

## **Curbing Candidates Desperate Desires for University Education against Other Tertiary Educational Institutions in Nigeria: Concerns and the Way Forward.**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper discussed curbing candidate's desperate desire for university education against other tertiary educational institutions. The paper began with a presentation of the general requirements for various types of tertiary education institution – Polytechnics, Colleges of education, Monotechnics and University. It delved into factors responsible for candidates desperate desire which include status disparity, high social rating of university degrees, excessive emphasis on university education, disparity in organizational ranking of graduates from universities and other tertiary institutions, poor funding of other tertiary institutions compared to universities and ineffective implementation of policies and programmes. In order to curb candidates desperate desire for university education, the paper recommended amongst others that: organizations (employers) should eliminate disparity in ranking and undue emphasis placed on university graduates against those from other tertiary educational institutions, other tertiary institutions should be adequately funded, government should provide and maintain equipment and facilities that encourage hands-on activities at college level in order to develop students interest in vocational and technical education offered in polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education (Technical), the government should institute a policy that will enable students in polytechnics and colleges of education get scholarship and also give automatic employment to graduates with technical background especially from polytechnics and monotechnics, priority should be given to vocational and technical subjects and be made compulsory at the secondary school level, campaign to sensitize and enlighten parents to desist from discouraging their children and wards from choosing higher education institutions other than universities should be on-going.*

**Keywords:** *Desperate desire, university education, tertiary/higher education, polytechnics, colleges of education, concern, way forward.*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Higher education has ceaselessly been perceived by government, scholars and stakeholders as a veritable tool for all round development in societies. This may explain why there is a high demand for higher education in various countries of the world including Nigeria. However, available spaces are far less than the number of candidates seeking admission. This state of affairs was confirmed by Adeniran in Onwurah and Chiahaha (2009) stating that “more and more people want to get into schools, colleges and universities and yet the places are not there...the demand far outstripped the supply”.

This state of affairs has existed for more than two decades now especially at the university level where prospective candidates have shown desperate desires for admission as against other types of higher education institutions. A possible explanation for this trend may be in the fact that countries, society, organization, employers of labour and individuals perceive and rate highly graduates from universities. Therefore, despite the existence of many other tertiary institutions offering the same/similar courses and shorter duration, a large number of candidates in Nigeria still opt for university education/degree. Consequently, the demand for university education has increased phenomenally and most candidates struggle to be admitted into any university to obtain a degree at all cost. Corroborating this state of affairs, the Nation (2015), noted that almost half a decade after the government introduced the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) to encourage enrolment into polytechnics and colleges of education, candidates continue to snub the polytechnics while others out rightly reject admission into colleges of education. These are indications that a higher percentage of students still prefer university degrees to other tertiary educational institutions or certificates, thereby overstressing facilities in the universities. It is against this background that this paper discussed curbing candidates' desperate desires for university education against other tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria.

## **II. TYPES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR ENTRY REQUIREMENTS IN NIGERIA**

Education is very vital for the overall development of any modern society. No wonder, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2014) stated that education in Nigeria is an instrument ‘per excellence’ for effecting national development. Education is the process by which knowledge, skills worthwhile attitudes and societal values are transferred through institution to learners in an environment which in turn brings about a relative change in the behaviour of learners. Supporting the foregoing assertion, Eziubochi (2011) stated that education is all about a desirable change in behaviour. If this is the case, it then means that polytechnics, colleges of education and monotronics just like universities play significant roles/functions in the progress of any nation both educationally, scientifically, technically and in terms of skill development.

Polytechnics are set up to instruct as well as train highly skilled technical and resourceful workforce for the accomplishment of technological goals of the country. Specifically, polytechnic education is germane to technical advancement in Nigeria and the world over, reason being that it produces middle level manpower/skill for the ultimate growth and development of the country. As Mimiko cited in Kukogho, (2014) stated, polytechnics train middle level manpower and universities train high level manpower. In a similar vein, Sunday (2007) believe that polytechnic education is responsible for creating and expanding technological infrastructure and the development of the right manpower. Tadoo as cited in Sunday, (2007) corroborates this by maintaining that a nation that is unable to develop the knowledge and skills of its citizens and utilize them effectively may find it difficult to develop other resources. In the light of the foregoing, polytechnics are tertiary educational institutions that offer relatively wide range of courses of studies in technical and vocational areas that confer the National Diploma (ND) on students found worthy in character and in learning. Successful students then proceed for a compulsory one (1) year industrial training or attachment to various organizations to assist them obtain necessary skills on the job as well as worthwhile practical experiences relating to their course of study before returning to school to obtain their Higher National Diploma (HND) and successful students are then posted to different states of the country where they engage in their National Youth Service Scheme which lasts for one (1) year period.

