Problems of Assessment and Selection into Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper outlines assessment and selection issues as they affected tertiary institutions in Nigeria before 1978 and how these issues necessitated the establishment of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB). It also explores the emerging turn of events after the creation of the Board and the inherent perennial problems these created for the Board. Thereafter, the paper describes the measures the Board has put in place over the years to cope with the identified problems. It concludes with what may be looked at as the Board's present stance and pleas to all aggrieved parties.

1.0 Historical Perspective of the Emergence of JAMB

The history of university education in Nigeria dates back to the setting up, by the British colonial government, of the Elliot Commission in 1943 which recommended, among other things, the establishment of a University College in Nigeria. University College, Ibadan, was founded as a College of the University of London in 1948. It drew some of the foundation students from Yaba Higher college. Also the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, with its branches in Ibadan, Zaria and Enugu, served as feeder-institutions and provided a substantial percentage of the candidates who enrolled at the University College for degree courses (Angulu, 1987).

Before 1960, there was only one institution in Nigeria, the University College, Ibadan. Within two years after independence, four other universities namely:

University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and the University of Lagos were established. During the 1975/76 academic year, seven new universities were established bringing the total number of the Universities to thirteen (Adeniran, 1988).

When there was only the University College, Ibadan, it was obvious that it had to devise the means of admitting its own students. When, however, other universities came into being, the situation ante remained as each university conducted its own entrance examination and admitted its students directly. This was despite the fact that the idea of cooperative admissions had been broached earlier by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors. Aminu (1986), reported that by 1963 there where five university institutions in the country and in the records of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors which was formed that year, there were references to the formation of a Joint Matriculation Board, to conduct a uniform entrance examination, and a Common Entrance Board, to centrally process admissions.

However, with the emergence of more universities, the institutions gradually began to see the need for a cooperative action in the matter of admission of students. Three issues and problems became very prominent. These problems included;

(a) **Multiple Applications:**

Each candidate was forced by existing practices to apply to more than one institution in any one given academic year and sit for entrance examination for the same. Often, the applicants had to depend on chance in order not to have conflicts in the examination dates. This approach, no doubt had serious toll in terms of costs on the individual applicant as well as on the nation.

(b) **Multiple Examinations:**

The problem of multiple examinations and attendant costs were not limited to applicants alone but were also true to the institutions. Just as the applicants had to sit for several entrance examinations, each institution had to conduct its own entrance examinations. The cost to the institutions and to the nation in general was monumental.

(c) **Multiple Admissions:**

A direct consequence of applicants being encouraged by the system to apply to more than one institution in a given year, was the high incidence of multiple offers of admission. The problem associated with multiple admissions was that other qualified candidates were deprived of places in those institutions whose offer a candidate eventually rejected. This led to shortfalls in enrolment in spite of the fact that there were several qualified candidates unplaced in the tertiary institutions. According to records available at the National Universities Commission, there was an average shortfall of 9.5% in enrolment of budgeted university places during the period of 1970-1975.

It was the awareness of these issues and problems and the attendant waste of scarce resources that prompted the Committee of Vice-chancellors to seek a more coordinated approach to university admissions in Nigeria (Salim, 2001). In 1974, the Committee of Vice Chancellors reacted to the situation by commissioning a panel of two experts; Kay and Pettipierre, to look into the problem of applications and admissions. Specifically, the experts were to examine the system of admissions into Nigerian Universities, identify the problems and shortcomings arising therefrom and make appropriate recommendations. Curiously, the original terms of reference of Kay and Pettipierre contained the stricture that whatever recommendation made would be "**without prejudice to existing individual**

standards and traditions of the various universities" (Aminu, 1986 ***emphasis the author's*)**. The experts submitted a report recommending among other things a gradual movement towards the centralization of admissions. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors took their time in considering the Report (Angulu, 1987; Aminu, 1986).

