

## Chapter 5

# Accessibility to Higher Education in Nigeria: The Pains, Problems, and Prospects

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### ABSTRACT

*Accessibility to university education represents a vital instrument for personal empowerment as well as the economic growth and technological advancement of a country. It is against the backdrop of the relevance and benefits of higher education that the quests for admission to Nigerian universities have assumed an alarming dimension due to the increasing annual applications to enroll for the entrance examinations conducted by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Boards and the subsequent screening by the respective universities. Unfortunately, most of the candidates are unable to gain admission to the university. The chapter considers some of the issues and challenges associated with low accessibility to university education for people seeking admission into Nigerian Universities and also suggest the ways to address the problems.*

### INTRODUCTION

Education is an important tool in any society or nation for moving the nation towards development and advancement in all fields of human endeavor. It is generally conceptualized as the process of acquiring skills, knowledge and attitude which helps in making an individual useful to himself/herself, his community and the nation at large. Although it is a universal feature of society, educational systems vary according to organizational structures, pedagogical practices, and philosophical and cultural organizations. A meaningful education is a functional education, that is, an education that will not make its product or possessor redundant but rather make him/her to become a useful member of the society to which they

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belong. According to Jaja (2013), education is the fabric of any culture; with it culture is transmitted, advanced and consolidated; thoughts are conceptualized and information is transmitted. It is therefore unimaginable to conceive a learning process without education. The importance of education cannot be over-emphasized, little wonder it is generally referred to as the best legacy parents can bequeath to their children.

Education may be formal or informal with unintended consequences. The ultimate aim is the shaping of human behavior (Hungerford & Volk, 1999), all-round development of the individual and preparation for life in society (Obayan, 1980). Education, particularly higher education, is fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations (World Bank, 1999). In fact, the advancement and application of knowledge has increasingly driven economic and social developments (Saint, Harnett & Strassner, 2003). Higher Education refers to the western type of education which is organized after college education or all organized learning activities at the tertiary level. The National Policy on Education (2004) in Nigeria defines tertiary education to include: universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and monotechnics. The objectives of tertiary education include the following:

- To contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower training.
- To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society.
- To develop the intellectual capability of individual to understand and appreciate their local and external environment.
- To acquire both physical and intellectual skills which would enable the individuals to be self-reliant and become useful members of the society.
- To promote and encourage scholarship and community services.
- To forge and cement national unity; and
- To promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Higher education in Nigeria has a long history dating back to 1934 when Yaba Higher College was established and in 1948 when the first university, University of Ibadan, was established. Today in 2016, besides the Federal Government and private universities, almost all the States in Nigeria have one or more universities. Nevertheless, the desire to provide equal educational opportunities to all has been mere expression of intentions without accompanied determination and commitment in the implementation and actualization of the desire. This is because the challenge of access to higher education has been further exacerbated by anticipated increase in demand for higher education owing to the higher education participation rate.

According to the National Policy on Education (2004), access implies making it possible for everyone who is entitled to education to receive it. It is the right to receive formal education as distinct from informal education (Dada, 2004). UNESCO (2003) sees access in tertiary education ensuring equitable access to tertiary education institutions based on merit, capacity, efforts and perseverance. Although accessibility to higher education refers to the opportunity to participate in the education sector whether formal or informal (Ehiamekalor, 2005). Access to university education in Nigeria has been plagued with numerous problems and challenges such as poor funding by government, limited spaces for prospective applicants due to federal character quota system, carrying capacity and educationally least developed States (ELDS) admission criteria, high cost, incessant strike action by academic university workers, low marketability of the university products, falling standard and quality as well as infrastructural decay, gender inequality and disproportionate female enrolment in university education. Other factors like

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