Corp, they must present their JAMB admission letters, another policy of embossing photograph of West African Examination Council certificates was also to ensure that those writing the examination are not impersonators.

Furthermore, JAMB did internal reforms aimed at making its examination more credible including the introduction of computer based examination and prompt release of results as a way of elimination the basis for which it lost some of its firm control over admission matters, however the favourable environment came with the change in government in 2015 when General Buhari a northerner was elected president appointing Adamu Adamu a fellow northerner as minister of education.

The manner in which the directive on universities to stop the post-UTME was communicated was wrong without consultation with the universities or even officials in the Federal Ministry of Education where his junior minister Professor complained that he was not in the know of the policy reversal. Moreso it was done in the middle of the admission process when most universities has gone far and implementing the directive would amount to a disruption of their system. This of course provided the ammunition for opponents to launch a campaign of pushback, leaving JAMB as the body that was pushing for the appropriateness of the directive in other to remain relevant. In the midst of the debate, JAMB came out with a new admission policy it called the point system.

According to JAMB this has to be the policy to be used for the 2016 admissions' process. This policy was developed after a meeting between JAMB and the nation's tertiary institutions. According to JAMB, "this new method would use point system to offer provisional admission to candidates. In other words, before a candidate can be considered for screening, that candidate must have been offered a provisional admission by JAMB. It says that JAMB admission checker portal would be used for the process. According to JAMB, the points would be evenly spread out between the candidates O' Level and JAMB results as a way of providing a level-playing field for all. In this new process, any candidate who submits only one result which contains relevant subjects applied for would earn 10 points. The examinations to be used would be NECO, WASSCE, and November/December WASSCE among

others(Ameh, 2016). However, candidates with two sittings in these examinations would only get 2 points meaning that candidates with only one result would be at advantage.

JAMB further explained that the “next point grades would fall into the O’ Level grades where each grade would have it equivalent point; for instance an A=6 marks, B=4 marks, C=3 marks, this means that the better the candidates’ grades, the better that candidates chances of securing admission in the universities..

The organization further explained that the next point would be UTME scores where each score range have its equivalent point. This can be summarised in this way, 180-200=20-23 marks, 200-250=24-33 points, 251-300=34-43, 300-400=44-60 points (Ameh, 2016). Each of these categories would contain five JAMB results per point added. For example a candidate with 180-185 gets 20 points, while a candidate with 186-190 gets 21 points. JAMB however failed to explain how the point system would apply for direct entry candidates but promised that it would be released soon.

Notwithstanding that this new policy by JAMB is a revolution, the body stated that fees would still be charged for screening which would replace the Post UTME test and emphasized that catchment and educationally less-developed state would not be abolished by this new system. The parameter that places 45% for merit 35% for Catchment and ELDS and staff lists contains the rest. Each university would determine its own cut off marks in the form of points. For instance, if a university declares its cut off mark for Medicine as 90 points and JAMB grants a candidate with 250 a provisional admission but his/her total point’s falls short of the 90 points, then the candidate would lose the admission. In other words the provisional admission would mean to an end, not the end in itself (Ameh, 2016).

This point system policy rollout by JAMB done amidst the debate on whether the universities should abrogate post-UTME or not, was applauded by many on the sideline, who saw it as filter that would ensure that quality candidates eventually make it into the country’s universities. But JAMB soon after came out with statement reversing itself by saying the new rollout was not a guideline for admission after all. JAMB maintained that the admission criteria to be used would remain the re-enforcement of admission guideline as recognized by law which the Federal Government has approved. The admission of candidates into tertiary institutions will be based purely on three pillars namely: merit, catchment and educationally less developed states (Premium Times, 2016). JAMB contended that the point system which was widely circulated by the media for days was wrongfully copied from the board’s website. The Board stated that it was rather an illustration used by its Registrar, Prof. Dibu Ojerinde to demonstrate how a few institutions were using the point system to select candidates while others were subjecting then to written test. JAMB contended that the media wrongly adopted it as the 2016 guideline for admission.(Naij,2016). It the reiterated that at the workshop convened by the Minister of Education on the modality for 2016 admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the Federal Government approved the re-enforcement of admissions guideline recognized by law and further emphasized the cancellation of the post Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME).

It must be noted that the government under Mohamadu Buhari in the midst of stiff opposition, eventually reversed the policy in the 2017/20 admission process but directed the JAMB admission cut off mark to be lowered from 180 out of 400, to 120 which is another controversial directive that many analysts believe was meant to favour the northern part of the country.

