

ADMISSION INTO SOCIAL SCIENCE COURSES: THE PLACE OF GEOGRAPHY EDUCATION AND GEOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS

BY

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Abstract

This paper focuses on admission into Social Sciences and Education courses in University of Lagos with regard to access and equity. University of Lagos is ranked as one of the 10 toughest Federal Universities to gain admission into in Nigeria today. However, the level of difficulty or ease of entry into University of Lagos or any federal University in Nigeria is dependent basically on the level of preparation, success at external examinations on the part of applicants and the admission requirement for the course of study. The research was carried out in University of Lagos, and primary data collected directly from the admissions office, senate building. From the data, it was observed that in the last five years (four sessions), admission into 100 level Education Geography was based on merit and has gradually decreased from 13 to 1 student, while the supplementary admissions still show a form of consistency over the years. To the effect that the Education Geography unit in the Department of Arts and Social Sciences/Social Science Education is populated based on supplementary admissions and change of course. For the cut-off marks based on quota/catchment, three of the years studied had a general merit score across board with no recourse to catchment (2018/2019, 2020/2021 and 2021/2022). Whereas, for Geography, candidates have been given admission mainly based on merit. The study showed that entry requirements for Education Geography and Geography are quite similar for both 100 level and direct entry for the last four academic sessions. The study concluded that there is still access and equity in the admission of students into both Education Geography and Geography in University of Lagos.

Keywords: admission, Education Geography, Geography, access, equity

Introduction

Admission into universities in Nigeria has over the years been and is still an uphill task which affects both students and even parents alike. Admission into most courses of study in Nigerian universities requires prerequisite ordinary level (O level) results in relevant subjects which has become more and more difficult to achieve over the years. Most Nigerian students who have the capability and potential for University education show desperation in their efforts to gain admissions into the very limited available spaces in Federal and state universities. Nigeria as a nation, has one of the lowest number of universities in the world which when compared to her large population of over 200 million is nothing to write home about. According to the official National Universities Commissions (NUC) website (2021), there are altogether, 174 accredited universities in Nigeria, made up of federal (43), state (52), and private (79). According to the NUC Ranking of 2022 found on the official NUC and Webometrics website, of all the universities in Nigeria, University of Lagos (UNILAG) ranks 2nd, and also boasts of one of the highest number of applicants for admission after university of Ibadan. The University of Lagos, sometimes referred to as UNILAG, is a public research institution located in Lagos, Nigeria. It was established by the federal government in 1962 and is made up of three campuses - two campuses are located at Yaba and the college of medicine is located at Idi-Araba, Surulere.

There are 12 faculties at the university including arts, clinical sciences, education, engineering, law, pharmacy, social sciences and sciences among others. In the 2020/2021 admission exercise for example, UNILAG recorded a total number of 59,190 applicants seeking admission into the 12 faculties and 85 courses. In the faculty of Education

is the Department of Social Sciences, in which education Geography programme is domiciled, there are eight Departments in all and it is home to over 5,000 students.

The Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB)

The Joint admissions and Matriculation Board which is the main admission body into Nigerian universities, was established by an Act of decree No. 2, of 1978, and was subsequently amended in 1989 and 1993, with the responsibility of ensuring a uniform standard for the conduct of matriculation examinations and placement of suitable candidates into the nation's higher institutions of learning. Prior to 1978, each University conducted its placement examination and admitted its students in line with available spaces. By the virtue of the 1978 Act, JAMB is empowered to be responsible mainly for the conduct of matriculation examinations into all Universities, Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in Nigeria. After the examinations have been conducted, the board is also responsible for the placement of suitably qualified candidates in the tertiary institutions of their choice in collaboration with those institutions. This examination known as the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) is conducted once a year in the computer-based test (CBT) mode. The test is a three-hour multiple-choice in four subjects, with a compulsory paper – the Use of English and three other subjects of a candidate's choice and proposed course of study.

JAMB therefore serves as a catalyst to achieving the goals of tertiary education in Nigeria, and it plays this role by putting in effort to make sure only qualified candidates who are sound academically are given admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The goals of tertiary education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education exclusively designed by the Federal Government (2014) are to:

- produce students with physical and Intellectual skills which will help them be relevant and useful members of the society.
- develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments.
- develop and inculcate proper values for survival in the society into students.
- contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training.
- produce graduates imbued with good discipline and ready to utilize theoretical knowledge in real life situation to achieve success.
- acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society.
- promote and encourage scholarship and community service.
- forge and cement national unity and;
- promote national and international understanding and interaction. (National Policy on Education, FRN 2013).

