Access to University Education in Nigeria: A Review

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Abstract

Demand for university education has increased due to the recent innovations of universal, free and compulsory education at the basic and senior secondary education level. Education has been expanding very rapidly at all levels in Nigeria. However, there are serious problems related to quality, equity, unavailable human and material resources and access. Some of these problems are related to the fact that formal education was introduced to the different regions in Nigeria at different time, and the nation's focus was more on the basic education, without building a strong framework for the higher education that could provide the necessary policies committed to equity, access, quality and efficiency.

The data on admissions and enrolments were obtained from the Federal Bureau of Statistics and National Universities Commission and Joint Admission and Matriculation Board's websites. The paper analysed the pattern of access based on the six geo-political zones in Nigeria, gender, and academic disciplines using percentage, mean and chart.

The impact of some major factors such as admission policy and finance on access to university education were also examined. The findings revealed that access to university education in Nigeria when compared with the number of qualified applicants was low. There was disparity in access across regional zones and there exists differences in the access of male and female all-over the country. Also, there was gap in access across disciplines. In addition, funding of the universities was state-supply model and this has restricted expansion of the institutions for more access. Furthermore, admission policy has impact on the rate of access to university education in Nigeria. Based on the disparity observed in access to university education in Nigeria, it was suggested that a coercive attention and affirmative action in terms of adequate funding and dynamic policy on admission are needed to address the situation.

Introduction

University education serves as centre for the production of persons with intellectual capacity and high-level work force needed for social and economic development, especially in the 21st approach towards modernization, technological and global advancement. For several decades, great emphasis was placed on primary and secondary education and resources committed to the course, but tertiary education has been neglected. It has been asserted that though primary and secondary education is essential for development, it is only through a strong and an appropriate higher education that learning and training can create people with enough wisdom to be used in advancing the issue of poverty and development in developing countries like Nigerian (Wolfensohn, 2000).

Many factors have been identified as determinants of the quantity and quality of higher education any country could offer her citizens among which are finance, academic qualification, available space and so on. The desire to provide equal education opportunities to all, have been mere expression of intentions without accompanied determination and complete implementation and actualization of the desire. The challenge of access to higher education is exacerbated by anticipated increase in demand for higher education that will result from successful implementation of UNESCO (2000)'s goal of Education for All. Presently, (Juman 2007) reported that higher education enrolment rate in Sub-Saharan Africa is lower than 5%.

The history of education in Nigeria has been that of educational imbalance due to the difference in the time when education was introduced in the different regions which made up Nigeria. The various measures taken to address the issues such as expansion of access, provision of human and material resources, quality, etc at the tertiary education seem to have failed. Instead of education to be unifying factor, it has widened the gap of education imbalance rather than correcting the problem. Furthermore, the fear of domination of one group over another may be responsible for the emphasis now placed on admission criteria. On the whole, the nation is far from achieving the goal of equal educational opportunity at the university level.

In the past, the numbers of universities in Nigeria were few and candidates seeking for admission are equally few. However, the importance placed on higher education by successive governments between 1980s and 2000s, appeared to account for why the demand for university education surged up. Precisely, in 1999, due to political pressure of social demand for access and equal opportunity to education, it became obvious that both federal and state governments could not meet the demand for higher education and consequently, private participation in the establishment of tertiary institutions was encouraged (Nwagwu, 2001). Presently, tertiary institutions in Nigeria are

302 (104 universities;198-university equivalent and enrolment of over 1,937,493 NUC: 2010). But the higher education participation rate (HEPR) defined as the proportion of 18-35 year age group that are enrolled in tertiary institutions in Nigeria is just 8.1%. This very low when compared with the developed countries like USA, Australia, Korea that have 64%, 41% and 51% HEPR respectively (Daniel, Kanwar and Uvalic-Trumbic, 2006).

There seems to be much problem that pertains to access to university education in Nigeria and other related institutions. Thus, the problem of this paper is to determine whether all qualified Nigerians have access to university education? To address the problem, the researcher reviewed relevant studies on enrolment and access to higher education. The rate of access to universities in Nigeria was analyzed based on geo-political zones; gender and across various disciplines offered in the universities for three academic sessions. The results were presented below.

