

# Quota System and Catchment Area Policies as Determinants of Students' Admission Processes in Public Universities in North Central Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study investigated the influence of quota system and catchment area policy on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study and two hypotheses were tested. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 17,240 respondents from thirteen public universities. A total of 862 respondents from six public universities were sampled using a multi-stage sampling procedure (purposive and proportionate stratified random sampling techniques). A 4-point structured 10-item rating scale questionnaire titled Quota System and Catchment Area Policy and Admission Questionnaire (QSCAPAQ) was developed by the researchers and used for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while Regression Analysis was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that quota system and catchment area policies have significant influence on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria. The study concluded that these policies provide citizens and groups with a sense of equal representation and participation. However, in achieving excellence, the universities should encourage universality that will foster respect and integrity; promote equity and justice; as well as provide fertile ground for the federal character principle and other national policies. It was recommended among other things that, to enhance access to university education, the quota system and catchment area policies or locality discrimination should be reviewed to liberalize the admission process and encourage hard work among students.

**Key Words:** Quota System, Catchment Area Policy & Students' Admission Processes

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education is said to be the biggest enterprise and one of the major prerequisites for the full realization of an individual and the societal goals. It equips individuals with the needed knowledge and skills to contribute their quarter to the development of the nation. It is true that in the closing decades of the twentieth century, education seemed destined to become the main preoccupation for all states and nations of the world. This has made the demand for education to increase

on daily basis. This competition is mostly noticed at the tertiary level of education especially the university system.

University education is widely regarded as the citadel of learning, the fountain and reservoir of intellectual development and a knowledge society where man's socio-economic and well being is advanced (Anao, 2011). Thus, the vision of university education as stipulated by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013, p. 36) are: to contribute to national development through high-level manpower training; develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society and develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments among others. Also, Ahmed (2011) postulates that universities are expected to achieve excellence and encourage universality out of which it derives her name. University education is the type and level of education that is given to persons who are qualified for admission and enrolment for courses after secondary school education and having fulfilled admission requirements or criteria. Such qualified candidates are offered opportunities to enrol, study and obtain degrees, diplomas and certificate courses of their respective choices from the numerous courses and programmes provided and made available in the university curricula. University education is different from primary and secondary education because it produces experts in different fields of learning and human endeavours, which are not obtainable in primary and secondary education (Okon, 2012).

The value derived from university education has made Nigerians, both youths and adults to attach much premium on it (Okoroma, 2008). Today, most Nigerians who have the potential for university education show desperation in their efforts to gain admissions into the highly limited available spaces. This obsession and preference for university education as against other forms of higher education such as colleges of education, polytechnics and monotechnics which also offer degree programmes have placed enormous pressure on admission processes in public universities in Nigeria and this seems to have consequently affected the standard of education negatively.

Admission into public universities in Nigeria and North Central, in particular, has been as contentious as the surge for university education continues to rise. According to Ogbonnaya (2009), students' admission is the formal acceptance into school or program of study for which certain requirements must be met. It is aimed at selecting the best from the pool of those qualified; hence, prospective students for admissions register and write Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) coordinated by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) after which some universities conduct an internal screening for the final selection and placement (Omeje, Egwu & Adikwu, 2016). Admissions into the universities vary according to the program of study and this includes admission into the remedial programs, part-time and full-time programs for both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Despite the enormous pressure on admission into universities today, Nigeria still operates only 75 universities to cater to over 140 million population according to the 2006 census. Going by this, one university is expected to accommodate 1,866,000 people. A country like the USA with a population of 290 million has 5,758 universities, India with one billion people has 8,407 universities, Argentina with 38.7 million has 1,705 universities and Spain with 40.2 million people has 145 universities. Others are Mexico with 10.9 million has 1,341 universities, Bangladesh with 130 million people has 1,268 universities, Indonesia with 238 million people has 1,236 universities, Japan with 127 million people has 1,223 universities, France with 60.1 million people has 1,062 universities and China with 1.2 billion has 1,054, to mention just a few (Ehiamezor, 2005). This shortage in the number of universities in Nigeria couple with the high demand for university education has put much pressure on university admissions.

Also, Ogbolosingha, Emeni and Nlewem (2010) posit that the heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state has since inception generated series of issues that have continued to engage the government and serious-minded individuals in thinking ways of preserving the existence of the system. These issues have divided the country along ethnic, religious, regional, majority-minority, advantage-disadvantage lines. As a result of this, education has had its fair share in the struggles resulting in an educationally imbalanced society, where the south is seen as the educationally advantaged region and the north as the disadvantaged region. To regulate admission matters into institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, the federal government of Nigeria initiated the policies of quota system, catchment area, carrying capacity and educationally less developed states to ensure fair and effective representation of states/ local government areas or ethnic groups in placement in enrolment into universities to control the already looming class conflict and also foster national integration (Adejo, 2005).

