

ACCESS GAPS IN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study considers access gaps to undergraduate education as indicators of uneven distribution of opportunities to acquire higher education among Nigerians and for various disciplines. Secondary data on number of applicants for admission to and new entrants for the various programmes in the ten disciplines defined by the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB) from 2002 to 2007 were used. Simple percentage was used to express access to the programmes, and the differences between national access figure and those of the other entities (e.g. geo-political zones) depict access gaps. Four research questions were raised and answered. Access gaps were generally negative for geo-political zones (in the south and north central) that had high number of applicants. This implies that admission of candidates from such zones were below the national average. The state universities in the geo-political zones with negative access gaps should be encouraged to increase number of new intakes to close or remove the negative access gaps. Providers of university education (private and public) should expand access to programmes in the faculties of sciences, engineering/environmental sciences, law, medical sciences and social sciences as a viable way of achieving higher rate of access to university education in Nigeria.

Key words: access gaps, geo-political zones, discipline, gender

Introduction

Nigeria is a West African country that has a population of about 150 million people with an annual growth rate of 2.8% spread over 350 ethnic groups. According to the Library of Congress (2008), British colonialism created Nigeria in 1914, joining diverse peoples and regions in an artificial political entity with little sense of a common Nigerian nationality. The country is divided into 36 States with a Federal Capital Territory, and grouped into six geo-political zones that reflect the ethnicity and culture of the people. The geo-political zones and the

states situated in each of them are shown in Table 1. Nigeria had had a handful of constitutional, economic and political reforms all geared towards achievement of national unity, self reliance, equality of opportunity for all citizens etc.

Table 1: Nigeria's Six Geo-Political Zones

Geo-political Zone	States within the Geopolitical Zone
North Central (N/C)	Benue, FCT, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau
North East (N/E)	Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe
North West (N/W)	Kaduna, Katsina, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto, Jigawa, Zamfara
South East (S/E)	Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo
South-South (S/S)	Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, Rivers
South West (S/W)	Ekiti, Lagos, Osun, Ondo, Ogun, Oyo

The 'federal character' principle was put in Nigeria's constitution in 1979 to ensure that appointment to public service and institutions reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity of the country. However, there is widespread notion that the 'federal character' principle promotes mediocrity, inequality and injustice.

Equity in education implies ensuring that all the segments of the society get their fair share of access to whatever educational opportunities that are provided (FME, 2003). The concept of equity in education also examines and strives to ensure equality of opportunity of being educated from the primary to the university level. The United Nation Education Social and Cultural Organization; UNESCO, (2003) explained equity of access to tertiary education as ensuring equitable

access to tertiary institutions based on merit, capacity, efforts and perseverance.

The problem of educational imbalance is not a recent development in Nigeria educational system. Ashby (1960) reported that there was a wide educational gap between the northern and southern parts of Nigeria. However, the conception that policy makers at the level of federal government in Nigeria have of educational imbalance and equity of access to education is more of physical presence of educational institution in all political entities of the country and such institutions enrolling same number of indigenes from those entities. Among the steps that have been taken by the Federal Government to achieve equitable distribution of and access to educational opportunities are:

- ❖ Establishment of federal universities in every geo-political zone of the country. There are 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory (FCT). All the 37 political entities share the 27 federal universities with a few of them having the presence of two institutions.
- ❖ Introducing an admission quota system to address regional and class imbalances.

The Federal Government through the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) defined admission quota as 40% for merit, 30% for catchment area, 20% for educationally disadvantaged students and 10% for the discretion of the Vice-Chancellor (Saint, Hartnet, and Strassner, 2003). In 1999, JAMB came up with another quota system which gives 45% for merit, 35% for catchment area and 20% for educationally less developed states (Akpan and Undie 2007 and Ene 2007). Ocho (1988) was reported by Ene (2007) as having asked the following questions on what equity of education is in our policies. "What do we mean by equal educational opportunities? Does it mean having the same number of educational institutions in each state? Does it mean tailoring the number of institutions in a state to its population? Does it mean opening more schools in states that are educationally backward? Does it mean allowing educationally backward states to catch up with the rest? In the views of Ene (2007) 'equally' in this capacity, should imply equal judgement, justice, fair play and fairness to all who have merited university education. The differences in access to

undergraduate programmes in the various disciplines in Nigeria universities and among applicants from the geo-political zones of the country are worth being estimated. It is against this backdrop that this study examined the gaps in access to undergraduate education in Nigeria universities.