Admission Policies in Nigeria

The problem of admission into Nigerian Universities and the maintenance of adequate standards have over the years been associated with some unpopular policies adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria to address the inadequacy in the number of admission spaces in the University system. Among these unpopular policies include:

- catchment areas policy which provides that a certain percentage of admission spaces must be reserved for the indigenes of the areas in which universities are located.
- backwardness factor policy ensures that a certain percentage of admission chances is reserved for the indigenes of States considered to be educationally disadvantaged or backward.

- quota system policy provides the allocation of certain percentages of admission places into Nigerian Universities based on populations, ethnic considerations and States of Origin.
- discriminatory fees policy provides for lower fees to be paid by the indigenes of the localities where Universities are established.

Akani (1996) believes that the above policies resulted in the reduction of admission standards and this allowed poorly qualified candidates to be admitted into Nigerian Universities. This is because the policy conferred on the various categories of persons the rights of admission, whether qualified or not.

Statement of the Problem

Admission into Education Geography and Geography (Faculty of Social Sciences) as courses in UNILAG has generally maintained a steady balance in the last five years. There are only three Social Science cohorts/units in the Department of Arts and Social Sciences/Social Sciences Education, and Education Geography has the least number of students (low enrollment) as well as the highest attrition rate when compared to the other two. This research by inference, sought to determine the reasons for these low numbers when compared to Education Economics and Early childhood Education. Hence, is there access and equity when it comes to admission into Education Geography, compared with Geography major in the faculty of Social Sciences?

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to aid the study:

1. Is there a notable increase or decrease in the number of students who gained admission for Education Geography in the last five years?
2. Are the admission requirements for Education Geography and Geography the same?

Research Hypotheses

Three research hypotheses were tested in the course of the study:

1. There is a significant change in the number of students admitted for Education Geography in the last five years.
2. There is no significant difference in the admission requirement for Education Geography and other Social Science Courses.
3. Candidates prefer Geography major to Education Geography

Jamb Admission Requirements for Social Science Courses

In a world marked by scientific evolution, the teaching of social science subjects has been facing some issues of relevance over the years (Esteves, (2014). The Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination, also known as UTME, is the examination organised by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) to be taken by all students seeking admission into tertiary institutions in the country. As the name suggests, the examination unites all institutions of higher learning by conducting only one examination which is graded over 400 marks. There is usually a general cut-off mark below which no student can gain admission into any higher institution. Each institution also has its own cut-off mark for admitting students in collaboration with the examination body. The admission requirement for Social Science subjects in the Faculty of Education are all similar, with English Language, Mathematics, Geography and Economics being the major entry subjects. For the UTME, each student is expected to take three subjects depending on their preferred course of study, plus English language which is compulsory for all students. Those eligible to sit for the UTME are students who have successfully completed the Senior Secondary School and are holders of the following qualifications or their equivalents: West African School Certificate

(WASC), Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE), National Technical Certificate or the National Business Certificate (NTC/NBC) and Teachers' Grade II Certificate.

The UTME is regarded as a just system of admission because it gives candidates equal access opportunity of gaining admission into any university of their choice or for which they qualify. For students registering for Education Geography, the UTME Subjects are: English Language, Geography and any two from Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Economics, Government and Mathematics. Each of the four subjects is graded over 100, hence the total of 400 marks. Aside from the UTME admission process, there is also Direct Entry admission usually into universities either from polytechnics, colleges of education or A level examination. Candidates are required to either have successfully completed their Higher National Diploma (HND), National Certificate of Education (NCE), or Advanced Level (A level)/Joint Universities Preliminary Examinations Board (JUPEB) programmes before they can seek admission through direct entry into the university, which takes them straight to the second year (200 level). In order to study Education Geography in the university, candidates for direct entry must have very good passes in three JUPEB/A Level subjects: Geography and any two of Economics, Chemistry, Biology, Physics and Government.

It is, however, quite unfortunate that JAMB has not been able to solve the admission and quality of education problems being faced in this country. This is according to Babalola (2005) and Eluemunor (2005); cited in Okoroma (2008), who both in their studies believe that many unqualified candidates have been offered admissions into Nigerian Universities through JAMB thereby lowering standards in these institutions. The issue of quality in Nigerian universities is also confirmed as being low by the World Universities Ranking Project (2023) which out of the 1,799 universities ranked, placed Nigeria's best 4 Federal universities, (the University of Ibadan and University of Lagos both within 401-55 bracket; Bayero University and Federal University of Technology Akure, both within the 1001-1,200 bracket) (Vanguard of June 2023).