The quota system is the formula used in the equalization of educational opportunity through its influence on admission

matters. Obielumani (2008) defines quota system as any selection method for school admission whereby a certain set of percentage of those selected must be of a given ethnic or racial background and/or of a particular sex or state/ local government area. Okoroma (2008) believes that the quota system which stipulates the number of candidates which should come from each state/ local government whether qualified or not is one of the euphemisms that have to be practised in the equalization process in education. In a contrary position, Ekundayo and Adedokun (2009) assert that the quota system policy ensures equity and fairness in the admission processes. With the quota system policy, universities are under obligation to admit students not entirely on merit but on quota of states as stipulated by the government. The federal government came up with quota system and catchment area policies in the bid to create equitable access to universities, bridge the educational gap, and meet the surging demand for higher education.

Quota system used during admission processes in most universities in Nigerian comprises academic merit which is determined by University Matriculation Examination (UME) and is allotted 45%, educationally less privileged state is allotted 20%, catchment area 25% and 10% to the discretion of the Vice-Chancellor (NUC, 1999). Up till date, Nigeria is polarized into Educationally Developed States (EDS) and Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS). EDS include Oyo, Lagos, Ekiti, Osun, Ondo Edo, Delta, Imo, Akwa Ibom, Cross-River, and Anambra States while ELDS include Adamawa, Bauchi, Bayelsa, Benue, Bornu, Ebonyi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, Rivers, Sokoto, Taraba, Yobe and Zamfara (Moti 2010; Egwa 2017). The ELDS have a reserve of 20% of the spaces.

Catchment area refers to the locality which in most cases is the geographical and socio-cultural area contiguous to the institution for which a candidate has applied (Moti, 2010). Similarly, Ogbonnaya (2009) defines the catchment area as the locality for which a university is established. Akpakwu (2013) states that catchment area is the area which a university draws its students from, which some people are given special preference by virtue of the location of the institution in the area. Consideration is given to students who fall within the catchment areas of the tertiary institution. Some institutions have all the states of the federation as their catchment area while some state-owned tertiary institutions have all local government areas of their states as their catchment area. According to the admission guidelines, twenty-five per cent of the available spaces are reserved for applicants from such states or locality (Adeyemi, 2001).

The benefit of quota system and catchment area policies is that they are designed by the FGN to diffuse ethnic tension and promote national integration. As good as these policies seem to be, it has been grossly bastardized by the influence of ethnicity derived from the tribe, gender, religion, and class status, among others. The FGN introduced the quota system in an attempt to provide equity in the universities, but this has

been grossly abused because universities may be encouraging these sets of candidates while they are throwing away other quality candidates. This perhaps explains why Akpakwu (2013) wonders on how today candidates who score fewer marks in JAMB and aptitude test examinations could secure admission while those who score higher would not. This perhaps explains the high rate of poor academic performance in the universities in Nigeria.

In a similar vein, Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006) maintain that the tendency to admit candidates with low scores in preference to those with higher scores leads to poor academic performance and high drop-out rates in the universities today. Today, stakeholders express dismay over the poor performance among the graduates in the labour market as well as defective admission procedures. While the quota system has to do with a number assigned to a divisional, geographical and socio-cultural area, it is also mapped out as catchment areas within the divisions during admission processes. Concerning the aforesaid assertions, this study investigated the perceived influence of quota system and catchment area policies on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Despite the efforts of government, non-governmental organizations and cooperate individuals to ensure balanced, fair and effective representation of states/ local government areas or ethnic groups in enrolment into universities by introducing several admission policies such as quota system and catchment area to allow the composition and conduct of public universities to reflect the country's diversity. It has been observed by some educational stakeholders that with the introduction of quota system and catchment area policies to ease class conflict on admission matters, meritorious students are denied admissions because their quotas are filled and examination grades are manipulated in favour of some students because of their states or local government of origin. Stakeholders of university education in the North Central States of Nigeria have expressed deep dissatisfaction on the conduct of admissions in public universities. They alleged that admission procedure in these universities is unconventional, unethical, and unfavourable to meritorious candidates or candidates from the poor socio-economic background as it will impair national unity and integration due to the parochial influence of ethnicity portrayed in the implementation of quota system and catchment area policies. Rules and regulations are compromised where certain mischievous behaviours seem to be condoned because a dominant group is involved.

Consequently, these policies may have encouraged social discrimination of some individuals or group against the other. The practice in all its ramifications also portends it to be the practice of favouring some candidates at the expense of others in the university admissions based on state of origin, local government area, tribe, nepotism, or choice of course of study. It is strongly believed that quota system policy as overriding consideration is one of the nonsense policies that have deterred the development of Nigerian educational system as

dull candidates are admitted at the detriment of the brilliant ones. It is this worrisome situation that made the researchers to carry out a study of this nature to seek the extent of influence of these policies on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to find out the influence of quota system and catchment area policies on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to find out the influence of:

1. Quota system on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria.
2. Catchment area policy on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

#### *Research Questions*

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the influence of quota system on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria?
2. What influence does catchment area policy have on student' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria?