Table 1: Distribution of Universities in Nigeria by Geo-Political Zones

Zones	South East	South West	South South	North East	North West	North Central	Total
No. of of Universities	16	30	19	08	13	18	104

Source: National Universities Commission News Report (2010).
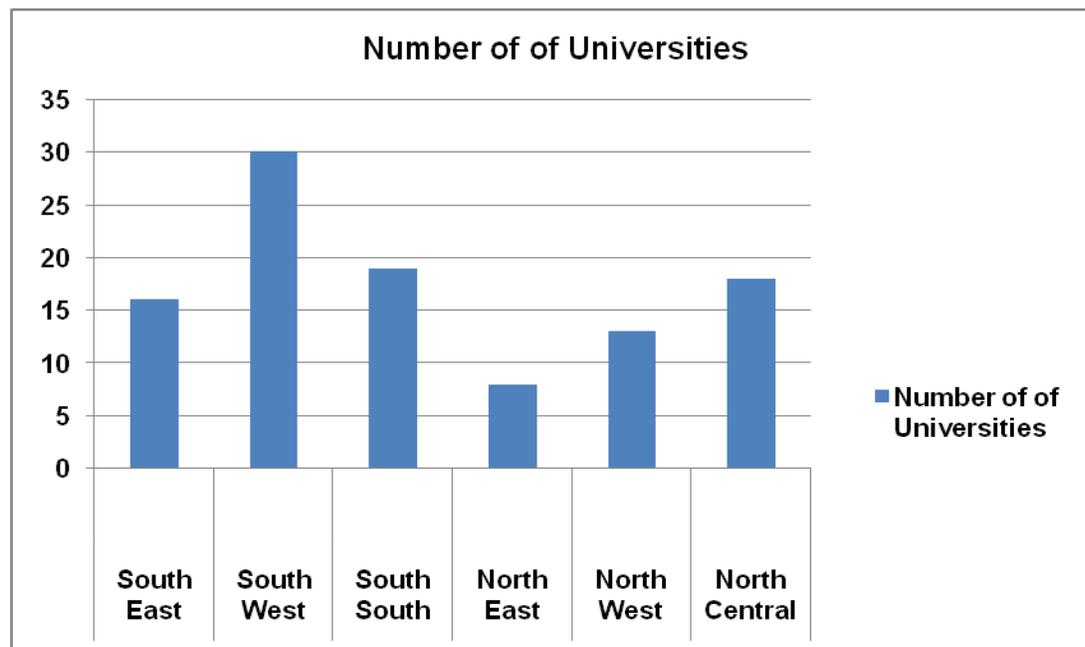

Figure 1: Universities by Region

Figure 1 showed the geographical spread of universities in Nigeria. South-East – 16 (15.3%);   South-West: 30 (28.8%); South-South: 19 (18.3%); North-East: 08 (7.7 %); North-West 13 (12.5%) and North-Central: 18 (17.3%): Total Universities

Access to universities in Nigeria

Access to education is the opportunity for enrolment as well as the facilitation of entry and the encouragement of sustained enrolment by learners in appropriate education programme. Thus, access includes features of openness to heterogeneous population, supportiveness to a diverse clientele and relevance of diverse offerings (Roberts 2003). Access to education in Nigeria seems constrained at all levels of the system and significant disparities in access are sometimes evident. The level of access to higher education in Nigeria compares poorly with economic competitors such as South Africa (17%), Indonesia (11%) and Brazil (12%) (Task Force, 2000). In the same vein, the Federal Ministry of Education report affirmed that in 2005, 200,000 candidates passed (23% success rate) the University Matriculation Examination (UME). In the same year, universities in Nigeria had a capacity to admit 148,323 students. This implies that the universities could only accommodate 17% (FRN 2006). Consequently, the gap that existed between the numbers of candidates that sits for UME (University Matriculation Exam) yearly and the number offered admission continued. Table 2 showed the JAMB Admission Statistics from 1999 to 2004.