In December, 1975, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors made a copy of the report of the experts available to the then Federal Military Government which thereafter set up the Michael Angulu Committee on Central Admissions Board with the following terms of reference to:

(i) study the problems of admissions into Nigerian universities with a view to removing all bottlenecks limiting entry into these institutions and thereby enhancing chances of admissions for candidates from all parts of the country;

(ii) study and make appropriate recommendations on how to ensure liberalization of admissions;

(iii) review the performance of pre-university examination bodies in Nigeria;

(iv) review entry requirements of the various universities with a view to making them realistic, responsive to national needs and aspirations, and uniform;

(v) make such other recommendations as will help the Federal Military Government achieve its objectives as enunciated in the Third National Development Plan.

One significant difference between the terms of reference of the Angulu Committee and those of Kay and Pettipierre was that the former was specifically

requested to consider the feasibility of setting up a Joint Matriculation Board. The Committee completed it's work in 1976 and signed a report after considerable heat, largely over the question of correcting geographical educational imbalance. The meeting (also) discussed quota extensively, but it was not reflected in the report. Instead, remedial programmes were advocated (Aminu 1986).

The Angulu Committee among other things recommended the setting up of a Joint Matriculation Board, and, with considerable reluctance, an eventual Common Entrance Board (Aminu 1986).

In February 1977, the Honourable Commissioner of Education summoned a meeting of the Committee of Vice Chancellors and the National Universities Commission (NUC) during which it was decided that a single body be set up to embrace the functions of the two bodies recommended by the Angulu Committee. "Dr. Jubril Aminu, the Executive Secretary of the NUC suggested the name Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), and it was accepted" (Angulu 1987). "Shortly after the meeting, Mr. Michael Angulu was translated from being Chairman of his Committee to the Registrar of the new Board" (Angulu, 1987)

The body, JAMB, came into being via decree No.2 of 1978 and later amended by Decree No. 33 of 1989.

2.0 Functions of JAMB

From the Decrees establishing the Board, the functions of JAMB remain basically those of:

(i) conducting entrance examinations into higher institutions in Nigeria;

(ii) placement of suitably qualified candidates in the tertiary institutions after having taken into account:-

(a) the vacancies available in each tertiary institution;

(b) the guidelines approved for each tertiary institution by its proprietor or other competent authority;

(c) the preference expressed or otherwise indicated by candidates for certain tertiary institutions and courses; and

(d) such other matters as the Board may be directed by the Minister to consider, or the Board itself may consider appropriate in the circumstances;

(iii) collection and dissemination of information on all matters relating to admissions into tertiary institutions or to any other matter relevant to the discharge of the functions of the Board, and

(iv) carrying out of such other activities as are necessary or expedient for the full discharge of all or any of the functions conferred on it.

3.0 Enabling Guidelines for the Operation of the Board

At independence, a silent revolution started in the educational sector. Efforts were made to increase access to education. Each of the regions started one form of free primary education or the other. At the national level, the oil boom paved way for the launching of the Universal Primary Education Programme in 1976. Expansion at the secondary school level followed with equal zeal. During the second republic in particular, the expansion of facilities for some form of secondary education in many states had no elastic limits. Furthermore this

revolution, apart from substantially increasing access to primary and secondary education, also increased the awareness for higher education. People began to use higher education not only as meal ticket but also one that opens the individual to the wider world and to opportunities for self improvement and support (Abdulrahman, 1991). All these no doubt, translated into a continuous surge in the number of aspirants to university education. In the face of this surge, disappointingly, there were bottlenecks in the admission processes. The then Federal Military Government on its part however, was anxious to expand educational opportunities at all levels including the liberalization of access to the universities (Aminu,1986).

JAMB thus, became a much needed initiative to overcome the bottlenecks for university education. There were also rising geographical demands. The problem of geographical representation is well captured in the words of Aminu (1986), when he stated:

> "such was the importance university admissions attained in the "National Question", largely because of excessive centralization and the indiscreet admission patterns in the universities, whereby some parts of the country felt left out even in universities located in their domains"(p. 7).

The Federal Military government also saw the setting up of the Board, as a way of not only expanding opportunities for university education but also to satisfy the growing geo-political demands. As observed by Aminu (1986), the Board thus was set up by the government purely and urgently for the political reasons of containing the annual "controversy" and "acrimony" over university admissions arising from geo-political demands.