Statement of the Problem

Several measures have been adopted by the federal government of Nigeria to ensure equality of access to university education in Nigeria universities. Provision of university education was on the exclusive legislative list of the federal government till 1979 when the first state university was established. In spite of the co-existence of public (federal and state) as well as private universities, the federal institutions remain the major provider of university education in Nigeria. The establishment of federal university in each state of the country and the enforcement of a quota policy on admission of candidates to the undergraduate programmes have been a contentious issue among Nigerian academics.

A school of thought to which most policy makers view equity of access to university education as physical presence of federal institutions in each state of the federation and enrolment of equal number of indigenes from the various states. On the other hand are the academics who adopt international definitions of equity of access to educational programme as the strict consideration of merit as a way of ensuring fair play. As way of measuring the level of fairness of admission policy to candidates from the various geopolitical zones of Nigeria from 2002 to 2007, this study used access gaps to the fairness in access to undergraduate programmes in Nigeria universities.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered.

1. What were the access gaps to undergraduate university education among applicants from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria from 2002 to 2007?
2. What were the access gaps to undergraduate university education among female applicants from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria from 2002 to 2007?

3. What were the access gaps to undergraduate university education among applicants for the various disciplines from 2002 to 2007?
4. What were the access gaps to undergraduate university education among female applicants for the various disciplines from 2002 to 2007?

Methodology

The descriptive research design was adopted because the study is a description of existing characteristics of the universities, and to enable the researcher to use analytical methods to estimate the gaps in access to undergraduate university education. Equity of access to education (on regional or state consideration) in Nigeria universities is explained by the gap/difference between the percentage of candidates of the state and that of the country. The extent to which the equity of access is achieved is indicated by the closeness to zero of the gap/difference obtained for the state. Value that is greater than zero indicates a favourable (above national) access for indigenes of the state while negative value implies that each candidate from the state has a lower chance than any other candidate (that is seeing as a Nigerian).

Secondary data on the number of applicants and new entrants to the nine academic disciplines recognised by the Joint Admissions and Matriculations Examinations Board (JAMB) from 2002 to 2007 was used. The even-handedness (equity) of access to university education in Nigeria can be explained by the differences between the tendencies for applicants from the various states of the federation to secure admission and such tendency at the national level.

The number of candidates that were granted admission in year t was denoted by $E_{(ug),t}$ while a total number of $A_{(ug),t}$ candidates applied for admission in the same year. Thus, the possibility that a candidate (irrespective of his/her state of origin) would be admitted into undergraduate programme if he/she applied during year t is given as:

$$\Phi_{(ug),t} = E_{(ug),t} / A_{(ug),t} \quad \dots 1$$

However, the possibility that a candidate from a particular state i would be admitted into undergraduate programme if he/she applied during year t is given as:

$$\Phi_{(ug),t}^i = E_{(ug),t}^i / A_{(ug),t}^i \quad \dots 2$$

The difference between the opportunities that a candidate has as an indigene a state i and that which he has as a Nigerian, or that between the male and female indigenes of same state is obtained as:

$$d_t^i = \Phi_{(ug),t}^i - \Phi_{(ug),t} \quad \dots 3$$

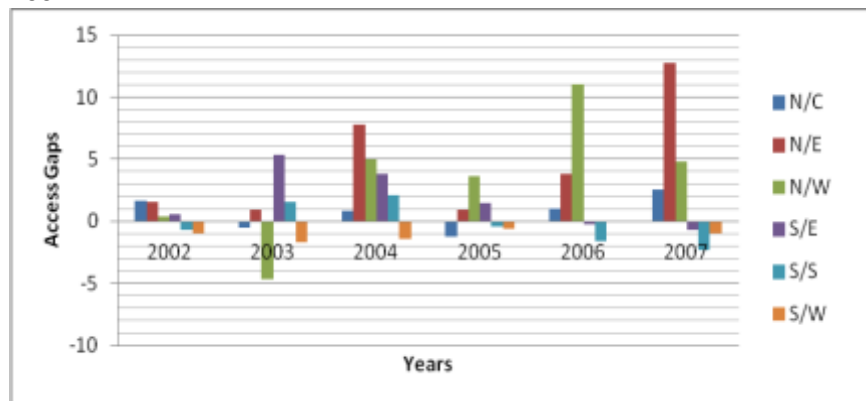
$d_t^i > 0$ if the chances of candidates from state i is better than the chances of all candidates at the national level, while $d_t^i < 0$ implies otherwise.