The prerequisite for entry into the National Diploma Programme in Nigeria Polytechnics include the following:

- Senior secondary school certificate (SSCE)/General Certificate in Examination or others with credit in minimum of five subjects significant to the programme in at least two sittings.
- Subjects offered in National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) examination should be in at least five credit passes
- Subjects offered in National Technical Certificates (NTC) or National Business Certificate (NBC), NBTE examination should be in at least five credit passes including English language.
- In addition to the aforementioned, candidates should have a satisfactory score obtained in the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) entrance examination which is conducted every 12 months.
- Graduates of the Advanced National Technical Certificate (ANTC) may be given provisional admission into the ND programmes as long as the candidates have met the minimum requirements into the programme and have attained satisfactory scores and have also met the minimum entry requirements into the ANTC Examinations (National Board for technical Education, 2008).

Colleges of Education are tertiary institutions that are established to train middle level teachers professionally to fit into teaching jobs and in turn carry out effective and efficient teaching. A synopsis of ideas presented by various authors on the roles of colleges of education in Nigeria shows that they perform the following functions amongst others:

- Improve professional teaching and learning for school members
- Prepare a diverse body of scholars. These scholars must be scholars of education since their major objectives are to train teachers.
- Colleges of education involve themselves in the dissemination of knowledge and skills
- They also improve the functioning of individuals in their physical health and leisure behaviour.
- They work with schools in the school system to prepare effective teachers and other professionals who help other students to learn.

Consequently, upon graduation from the college of education, graduates are awarded the Nigeria Certificate in education (NCE) whose course duration is usually three (3) years in any discipline. Admission into colleges of education is also stringent because intending students also pass through Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) which is conducted by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) yearly, thereafter, successful students are granted provisional admission into the colleges of education. It is pertinent to note that besides the classroom work lectures and assignment, test and so on that students undertake

in the course of the programme, students are expected to proceed to a compulsory teaching practice for a duration of 1-4 months in an assigned school where they are supervised during the period. The basic requirement for admission into colleges of education in Nigeria according to Bassey (2010) is as follows amongst others:

- A Senior Secondary School Certificate (SSCE), National Examination Council (NECO) or GCE O-level with passes in 5 subjects including English language, 3 must be at credit level at the same sitting or 4 credits at 2 sittings, 2 of the credits must be relevant to candidates course of choice, offer credit in English and/or mathematics may be required in some courses to meet departmental requirements.
- Grade II Teacher Certificate (TCII) with merit in 3 different subjects, 2 of them must be related to the discipline the candidate choose to offer. Credit/merit in both English language and mathematics may be needed in some disciplines.
- Teachers Grade II certificate with a minimum of 5 years post qualification with effective teaching experience whether he/she has the required credit/merits in 4 subjects at least may be an acceptable qualification.
- Candidates that are aspiring to take course in vocational and technical education or city and guilds/intermediate certificate or the Federal Craft Training Certificate in Nigeria or abroad, may also be an acceptable qualification.
- All candidates considered for admission must enroll for and write the selection examination organized by an accrediting body.

Monotechnics are innovative institutions or enterprise institutions. They are specialized institutions of higher education that train individuals (students) in specific skills, vocation as well as other areas of human endeavours. It is usually mandatory for beneficiaries to have completed their secondary education. However, in addition to several universities established in Nigeria, there is still the need to establish monotechnics. Monotechnics are single discipline training institutes where technical subjects are taught. Affirming the foregoing, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN) as cited in Potokri (2014) stated that monotechnics are regarded as single subject technological institution that offer specialized programmes in disciplines like Surveying, Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, Accountancy, Nursing, Mining, Petroleum and language. The monotechnics just like polytechnics are regulated by the NBTE and they also play significant roles in the growth and development of many nations both technologically, technically, agriculturally and otherwise. The FRN (2004) stipulated that the objectives and methods of operation of monotechnics is similar to that of polytechnics. This means that the monotechnics operate a two phase programme: the Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) just like the polytechnics. Graduates of monotechnics are given provisional admissions into universities or allowed to run degree programme in universities owing to the fact that they have met the basic requirements for that particular discipline. It is worthwhile to note that JAMB as a statutory body is also responsible for admissions into monotechnics and the basic requirements into monotechnics are the same with the polytechnics as stipulated by the NBTE.