Table 2: JAMB Statistics from 1999 to 2008

Year	# Applicants	# Admitted	# Rejected	Success Rate (%)	Failure Rate (%)
1999	593,670	64,358	5 29,312	10.8	89.2
2 2000	467,490	45,681	421,809	9.8	90.2
2001	749,727	90,769	658,958	12.1	87.9
2002	994,381	51,845	942,536	5.2	94.8
2003	1,046,950	105,157	941,793	10.0	90.0
2004	841,878	122,492	719,386	14.5	85.5
2005	916,371	76,984	839,387	8.4	91.6
2006	803,472	88,524	714,948	11.0	89.0
2007	1,028,984	129,445	899,539	12.6	87.4
2008	1,192,050	113,100	1 1,078,950	9.5	90.5

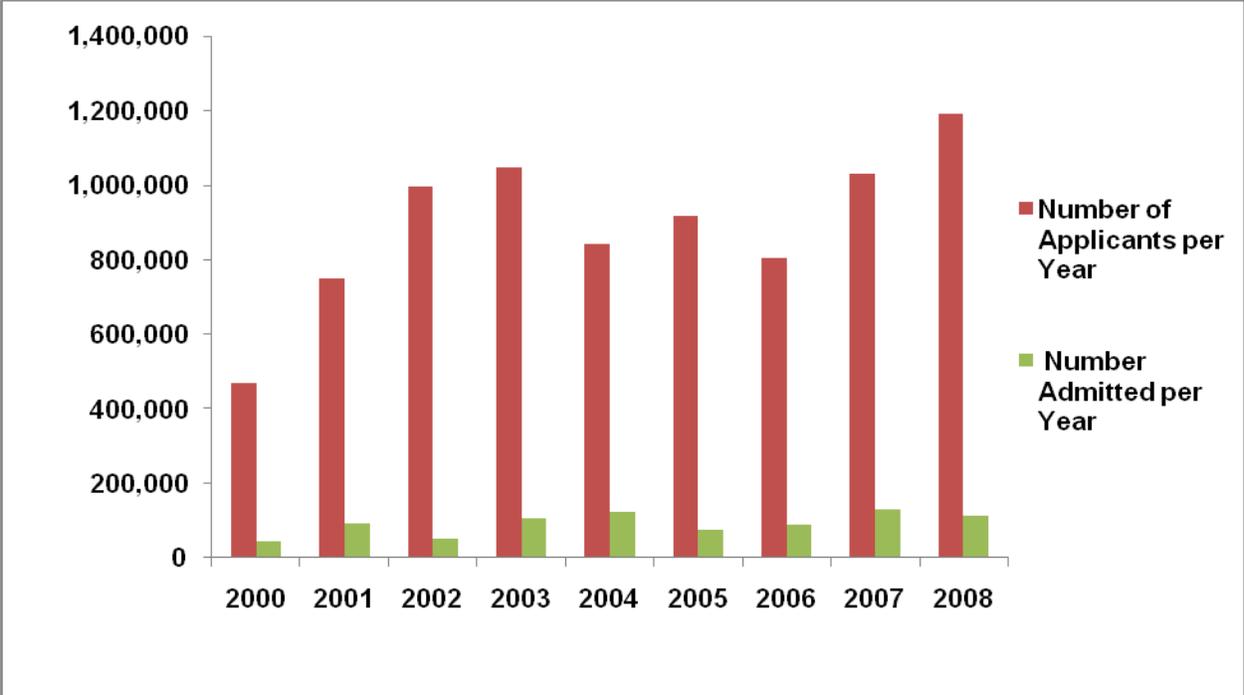Source JAMB Annual Report 2009; Key: # - Number

Figure 2: Candidates applications and Access to universities in Nigeria

In order to ascertain the level of access in the universities in Nigeria between 2006/07 and 2007/08 academic sessions across the geo-political zones, the UME candidates as well as those that were admitted was analysed and the results are presented in table2.

