

2009 EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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Abstract

Despite the pivotal role of education to the advancement of humankind, the opportunities for enrollment in tertiary education in Nigeria are grossly inadequate for the needs of the country. Access to higher education, and the lack of capacity of the system to absorb the numbers of candidates seeking admission to higher educational institutions, continues to pose severe problem to the attainments of education sector goals in the country. The paper seeks to ascertain the extent to which 2009 improves access to higher education, and to establish how issues of carrying capacity, funding and infrastructures affect access to higher education in Nigeria. The paper mainly used a secondary source of data such as Federal Ministry of Education Annual Reports, UNESCO country reports, Roadmap for Education (2009) and JAMB annual reports/publications for descriptive and analytical purposes. The paper found out that from 2011-2016, the 20% annual increase in admission benchmark though reasonably achieved with 62% positive variance, the gap between those admitted and candidates left out continues to grow; thus out of the 7.5 million candidates that applied for placements into Nigerian tertiary institutions, only about 1.7 million candidates admitted (21.9%) leaving out 78% or 5.9 million from opportunities for tertiary education, some of whom are qualified but limited by a quota and carrying capacity. The annual carrying capacity for admissions to higher education is grossly inadequate to meet the growing learner populations' demands in Nigeria. Also, inadequate funding and the level of infrastructures provisions greatly affect access to higher education. The paper recommends that efforts to attain both the 26% UNESCO benchmark on national budget for education, and the 2009 educational reform benchmark on access (20% increase in admissions annually from 2011) in the tertiary institutions should be intensified such that reasonable number of candidates be admitted to higher education. Increase in funding benchmark of 26% to education should be attained for the expansion of facilities (lecture theatres, classrooms, laboratories, hostels, etc.) to raise the carrying capacity to accommodate current reality.

Key Words: Education, Educational Reform, Higher Education, Access to Education, Quality Education

Introduction

Throughout the world, education has been valued as a means of addressing socio-economic inequalities where they exist and for transforming societies and cultures. The general acceptability of education as the most desired instrument for political, economic, social and technological development and advancement globally is not debatable. Modern societal conditions are reshaping education the world over in a rapid and profound manner. It is becoming more evident that human capital has become an increasingly valuable asset in the race for industrialization and thus the management of policy concerning this most vital sector has become more important necessitating the need for constant review and reform.

Of great importance to the development of educational reform is to recognize the fact that as the Nigerian's national population continues to grow significantly each year, the capacity of the higher institution of learning to meet the need of a growing learner population should be an area of concern to strengthen the education system to accommodate the growing demands for higher education. Correspondingly, the gap in access to higher education in Nigeria was remarked upon by Clark (2005), and the former Minister of Education, Prof. Ruqaiyyatu Rufai (FME Report, 2014), that only about one-third of applicants get placed in the tertiary institutions through JAMB annually. More disturbing is the scenario where 40% of applicants averagely over the years (2008-2015) pass the UTME. Still, only 18.8% get admitted leaving 21.2% who passed but not placed. This situation is frustrating both to the qualified candidates and their parents, and the frustrated candidates are most likely to engage in untoward activities which may even constitute a security threat to the society.

Empirical studies established the interplay between public financing, carrying capacity, and infrastructure as determinants to unhindered access and quality education (Okebukola; 2005, 2006; UNESCO Report, 2006; FME, 2009, Edukugbo, 2011). Equally, there is sharp decline in quality of graduates produced in Nigeria beginning from 1990s. As reported by the Federal Ministry of Education (2015), the quality of graduates dropped from 72% in 1979 to 68% by 1999. Only 10% of the 130,000 students that graduate from Nigerian universities annually can secure paid employment. The non-inclusion of any of the Nigerian's Universities in the world best 500 Universities and worst still, Nigeria ranked (then) 44 after Ghana, Kenya, South Africa in the ranking of African Universities continues to worry academics and policy makers in search for solutions. The problem worthy of investigation is to what extent has the 2009 educational reform improved access to higher education? How have issues of carrying capacity, funding and infrastructures affected access to higher education in Nigeria?

