



## **UNJUST SYSTEM OF ADMISSION: A REVIEW OF LAW STUDENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper is designed to study the policies regarding university admission, how the policies are positioned, and the contemporary issues faced, in terms of creation of a new varsity. In order to achieve this objective the study focuses on identifying what university policies on admissions are, by a standard literature review of government policy.*

*The literature review covers major policies on university admissions, which have received little attention by past studies of university education in Nigeria. A qualitative approach is adopted with the use of interview as the sole research instrument through which to understand admission policy and how it affects students and institutions. Therefore, this paper fills a gap in knowledge by studying governmental policies for Nigerian university admission, with the hope of understanding how the universities operate in terms of admitting students. The findings reveal that the admission process, that might add value to the quality of graduates produced by the universities, is not considered effective due to various government policies affecting the smooth running of the system.*

**Keywords** – admission, government policy, implementation, university

## **Introduction:**

University education in Nigeria was established prior to the country's independence with the purpose of developing manpower for the ministry, and promoting economic development within the state. In the mandate of the government, they promised to make university education accessible to all citizenry regardless of ethnicity, culture, religion or gender (Oyedeki, 2011). However, the policy on admission has not been reviewed since independence, for many reasons. Agboola and Ofoegbu (2010) say that what creates worries in the admission process is that many qualified applicants, fresh from secondary/colleges, cannot gain admission into the Nigerian university of their choice, due to admission policies such as the Post-Unified Tertiary Matriculations Examination (Post-UTME) screening, catchment areas, the quota system, and other factors such as the shortage of manpower, the limited number of universities and a lack of facilities. Although, finance has been listed among the factors that hinder universities from admitting many students (Adebayo, 2003), Akpotu (2005) stated that the cost of tuition fees or materials for learning are not the main barriers to gaining admission into Nigerian universities. Akpotu (2005) suggests that the absorption capacity for learning is limited, catchment areas, the quota system, admission policy itself, and poor or inadequate facilities, are also barriers. Likewise, Imhanlahimi and Maduwesi (2006) suggest that today, there are governmental policies and unfavourable factors that stand against more than 70% of qualified applicants who seek admission into universities and other institutions. Moti (2008) says that, on average, less than 20% are granted admission to universities out of hundreds of thousands of applicants who take the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examination yearly. Moti (2010) ascertained that only about 10% of the total applicants are granted admission into other tertiary institutions such as colleges of education, polytechnics or monotechnics. Applicants who could not secure admission in the year either pick up casual jobs, travel abroad for education or wait till the following year and re-take the JAMB examination. Others meanwhile remain liabilities and burdens on their guardians and parents (Imhanlahimi & Maduwesi, 2006).

In an attempt to discuss the quality of university provision in Nigeria and develop a business model that can be tested within the sector, the researcher found that there are still many elements listed in the model that have not been touched, one of which is the admission process. In Nigeria today, gaining admission into the university of your choice is a challenging issue as is being able to enrol for the course you want to study. These problems

have necessitated the need to understand how the process of admission into the university system is been managed in the country. Even with the enormous number of policies created by the government to govern the admission process in the country, as noted by Akpan and Undie (2007) and Moti (2010), access to university education in the country is still problematic. Many of the problems centre on entrance issues, stemming from the high level of diversity the country is experiencing in terms of culture, religion, wealth, class and taste. These problems, among others, have been debated extensively. The debate has always widened the gap in knowledge of how best to manage the sector's entrants to improve the quality of the services rendered. Scholars have continued to pay attention to this major contemporary issue which needs urgent attention if the sector is to expand best practice.

Over the years, many researchers (Adeyemi, 2001; Oyedeji, 2011) have written on admission issues. Adetunji and Ogunleye (2015) have written on the corollary of Government Policies on University Admission, but all studies have ignored students' perceptions of the admissions process to Nigerian universities. Many authors (Imhanlahimi & Maduwesi, 2006; Okoroma, 2008) have talked convincingly about the admissions process to university from either a theoretical viewpoint or an evaluation viewpoint, measuring the quality of their admissions or intake processes. However, they have not taken into account other opinions, such as students' views, leaving a wide gap in their studies. Adetunji (2016) focuses on problems hindering quality provision in Nigerian universities and a review of academic officers. However students, who are the recipients, are not considered in the studies that actually affect them. Therefore, this study focuses attention on students' views of the admission process, equally considering those admitted and those not admitted to the programme.