It is noteworthy that at this time, the nation had just come out of a bitter civil war. Thus, given the mood of the time, government was anxious to promote national unity and identity and saw the universities as a forum to achieve this. It

therefore, felt that admissions into universities should reflect federal character and would be easier if it were centrally coordinated (JAMB, 1994).

To achieve the objectives of ensuring geographical balance among the various geopolitical components, the Federal Military Government in August 1981, introduced **guidelines** for admissions into the federal universities. State governments that are proprietors of higher institutions have similar guidelines of selecting candidates for their respective institutions. For the federal universities, the guidelines stipulated that 40 percent of the candidates should be selected on merit, 30 percent on locality (which in most cases is the geographical or socio-cultural area contiguous to the institution); 20 percent is reserved for candidates from the educationally disadvantaged states; and 10 percent is left to the discretion of each institution. Of this 10%, the universities are enjoined to reserve 2.5% for applicants from foreign countries, especially distressed African countries. For all such cases however, the basic minimum O/L requirements as well as minimum cut-off point (score) are never compromised (JAMB, 1997).

Angulu (1991), in his account of the early years of the Board noted that when guidelines was first introduced, the percentage allocated to each criteria depended upon; the

(a) age of the university (whether it was first generation, second generation or new university) and

(b) type of university (whether conventional, technological or agricultural).

The Guidelines was recently modified with the removal of the 10% discretion criterion. This is now shared between merit which is now 45% and locality which is now 35%. Today, the criteria and the percentages are as follows:

Merit - 45%

Locality - 35%

ELDS - 20%

4.0 Problems Inherent in the Emergence of the Board

4.1 Perception of the Board by the Universities.

A brief review of the genesis of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board appears appropriate in order to put things in proper perspective. It is a fact that the concept of a Joint Matriculation Board was a brain child of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors. It is also a fact that the Vice-Chancellors appointed the first Committee of two experts (Kay and Pettipierre) to study and advise on the issue of admission into universities. It is worthy of note however, that the prime interest of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors was that whatever was recommended would **be without prejudice to existing individual standards and traditions of the various universities.**

In otherwords, whatever would be recommended must be without prejudice to the autonomy of the universities especially in terms of their powers under their laws to admit their own students. Unfortunately however, the report of the Committee of the two experts touched on a sore side when it among other things recommended that the universities should work gradually towards a central admissions system. This, they saw as a breach of that fundamental clause which sought to preserve the status quo (University Autonomy on Admissions).

To understand this issue of preservation of university autonomy better, it has to be recalled that of the seven universities at that time, five were regional and only two were federal. These regional universities would of necessity want to maintain their autonomy in order to protect and maintain the interest of the regions which are their main financiers and whose interest they are committed to serve.

The deliberations of the Committee (i.e. the Angulu Committee) which was set up by the then Federal Military Government were spiced with a lot of rancour. The two major contentious issues related to using the admission processes and quota system to correct geographical imbalance. Although the Committee discussed the issue of geographical imbalance and the related quota system extensively, the deliberations were not reflected in the final report. Instead the Committee recommended the introduction of remedial programmes for the educationally less developed states. In addition, the Committee recommended among other things, the setting up of a Joint Matriculation Board and with a considerable reluctance, an eventual Common Entrance Board. There was much hesitation over the latter because of the calculated logistical problems (Aminu, 1986).

The politics of the emergence of the Board is well captured in the observation of Aminu (1986), who was then the Executive Secretary of the National Universities Commission when he stated:

> "the importance of university admissions in the "National Question" surfaced when the Honourable Commissioner for Education, following a speech from the throne order at a Convocation Ceremony, the previous November, summoned a meeting of National Universities Commission and the Committee of Vice–Chancellors, to announce the decision of Government to set up a Common Entrance Board, because of what he called the "increasingly disagreeable acrimony" over each year's university admissions. The Registrar–designate of the Board attended the meeting. So did Mr. Angulu, who read out the relevant recommendations of his Report even before it was submitted" (Aminu, 1986, p. 8).