8 IMPLICATION OF NIGERIA’S POLICY ON ADMISSION ON UNIVERSITIES AND SOCIETY

The advent of universities in Nigeria started on a sure foundation comparable to the standard obtainable from other climes in the world. However, the character of the Nigerian state and the meddlesomeness of the state over the years have watered down standard and the universities have not been able to champion development of the country. The decree passed by the military government in the 1970s took away control of admission from the universities to JAMB and the universities over the years has been trying to wrestle back this power, which sort of materialized to an extent with the introduction of post-UTME in 2004. However the directive of the new administration of Mohamadu Buhari abrogating the post-UTME, have reversed those gains.

Though in some quarters, parents and prospective university students who are overburdened with another round of test beside the UTME and the demand of paying for the post-UTME before securing admission welcomed the directive, yet many others see it as a way for the government to assert its authority and control over university admission to favour a segment of the Nigerian population.

This new directive was seen by university administrators as backward because it will return the era of malpractice where students secure admission with scores they didn't earn. The post-UTME enables the universities that would be dealing directly with the students would help to ascertain their abilities for oral or simple English test, syntax or written statement by applicants to ensure that those admitted can really understand and can write English Language.

Furthermore, the continuation of the admission policy would continue to stifle academic freedom as the handing over of admission to JAMB has done. This role played by JAMB disempowers university senate of their statutory powers to decide modalities for admission into each university. More so the role of JAMB and the NUC, amounts to over regulation that stifles the abilities of the universities to innovate and be competitive. As it is all Nigerian universities controlled by the ministry of education are at the same level, no form of competition.

In a normal situation, university senate determines admission matters. The senate delegates this power to Academic Affairs Unit in Vice Chancellors office, but JAMB has taken over this function, turning the Academic Affairs unit into clearing house for JAMB which approves the admission. The universities shortlist candidates using the approved guideline and returns to JAMB which verifies the level of compliance using the tripod criteria of merit, catchment area and educationally less developed states, the last two of which were intended to trump merit so that low-scoring candidates from particular localities or states could be admitted. With the continuation of the old admission system, the ability of the university senate to control standard in admission process is lost. This raises questions as to the business of federal government in forcing universities established by state governments and funded by them in admitting low-scoring candidates from other states. More so, the criteria of determining the states that falls into this category was arbitrarily done by the military administration of the past headed by individuals of northern extraction. Why hasn't the federal government reviewed the categorization of educationally less developed forty years after it was determine and why is there no improvement for those states so called educationally less developed.

It can further be argued that the manner universities are ran in Nigeria is absurd to what obtains elsewhere, as there is no semblance of autonomy with the Federal Government through its agencies like JAMB and NUC renders university autonomy non-existent. This is because whereas JAMB admits students, NUC regulates everything including accreditation of courses, curriculum guidelines and classification of degrees. Even the appointment of the councils of public universities and Vice Chancellors is handled by the government. The implication of all these is that the universities in Nigeria are regarded as extension of the ministry of education, thereby hampering there development.

9 CONCLUSION

The Nigerian society has never been an organic society, it was forced union by British colonialism and the disunity among the disparate groups reflects governance and administration that has continued over the years. The educational sector including the universities has not been excluded. The policy of university admission that revolves on a tripod of merit, catchment area and ELDS were instituted to advance the interest of the north and stunt those of the south. The dominance of the north in the administration of the country particularly the unaccountable military rulers was used to perpetuate this regime which democratic administrations headed by southerners were unable to roll back but the policy of post-UTME was seen as a measure for the universities to regain back their autonomies however the emergence of Geberal Buhari as president who hails from the north have seen the danger that should this continue, federal agencies like JAMB may eventually loose its relevance for greater autonomy of the universities. The implication that autonomous universities in Nigeria would create a competition in the sector would certainly not be in the interest of the north.

ADDENDUM

It is worthy of note that as at the time of filing this report, the Federal Government of Nigeria reversed the controversial policy directive that prohibited post-UTME examination conducted by Universities in their admission process given the stringent opposition mounted to that policy (Laleye, 2017). However, this directive was replaced with a more controversial decision by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board announcing a a reduction of cut-off mark from 190 to 120 marks out of a total obtainable 400 marks (NaijaRay, 2017). Many analyst sees these lowering of standard as a ploy by the government headed by northerners to ensure that more candidates from the north who cannot compete with their southern counterparts are given opportunity to fill their quota especially in the many Federal

universities in the north where it has been problematic for them to do this with cut-off mark at 180 (Abati, 2017).

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