### **Government policies on admission**

Moti (2008) explained that the geographical area from which a higher educational institution is allowed, or obliged, to pick candidates is referred to as a catchment area. Catchment areas mean that preferences are given to the indigenous people where the university is located when considering candidates for admission. States in the country are grouped into catchment areas of each federal university, in order to give equal opportunities to all applicants. This method of selection, also called locality, in most cases limits the sociocultural and/or geographical area, and hence the institutions, to which candidates can apply. At the start of this policy, it was only centred on federal universities. During that period, universities considered applicants based on location and merit.

In most cases consideration is given to students who fall within the catchment area of the university. However, Imhaniahimi and Maduewesi (2006) opine that all state-owned universities have all local areas of their state as their catchment area, while Abuja, as the federal capital, has all the states of the federation in its catchment area. Based on admission guidelines, as given by Adeyemi (2001) and Moti (2008), 30% of available spaces are reserved for applicants based on state/locality. Likewise, according to Saint, Hartnett and Strassner (2003), only 40% of applicants are considered for admission on the basis of merit or their academic performance. JAMB reserves 30% of a university's admissions for residents of its immediate geographical catchment area, and a further 20% for educationally disadvantaged students. The last 10% of university admissions are made at the Vice Chancellor's discretion (Saint, Hartnett & Strassner, 2003, p.12).

### **Government Policy**

(i) Quota System: The Federal Government of Nigeria introduced a quota system to provide equal access to university, but this has become a problem for access and has been grossly abused, denying applicants access to university education. When educationally less developed areas are within a catchment area, it allows universities to lower their entry requirements for states considered less educationally developed. This approach, supported by the federal character commission (FRN, 1996), gives 20% exclusive admission, to the detriment of candidates with higher scores in the matriculation examination. The Federal Government of Nigeria claimed to have introduced the policy to cater for less privileged states within the country, but of the 29 state, 23 are classified as less privileged.

(ii) Carrying Capacity: The National University Commission suggested that, due to continuing population growth and demand for university education, university expansion should be followed according to the demand. This policy was formulated following an NUC inspection of some universities, when they officially observed that many facilities were overstressed and overpopulated. The carrying capacity policy means that students are admitted based on the facilities available. These facilities include adequate lecture rooms, well-stocked libraries, good staff/student ratio, accommodation, etc. The policy was expected to enhance quality, but has become an impediment to access to university, as universities are careful not to exceed their capacity by a high margin, in order not to incur sanctions from the NUC.

(iii) Funding: Closely connected with the issue of expansion of universities according to the demand, is the issue of better funding. Expansion should be accompanied by increased funding, but the policy relating to funding is a challenging issue. As Akpan and Undie (2007) observed, the budgetary allocation to education is on the decline. In 1999, 11.12% of the annual budget was allocated to education in Nigeria. Surprisingly, this was drastically reduced to 5.9% in 2002 and 1.83% in 2003 (Akpan & Undie 2007), while the minimum standard set for developing countries is 26%. UNESCO's recommend 25% of the annual budgetary allocation goes to the education sector. Instead of moving towards this minimum standard, the experience is a decrease. Nigeria is far from allocating the recommended resources to education, making expansion difficult if not impossible. This lack of proper allocation of funds to the education sector in the country has built up over a decade, and has prevented many university courses from being accredited by the NUC, thereby reducing the access of many who could have been admitted. It is obvious that universities in Nigeria need to be better funded, although one cannot ignore the immense contribution made by the Education Tax Fund (ETF). The ETF is a welcome development. The organisation has put many infrastructural facilities in place, funding and building lecture halls, and introducing financial aid as support for the institutions, in order for the institutions to survive. The government should, on its part, increase the budgetary allocation to meet the recommendation for developing countries, rather than, as now, using an element of deregulation to cater for educational funding problems. Private investors are allowed to provide their own funding and management for private universities.

## **Methodology**

This paper is grounded in the critical realist research philosophy, gathering qualitative data for in-depth knowledge of the study. In-depth individual interviews have been piloted as the main research instrument to collect data for the study. There are 132 universities in Nigeria, but due to the nature of the research and owing to the fact that all the universities cannot be studied, a purposive sampling technique is adopted, and a private university selected as a case study. The research does not claim to have used a case study approach, a single case is used only for the purpose of a concentrated study. A stratification sampling technique was later used to select Law students for the study. The reason for choosing this set of students was the difficulties they experience in getting admission, and as well as the high demand to admit students to the faculty on a yearly basis.