Table 3: Rate of Access in the Nigerian universities across geo-political zones 2003-2005

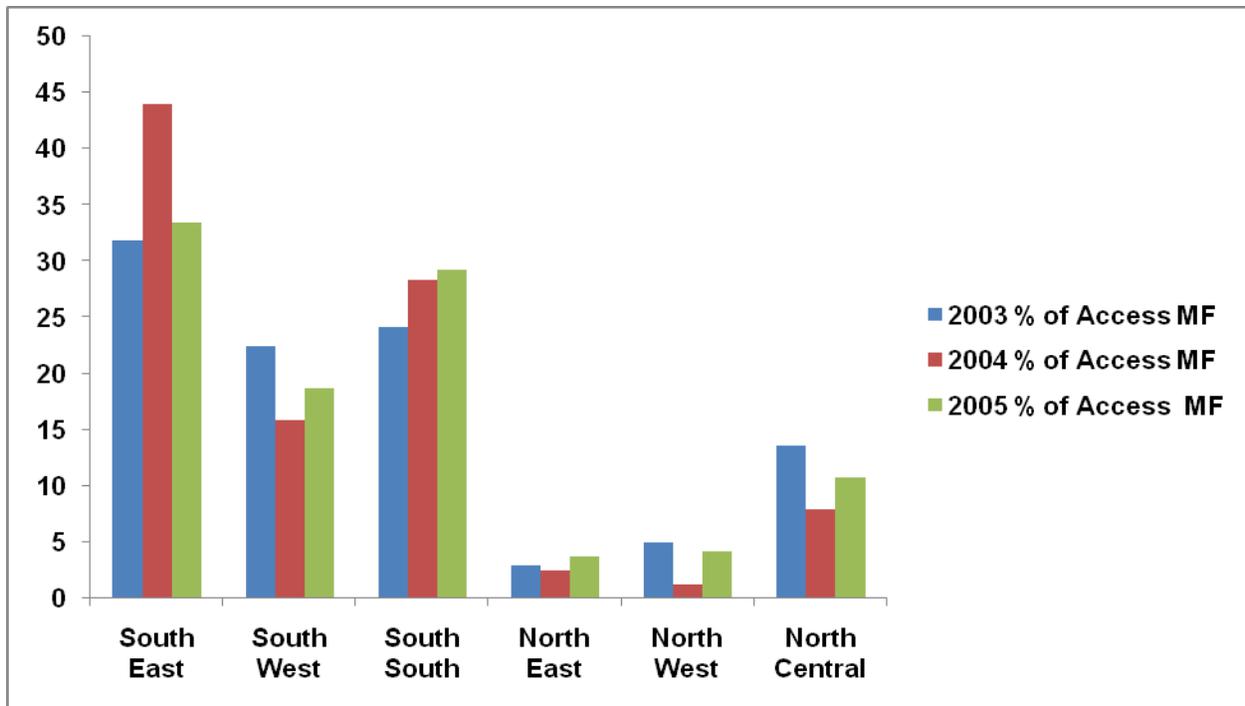| Year	2003		2004		2005	
Zones	Access	% of Access MF	Access	% of Access MF	Access	% of Access MF
South East	16,541	31.9	47578	44.0	41026	33.4
South West	11621	22.4	17228	15.9	22901	18.7
South South	12485	24.1	30739	28.4	35788	29.2
North East	1536	3.0	2563	2.5	4572	3.7
North West	2558	5.0	1418	1.3	5112	4.2
North Central	7048	13.6	8540	7.9	13261	10.8

Figure 3: Access into Nigerian Universities across Regions

The data in table3 reveal disparity in the rate of access to higher education across the six zones. The southern zones of the country have average access of 9.6% and 29.3% while in the northern zones, access ranged between 13.2% and 36.6%.

According to experts, the disparity witnessed in the higher education could be due to admission policies and criteria for admission such as merit, catchment area and educationally less developed states. While some states have more candidates than their quota, some have no enough candidates to fill theirs. In addition, there appear that the population of school age in relation to the region population is disproportionate. This figure confirmed that level of access to education in Nigeria is less than 40 percent recommended ratio for any nation to make appreciable impact on the economy (UNESCO, 2000). However, Adeyemi (2001) affirmed that the difference in access ratio to tertiary institutions in Nigeria among regions, is because the admission is not proportional to the size of enrolment at the terminal grade of the secondary school level in these regions,

Gender and Access to Higher Education

In the last two decades, at different levels, worries about equity in access to education and gender disparity are increasing. In Nigeria, as elsewhere in the world, the level of female enrolment and their access particularly at the second and third levels of education system is low. Osagie (2008) observed that the female enrolment at the primary

level of education was low and could have impact on the university education. At the regional level, the results of several studies conducted showed that the average male enrolment is higher than the female except in South East (Atuora 2006). Disparity also existed in gender enrolment in the universities in Nigeria across the geo-political zones and disciplines. It was noted that there was a steady increase in the rate of female enrolment, but it was insignificant (Imogie and Eraikhuemen 2008; Adeyemi and Akpotu 2004). The access rate by gender was presented in Table4.