Thus, the decision of the meeting of the Honourable Commissioner of Education, the Vice-Chancellors and the National Universities Commission which was convened in February 1977, (that is the following year) to discuss the recommendations of the Angulu Committee was a foregone conclusion. This is

because the formation of a single body: the Joint Matriculation Board to carry out the two functions of matriculation examinations and admission was a fait accompli.

From the foregoing, it can be said that the then Federal Military Government did not necessarily have similar objectives as the universities that initiated what eventually saw the emergence of the Board. While the universities wanted an agency that would conduct the entrance examination, the then Federal Military Government wanted an agency that would help it solve existing geo-political problems: those of assuring access to university education; assuring semblance of geo-political representation in the universities and using same to achieve the much needed national unity.

These portend nothing short of an understandable resistance to the Board by the universities as it in many respect went against their original intention and most importantly violated their powers under their laws to admit their own students – a right they had sought to protect from the very beginning. However, government, in furthering its political goals, saw the Board as a worthy tool. To the universities therefore, the Board was government's tool for reduction of the universities autonomy and bringing in the quota system through the back door.

4.2 Perception of the Board with Respect to the Guidelines

On the face value, the guidelines appears to forestall geo-political imbalances in admission as a means of protecting the weaker geographical components from the ensuing stiff competition for the scarce positions in Nigerian universities. Innocent as the guidelines may appear, they turned out to be perhaps the most difficult problem the Board has had to grapple with during the early years (Angulu, 1987). Today, it still remains a problem.

The problem arises from the fact, that the formula put forward implies the use of "quota" and thus "differential/discriminatory" cut-off points for deciding on who to admit or not. The implied concessionary nature of decision on who to admit of necessity attracts a feeling of injustice at both individual and geo-political level. As observed by Angulu (1987), Southerners complained (and continue to complain) that the quota system keeps qualified Southerners out of universities in order to make room for less qualified Northerners. To them, the issue is whether merit should be sacrificed for geographical representation. The Longe Report (1991), aptly describes the feelings/frustrations of Nigerians to this system when it observed that:

(i) the basis for the controversial Quota System of Admissions which mandates a quantum of in-takes from defined educationally disadvantaged states has been questioned in a large number of submissions and representation as morally indefensible and contrary to the spirit of the constitution.

(ii) others have argued that if it was justified a decade or so ago because of imbalance in educational opportunities, the creation of thousands of primary and hundreds of secondary schools following the inauguration of the 6-3-3-4 National Policy on Education, should by now, have given the so-called disadvantaged states the opportunity to catch up. It was never envisaged that such a concession should be enjoyed on a permanent basis.

(iii) the more radical critics of the quota system have therefore, advocated its total abolition. Less severe views have advocated its drastic reduction over time yielding its place to meritocracy so that it would be phased out completely in due course.

Furthermore, immediately after the establishment of the Board, "the ensuing debate and discussions became increasingly emotive and virulent" (Angulu,

1987:46). With the advent of the civilian government in 1979, there was renewed momentum to the requests that the Board should be scrapped. Surprisingly, the fray was joined and promoted by institutions who claimed to represent the interest of the educationally less developed areas of the country. One of the institutions was the New Nigerian Newspaper which alleged that the Board was perpetuating the imbalance between the educationally developed and the educationally less developed areas of the country; that it was admitting only few female students and that it had failed to provide enough places for the many "qualified candidates who were seeking university places (Angulu 1987). There were draft bills and threats from some members of the National Assembly. Conflicting instructions were received from the government as to whether the Board should continue or not. It was a most uncertain and trying period often referred to as one during which the Board "lived by installments" (Angulu, 1987).

At the other end of the divide, however, the "Quota Systemites" are strongly opposed to admission by merit and merit alone pointing out that as long as such "Merit" remains stigmatized by the ogre of Exam Malpractice, such a policy will be unjustifiable. This is so because unfortunately, where one set of geo-political zone continues to be deficient in terms of number of good schools and consequently a suitable number of high scoring (or even low scoring) candidates, the other set is viewed suspiciously as the haven of those who achieve their high scores through dubious means.