To understand the importance of the admission process in the university system, Adetunji (2014) highlights the need to examine perceived quality. Ishikawa (1990) claimed that quality is everyone’s responsibility, but for the purpose of this study, attention was paid only to Law students’ perceptions of the admission process. This set of students usually face a lot of challenges in the admission process, even when they have fully satisfied the admission criteria. Therefore, it is worth considering how the process of admission affects them.

Given the nature of the study, the researcher carefully considered an in-depth discussion with 6 non-admitted students and 4 admitted students. The use of in-depth interviews as a research tool for this study has the advantage of providing the researcher with an opportunity for in-depth questioning, enabling the researcher to better understand the respondents’ beliefs, perceptions, views, thoughts, feelings and experiences in relation to the areas covered.

Admitted - Janet, Jumoke, Ishola, Mark  
 Not admitted - Joke, Abigeil, Toyin, Hameed, Suliyat, Bisi

Representation:

A = Admitted student to the Law college: 1 = Janet, 2 = Jumoke, 3 = Ishola, 4 = Mark. Therefore, A1 is Janet, A2 is Jumoke etc.

B = Non-admitted student to the Law college: 1 = Joke, 2 = Abigeil, 3 = Toyin, 4 = Hameed, 5 = Suliyat, 6 = Bisi. Therefore, B1 is Joke, B2 is Abigeil, etc.

Two of the selected participants opted out during the process, claiming to have a lecture, and were unable to return to the session.

Participants Grid

Participants	Admitted	Non-Admitted
	A	B
1	*	*
2	*	*
3	*	*

4	*	*
5	-	*
6	-	*

## Findings

Respondents were first assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The names presented in this study are not the real names of the participants. The informants were told the importance of the study to identifying practices, which are unfair in the admission process for Law students. This is not to say the Law department or faculty is the only one with such problems, but it has been observed by past researchers that the department or college of Law is always competitive, as many students put in for this professional course. There is a need for the admission process to be demanding. Blame for the admission process has been ascribed to the universities, but universities admit all students to the programme of study through their registry departments. This paper intends to uncover concerns raised by students, under 3 sub-headings, about the admission process, using a case study of a private university.

## Nepotism

All the non-admitted students shared negative feelings towards college admission to the private university, as nepotism is believed to be the main order of events. B3 and B4 expressed that this year's admission was the 3<sup>rd</sup> time they had tried to apply for a Law course, but were offered Sociology instead of Law. Another respondent, who was not admitted, shared a similar view, saying, 'this year was the second time I am applying for the Law programme in this same university, but again they have offered me communication':

*I do not know why and no one is giving me explanation on what I have done wrong. I have good grades and not even a pass in any of my course. I passed that JAMB cut off mark for this university but a friend of mine who went to the faculty to ask which he was given another course said the faculty officer said they now have enough candidates (B5).*

One of the respondents who gained admission explained:

*I was lucky to be admitted onto the programme because last year when I applied with the same result I was not given the opportunity. But this year I went to a pastor who know the staff in the university and he assured the pastor that I will be shortlisted this year. Honestly, I was shocked to see my name on the first list. I believe the pastor involvement has made a different (A1).*

Four other non-admitted students held a similar view that nepotism, or ‘godfatherism’ as they put it, is of the highest order. They believed they had not been admitted to the programme they applied for because they did not know anyone who could help them with the admission process (B1, B3, B5 and B6). Two of them claimed that nepotism is of the highest order within society, and you need to know someone to actually achieve anything in terms of getting into university, and most especially into a programme of your choice (B1 and B6). Another respondent who was not admitted said:

*I can tell you in today’s society you have to be highly influential to get higher and the children of those who have money pay their way to get what they want irrespective of whether or not they qualify (B2).*

Two admitted candidates agreed with this point and expressed the idea that one thing people don’t know is that a high level of societal connection determines who gains admission (A3 and A4).

### **Societal connections**

All the participants who talked about nepotism did not stop there. They expressed the opinion that it is not about having a ‘godfather’ alone, it is about how well your godfather is connected within the community. Four of the informants referred to societal connection, the level of socioeconomic status one has attained in society, as leading to the ability to achieve or get whatever one needs, be it employment or admission (A2, A3, A4 and B6).