Objectives of the Paper

The paper seeks to ascertain the extent to which 2009 educational reform improves access to higher education, and to establish how issues of carrying capacity, funding and infrastructures affect access to higher education.

Methodology

This paper mainly used a secondary source of data such as Federal Ministry of Education Annual Reports, UNESCO country reports, Roadmap for Education (2009) and JAMB annual reports/publications for descriptive and analytical purposes.

Literature Review

Conceptual Issues

Educational reforms emanate from the fundamental conviction that considerable progress can be made in a nation by its people through careful engineering of the educational process. The current reform agenda (FME Roadmap, 2009) and transformation programmes of the Federal Government of Nigeria are part of the historical attempts to direct public attention to necessary changes that should be taken collectively and separately to address our daunting challenges in public and private spheres, especially in higher education.

The conceptualization of an education reflects the universal declaration of human rights, which asserts that everyone has a right to education that should provide a guarantee for everyone entitled to education to receive it; it implies the educational opportunities or means of making available within the reach of every citizen of a nation (Enaohwo, 2008). Access to education in its full and broad sense, means free and unlimited, unhindered and unfettered opportunities at each level of education to obtain knowledge, skills, and abilities available at that level needed to optimally participate and contribute to development in the society (Okeke, 2008). Similarly, quality education means relevance and appropriateness of the education programme to the needs of the community and country (Yoloye, 1989). Further, indices of quality education include the ability of tertiary institutions to meet specific criteria

relating to academic matters, staff-students ratio, staff mix by rank, staff development, physical facilities, funding and adequate library facilities (NUC, 2007).

Empirical Issues

Access to education covers the threshold of access/enrolling, attending and completing and possibly transiting to the appropriate level of education. The challenge of access to tertiary education is compounded by the national university commission policy on carrying capacity. By this policy, the NUC has pegged the number of students that can be admitted by each university in Nigeria every year. This has reduced considerably, the rate of admission into Nigerian universities. One may not also forget the high student and academic staff ratio, leading academic staff to teach up to six courses in a semester, at times, at both the undergraduate and higher degree levels. The carrying capacity of Nigerian university system stands at 150,000 while the actual demand is about 1 million. In 2011/2012 academic session, a total of 1493,604 candidates sat for the unified tertiary matriculation examination (UTME) conducted by the joint admission and matriculation board (JAMB). The results announced showed that 842,851 candidates scored below 200 marks over 400, indicating less than 45 per cent passed the examination. Jamb later fixed 180 marks as minimum for university students and 160 for Colleges of Education and Polytechnic (FME, 2009; Edukugho, 2011).

Also, the current situation of infrastructure facilities in most tertiary institutions in Nigeria are still far from a state that will enhance access and promote optimal teaching, learning and quality education (Okebukola, 2008). Consequently, funding which is central to unhindered access and quality to tertiary education remains a formidable problem. This is despite the recommendation of UNESCO that 26% of national expenditure must be devoted to education (UNESCO Report, 2006), the Nigerian government still expends between 4% and 16% annually on education in default of the (UNESCO) benchmark. Indeed, there is gross underfunding of the educational sector in Nigeria for the past ten years (2009-2018) going by the prescribed UNESCO benchmark of 26% of National budgets with a cumulative total shortfall of ₦4.4 trillion. The implication of this poor public financing of education is the fact that it inhibits access to education, thus, giving only an insignificant number of candidates seeking admission opportunity to pursue higher education.

Inadequate funding adversely affects infrastructure provisions needed to improve the quality of education and that funding levels have hampered education delivery, monitoring, inspection and other quality assurance activities. This viewpoint was supported by the studies of Ajayi & Adeniji (2009), observing that “funding is central to unhindered access to tertiary education. As it has been found that virtually all problems of higher education in Nigeria are attributable to inadequate funding”. In the same vein, Okebukola (2005; 2008; 2009) maintains that “the depressed quality of education in Nigeria has been explained in part by the inadequate funding of the system. With increased and proper funding, proper resources mobilization (inclusive of Internal Revenue Generation) and effective utilization of resources, infrastructural facilities would be enhanced for increased access and quality of education.