Table 4: Access to University Education by Gender

Year	Sex	Applications per Gender	Total Applications	Admissions per Gender	Total Admissions	Admission Rate by Gender (%)	Rejection Rate by Gender (%)
2000	M	238,456	416,291	26,665	45,766	11.2	88.8
	F	177,835		19,101		10.7	89.3
	M	743,725	1,056,617	54,972	90,769	7.4	92.6
2001	F	312,892		35,797		11.4	88.6
2002	M	580,338	994,380	31,942	51,845	5.5	94.5
	F	414,042		19,903		4.8	95.2
2003	M	603,179	1,046,950	59,742	105,157	9.9	90.1
	F	443,771		45,415		10.2	89.8
2004	M	486,539	841,878	69,715	122,492	14.3	85.7
	F	355,339		52,777		14.9	85.1
2005	M	526,281	916,371	45,256	76,984	8.6	91.4
	F	390,090		31,728		8.1	91.9
2006	M	456,953	803,472	52,413	88,524	11.4	88.6
	F	346,519		36,111		10.4	89.6
	M	911,653	1,302,529	64,706	107;370	7.1	92.9
2007	F	390,876		42,664		10.9	89.1
	M	598,667	1,054,060	NA	113,100		
2008	F	455,393					

Sources JAMB Annual Report 2009; Key: M – Male, F- Female; Base Year- 2000
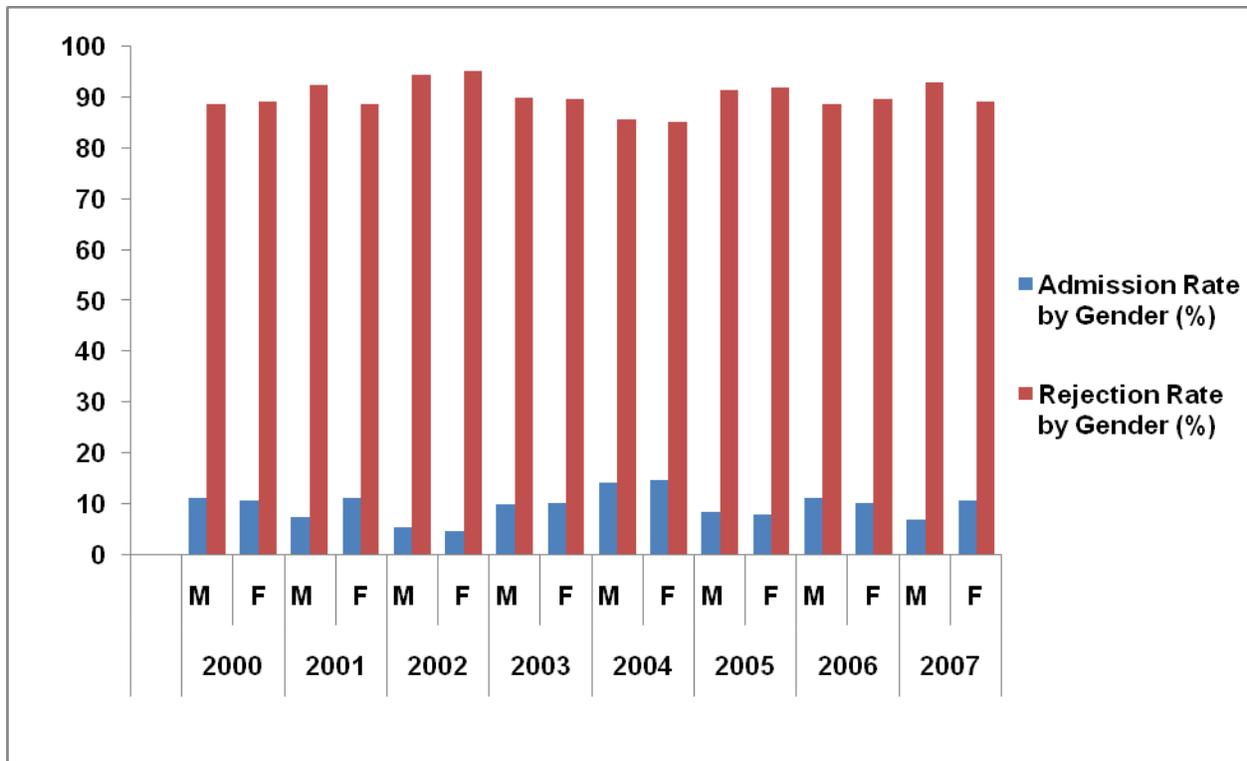
Figure 4: Access by Gender.