One of the non-admitted students, said, in frustration:



*I finished secondary school in 2010 with good O' level results and applied to the university four times, all without success. I believe that one has to have a "godfather" who is highly connected before one can gain admission (B4).*

Another respondent who had failed to get admission onto his course of choice for three consecutive years said:

*Of all the JAMB and Post-UME exams that I took from 2012 to 2015, I got scores good enough to grant me admission except that in the year 2013 that I scored 170 on the JAMB, which was below the cut-off mark of 180. I felt this was due to frustration and under preparation on my own side, but yet I cannot comprehend any reason why I was denied admission in the previous years when my score was high (B2).*

Another respondent said:

*The same year I graduated from secondary school was the same year I took the JAMB; I got 199 and my friend got 182, but he was admitted while I was denied admission in the same course of study (Law), because his uncle was working in the university. Admission in this country is based on godfatherism. If you don't have anybody, you will never gain admission, no matter how averagely intelligent you are (B6).*

One admitted candidate, lamented that godfatherism-based admission policies have thwarted a number of qualified students from achieving their educational goals, especially the programme of their choice (A4). Universities now tend to offer candidates a separate course when they have not yet filled their quota of candidates. Another candidate who did not gain admission for Law, but was offered another programme, said that sometimes you feel sad that you are not well connected in society, one more reason why you cannot get what you want to study, but rather the university offer you just any rubbish course that you did not even apply for (B5). Another candidate who did not gain admission, expressed that since she finished her secondary school in 2013, she had been applying for admission to study Law at university. She sat the JAMB and scored 184, which was above the cut-off mark of 180, and also took the Post-UME and obtained the required points. In the process of pursuing admission she became connected with some university staff, but she was still not offered admission. When

asked why she had been denied admission, she was told by one of the university staff that admission slots are always reserved for candidates that have politicians as their godfathers (B1). She said:

*I can't really say I had the required scores. There was this man that was trying to help me with the necessary information I needed. I was thinking everything was okay. He called often to tell me to bring so and so document. I would rush and take it to him and then we became intimate, and accidentally he got me pregnant. I managed to abort it, when he said private universities would not admit pregnant ladies. He supported me with all the things I needed; but at the end of the day, he said I should wait for the first list. The first list came out and my name was not there. He said I should wait for the second list; I did wait, I checked again, and my name was not there. He later came to tell me to take heart - that admission was meant for the candidates of politicians, but the university can offer me another course if I like (B1).*

One of the non-admitted candidates was dissatisfied with the admission situation because, despite her strong desire and her high scores on both the JAMB and Post-UME even at her first attempt, she was still denied admission (B5). The respondent believed she was denied admission because of nepotism (godfatherism) and a lack of high connections in the university or with any politician. According to the respondent, gaining admission is all about who is who. The researcher probed further, asking the respondent to explain. The respondent said:

*When I say who is who, I mean, who do I have? Who do I know working in the university or top government official? Who am I connected to? (B5)*

Another respondent, who shared a similar view, expressed the idea that, in Nigeria, politicians head most of the sectors by appointment. He continued to claim that this is why it is easy for a top politician to issue the name of a candidate for admission and the candidate will be considered for admission by the university authority, regardless of merit (A3). One of the respondents admitted this, claiming that, from her own personal point of view and 2 years of waiting before gaining admission, her experience showed that merit is not enough to grant people admission; personal connection and having a godfather is paramount to admission (A2). The question raised by the researcher here is: when can those intelligent young people

be given the chance to build a career for themselves and, in turn, build the nation through higher education? The interviews with two of the admitted candidates showed, without a doubt, that they were highly intelligent young women eager to enhance their talents through education (A2, A3). But who will break the university admission barrier to create access for qualified candidates? It is true that Nigeria has come of age; yet the need to go for the best in everything is urgent, and educational opportunities should not be based on who you know or your social status in society.

There are also corrupt practices in the process of gaining admission.

### **Admission corruption.**

Five of the respondents shared a similar view on this point, while the other three, who did not share their view, were indifferent to what they proposed. Three of the respondents said that it is not uncommon for youth and parents to experience corrupt practices when seeking university admission (A3, B3 and B5). They list the type of corrupt practices they have experienced as very common practices in the university. They include receiving bribes to change shortlisted candidate's names, and cases of missing results. For example, one admitted candidate lamented the issue of corruption in the university admission process. He graduated from high school in 2011 and applied for admission to the Law programme two times without success. He was very frustrated, and promised himself to apply one more time and then never try again. He believed that the country and the university system were corrupt, with immoral men at the head of affairs (B1). Another respondent in the same category said that the first university he applied to was a private university, and he scored 183 in JAMB, which was above the cut-off mark of 180, but he was not offered admission to the private university. However, he was offered another course in another private university very far away from where he lived (B4). One of the respondents claimed that it is not as bad as you might think, because at least you are given another admission opportunity against your wish. It may not be the course or the institution you want, but at least you will not be home for another year waiting to take the JAMB (B4). He claimed that in his experience, the second time he applied to one of the private universities for Law, still without success:

*I was offered another course, which I don't want to do, I believed that sometimes there is a manipulation of results and that is why I was not given admission. I felt bitter because I was not admitted despite my good performance on the JAMB and Post-UME, I finally settled for another course, which I would not have enrolled for, if*

*I had my way. In some instance I was even compelled to pay money in order to secure admission (B4).*

Additionally, two respondents shared similar views on admission as they felt that admission was all about the issue of corruption. Many of the admissions officers were living above their salaries because they demanded money with style from the applicants, or pretended to be doing the candidate a favour in front of their parents so that the parents gave them something (A4, B3). One of the participants pointed that the two universities he applied to had similar practices:

*I tell you the admission officer was telling me 'you know what to do' before applying for Law (B3).*

A respondent shared a similar experience, although she was granted admission. She claimed that her father gave the admission officer N30000 (\$150) for credit, so that he would call him for an update when the admission was released. She explained that:

*The guy (admission officer) kept calling my Dad, saying 'I am broke, I can't go to school this week but next week I will follow the admission up'. Yes my dad understood what he means, then my dad would send money to him again, but I can't complain because at the end I was shortlisted for Law, even in the first list with less JAMB score (the score was not disclosed). I agreed that corruption is higher in every university on the issue of admission because my friend that scores higher than me was given another course to study and not Law related (A1).*

Another respondent who fell victim to admission corruption lamented that the last time he applied for admission for Law, in the same university, he was directly asked to pay a bribe in order to secure admission. He said that the admissions officer told him to do something very quickly:

*I gave him the sum of N15, 000 (\$85) then and I applied for Law first and second choice with the hope that it was a guarantee. The admission officer assured me that I would get the admission and I was quite excited, but he failed me and I couldn't go back to ask for my money, so I decided to leave everything to God (B6).*

## **Summary**

If only the university admission system would do away with corruption, things would go well. For some of the respondents, corruption was the main problem of admission to a Law degree. They felt that their exam results were not accurately considered on many occasions, and they were directly or indirectly asked for bribes before they could gain admission. Some participants were victims of bribery; they were compelled to play the game in order to gain admission. Their experience illustrates that there are lots of youths who go through this kind of situation and probably lose faith because they cannot deal with the corrupt system where one has to pay to gain admission and even after paying, still does not gain admission for the right course.

## **Conclusion**

The study of non-admitted students demonstrates that nepotism is on the same high level as societal connection in determining who gains admission. The concept of societal connection refers to the level of socioeconomic status one has attained in society, and the ability to achieve or get whatever one needs, be it employment or admission. This nepotism and societal connection syndrome thwarts a number of qualified students from achieving their educational goals, especially gaining admission for the course they want to study. From this study, in the respondents' view, merit is not enough to grant admission, but personal connection and having a godfather is key to admission. Another issue is the role admission officers play in determining candidates who are granted admission to study a course in the university. It is worth mentioning here that sometimes the university management may not even know what is going on, as some of the admission officers had a habit of taking their duties for granted. This, consequently, places a lot of shame on the university they work for, all in the name of living above their income. Some of the non-admitted students believed they were denied admission simply because they did not know someone influential, and were not ready to dance to the music of the admission officers. The findings show that admission is granted not only on merit but also on the issue of whether one is well connected. The last issue raised by the non-admitted students was the corrupt practices that they experienced while seeking admission, such as bribery, changing shortlisted candidates' names, and cases of missing results. The study shows that there are non-admitted students who bribed in order to gain admission, but after paying still did not gain admission for the course of their choice.

## Further study

The attention of this paper centred on only universities as a higher institutions of learning. While other non-university opinions were not represented in this paper, this is not to underestimate the great work these institutions are doing, or to assume they are not experiencing similar issues. The researcher's intention to focus on university education was to be precise about the findings. The research suggests that further work could be carried out in other areas of university education such as the Medical student admission process. Likewise further work could look into the admission officers' views of the admission process or external involvement on admission issues, a gap untouched by research.

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