Findings

Q₁: What were the access gaps to undergraduate university education among applicants from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria from 2002 to 2007?

The North Central, North East and North West geo-political zones had positive access gaps for most of the years from 2002 to 2007, Figure 1. Within the period the North Central zone recorded negative access gaps (-0.5%) in 2003 and (-1.19%) in 2005. The North West zone recorded negative access gap (-4.7%) in 2003. Negative access gaps were more prominent among the three southern zones. Only the South-East zone recoded access gaps of (0.6%), (5.34%), (3.84%) and (1.49%) above the national access rates of the respective years from 2002 to 2005.

Figure 1: Access Gaps in Undergraduate University Education among Applicants from the six Geo-Political Zones of Nigeria from 2002 to 2007



Source: Compiled from JAMB Records (2008)

The fact that numbers of applicants from the South-West were consistently lower than what obtained for the two other Southern zones notwithstanding (Table 2), access gaps for that zone were not only the lowest but also negative from 2002 through 2007.

Table 2: Number of Applicants by Geo-Political Zones (2002 - 2007)

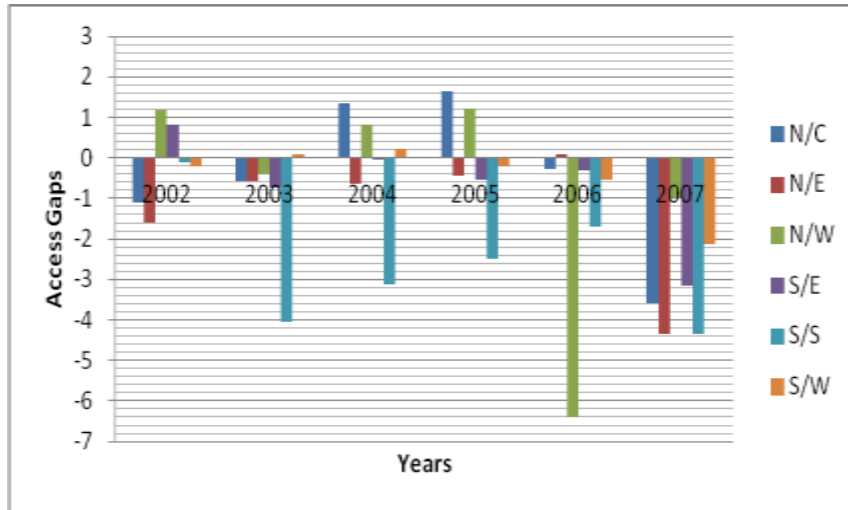
YEAR	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
N/C	102207	105509	89833	99825	85431	110809
N/E	23190	27039	21011	23950	25009	30995
N/W	32878	34857	29356	35622	34559	48550
S/E	364341	310128	250477	275419	250110	263046
S/S	274110	383883	244323	252182	215509	238279
S/W	272897	267856	205071	227143	190358	218739

Source: JAMB 2008

Q₂: What were the access gaps to undergraduate university education among female applicants from the six geo-political zones of Nigeria from 2002 to 2007?

Access gaps for undergraduate university education for female candidates were negative for most years from 2002 to 2007 in all the geo-political zones (Figure 3). The fact that the North-East and North-West geo-political zones had the lowest numbers of female applicants for the years all through notwithstanding (Table 3), the zones recorded negative female access gaps for five and three respective years from 2002 to 2007.

Figure 3: Access Gaps to Undergraduate University Education among Female Applicants from the Six Geo-Political Zones of Nigeria from 2002 to 2007



Source: Compiled from JAMB Records (2008)

The lowest negative female access gaps for all the geo-political zones were recorded in 2007. The largest negative female access gaps for all the geo-political zones were recorded in 2007.

Table 3: Number of Female Applicant by Geo-Political Zones (2002 - 2007)

YEAR	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
N/C	33233	35864	30067	33886	30137	39707
N/E	6761	7980	6390	7032	7912	9483
N/W	8071	9126	7831	9681	9627	12877
S/E	119631	162543	127818	140220	126869	133642
S/S	115219	175972	103630	107653	93389	104049
S/W	101762	101411	79134	90734	77593	90705