Table 4 revealed that the numbers of candidates seeking for admission into universities by gender differ. Male candidates are more than the female subsequently; the rate of access of female is lower.

Academic Discipline and Access to Higher Education

Access to academic disciplines offered in the univerities were analysed and the result was presented in Table 4.

Table 5: Candidates Access into Nigerian Universities across Disciplines (2000-2008)

	Discipline								
Year	Admin	Agric	Arts	Education	Eng/Env	Law	Med Science	Science	Soc. Science
2000	6790	1391	4562	2840	8061	2431	3862	8027	7690
2001	13526	3609	9301	9711	14836	3623	5105	16099	13957
2002	7687	1880	5376	5826	8311	2199	3844	8468	8264
2003	14193	4789	10836	14988	15352	3455	7206	17059	16924
2004	13637	5356	13197	21195	15936	3607	7171	20495	22050
2005	7858	4452	6815	13855	10098	3010	4649	14172	11496
2006	13861	4864	9224	12655	11861	3149	6066	16181	15386
2007	10422	6404	10111	13594	14047	3463	7138	23387	18775
2008	9903	6834	10947	14551	15371	3028	8075	26038	18353

Source: JAMB (2009); Key: Edu- Education, Eng/Env- Engineering/Environmental Technology, Med Sci- Medical Science, Sci- Science
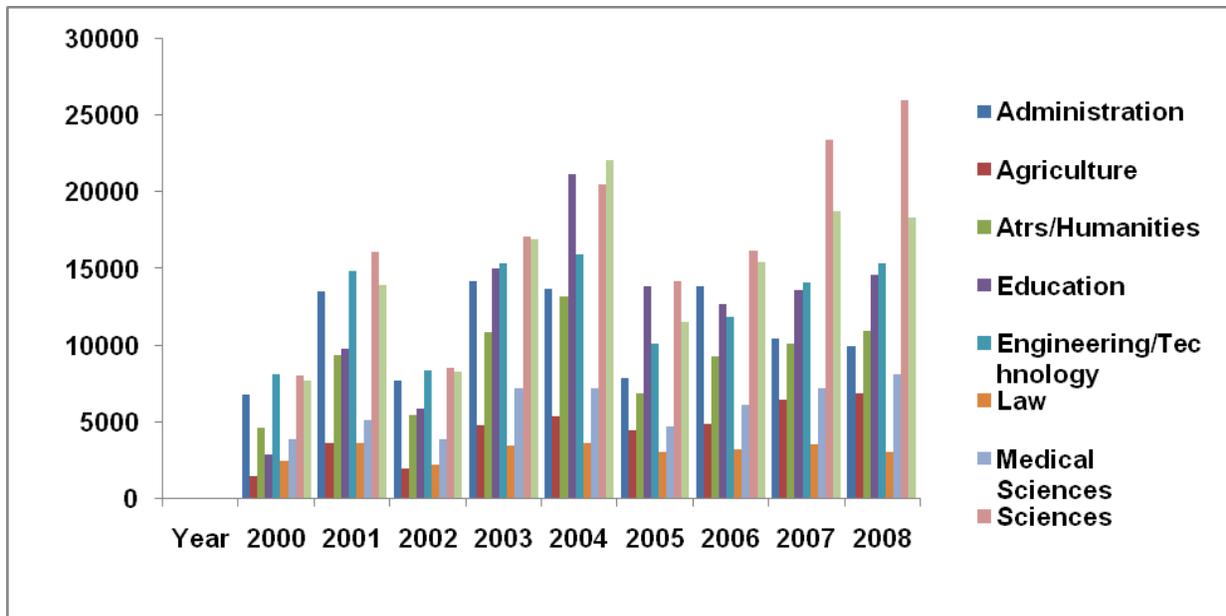
Figure 5: Access by Academic Discipline