'O' Level Subjects required for Geography Education

Candidates seeking admission into Nigerian universities to study Education Geography or Geography are expected to obtain a minimum of five O/Level credit passes in English Language, Mathematics, Geography and any two of Economics, Government, Further Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology. The credit/merit passes in question should be attained at not more than two sittings for some universities (UNILAG not included). Normally, credit passes in Mathematics and English Language are required for all tertiary education courses except where it is stated otherwise. In addition to the general entry requirements specified above, candidates must meet any other specific entry requirements. In the University of Lagos, the 'O' Level requirements for Education Geography and Geography include credit pass in English language, Mathematics, Geography, and any other two from the following: Economics/Commerce, History/Government, CRS/IRS, and Literature in English.

Enrollment Norm for Education Geography

Although Geography has continued to occupy a place among the subjects taught in secondary schools in Nigeria, much of the interests and enthusiasm which previously decked the subject have waned in recent years, leading to low enrollment in Nigerian universities. One major contentious issue in recent times, has been the rate at which the study of Geography in Nigeria appears to be moving into well delineated cognate disciplines where geographers could easily be carried away by those disciplines, ideas, techniques, and perspectives, thereby losing the core of Geography, which is spatial analysis (Filani, 1999).

Upon close observation, there are so many factors which determine students' enrollment for Education Geography as it occurs in other subjects and courses; top on the list being the candidate's JAMB score, and 'O' Level result. Others may include, but not limited to:

- parental influence,
- availability of course of study

- peer group interaction and relationship. Most students' choice of higher institution is influenced by the choice of their friends/peers. Students would rather study a course they do not like (but are qualified to study) as long as their friends have gained admission into the same university albeit to study their own preferred course.
- The student's choice, interest and ambition in a particular profession for which the university is well grounded and equipped to teach.

The admission criteria or requirements into the University of Lagos to study Education Geography are major determinants of students' enrolment. Some of the requirements are based on so many factors which are common or uncommon to the university itself, and they include:

- Jamb admission cut-off mark for a year, which is usually based on the overall performance of candidates;
- The post UTME-examination score. The university organises its own internal assessment examination known as the post UTME examination which when added to the JAMB score and 'O' Level results in relevant subjects will give the candidate the aggregate score to determine admission;
- The quota systems or catchment areas criteria. Catchment areas policy which provided that a certain percentage of admission places must be reserved for the indigenes of the areas in which universities are located. "Catchment Area" is another phrase in the admission policy to promote equalisation of educational opportunity. "Catchment area" refers to the locality in which federal universities are established. This policy stipulates that the states in the immediate vicinity of each University should derive special preferences in terms of admissions. Based on the geographical location of the university, some states around her are categorised under educationally advantaged and educationally disadvantaged states. This is in order to encourage candidates from those states to have easier access to admission in the University of Lagos than those further away from the region. Some of the states under consideration include Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun and Ogun.

The quota policy was a post-colonial policy designed ostensibly in response to Nigeria's diversity. This was to bring about equality and equity in the admission process so that no ethnic group or tribe would be said to be disenfranchised or marginalised. Rather, all Nigerians wherever they live or come from would be given the chance to seek and gain admission into any federal university of their choice. This is because some states are considered to be more educationally disadvantaged than others, especially those in the Northern parts of the country. Opinions are divided on the appropriateness, validity and scope of the quota policies in Nigeria. While some argue that it is important for managing national diversity, equity and national integration, others hold the view that the policies are encouraging discrimination and undermining merit in university admission. (Abdu and Joshua, 2019).

The Federal Character Policy in Nigeria

The Federal Character Policy has its root from section 14 of 1979 constitution and re-enacted in section 14 of 1999 constitution and states:

The composition of the government of the Federation or any of its agencies and conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.

This statement depicts that public authorities, educational institutions and private sectors should ensure fair representation of states, local government area and even ethnic groups in position of authority and power, admission into schools, etc. In order to regulate admissions into the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, the Federal Government initiated and promoted a federal character policy which gave rise to the concept of equalisation of opportunity in university education (Okoroma, 2008).