The university as a citadel of learning is an organized institution made up of different faculties and departments as well as an assemblage of people where degrees are awarded to students after completing a course of study. This means that at the end of the programme duration, trained manpower are produced for the ultimate growth and development of the society and the nation at large. This must have informed the views of Adekunle as cited in Ekundayo and Ajayi, (2009) that universities train future leaders and develop the high level technical capacities that underpin economic growth and development. Considering all the goals of university education in Nigeria as enumerated by the FRN (2004 & 2008), the crux of the matter is providing a healthy work-force or manpower for the nation. Little wonder Ibukun as cited in Ekundayo & Ajayi, (2009) posit that the maintenance and significance of university education in Nigeria is the provision of the much needed manpower to accelerate the socio-economic development of the nation. In the light of the above, universities in Nigeria are regulated by the National Universities commission (NUC) and JAMB is also the recognized body responsible for conducting the UTME examination whereby candidates who score 180 and above are thereafter invited to the universities of their choice for the post UTME examination. The course of study of an undergraduate may be of 4 or 5 years duration depending on the discipline. Thus, the admission requirements into universities are similar to the requirements obtained in polytechnics, colleges of education, the difference being the duration of the programmes.

### **III. CANDIDATES DESPERATE DESIRES FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

The fact that the demand for higher education the world over and especially in Nigeria is on the increase is incontrovertible. However, available spaces are by far less than the number of candidates seeking admission. This state of affairs was confirmed by Adeniran in Onwurah and Chiahia (2007) when he stated that “more and more people want to get into schools, colleges and universities and yet the places are not there...the

demand far outstripped the supply.” Of course, this state of affairs has existed for more than two decades now especially at the university level where prospective candidates have shown desperate desires for admission as against other types of higher education institutions, for instance the Bureau of statistics (cited in Shu’ara, 2010) reported that in the year 2007; 911,679 sat for the University Matriculation Exam (UME) while 167,836 sat for the Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education (MPCE). In the year 2008; 1,192,050 sat for the UME while 310,022 sat for the MPCE. In 2009; 1,184,651 sat for the UME while 342,908 sat for the MPCE. In 2010; 1,330,531 sat for the UME while 45,140 sat for the MPCE. Similarly, Okoroafor (2013) noted that 96% of the candidates who sat for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) chose University as their preferred institutions. 1.69% chose Colleges of Education, while 1.9% chose Polytechnics. He added that the situation has multiplied illegal degree awarding institutions in Nigeria. He stressed that necessary actions should be taken to address the challenges of higher education in Nigeria. This desperation has assumed a worrisome dimension to the extent that, it is now common for candidates to bribe admission officers in universities in order to secure a place (Uzochukwu, 2013). Some candidates waste their time and resources writing the UTME examination every year without securing admission into the university while the scores they obtained could fetch them admission into other tertiary institutions. Although many of such candidates are aware that with skills acquired in other higher educational institutions other than universities, they have the potentials of gaining employment, sometimes even before the university graduates, yet they continue to struggle for admission into universities instead of considering other tertiary institutions. They do not mind how long it takes to secure admission as long as they get the admission in the long run. Some have resorted to unethical means of securing admission like bribery, forging of admission letters, hiring of mercenaries to write examination for them, cheating in examination halls and so on. Sometimes these desperadoes cannot even cope with the rigours of academic pressure and soon drop-out mid-way during the course of study (Busayo, 2010). Some who manage to remain and complete their study graduate with very low grades. The pertinent question begging for an answer at this juncture is: What are the factors responsible for the desperate desires observed among candidates seeking admission into universities in Nigeria?

One major factor that seems to fuel candidates desperate desires for university education against other types of tertiary institutions is status disparity. Status refers to an individual’s perceived position in his/her environment or society. This attracted Nwali (2013) who asked: What is the need of going to polytechnics when the university is there for them? What is the need of going to polytechnics to obtain Higher National Diploma that will take additional two years to go for Post-graduate diploma which will make the degree equivalent? Why would you go through all these and still not be sure about gaining employment after all the rigorous exercise? All these and more, the scholar liken to status disparity. However, because of this disparity, it becomes an obvious fact and a bitter truth to note that an average Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) holder is more confident than an average HND holder.

High societal rating of university degrees may be a reason for this disparity. This is evident because individuals, families, communities and the entire society perceive, and rate a university degree holder as the highest when compared to their counterparts from other tertiary educational institutions. Writing in the same vein Ehiamentalor (as cited in Ene, 2007) noted that a general perception exist within the Nigerian citizens that only a university degree can give a bright future. Furthermore, he said that the demand for university education has reached an unprecedented high level that more than double the current number is required to fill this need. Worst still, employers of labour in various organizations are not excluded from the axiom and to this effect, Imonigie and Onozuawo as cited in Stephen, (2015) lamented that employers and the general public tend to relegate polytechnic graduates to the extent that, it had began to affect our technological development/advancement negatively with respect to the roles of the various cadres of technical personnel in technological growth. The implication of this trend is that in the nearest future, the country may be faced with lower percentage of skilled and technical workers from other tertiary institutions.