Oyaziwo (2012) worked on “*Increasing Access to University Education in Nigeria, Present Challenges.*” The study recognized the fact that low access to university education in Nigeria could be the result of the problem of carrying capacity; infrastructural/facilities challenge; inadequate public financing; economic constraints; labour market failure (low absorptive capacity of economy; and issue of curriculum and the problem of curriculum delivery). The study recognized the fact that more generous access to university education in Nigeria, the study recommended curbing financial waste in the Nigeria university system (applying the policy of consolidation to its letter); downsizing the number of support staff in Nigerian university system; retraining of Nigerian universities, academic staff to embrace ICT e-learning, and, revision of Education Trust Fund support for the production of books and journals in the Nigerian tertiary institutions to include display production of online materials for distance learning centers that would serve the greater populace desiring university education.

Anselm (2013) on “*Effect of Reforms in Nigerian Educational Sector*” found out that, although the workers were aware of the intention of the federal government in initiating the reforms; they noted its poor implementation which caused untold hardship to staff affected by the exercise. The poor performance of the reform agenda made the attainment of the objectives of the reform unsustainable and unattainable. The study recommends that, the performance of reforms in colleges of education be executed in such a manner that all the workers and other stakeholders affected be timely and adequately compensated. Workers should be paid all their entitlements and be made to adjust correctly to avoid loss of confidence from the workforce.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts Principal/Agent theory propounded by Jensen & William (1976). Critical to the theory is the issue of accountability and sanction. The activities of agents (managers) need to be monitored by the principal and stakeholders for accountability and to establish if objectives of the reforms are achieved or not. Hence, contractual obligations should be reviewed periodically to determine the success or otherwise. The 2009 educational reform objectives on access to education is expected to be achieved through collective and mutually agreed means of progress and development more to the benefit of the principals (entire public inclusive of parents, staff union and students). Fundamentally, for accountability matter, the implementation process of the 2009 education reform involved regulatory bodies but, the reality is these agents are yet to periodically monitor, evaluate and re-assess performance indicators on the reform expectations and benchmarks.

Putting Principal/Agent theory into context, the agents of the educational reform are the federal government, Federal Ministry of Education, the regulatory agencies (NUC, NBTE, NCCE) and management staff of tertiary institutions. The principals include (the general public, staff and students and the Alumni). The concerns are to ascertain whether the key agents (NUC, NBTE, NCCE and CEO) of tertiary institutions exert influence in ensuring that targets are achieved to enable the principals to monitor the extent to which the 2009 educational reform benchmarks on access to education is achieved. When this is ascertained, sanctions laid down by government for the regulatory bodies (NUC, NBTE and NCCE, Governing Councils and Management of the tertiary institutions need to be enforced in the case of failure to meet the established benchmarks.

