

THE POLICY, PRACTICE, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF THE UNIFIED TERTIARY MATRICULATION EXAMINATION (UTME) IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The Nigerian Education Sector has over the years gone through policy changes. These changes emanated from the “needs of the hour”.

The first National Policy on Education in 1969 was an expression of the general dissatisfaction with the then existing educational systems which were irrelevant to the national needs, aspirations and goals at that time.

The Universities Matriculation Examination (UME) was introduced into the Nigerian Education system with the establishment of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in 1978 to centralize admissions into the National Universities which had hitherto been characterised with problems of multiple applications and multiple admissions. In 1989, the Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Matriculation Examination (MPCEME) was introduced. The present policy of the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) is part of the specific activities of the Federal Ministry of Education to rebrand the education sector. The priority areas among others are: Access and Equity, Standards and Quality Assurance; etc. Since the approval of this policy by the Federal Executive Council (FEC), the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board has put in place planned strategies for its implementation with effect from April, 2010.

This paper therefore discusses the four key points (Policy, Practice, Problems and Prospects) in the implementation of UTME and how the Board has been able to surmount the challenges attendant upon the introduction of this new system of examination.

KEY WORDS: UTME, Policy, Practice, Problems, Prospects.

INTRODUCTION

Oftentimes, changes in education often come about when current practices are challenged and questions asked about the way things are done. The quest for a more efficient way of achieving educational objectives may guide educationists to propose either a new way of doing the same thing, or reforming the current provisions to enable the achievement of the same set of goals.

As part of Federal Government efforts to solve the problems of multiple applications and multiple admissions into Nigerian Universities, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) was established in 1978 via Decree No 2 of 1978 to conduct entrance examinations and also undertake admissions into the various universities. In December 1989, the Federal Government repealed Decree No. 2 of 1978 and replaced it with Decree 33 which vested in the Board additional responsibility of conducting admissions into Polytechnics and Colleges of Education nationwide.

Decree 33 of 1989, therefore expanded the scope of operations of the Board to cover Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of education by whatever named called in Nigeria. The enabling Decree also empowered the Board to monitor and describe admission practices into all higher institutions in Nigeria. Consequently, the Board conducted the Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education Matriculation Examination (MPCEME) alongside the Universities Matriculation Examination (UME) till year 2009.

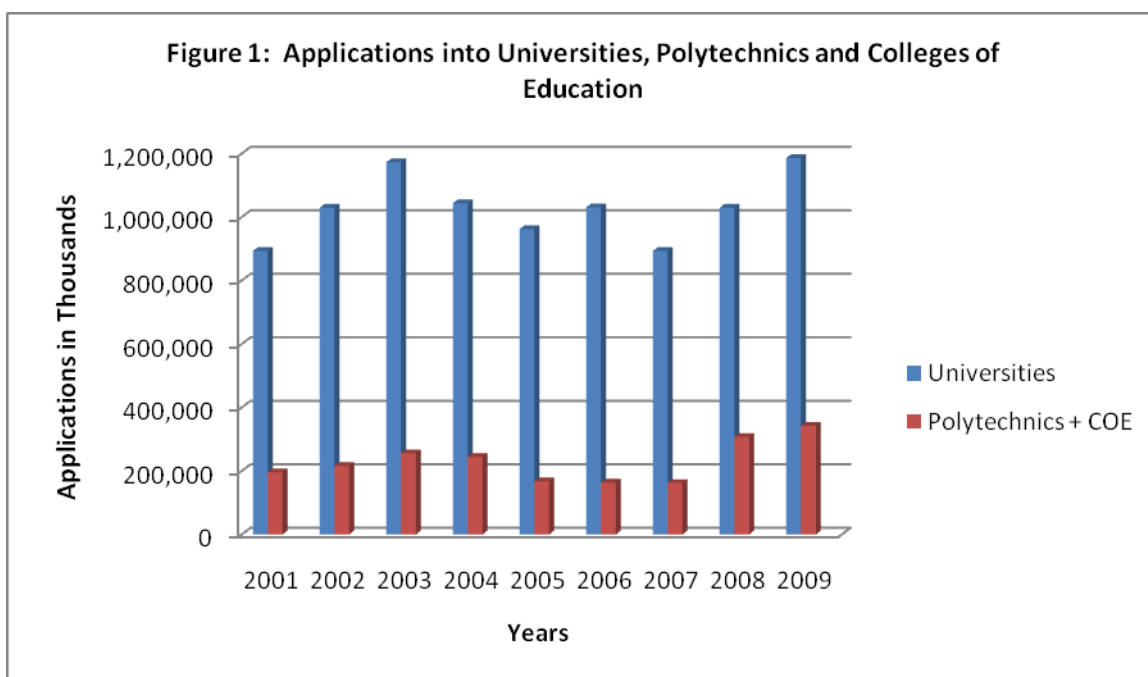
THE POLICY

The Emergence of the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME)