A huge disparity exists between HND and B.Sc holders seeking employment in organizations. For instance, when employment advertisements are placed in reputable media, the cadre sought after for employment is usually specified. Often university graduates are preferred to graduates from other tertiary institutions. To further buttress this point, Abbas and Agiya (n.d) noted that the employers of labour are not even helping matters. They observed that many job advertisements specify that only graduates with B.Sc and not those with HND are needed. In the same vein, Abdulkadir (2014) lamented that polytechnic graduates in Nigeria have continued to suffer from division created by employers of labour including the government. Consequently, the difference created between university graduates and graduates from other tertiary educational institutions by the government and especially employers of labour and the Nigerian society has impacted negatively on the minds of young people seeking admission into the higher education institutions. Thus, they now prefer to be admitted into universities at all cost because of the obvious reason of discrimination in employment meted out by the employers of labour.

Excessive emphasis on university degree is another concern. It is expedient to state here that as long as individuals, parents, organizations and the Nigerian public as a whole continue to see the university degree as the most important degree in the country, their belief will continue to be a clog in the wheel towards the growth and development of the country. This means that there will be a shortage of manpower for core technological sectors of the economy. This may be an explanation as to why young secondary school leavers intending to go to higher education institutions would rather wait for several years to be given provisional admission into universities to study various courses of their choice. This position corroborates the observation made by Nwali (2013) that some students vowed not to attend polytechnics for any reason and much less colleges of education to be regarded as 'teachers.' Many people do not really see much difference between secondary school leavers and that of polytechnics. These are indication of the excessive emphasis on university degrees.

Another concern is disparity in organizational ranking of certificates. Organization whether public or private, profit or not for profit, production or service oriented, military or government parastatals, bureaucratic or not perceive and rank their employees according to their certificates at the point of entry. Arising from this, it has become a major problem dividing graduates from the universities and graduates from other tertiary educational institutions. This misnomer will always exist as long as societies continue to rate a university degree very high above other academic certificates. However, even when graduates from other tertiary institutions are employed, the university graduate is always promoted quickly to become the boss. In support of the foregoing assertion, Olabisi (2013) declares that this is a common phenomenon among employers of labour to impose university graduates on graduates of other higher education institutions even when the latter are better and have spent a considerable time or number of years than the former in the same organization. The scholars further stated that a holder of a university degree is revered; he becomes the boss with higher remuneration and other benefits. For instance, in state government civil service commission (Ministry of Education), a teacher with the HND certificate is placed a step lower than his counterpart with a first degree (level 8 step 2 against level 8 step 3). This situation is also in line with the observation of Stephen (2015) who stated that the council of Registered Engineer in Nigeria (COREN) registers polytechnic graduates as Engineering Technologists while university graduates of Engineering are registered as and proudly called engineers. Wage disparity is another concern that needs to be addressed so that these prospective students will enroll into other tertiary institutions. Wages are rewards in the form of money due to a worker at the end of the month in any given organization. Wage disparity between university graduates and graduates from other tertiary institutions for desperation shown by prospective higher education candidates. Hence, there will continue to be a desperate move by potential candidates in favour of universities against other types of higher education institutions. This disparity will also continue to generate negative feelings among employees who hold other certificates other than degrees. A perfect example is in the banking/financial sector, even when the B.Sc and HND certificate holders are employed simultaneously, the B.Sc holders will in most cases earn more than HND holders and often times, even when they are employed, it is usually on contract basis. This observation is in line with Olibie, Eziuzo and Enueme (2013) who succinctly stated that graduates from these tertiary educational institutions are not paid the same salary nor ranked equally even in the government parastatals.

The scholars further argued that B.Sc holders' remunerations and status are always higher and superior. This means that the disparity in wages can lead to dissatisfaction, lack of motivation and inequality among workers in the workplace. Poor funding of polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education is another major concern that has exacerbated candidates' desperate desire for university education against other tertiary educational institution. Funding is a key element in every organization and without adequate funding; no organization/institution can accomplish its stated goals. Inadequate funding of tertiary institutions by federal and state government has resulted in decaying infrastructure and facilities which has made prospective candidates shun/snob other tertiary institutions in favour of universities. This must be why Stephen (2015) noted that government's attitude towards polytechnic education is quite discriminating in favour of university education. He made it clear when he stated that this is evident in the kind of pronounced infrastructural development work one sees in universities as compared to polytechnics. Similarly, Olibie et al (2013) lends credence to the foregoing assertion when they stated that the situation in these universities including poor funding of the education sector has been the cause of strike action in all levels of education and especially at the tertiary level.