Results and Discussion

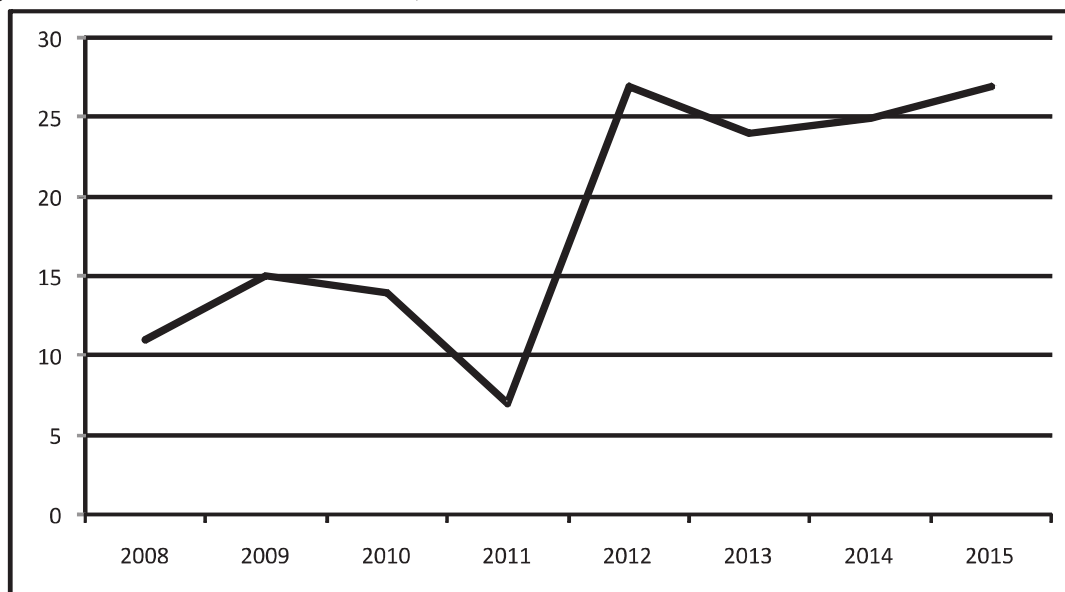
Table 1: JAMB Applications and Admission, 2008-2016

A Year s	B Applicant s	C Admitted	D % Admitted	E Not Admitted	F % Not Admitted	G Actual 20% of Admitted	H Expected 20% Annual Increase	I Variance from 2011(H- C)
2008	1054082	118691	11	935391	89	23738	NIL	NIL
2009	1306005	190786	15	1115219	85	38157	214524	23738
2010	1404111	192255	14	1211856	86	38451	230412	38157
2011	1493607	98296	7.0	1395311	93	19659	-----	-----
2012	1503933	410157	27	1093776	73	82031	117955.2	-292201.8
2013	1668314	400269	24	1268045	76	80054	141546.2	-258722.8
2014	1551289	393573	25	1157716	75	78715	169855.5	-223717.5
2015	1329876	353697	27	976179	73	70739	203826.6	-149870.4
2016	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NIL	NIL
Total	7547019			5891027			633183.5	-
		1655992						1022808.5

Source: JAMB Report, (2017) and NA=Not Available

Table 1 showed the total number of JAMB applications and admissions between 2008 and 2016 when the reform benchmark was to be achieved. The table shows that the 20% annual increase in admission benchmark though reasonably achieved with 62% positive variance, the gap between those admitted and candidates left out continues to grow, thus out of the 7.5 million candidates that applied for placements into Nigerian tertiary institutions, only about 1.7 million candidates were admitted (21.9%) as against 633,183.5 thousand expected annual increase. Hence, an average of 40% (yearly) over the period passed the UTME but only 18.8% secured admission (2008-2015), leaving 21.2% who had passed but were not admitted by JAMB.

Figure 1: Trend in JAMB Admission, 2008-2015



Source: Authors' Computation, (2020)

Figure 1 showed the trend in those admitted and not admitted in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria for the period under review which indicates that there was a wide gap between those accepted against the applicants, particularly, in 2011 where 93% of the applicants not admitted while from 2012 the situation with regards to admissions improved from 7% in 2011, 27% (2012), 24% (2013), 25% (2014), and 27% (2015). Hence, over two-thirds of the applicants (some of whom had passed UTME) not admitted.