#### *Hypotheses*

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Quota system has no significant influence on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria.
2. Catchment area policy has no significant influence on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted survey design. It is a design by which a group of people or items are studied in their natural settings by collecting, analyzing and interpreting data from a sample considered to be a representative of the entire population (Emaikwu, 2019). The population comprised 17,240 respondents (8,264 academic and 8976 senior administrative staff) from thirteen public universities (Registry Department of the Universities, 2019). A sample of 862 respondents (413 academic staff and 449 senior administrative staff) representing 5% from six public universities was selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure. This sample was considered adequate since it is in line with Achor and Ejigbo's (2006) assertion that for a larger population, a sample of 10% of the population is adequate. Achor and Ejigbo further postulate that the percentage could be higher or less depending on the population of the study. Therefore, 5% of 17,240 respondents constituted the sample. This makes the sample statistics valid estimates of the population parameters.

A researcher-structured questionnaire titled "Quota System and Catchment Area Policy on Admission Questionnaire (QSCAPAQ)" was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into Sections A and B. Section A contained items on the personal data of the respondents, while Section B was divided into two clusters - 1 and 2. Cluster 1 contained items 1-6 that focused on the influence of quota system on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria. Cluster 2 contained items 7-12 on the influence of catchment area policy on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria. The decision was based on the real limits of numbers. Hence a mean response score of 3.50-4.00 was considered Very High Extent (VHE), 2.50-3.49 High Extent (HE), 1.50 -2.49 Low Extent (LE), while 0.50-1.49 was considered as Very Low Extent (VLE). The data collected were analyzed using Mean Scores and Standard Deviation to answer the research questions. Any

item with less than 2.50 was rejected and considered as having low or very low influence. On the other hand, it was accepted as having high and very high influence if it was 2.50 and above. Chi-Square test of goodness-of-fit was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

### III. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A total number of 862 copies of the questionnaire were taken to the field and administered to the respondents and 848 or 98% were returned whereas 14 or 2% were not returned due to the non-cooperative attitude of some respondents. The data were analyzed and interpreted based on the question raised and the hypothesis formulated for the study.

*Research Question One:* What is the influence of quota system on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of the Respondents on the Influence of Quota System on Students' Admission Processes in Public Universities

Item No	Item Description	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	X	SD	Decision
1	Quota system avail admission access to candidates who do not have connection with those in power.	192	365	174	117	2.75	0.96	High Extent
2	Quota system does not ensure fairness in admission process in public universities.	150	182	301	215	2.32	1.04	High Extent
3	Quota system gives admission opportunities to all categories of students in the area.	211	294	198	145	2.67	1.03	High Extent
4	Quota system helps public universities to reflect on tribal sentiments in admission process.	221	305	201	121	2.74	1.00	High Extent
5	Quota system encourages educationally less developed states to enrol in university education.	192	345	176	135	2.70	0.99	High Extent
6	Quota system does not encourage the admission of dull candidates in public universities.	183	209	245	211	2.43	1.08	High Extent
	<b>Cluster Mean</b>					<b>2.60</b>		<b>High Extent</b>

Table 1 showed that the mean ratings of items 1-6 are 2.75, 2.32, 2.67, 2.74, 2.70 and 2.43 respectively with the corresponding standard deviations of 0.96, 1.04, 1.03, 1.00, 0.99 and 1.08. The standard deviations are small showing that the respondents' responses are closely clustered around the mean and as such are homogeneous. The table also showed that the respondents had a cluster mean of 2.60. This is above

the cut-off point of 2.50. Thus, the answer to research question one is that students' admission processes is influenced by quota system to a great extent.

*Research Question Two:* What influence do catchment area policy has on student' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of the Respondents on the Influence of Catchment Area Policy on Students' Admission Processes in Public Universities

Item No	Item Description	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	X	SD	Decision
7	Catchment area policy encourages unethical practices during admission process.	217	243	204	184	2.58	1.09	High Extent
8	Catchment area policy does not encourage social discrimination of candidates seeking admission into public universities.	156	185	315	192	2.36	1.03	High Extent
9	Meritorious candidates are denied admission because of their location.	211	305	179	153	2.68	1.03	High Extent
10	Catchment area policy enhances admission of qualified candidates into public universities.	216	231	201	200	2.55	1.12	High Extent
11	More consideration is given to candidates seeking admission who fall within a certain geographical area.	245	281	201	121	2.77	1.02	High Extent
12	Ethnicity has bastardized the catchment area policy which tends to denial students admission into the university.	218	225	208	197	2.57	1.11	High Extent
	<b>Cluster Mean</b>					<b>2.59</b>		<b>High Extent</b>

Table 2 revealed that the mean ratings of items 7-12 are 2.58, 2.36, 2.68, 2.55, 2.77 and 2.57 respectively with the corresponding standard deviations of 1.09, 1.03, 1.03, 1.12, 1.02 and 1.11. The standard deviations are small showing that the respondents' responses are closely clustered around the mean and as such are homogeneous. The table also showed that the respondents had a cluster mean of 2.59. This is above the cut-off point of 2.50. Thus, the answer to research question two is that students' admission processes is influenced by catchment area policy to a great extent.