The manner in which government which is the major stakeholder in tertiary institutions handles policy formulation and implementation has affected candidate's preference for university education as against other higher education institutions. Policies which are laid down rules and regulations that guide the activities of people in an organization appear to have been haphazardly handled in the Nigerian context. For instance, the former Supervision Minister, Barrister Nyesom Wike on April 24, 2014 at a special retreat for chairmen of governing councils of federal polytechnics and colleges of education in Kaduna, announced a committee set up by the former President, Dr. Goodluck Johnathan to resolve the B.Sc and HND dichotomy (Abbas & Agiya n.d). However, no policy was formulated to that effect. The debate was swept and dropped under the carpet (Eziubochi, 2011). In the same vein government does not seem to be implementing effectively policies

formulated to address this scourge. If not why has the government not made any categorical statement on the dichotomy? This may be why Temitope (2015) noted that the academic staff, students and graduates of polytechnics welcome the news with joy but beneath the façade of their celebration lay nagging fear whether the government would be bold enough to address this prolonged issues. Or is it another political promise as usual? Effective policy formulation and implementation to address these concerns are desirable.

#### **IV. CURBING CANDIDATES' DESPERATE DESIRES FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: THE WAY FORWARD.**

It is pertinent to mention at this point that the curbing of candidates' desperate desire for university education against other tertiary institutions will not occur spontaneously but deliberate effort must be made by stakeholders (students, parents, employers, government and society) to bring to an end these perceived disparities in the higher education system in Nigeria.

The first step is the elimination of identified disparities. Organizations whether public or private should as a matter of urgency eliminate the disparities, discrimination, segregation and relegation that exist among tertiary education graduates. Therefore, graduates from universities and other tertiary education institutions should have equal entry points, equal ranking, be duly promoted as at when due and placed on the same salary scale when employed into organizations.

Adequate funding of polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education just like the universities is necessary for effective service delivery in tertiary institutions. This and is because to operate these institutions without adequate funding is a herculean task. Hence, making the ambiance of these institutions in terms of buildings and facilities suitable is good enough for students and teachers who would encourage students to enroll thereby curbing the desperate desires for universities. In addition upgrading polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education to attain status of degree awarding institutions, especially in technological disciplines will to a very large extent be useful in curbing the desperate desires among young secondary schools leavers to enroll into universities. Government and corporate bodies should provide and maintain equipment and facilities that encourage hands-on activities at the secondary school level in order to develop students' interest to undertake studies in vocational and technical fields which are often done in polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education (technical).

Government at all levels and regulatory agencies (NBTE, NCCE, etc) should sensitize the public and create awareness on the importance of technological and vocational education in a developing economy such as the Nigerian economy. Government in conjunction with accrediting agencies should institute the award of full scholarship to students in polytechnics and colleges of education. This will attract a pool of candidates to these tertiary institutions. Technical subjects should be prioritized at the secondary school level. This will enable students develop interest and skills needed to study in polytechnics, monotechnics and technical colleges of education which offers highly technical training.

Campaign to sensitize and enlighten parents and the general public on the disadvantages of discouraging their children and wards from choosing higher education institutions other than universities should be mounted by the federal and state governments and should be sustained. Government at all levels of governance in conjunction with teacher training institution should develop adequate technical teaching manpower that are well motivated because a well motivated teacher will also produce well motivated students who will see their teachers as role models and therefore, emulate them. Thus, government should formulate and implement policies that will enable students in polytechnics transfer to universities and vice-versa. This will mitigate candidates' desperate desires for university education and the problem of dropout from tertiary institutions.

The federal government should formulate and implement policies that will enable polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education graduates get automatic employment into various organizations. This gesture will attract prospective students into polytechnics and colleges of education with the hope that when they graduate, they will be given automatic employment. Automatic employment will increase the number of technicians and technologist available to drive the technological needs of the nation.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Desperate desires for university education against other types of higher education institutions among prospective students may not be curbed unless concerted effort is made to address the disparities that exist in the higher education system. It is only when prospective students believe/know that enrolling into other types of higher education institutions will offer them the same opportunities as the universities that they can willingly choose these institutions. This will result in increased number of technological/technical manpower, greater equalization of status and income and decrease the pressure on university resources and personnel. All these will lead to economic growth and technological advancement. The greatest legacy any nation can bequeath to its citizens is education and any nation that discriminates against its citizens by not giving them equal opportunities is jeopardizing its future and that of its citizens.

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