According to Abang (2019), most students in the Universities fail in their career pursuits because, they do not seem to be definite and intentional about what they want to study, where to study it rightly and what to become at the end of the day. Some students who are admitted into some Departments or Faculties such as Education, whose desire and interest were initially in Law, Economics, Geography, Medicine and Engineering only exhibit nothing but divided loyalty right from the first day they gain admission into the institution to study a course such as Education Geography. They always have one of their eyes on the desired Department, Faculty or school and this usually leads to outright failure and lack of interest.

National Universities Commission

It is the responsibility of the National Universities Commission along with other bodies like the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), the National Examinations Council (NECO) and the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) to work hand-in-hand to set benchmarks and standards for admission into Nigerian universities. A lot of criteria are usually used for the admission process, the most prominent of them being the need to have credits in at least five subjects, Mathematics and English inclusive. According to the National Universities commission benchmark minimum academic standards for undergraduate programmes in Nigerian universities which was published in April 2007, under decree (Act) No. 16 of 1985 as contained in the National Universities Commission amended Decree (Act) No. 48 of 1988, the Commission is empowered to lay down minimum standards for all programmes taught in Nigerian universities. This is done through collaboration by the commission with the universities and their staff through an approved document in which minimum academic standards for all the programmes taught in Nigerian universities was developed in 1989.

The course Education Geography falls under B. Sc. Ed Social Sciences Related Programmes, and the philosophy underlying the degree programme is to produce a crop of graduates equipped with appropriate knowledge to make effective contributions to the development of Nigeria, Africa and the global community having been exposed to a broad foundation of knowledge in the field of education, Social Sciences in general and in the various sub-fields of Geography in particular. Other Aims & Objectives include to;

- instill in students a sound knowledge of Geography, an appreciation of its applications in different socio-cultural contexts and to involve the students in an intellectually stimulating and satisfying experience of learning and studying the workings of society.
- provide students with broad and well-balanced knowledge of geographical theories and methods.
- cultivate in students the ability to apply their geographical knowledge and skills to the understanding and solution of societal problems in Nigeria and elsewhere.
- provide students with relevant knowledge and skill base from which they can proceed to further studies in special areas of Geography or multi-disciplinary areas involving Geography.
- instill in students an appreciation of the importance of Geography in spatial and environmental contexts.
- develop in students a range of useful competencies in public, private or self-employment.

The most current guideline on admission approved by the Federal government of Nigeria through the National Universities Commission (NUC, 1999) is as follow: Merit = 45%, Catchment area = 35%; disadvantaged states = 20% (NUC 1999, P. 5). The Federal Government through the NUC (1999, p.68) also states that:

- (i) If because of the pattern of applications and the range of courses offered by universities cannot fill all the places allocated to some States, Universities are to consult the second-choice lists of candidates.
- (ii) In any given university no state shall benefit from both the criteria of locality and educationally disadvantaged.

The National Universities Commission (NUC, 2012) is faced with the necessity of access to higher education and this is compounded by population explosion, which is complicated by the competitive desire of every individual to possess educational certificate especially at the higher education level. Consequently, the universities seem to be

confronted with demands and measures beyond their capacity to maintain (Owhondah, Kalagbor and Kalagbor, 2016).

Equity in the Federal University's Admission Process

The term equity is usually used when referring to equality or the need for fairness in a particular situation that has to do with different people from various works of life seeking the same or similar opportunities in life. According to Abdu and Joshua (2019), equity and related actions have long been associated with university education in most parts of the world, it was particularly so since the end of the Second World War. Depending on context, it is often associated with affirmative action in protection or promotion of considered disadvantaged groups. They believe that the key to beginning the work of equity in the educational sector can only be achieved when there is proper buy-in and acceptance from all affected institutions.

Results

1. Is there a notable increase or decrease in the number of students who gained admission for Education Geography in the last five years?

The admission process for the university of Lagos is done based on the marks obtained from the Post-UTME/Screening. The admission data for the last four years are shown below on Table 1:

Table 1: Cut of Mark for Geography and Education Geography

Session	Education Geography (Merit)	Geography (Merit)
2018/2019	55.05	60.9
2019/2020	55.825	59.975
2020/2021	55.75	57.8
2021/2022	59.575	62.475

Table one indicates that the admission cut-off mark for Education geography and Geography from 2018/2019 academic session increases from 55.05 to 59. 575 and 60.9- 62.475 respectively. This implies that there is an increase in the performance of students applying for Education Geography and Geography respectively as a course of study in the University of Lagos. Also, this determines the number of intakes based on the merit list. This is shown on table 2.