The emergence of the guidelines should be placed in proper perspective. In Nigeria, education is both an individual and a social need. As a social need, and in a system of inequality, government has a role to mediate supply with demand in order to protect the weak from the powerful. It has a social obligation to ensure that all segments of the society and all interest groups are allowed access to higher education especially when government has defined education provision as a tool for developing the individual person and the society. Without the guidelines, it would have been possible to exclude citizens of a number of states from

university education. By focusing on the merit criterion alone, educationally advantaged states would successfully place their citizens into all the available spaces in the universities in any given year to the exclusion of the rest of the states. The Federal Government Guidelines on admissions was therefore fashioned as a balancing mechanism to check the widening gap between geo-political zones.

The problem of the Board as discerned from the foregoing can be summarized into three. Those of:

(i) geo-political imbalance which saw to the emergence of the Board;

(ii) "quota system" arising from the guidelines and

(iii) resistance from the higher institutions for obvious reasons.

5.0 Strategies Evolved by the Board to Cope with the Identified Problems

(i) improving participation right from its roots as a means of dealing with the issue of geo-political imbalance;

(ii) openness and transparency in the admission process with the aim of eradicating favouritism; and

(iii) active cooperation with the higher institutions in order to reduce resistance ultimately.

With respect to improving participation in tertiary education, the Board has used a combination of approaches. These includes: information sharing; the use

of varied outreach approaches to reach the clientele; and the use of strategic awareness programmes.

Information sharing has been used as a means of sensitizing the states to probable deficiencies in terms of their relative abilities to meet admission quota. The Board compiles, on annual basis, the statistics of applications and admissions by universities and by states. From this, each state discerns its achievements (in terms of the degree of the imbalance or otherwise between her and the rest of the states) and hopefully designs and implements strategies for effecting remedy where need be.

Another approach the Board has adopted to increase participation in tertiary education is to increase opportunities for participation in the selection examinations. This approach aims at bringing the services of the Board much nearer to the clientele through a number of outreach programmes/opportunities. For example, by 1979, the Board had only **three** zonal offices in the country. As at now, the Board through intensive dialogue and co-operation with the states, has **seven** zonal offices and a state office in thirty-four of the thirty-six states of the federation. These offices are outfits through which information about the activities of the Board are disseminated to the public through workshops, seminars, handbills and charts. Here, candidates can buy application materials and submit on completion. The public on the other hand makes enquiries on matters affecting the candidates from these outfits instead of having to travel to the Board's headquarters.

The Board has also opened Public Complaints Offices at the National Headquarters and with units in each of the seven zonal offices. Here, the public may make enquiries and receive hearing on whatever problems they have relating to the operations of the Board.

Furthermore, while the zonal and state offices are, among other things, centers for the sales of application forms to candidates, the Board has other alternative centers. The aim is to offer the candidates a wide variety of choice of centers to buy the forms. Initially, the Board used as additional selling points; Ministries of Education, the Nigerian Postal Services (NIPOST) and subscribing tertiary institution. Today, while abandoning the use of tertiary institutions and the Ministries of Education, the Board uses designated Banks. Use of the Banks has one advantage in that, like the NIPOST, most of the Banks have branches in the nooks and crannies of the nation and each branch of the designated Bank is a selling point. The spread and ease of access of the selling points is an advantage.

In addition to bringing the selling points for the application forms nearer to the clientele, the Board considers **"awareness to its programmes"** an essential aspect of increasing participation. Towards this, all necessary information required by an applicant for each year is packaged in a "brochure". Specifically, the brochure contains all the information that is needed for the completion of the application forms. This is presented in the sequence that the candidate can easily follow in order to complete all the forms that make up the application package. In addition, the booklet contains information on the admission requirements and the examination subjects for every discipline/programme offered in each tertiary institution in Nigeria. The brochure is reviewed annually to update it on the programs available in the respective universities and their admission requirements.