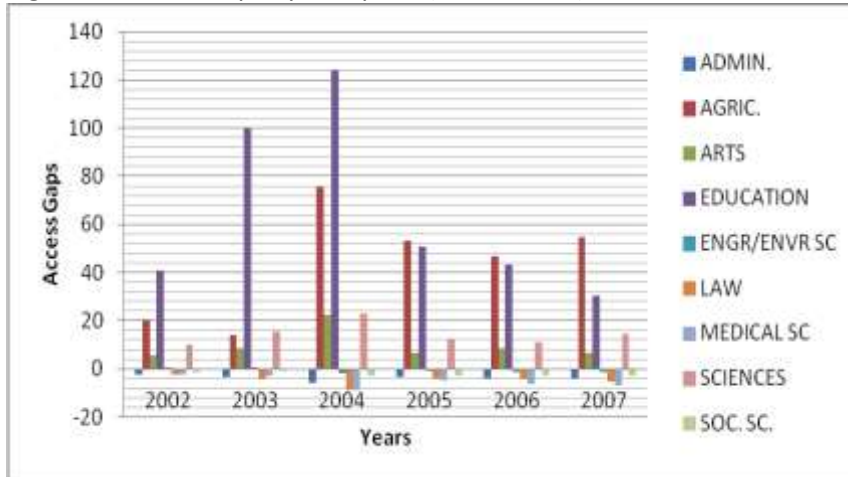
Source: JAMB 2008

The female access gaps in 2007 were North-Central (-3.60%), North-East (-4.34%), North-West (-0.98%), South-East (-3.16%), South-South (-4.34%) and South-West (-2.12%). The South-South zone was the only geo-political zone that recorded negative female access gap from 2002 to 2007.

Q₃: What were the access gaps to undergraduate university education among applicants for the various disciplines from 2002 to 2007?

Access gaps for the Faculties of Agricultural Sciences, Education, Arts and Sciences were positive throughout the period covered by this study (Figure 3). Access gaps for the Faculties of Administration, Medical Sciences, Law, and the Social sciences had negative access gaps from 2004 to 2007. Those faculties had the greatest number of applicants from 2002 to 2007 (Table 4).

Figure 3: Access Gaps by Discipline (2002 - 2007)



Source: Compiled from JAMB Records (2008).

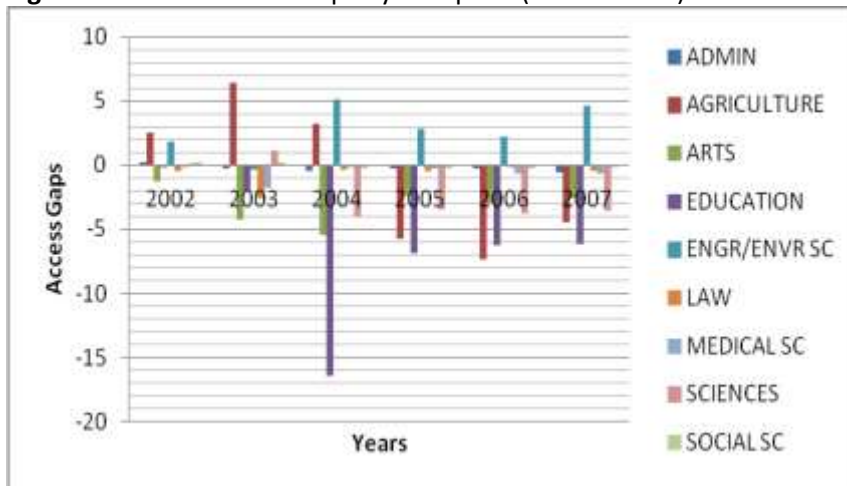
Faculties of Agriculture and Education recorded the largest positive access gaps throughout the period of this study. However, it is observed that the two faculties had the lowest number of applicants each year (Table 4). The total number of applicants for all faculties had annual average of 944,084 from 2002 to 2007. Number of applicants to the Faculties of Agricultural Sciences and Education had a maximum sum of 41,964 in 2007, while Faculty of Arts that usually record the third lowest number of applicants had its lowest of 36815 in 2004 with the observation that the sum for the former faculties was always lower than that of the latter.

Table 4: Number of Applicants by Discipline (2002 - 2007)

YEAR	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
ADMIN	291753	291227	171639	168372	132472	142121
AGRICULTURE	7393	20773	6009	7247	8447	9770
ARTS	52557	62778	36815	45864	47614	56791
EDUCATION	12787	16405	15389	23604	23435	32194
ENGR/ENVR SC.	170392	175548	135809	142469	127076	140662
LAW	83685	111379	68410	69765	50712	56846
MEDICAL SC.	150012	170688	145939	161417	145905	165439
SCIENCES	56821	69554	56110	68691	74020	90609
SOCIAL SC.	244223	210920	203951	226712	191295	215986

Source: JAMB 2008

Q₄: What were the access gaps to undergraduate university education among female applicants for the various disciplines from 2002 to 2007?