Table 2: Intakes for Geography and Education Geography in University of Lagos

	Education Geography			Geography		
Session	Merit	Supplementary	Total	Merit	Supplementary	Total
2018/2019	13	00	13	55	0	55
2019/2020	11	03	14	70	12	82
2020/2021	04	14	18	41	2	43
2021/2022	01	13	14	27	7	34
Total	29	30	59	193	21	214

Anecdotal record above indicates that from 2018/2019 academic session in university of Lagos merit list has been the major sources of admitting students into Geography and Education Geography respectively. However, during the 2021/2022 academic session, supplementary admission was used for Education Geography due to constant reduction in the number of merit list candidates from 13, 11, 04, and 01 from 2018/2019 to 2021/2022 academic session. For Geography there was only an increase during the 2019/2020 academic session. Since then, it has been a drop in the number candidates admitted through merit. This implies that as the cut-off mark increases for merit, student's admission also decreases.

2: Are the admission requirements for Education Geography and Geography the same?

The admission requirement for Education Geography and Geography for the University of Lagos are the same from 2018/2019 academic session to 2021/2022 academic session. This requires a very good passes in three JUPEB subjects: Geography, and any two of Economics, Biology, Geography, History, physics, and Government. Also, five O'level credit passes in English language, Mathematics, Geography and any two of Economics, Government, and further mathematics.

Discussion of Findings

The result of tested hypothesis 1 shows that there is no significant change in the number of students admitted for Education Geography in the last five years, but rather, as the numbers admitted on merit decreases, the numbers given supplementary admission increases. Hypothesis one was therefore rejected. In addition, the study also established that more Education Geography students were given supplementary admission in the last two sessions when compared to Geography Department where more candidates were given admission based on merit and less in the supplementary admission based on quota, catchment area or discretion of the university management. This is in congruence with a study by Nweneazizi, Ebeigbe and Egwuelu (2018), In which it was discovered that out of all the criteria for admission into Federal institutions of learning, merit was the least favoured. Furthermore, the results show that there is no significant difference in both the admission requirement for Education Geography and other Social Science Courses nor is there a notable difference in the cut-off marks for Geography and Education Geography in the sessions under study. However, there is an increase in the performance of students applying for Education Geography and Geography respectively as courses of study in the University of Lagos, leading to the increase in the cut-off marks for the two. The study also revealed that the quota system and catchment area admission, have minimal effect on students' admission into both Geography and Education Geography. Finally, there is no clear indication that candidates prefer Geography major to education Geography apart from the fact that there are more intakes in Geography than in Education Geography. This is against the backdrop from Okoroma (2008) that Nigerian youths in particular, and the adult population in general, attach much premium on University education, and hence the show of desperation in their efforts to gain admissions into the highly limited available spaces no matter what course they are offered.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have shown that; In Nigeria today, there are millions of candidates who are qualified to be admitted into any of the existing 43 Federal universities, but are unable to do so due to very slim and meagre carrying capacity of each of these institutions and the interest in particular Faculties, Departments and courses of study. Though the adoption of quota system of admission into Federal universities in Nigeria might have the tendency to lower academic standards; not only in terms of number of students considered for admission, but most importantly in the quality of students admitted. Also, in terms of the work of both academic and non-academic staff employed to make up the staff/students' ratio in each Department/Faculty. However, there is still access and equity in the admission of students into both Education Geography and Geography. In order to enable the University of Lagos and other Federal universities to admit and accommodate more applicants, the carrying capacity of the universities must be increased by providing more infrastructure in terms of conducive and furnished lecture halls/theaters, well equipped laboratories, hostels and halls of residence as well as standard office space required members of staff. As for University of Lagos, both Geography and Education Geography still have manageable number of students when compared with other education and social science courses.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the results of the study to assist not only university of Lagos, but all other Universities in Nigeria with the admission process and increase in the number of candidates considered for admission into Education Geography and Geography:

1. The place of Geography should be moved from its nearly inconsequential position to compulsory for all students in the secondary schools in Nigeria to enable them enroll for either Education Geography or Geography in higher institutions of learning.
2. The admission requirements for both Education Geography and Geography need to be reviewed to allow more candidates apply for the courses.
3. Catchment area policy of admission should be deemphasized to accommodate more candidates who may be interested in either of the two courses.
4. Education Geography courses should mainly be domiciled in the faculty of Education to minimize the continual trips to the Department of Geography for lectures.
5. All university admissions should be devoid of all interferences whether ethnic, catchment area or even quota, but should be based purely on merit and candidate's choice

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