Apart from the brochure, the Board places paid advertisements on some popular dailies in the country, informing the public on the resumption and closing dates of its application forms and the conditions for the purchase and return of completed forms. Similar information are also disseminated through the national radio and television stations.

In addition, the Board has taken advantage of the emerging Information Technology to install on-line and e-mail services to applicants. With a scratch card, candidate can go to any telephone booth and make enquiries about their application and admission status; as against when one would have to travel to the National headquarters of the Board for the same information. The awareness these steps have created are manifested in the increasing urge in participation in the educational activities of some of the states of the Federation. For example, states that have become aware of their backwardness in education have introduced free education and scholarship awards to their indigenes at various levels of education.

Of recent, there are states that buy JAMB forms and distribute to their O'level final year students free of charge. Others in addition, register their students for WAEC and NECO examinations also free of charge.

Efforts at **openness** especially in the Board admission activities is aimed at two major objectives namely to ensure;

- that guidelines are implemented in spirit and to the letter and

- to ensure transparency and the eradication of favouritism in the admission processes.

At the inception of JAMB, admissions were conducted by the Governing Board, which had a Vice-Chancellor as the Chairman and had members drawn from the universities, intermediate, post secondary schools, the Ministries of Education (states and federal), the Registrars of the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and JAMB, and three other persons from the public.

The board had a standing committee that supervised admissions through the admission panels. These admission panels were chaired by members of the Governing Board. Other members of the admission panels included the Admission Officers from the universities, represented by faculties, and JAMB representatives who served as panel secretaries respectively.

At this time, admission was done on faculty basis. Each faculty officer presented the faculty's list of candidates recommended for admissions to the panel. The panel would then consider individual candidate's case on their merit; taking into consideration the admissions guidelines. They always insisted on the guidelines being strictly adhered to. Anywhere there was a breach, they stamped their feet and insisted on compliance. By so doing, they ensured that only suitable candidates were placed in the universities.

Furthermore, they ensured that high scorers in the Board's examination who otherwise could not have gained admissions on merit in their chosen fields were offered provisional admission to read related though different courses. Also, candidates who had high but could not be given alternative course within the university of their choice were offered provisional admissions into alternative universities. In both cases, such candidates were always given an option of choice.

In summary, the involvement of parties-external to the universities and JAMB, created room for transparency and to making the universities stick to national interest rather than parochial interests.

In 1994, the Governing Boards of parastatals (JAMB inclusive) were dissolved by the then Federal Military Government. That of JAMB has never been reconstituted up till now. However, JAMB in its wisdom has evolved an alternative instrument to carry out the admission functions of the Board. It came

up with a novel idea of a **policy committee on Admissions** which has its subsidiaries as the **Technical Committee on Admissions** and **Admission Panels.**

The **Policy Committee on Admissions** has the Honourable Minister of Education as its Chairman. Members of this Committee are the Registrar, JAMB, the Executive Secretaries of NUC, NBTE, and NCCE. Other members are the Director, NTI, Registrar NABTEB, Head of National Office, WAEC, Registrar, NECO, Vice-Chancellors of universities, Rectors of Degree Awarding Institutions, Provosts of Degree Awarding Institutions, Registrars of Degree Awarding Institutions, Director of Admissions, JAMB. The Deputy Director, Office of the Registrar JAMB, serves as the Secretary.

The **functions** of this committee are: to create a forum where JAMB and the tertiary institutions deliberate on admissions' issues and proffer solutions to them; strengthen the already existing understanding and establish more rapport between JAMB and the tertiary institutions; inform all the stakeholders of the important role of JAMB in monitoring and ensuring compliance with the laid down guidelines on admissions; ensure the smooth conduct of the admissions exercise on schedule; and to acquaint all the stakeholders with policy issues which require implementation or periodic review.

The **Technical Committee on Admissions** has the Director (Admissions) as the Chairman. Other members are: the Directors of the Board, Admissio n Officers of Degree Awarding Institutions, Admissions' Panel Secretaries and the Deputy Director (Admissions/UME) as the secretary. This Committee has the following as its objectives: to ensure that recommendations on marked computer print-outs are presented; estimated in-takes and adherence to the NUC, NBTE and NCCE prescribed quota for admissions are submitted; high scoring candidates who may not have been recommended while applying the guidelines are recommended for selection, the procedure for rejection of candidates who did not meet minimum requirement is followed; adherence to entry requirements in the brochure is

strictly followed; and lastly to ensure that admission schedules are complied with.