The UTME which took effect from 2010 is part of the Roadmap for the education sector by the Federal Ministry of Education to rebrand and reposition the Nigerian Education Sector to ensure that it plays a pivotal role in human capital development needed for the attainment of socio-economic and political growth in the country, and as one of the turn around strategies. Consequently, JAMB was mandated to conduct UTME, a unified common entrance examination into tertiary institutions in the country.

Table 1 Applications into the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education

Year	Applications into the Universities (UME only)	%	Applications into the Polytechnics + Colleges of Education	%
2001	893,259	82.02	195,788	17.98
2002	1,028,988	82.68	215,541	17.32
2003	1,172,313	82.10	255,659	17.90
2004	1,043,361	81.02	244,463	18.98
2005	962,133	85.20	167,089	14.80
2006	1,030,670	86.32	163,331	13.68
2007	893,259	84.65	162,031	15.35
2008	1,028,988	77.00	307,215	23.00
2009	1,185,574	77.60	342,499	22.40



The UME applications/admissions statistics for the last five academic years, 2005-2009 (see Table 1), shows that in year 2005, 125,673 of the 962,133 that applied were admitted. This accounted for 13.10% of the applicants. This means that 86.90% of the applicants were uncatered for. In 2006, out of 1,030,670 that applied for university education, only 107,161 were admitted. This accounted for 10.40%, leaving 89.60% of the applicants uncatered for. In 2007, 149,033 (16.70%) were admitted out of 893,259 applicants. In 2008, 183,420 out of 1,028,988 were admitted into the universities. This accounted for only 17.80% leaving out 82.20% of the applicants. In 2009, 211,991 (17.90%) out of 1,185,574 were admitted that means 82.10% of the applicants were left out. The number of applicants that could not secure admission into the universities kept on increasing on yearly basis.

Table 2: Table showing cut-off points for UME from 2003 to 2009

S/N	YEAR	NATIONAL CUT –OFF POINTS	NOS ABOVE NAT. CUT – OFF POINTS	NO ADMITTED (%)	% WASTAGE
1.	2003	160	457,192	175,358(38.40)	61.60
2.	2004	160	551,368	108,148(10.60)	89.40
3.	2005	160	595,574	125,673(21.10)	78.90
4.	2006	160	562,077	107,161(19.10)	80.90
5.	2007	170	703,653	149,033(21.20)	78.80
6.	2008	170	803,174	183,420(22.80)	77.20
7.	2009	180	940,000	211,991(22.60)	77.40

By this policy, the Federal Government of Nigeria has merged the UME and the MPCME for candidates seeking admission into the universities, polytechnics, monotecnics and colleges of education respectively. This is to improve access and the quality of entrants into tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

The introduction of UTME would tackle many admission problems often faced by candidates, just as it would help to harmonise academic calendar in such a way that admissions into tertiary institutions would be conducted and concluded early within a record period.

THE PRACTICE

In order to carry out the activities for the realisation of this mandate, the following procedures were followed:

- i. Harmonization of UME and MPCEME brochures.
- ii. Review of the existing online registration details.
- iii. Review and harmonization of UME and MPCEME answer sheets.
- iv. Review and harmonization of the entry requirements.
- v. Inspection and validation of examination centres.
- vi. Review and harmonization of the list of existing examination officials and documents for test administration.
- vii. Harmonization of UME and MPCEME syllabi.
- viii. Review and harmonization of the list of existing examiners for test development
- ix. Review and harmonization of policy and technical committee meetings on admissions.
- x. Sensitization of the students, public and other stakeholders through workshops, seminars, symposia, lectures, radio jungles, television announcements, advertorial and press conferences.