Discussion

Based on facts presented, it is evident that a challenge of access to education remains formidable due to the interplay of carrying capacity, funding, and infrastructures provisions. Critical to the principal/agents is the fact that the 2009 educational reform objectives on access to education is expected to achieve through collective and mutually agreed means of progress and development but, the reality is these agents (the federal government, Federal Ministry of Education, the regulatory agencies (NUC, NBTE, NCCE) and management staff of tertiary institutions).are yet to periodically monitor, evaluate and re-assess performance indicators on the reform expectations and benchmarks in order to influence policy direction and to provide analytical frameworks on how challenges on the reform agenda could be addressed. It is through this means that the reality of the reform could be stressed. This paper has among other things situated that the rate of admission of 6% into tertiary level education as against the generally accepted minimum of 16% for meaningful economic development brings out the challenges clearly. The low carrying capacity of tertiary institutions which stands at 150,000 for the NUS while annual demand

is about 1 million, explains one of the reasons for the gap. For the Polytechnic system, the gross carrying capacity of 158,370 and the actual is 340,535 (more than 100% over-enrolled); and for the Colleges of Education 118,129 while the real is 354,387. The situation is further compounded by a preference for university education. On the other hand, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education are having difficulty attracting qualified candidates. For instance, in 2008/2009 academic session, a total of 957,172 applied for placement in universities as against 232,598 and 58,819 for Polytechnics and Colleges of Education respectively through JAMB.

The NUC policy on carrying capacity also posed a daunting challenge to access to education. By this policy, the NUC has pegged the number of students that can be admitted by each university in Nigeria every year. This has reduced considerably in recent years the admission into Nigerian universities. It was made more evident by the Federal Ministry of Education (2009), which noted that the carrying capacity of NUS stands at 150,000 while the actual demand is about 1 million. In the 2011/2012 academic session, a total of 1493,604 candidates sat for the UTME conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board. The results announced showed that 842,851 candidates scored below 200 marks over 400, indicating less than 45% passed the examination. JAMB later fixed 180 cut-off points as a minimum for university students and 160 for Colleges of Education and Polytechnic (Edukugbo, 2011). Edukugbo (2011) went further to posit that when the Executive Secretary of NUC when asked about the admission quota, he said one could not be too sure, but thought that about 400,000 students might be permitted into all the universities in Nigeria.

Summary of Findings

The paper found out that from 2011-2016, the 20% annual increase in admission benchmark though reasonably achieved with 62% positive variance, the gap between those admitted and candidates left out continues to grow. Thus, out of the 7.5 million candidates that applied for placements into Nigerian tertiary institutions, only about 1.7 million candidates admitted (21.9%) leaving out 78% or 5.9 million from opportunities for tertiary education, some of whom are qualified but limited by a quota and carrying capacity. The annual carrying capacity for admissions to higher education is grossly inadequate to meet the growing learner populations' demands in Nigeria. Also, inadequate funding and the level of infrastructures provisions greatly affect access to higher education.

Policy Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on the facts presented and discussed in this paper, the 2009 educational reforms stem from the poor state of the service delivery in the Nigerian education system and the need to revitalize the education sector. The paper uncovers that out of the 7.5 million candidates that applied for placements into Nigerian tertiary institutions (2011-2016), only about 1.7 million candidates permitted (21.9%) leaving out 78% or 5.9 million from opportunities for tertiary education. There is the need for a comprehensive periodic review of the implementation of the 2009 educational reform by the principal/agents and academics to address salient issues in the reform with much emphasis on access, issues of funding, and carrying capacity for the continued survival of the educational system in Nigeria.

This paper, therefore submits that the challenges of access to higher education remain formidable area that requires attention by educational development policy makers to work out strategies that could address issues of carrying capacity, inadequate funding, and gaps in planning and execution of transition programmes at the basic, post-basic/secondary in relation to entry programming of higher education. The paper recommends that efforts to attain both the 26% UNESCO benchmark on national budget for education, and the 2009 educational reform benchmark on access (20% increase in admissions annually from 2011) in the tertiary institutions should be intensified such that reasonable number of candidates be admitted to higher education. Increase in funding benchmark of 26% to education should be attained for the expansion of facilities (lecture theatres, classrooms, laboratories, hostels, etc) to raise the carrying capacity to accommodate current reality.

Scholars should therefore engage in conducting impact evaluation studies using case studies to compare levels of accesses to education in Universities, Federal Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, and to ascertain the extent to which funding, carrying capacity and infrastructures provisions affect access to education

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