The decision of the aforementioned committees are implemented by the **Admission Panels** which consist of the Vice-Chancellors of universities as Chairmen. Other members are: Director of JAMB, admission officers of the universities and desk officers who are staff of the admissions Department of the Board. The admission panels now carry out the same functions as the admission panels of the then Governing Board; the difference being that, whereas at that time, admissions were on faculty basis, now a single admission officer, represents the whole university.

To further ensure that the decisions of the admission panels are carried out, the Board, statutorily, has a Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Department and a mandate, to examine the records of the tertiary institutions with respect to admissions. The monitoring exercise seeks to ensure compliance with the following: the matriculation requirements as defined by the institutions as contained in JAMB's brochures; and admission guidelines as defined by the Proprietors (governments) and decisions arrived at during admission meetings of the Board with the institutions.

The need for developing **effective cooperative strategies** was realized very early in the life of the Board. Aminu (1986), one of the brains behind the creation of the Board, confirmed the essence of "cooperation" especially with tertiary institutions to the survival of the Board when he observed that "having set up the Board and after much discussion, it was found that the cooperation of the universities would only be guaranteed if they were fully represented and if a Vice-Chancellor was the chairman" (p.8). This co-operative attitude continues to be part of most of the activities the Board engages in, in the discharge of its statutory functions.

In developing the examination syllabuses and the attendant tests in the respective subjects tested, the respective institutions are taken into confidence and involved at every stage of the processes. Effective co-operation is also maintained with the higher institutions in the test administration phase. Principal officers for the test administration for various examination towns (examination coordinators and center supervisors) are normally nominated officials of the higher institutions.
Similarly, the admissions process for which the Board is often vilified is a co-operative activity between the Board and the respective tertiary institutions. Admissions panels comprise of a Chairman (who could be a Vice Chancellor, Rector, Provost, Registrar of higher institutions or a Director of the Board, the Admissions Officers of all the degree-awarding institutions (for UME) and Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education (for MPCE) and a panel secretary who is usually an officer of the Board. The responsibility of the Admission Panels is to select/recommend candidates for each institution taking into consideration the admissions quota, cut-off marks, subject combinations for the various courses, etc.

The monitoring of admissions as conducted by the Board is a cooperative effort between the Board and the respective tertiary institutions. The institutions are requested to nominate relevant senior staff who work with visiting staff from the Board.

6.0 Conclusion

The Board has put a number of ongoing programmes in place to assure co-operation between it and participating tertiary institutions and hopes that with time the relationship will continue to improve. However, if the problem of the guidelines and the quota system persists the Board feels that in the spirit of the guidelines a middle ground has to be designed to protect the interests of all concerned. This is the basic premise behind the institutionalization of the

admissions quota. What it translates into however is that, depending on where you come from, your gender, the institution and course to which you have applied, your admission chances may be positively or negatively affected by the guidelines. At the end of the day however, the nation, rather than the individual, is the main beneficiary. For a developing country, fashioned out of the mergers of various ethnic nationalities (about 350) the use of such an admission policy is not only desirable, but necessary, at least, for the foreseeable future. It is hoped that critics will appreciate its obvious needs rather than latch on the inherent injustice on this concession to lampoon the Board for favoritism and the lowering of standards.

While the introduction of the guidelines remains a political decision, the Board will continue to bear the brunt of the criticisms the policy attracts. The prayer is that with time, the educational fortune of the disadvantaged states of the federation as well as societal war against examination malpractices will improve to allow for the supremacy of merit to be recognized once more. Until then, one would only wish that those affected adversely will in the words of Abdulrahman (1991) accept that often, in a federal system, it is advisable for the weaker components to be protected, not to the detriment of the strong, but to enable the whole progress more uniformly.

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