This was to ensure smooth merger of the UME and MPCEME through interaction with stakeholders in particular and the public in general, to clear doubts, inform and enlighten the public on the UTME.

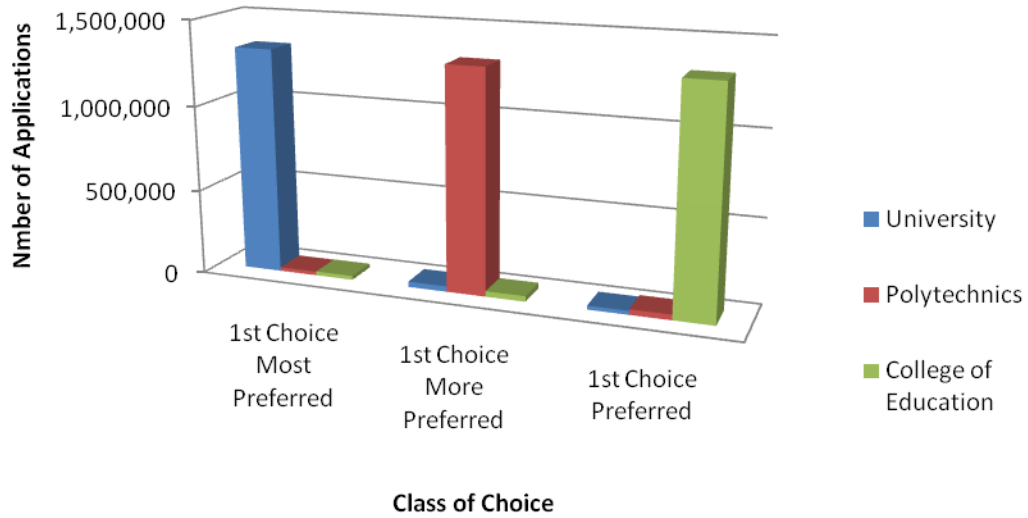
Registration

At the point of registration, candidates were required to make six choices of institutions as follows: two from universities; two from polytechnics; Monotechnics/specialised institutions and two from Colleges of Education. A total number of 1,375,652 candidates registered for the examination (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: 2010 UTME Statistics of candidates applications by Choice

Institution Type	1st choice			2nd choice		
	Most preferred	More preferred	Preferred	Most preferred	More preferred	Preferred
University	1,330,512	32,037	13,103	1,325,958	35,933	13,761
Polytechnic	23,317	1,311,108	42,721	26,197	1,306,485	42,970
College of Education	21,823	32,507	1,319,828	23,497	33,234	1,318,921
Grand total	1,375,652	1,375,652	1,375,652	1,375,652	1,375,652	1,375,652

Figure 2: Barchart showing 2010 UTME Applications statistics (1st Choice).



Examination Administration

The maiden edition of the examination took place on Saturday, 17th April, 2010 in 321 examination towns in Nigeria and 6 foreign centres namely: Accra in Ghana, Buea in Republic of Cameroon, Cotonou in Republic of Benin, London in United Kingdom, Jeddah in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Johannesburg in Republic of South Africa.

The Board mobilised six hundred and eighty-four (684) staff of sister organisations for effective supervision of the examination centres. Each candidate wrote the examination in the Use of English and three other subjects relevant to the course of study.

The results were released on Friday, 23rd April, 2010 i.e. within four (4) working days.

THE PROBLEMS

Syndrome of university preference

Writing a Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination for admission to the tertiary institutions did not stop candidates' preference for university education. However, all tertiary institutions will have a sufficient pool of quality entrants for admission. Table 3 shows the distribution of candidates' choices for the 2010 UTME.

Logistics problem

Problems of information management, crowd control and communication effectiveness accompanied the conduct of the UTME, since it was conducted for the first time and on a very large scale.

Overstretching of facilities

Candidates for UTME were more than either the UME or the MPCEME. Invariably, the Board had to inspect more secondary schools in the country for the conduct of the examination.

Examination Malpractice

Candidates were more desperate, considering the fact that there is no alternative examination till the following year unlike when there was opportunity for MPCEME if UME did not work.

Acceptability of the policy

Change, as the maxim goes, is the only thing that is constant. It is a well established fact that people are resistant to change in spite of whatever good it would bring their way. Many are sceptical about the workability of the policy but it has been well thought out and is being assiduously implemented.