Table 5 revealed remarkable differences in access to university education across the disciplines. Access in Engineering, Sciences, Social Sciences, Administration and Law during the period examined is low while in Arts, Agriculture and Education access rates were high. The gap in the enrolment across the disciplines was also gender based (Imogie and Eraikhuemen 2008; Adeyemi and Akpotu 2004). This was attributed to poor academic performance in science related subjects in the Senior School Certificate Examinations (FRN, 2006 and WEAC, 2006).

Major Factors that Impede Access to University Education in Nigeria

Many factors have been identified by experts to have impact on the access of eligible candidates to tertiary education in Nigeria. The factors identified include:

Government Policy and Access to Higher Education

Harold, Lasswell (1925) asserted that "power" is the basis of the study of politics, because in many ways, this is what politics is, who gets what, when and how. Those with powers are most likely to control the allocation of scarce resources for which there is competition in the society. Education sector is not exempted from the competition of the allocation of scarce resources

Successive governments in Nigeria have made concerted effort in ensuring that equal education opportunity is accorded her citizens as was evident in the National Policy on Education, FRN (2004:9) which stated that:

In order to realize fully the potentials of contribution of education to achieve national goal, education and training facilities shall continue to be expanded in response to societal needs and made, progressively accessible to afford the individual a far more diversified and flexible choice.

The benefits of education are however yet to be realized fully as many willing and able Nigerians have no access to education particularly at the tertiary level. This could be attributed to the level of resources in most institutions of learning, thus admissions into tertiary institutions was regulated by various admission policies. In addition, the discrimination between types of higher institutions and certificate awarded has further constrained access. Most students preferred university education to that of polytechnics or college of education; and public to private institutions. Hence physical infrastructures rot away in tertiary vocational/technical and private institutions for lack of students (Salawu 2008; Babalola 2000, and Aghenta 2001). Furthermore, the policy adopted in the past by the government in establishment of universities and other tertiary institutions was based on region, population and national needs, today; it has been replaced by political interest and affiliation. Students are denied access on the basis of state of origin,, and other parameters such as :"quota system", "carrying capacity", "catchment areas", "environmental" and "educationally disadvantage areas". This oftentimes makes admission political and lower access (Okebukola, 2006). The access to university has further being restricted by the policy of 60:40 ratio of admission to science and liberal arts discipline respectively in the university and 70:30 in polytechnics (Ojogwu, 2004).

Finance and Access to University Education

Funding for whatever purpose is often next to planning. It could make or mar a project. Funds can never be enough to finance the education project due to the nature of its inputs both in quantity and quality. Thus money is the crux of the matter, if the nation would attain an acceptable level of access to university education. The inadequacies and lack of human and material resources that made universities not to be able to absorb new more intakes have been attributed to inadequate finance (Adeyemi 1998; and Baikie 2002). Inadequate financing of the system have been identified as the major bane to sustenance of the enrolments growth and expansion for access. As a result, access and students' enrolments in several countries have not been encouraging (World Bank 2002; Nicholas 2002; Varghese, 2001; Maduewesi 2001, and Viagner, 1999).

Finance also appears to have inhibited the capability of the universities to employ and retain teachers in quantity and quality. In addition, the low student-ratio as stipulated by (NUC 2000; World Bank 1995) seems to have influenced

the attainment of equalization of educational opportunity and slow down the rate of access. UNESCO (2005) as cited by Okebukola (2008) reported that the public expenditure on education as percentage of GDP in Nigeria is 3.6%. Consequently, the predictor of the performance of education sector in terms of quality and quantity (access) is the funds made available to the sector.