Figure 4: Female Access Gaps by Discipline (2002 – 2007)

Source: Compiled from JAMB Records (2008).

Access gaps for female applicants were negative for most disciplines from 2002 to 2007. Among the faculties for which that scenario was observed were Administration, Arts, Education, Law, Medical Sciences and Sciences. From 2004 to 2007 female access gaps were positive for the faculty of Engineering/Environmental Sciences only. By comparing

the numbers of applicants (male and female, Table 4) with the numbers of female applicants (Table 5) for each discipline, it is observed that numbers of female applicants were higher than the numbers of male applicants for the Faculty of Education. In spite of that scenario female access gaps for the Faculty of Education were among the largest negative (Figure 4).

Table 5: Number of Female Applicants by Discipline (2002 -2007)

YEAR	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
ADMINISTRATION	121546	143706	90301	88968	71666	75851
AGRICULTURE	2764	6845	2622	3179	3748	4295
ARTS	31142	46401	23765	29430	30533	35044
EDUCATION	6673	10415	9393	14085	13869	18190
ENGR/ENVR SC	18786	30442	15948	15871	13819	14698
LAW	37076	65441	31926	32124	23752	26734
MEDICAL SC	64247	78563	70055	79297	74212	86290
SCIENCES	23236	29033	26379	31698	33480	38761
SOCIAL SC	79207	82050	84481	94554	80448	90600

Source: JAMB 2008

Discussion

Access gaps were generally negative for geo-political zones (in the south and north central) that had high number of applicants. This implies that admission of candidates from such zones were below the national average. This scenario is an expression of form of educational gap between the northern and southern parts of Nigeria. However, the access gap established in this study is that of inequity of access to undergraduate education in Nigeria universities. This finding is at variant with educational imbalance reported by Ashby (1960), which discuss the very low participation in western education of northerners in Nigeria. The pace of improvement in the willingness and readiness of the north-east and north-west to acquire university education as expressed through the numbers of indigenes from those zones who applied for admission is still low. Government policy on even share of educational opportunities as expressed through the establishment of universities in the various political entities of the country and adoption of a quota system for admission has not been effective means of neutralising the educational imbalance between the north and south

Nigeria. However, this study has shown that higher percentages of candidates from the north than those of their southern counterparts were able to secure admission to undergraduate programmes. This finding affirms the view expressed by Ene (2007) that the policy of admission to university education has adverse effects on the chances of some academically good candidates from the southern parts of Nigeria. Female access gaps were negative for some years in the cases of most of the geo-political zones, and throughout for the south-south zone. In 2007, access gaps were negative for all zones despite the fact that number of female applicant was less than that of the male applicants each year for most of the zones with the exception of the south-east zone. In addition, the depths of negative access gaps for female candidates were longer than what obtained for male and female candidates when put together. University education of the girl child suffers two defects. The first is the fact that the number of female applicants for university education is lower than that of male applicants. Female gap in higher education enrolment of 27% was reported in Nigeria in by the United Nations in 1995. The finding of this study is a pointer to the fact that the country has not achieved gender balance in access to higher education.

Also, large positive access gaps that were recorded for the Faculties of Agriculture, Arts and Education establish the assertion that applicants for those disciplines had better chances of securing admission to undergraduate programmes than their counterparts that applied for other disciplines. As earlier observed, those disciplines were the least patronised by applicants going by the numbers of those who signified interest to pursue programmes that are offered by the faculties. It suffices to say that the demand for university education in Nigeria will remain to be in excess of its supply if additional spaces are not created in the disciplines that have higher demand.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The approaches being adopted by the Federal government towards neutralising the educational imbalance between the northern and southern Nigeria has paved way for wide access gap to undergraduate education in Nigeria universities among candidates from the northern and southern geo-political zones. The state universities in the geo-political zones with negative access gaps should be encouraged to

increase number of new intakes to close or remove the negative access gaps. Government policy on admission should encourage female applicants through a quota policy that will not have adverse effect on the quality of intakes.

Providers of university education (private and public) should expand access to some disciplines (such as administration, social sciences, medicine, engineering, law and sciences) as a means of achieving higher rate of access to university education in Nigeria. The National Universities Commission (NUC) should encourage new universities to offer undergraduate programmes in those disciplines. The disciplines are sciences, engineering/environmental sciences, law, medical sciences and social sciences.

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