Expansion of Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education to Award Degrees.

The expectation of stakeholders and government is that most of the polytechnics and colleges should be upgraded to degree-awarding status. This will expand access to candidates who opt for degrees. The reality however, is a far-cry from what is expected because very few polytechnics and colleges of education currently award degrees. This poses a challenge because candidates' preference for the universities will still be there. The government has given approval for these institutions to award degrees but the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), National Universities Commission (NUC) and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) are yet to work out the modalities.

THE PROSPECTS

UTME has implications on

The Institutions

a. Harmonisation of calendar for all tertiary institutions

With the UTME, there would be a harmonized admission exercise for all tertiary institutions. This would encourage a harmonized academic calendar.

b. Increased enrolment

Enrolment of quality entrants into the Monotechnics, the Polytechnics/Specialized Institutions and the Colleges of Education may increase.

c. Harmonised entry requirements

The minimum requirement for entry into any tertiary institution under UTME is the possession of the Senior Secondary School Certificate or its equivalent with credit passes in five subjects including English Language and Mathematics. Candidates who do not satisfy the minimum requirement are not qualified for admission.

d. Improvement of interactions

There would be an improvement in the level of interactions among all levels of tertiary institutions as Policy and Technical Committee meetings, etc. would now be held jointly.

e. Uniform National cut-off point

All the three (3) categories of tertiary institutions now have the same national cut-off point for all the admissions. (see Table 2)

The Parents/Guardians

a. Cost reduction

Parents will pay less as they will be paying for only one matriculation examination instead of two.

b. Psychological relief

There will be reduced anxiety due to the increase in the probability of securing admission into the tertiary institutions.

The Candidates

a. Cost reduction

They will be paying for only one examination.

b. Expansion of access to tertiary institutions

The probability of being admitted is higher.

c. Opportunity of choice of six (6) institutions

Each Candidate will be allowed six (6) choices of institutions: two (2) from Universities, two (2) from Polytechnics, Monotechnics/Specialized Institutions and two (2) from Colleges of Education instead of the former practice of only two (2) choices.

d. Minimum risk

The risk of moving from one place to another in order to write examinations would be minimized

e. Less trauma

The candidates would experience less anxiety since their chances will be increased.

The Government

a. Teacher education

The increase in enrolment into these institutions would help to achieve the technological advancement of the country.

b. Realization of vision 20:2020

Qualitative and functional education is one of the 7-Point Agenda of the present administration to make Nigeria one of the 20 largest economies in the world. This could only be achieved through redirecting students to focus on technical and vocational education.

c. Improvement in the quality of teachers

With the UTME, the erroneous impression that only those with low academic status undertake Teacher education courses would be eroded as the minimum entry requirement into all tertiary institutions will be uniform. This, consequently, would bring about quality teachers.

d. Increase in teacher/student ratio

Research has shown that the fewer the teacher /student ratio, the better the performance of students. Increased teacher enrolment could lead to larger turnout which would invariably reduce failure rates in schools and national examinations.

e) Restoration of the dignity of teachers and graduates of polytechnics, monotechnics and specialized institutions

With the harmonised entry requirement for all tertiary institutions, there is bound to be a reduction in the inferiority complex formerly associated with non-university graduates. It would also be a step towards eliminating the existing dichotomy.

f) Flexibility in choice of course

Instead of two (2) choices, candidates now have six (6). This would increase the probability of being admitted in a particular year. Likewise, the four (4) UTME subjects will increase the variety of subject combinations for more courses in the Monotechnics, Polytechnics/Specialized Institutions and Colleges of Education.

The Society

a. Improved public perception of tertiary education

The negative impression of the general populace about the products of our tertiary institutions would be erased.

c. Increase confidence in tertiary education

Quality of entrants would generate increased confidence.

d. Improved standard of education

The perceived falling standard of education would be erased.

Technical and vocational education

There would be:

- increase in enrolment;
- removal of the dichotomy between University and Polytechnic graduates as a result of the introduction of B.Tech in the Polytechnics;
- realization of vision 20: 2020 and
- increase in the number of technical and vocational instructors, etc.

CONCLUSION

With the success of the first outing, it is certain that subsequent outings will be successful. However, the challenge before the Board is the simultaneous conduct of the admission exercise into the three categories of the tertiary institutions which the Board has mapped out strategies to surmount.

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