**Hypothesis One:** Quota system has no significant influence on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

Table 3: Chi-square test of the Influence of Quota System on Students' Admission Processes in Public Universities in North Central Nigeria

Opinions	Observed frequency	Expected Frequency	df	Level of sig	$\chi^2$ -cal	P-value	Decision
VHE	221	212.0					
HE	305	212.0	3	.05	80.811	.000	Significant
LE	201	212.0					
VLE	121	212.0					
Total	848						

Table 3 shows that  $\chi^2$ -cal.=80.811<sup>a</sup>; P<.05 with 3 degrees of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis which stated that quota system has no significant influence on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria was rejected. This means that quota system has significant influence on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

**Hypothesis Two:** Catchment area policy has no significant influence on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

Table 4: Chi-square test of the Influence of Catchment Area Policy on Students' Admission Processes in Public Universities in North Central Nigeria

Opinions	Observed frequency	Expected Frequency	df	Level of sig	$\chi^2$ -cal	P-value	Decision
VHE	211	212.0					
HE	305	212.0	3	.05	62.358	.000	Significant
LE	179	212.0					
VLE	153	212.0					
Total	848						

Table 4 reveals that  $\chi^2$ -cal.=62.358<sup>a</sup>; P<.05 with 3 degrees of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis which stated that catchment area policy has no significant influence on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria was rejected. The implication is that catchment area policy has significant influence on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria.

#### IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding of this study revealed that quota system has positive significant influence on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria. The result shows that quota system policy provides avenue for social consideration of varying ethnic groups that exist in Nigeria. This is in line with Omeje, Egwa and Adikwu (2016) who note that quota system provides access to the university education for candidates who are from educationally disadvantaged areas. In addition, Ekundayo and Adedokun (2009) reported that quota system ensures equity and fairness in the admission processes. With the quota system policy, universities are under obligation to admit students not entirely on merit but on quota of states as stipulated by the government. This policy was introduced in a bid to create equitable access to universities, bridge the educational gap, and meet the surging demand for higher education in the country. On the contrary, Adayemi (2001) reported that the 2004-2015 admission lists of some states and federal universities shows that while some states and local government areas had candidates who scored 200 points and above in JAMB, others had very few candidates who managed to score up to 180 points which was the cut-off mark. Consequently, those candidates who scored 200 and above were from the so-called educationally advantage local government areas where their quotas are already filled. They were denied admissions, but those candidates who scored 180 points from states and local government areas with less number of candidates were admitted. This has led to the production of low-quality graduates in the universities as less qualified are given admission, while the qualified candidates forfeit their admission on the grounds of their state or local government area.

The study also found that catchment area policy has positive significant influence on students' admission processes in public universities in North Central Nigeria. This is an indication that the policy provides a platform for candidates from minority and educationally less developed areas to step up in their educational attainment. This finding is at variance with that of Akpakwu (2013) who found catchment area policy as a tool used by corrupt politician/ administrators to deny qualified candidate access to university education. As a result of this policy, candidates who score fewer marks in JAMB and aptitude test examinations could secure admission while those who score higher would not. This perhaps explains the high rate of poor academic performance in the universities in Nigeria. In a similar vein, Ojedele and Ilusanya (2006) maintain that the tendency to admit candidates with low scores in preference to those with higher scores leads to poor academic performance and high drop-out rates in the universities today.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Quota system and catchment area policies are essential in our university today, especially in a pluralized society such as Nigeria. With these policies, all citizens and groups feel a

sense of equal representation and participation. However, in achieving excellence, the universities should encourage universality that will foster respect and integrity; promote equity and justice; as well as provide fertile ground for the federal character principle and other national policies.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it was recommended that:

1. To enhance access to university education, the quota system and catchment area policies or locality discrimination should be reviewed to liberalize the admission process and encourage hard work among students.
2. The university management should set up a committee to include principal officers, professors, deans, heads of departments, and senior non-teaching staff to coordinate admission processes in universities. It should be the responsibility of the committee to ensure that they balance the admissions processes. Merit should not be sacrificed at the altar of quota system and catchment area dogma.

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