The cost of higher education has also been identified as one of the factors that constraints access. Many state and private universities have infrastructure and other resources that could have provide access to many candidates, but the cost of procurement have put off many candidates from seeking for admission in these institutions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper examined the pattern of access in the Universities in Nigeria. This was analysed to arrive at the rate of access to Nigerian universities. From the analysis, it could be concluded that the rate of access to universities is low, there is disparity in access across regional zones in Nigeria which could be attributed to lack of facilitating entry and features of openness to heterogeneous population, supportiveness to a diverse clientele and relevance of diverse offerings irrespective of sex, region, cultural background etc. Often time, admission policies put in place does not facilitate entry for some regions. There exist difference in the access of male and female all-over the country. Higher male enrolments in South East contradict early findings of low male enrolment in that region. There is also gap in access across disciplines. Adduced reason for the high access rates in some disciplines, despite low number of applicants was that, candidates are drafted to these areas to make up for their admission quotas as most candidates are not keen to study those courses.

The observed disparity in access to university education in Nigeria calls for coercive attention and affirmative action that will address it. The following recommendations are thereby made based on the findings of this paper:

-        To ensure facilitation of entry and features of openness to heterogeneous population, supportiveness to a diverse clientele, admission policies that put some regions at an advantaged position over others irrespective of school-age population should be look into by the policy makers and the educational bodies.

-        The existing infrastructure in government owned institutions should be expanded where necessary, while private schools with enough land to spare are to be encouraged to expand their facilities with government assistance. In addition, other tertiary institutions such as polytechnics, colleges of education, should be expanded and upgraded institutions with up-to-date facilities to Bachelor degree awarding to diffuse the congestion of intakes in the universities and make room for more new intakes.

- The secondary school level should be looked into as it is the threshing floor for higher education, ill-prepared students at secondary level will have poor results in the School Certificate, consequently will not be able to transit to higher level of education;

- The funding of all levels of education should be viewed with all seriousness, government and other stakeholders should be jointly responsible for the funding of the system; the issue of autonomy of universities is to be reconsidered by the government, as it will pave way for the institutions to source for alternative methods of financing their programme. However, caution should be exercised so that higher institutions will not turn to business venture as against their primary role of teaching and research;

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Appendix

Table 1: Distribution of Universities in Nigeria by Geopolitical Zone and Ownership

South-East					South-West					South-South				
State	F	S	P	Total	State	F	S	P	Total	State	F	S	P	Total
Anambra	1	1	3	5	Ekiti	-	2	1	3	Akwa Ibom	1	1	1	3
Abia	1	1	-	2	Lagos	2	1	3	6	Bayelsa	-	1	1	2
Ebonyi	1	1	2	3	Ogun	1	2	5	8	Cross Rivers	1	1	1	3
Enugu	1	1	2	4	Ondo	1	2	3	4	Delta	1	1	2	4
Imo	1	1	-	2	Osun	1	1	3	5	Edo	1	1	3	5
	- -				Oyo	1	1	2	4	Rivers	1	1	1	2
Sub-Total	4	5	7	16		6	9	15	30		5	6	8	19

North East					North West					North Central				
State	F	S	P	Total	State	F	S	P	Total	State	F	S	P	Total
Bornu	1	-	-	1	Kaduna	2	1	1	4	Kwara	1	1	2	4
Bauchi	1	-	-	1	Kano	1	1	-	2	Kogi	-	1	1	2
Adamawa	1	1	1	3	Kastina	-	1	1	2	Benue	1	1	1	3
Gombe	-	1	-	1	Kebbi	-	1	-	1	Niger	1	1	-	2
Taraba	-	-	1	1	Jigawa	-	-	1	1	Nassarawa	-	1	1	2
Yobe	-	1	-	1	Sokoto	1	1	1	3	Plateau	1	1	-	2
					Zamfara	-	-	-	Nil	FCT	1	-	2	3
Sub-total	3	3	2	8		4	4	2	13		5	5	6	18

Sources:JAMB-website.http://www.jambng.com:8080/jamb/
NUC-website, http://www.nuc.edu.ng/pages/universities.asp

Key: F- Federal, S- State, P- Private; Total Universities = 104

Summary: %   %

     South East –   16   15.4   North East -   08   7.7

     South West -   30   28.8   North West - 13   12.5

     South South -   19   18.3   North Central - 18   17.3