

Historical Assessment of Jamb Admission Process in Nigerian Universities: Stakeholders' Perceptions on the Politics of Zones and Regions

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the historical assessment of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) admission process in Nigerian universities with emphasis on stakeholders' perceptions of the politics of zones and regions. The study investigated the historical development of JAMB admissions, the influence of regional and zonal politics, the effects of quota system, catchment area and Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) policies, factors responsible for students' preference for Southwestern universities, implications of regional admission policies, and the reforms and challenges associated with the admission process. A historical research design was adopted. The population comprised JAMB records, government documents, university admission statistics, policy papers, and relevant stakeholders. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 672 respondents, including JAMB officials, lecturers, parents, and students. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation, with a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.84. The study was analyzed using descriptive statistic of frequency counts and mean. The results show that respondents acknowledge the progressive changes made to JAMB admission procedure such as the introduction of UTME, CBT and the admission policy with emphasis on merit, catchment area and ELDS criteria. Respondents view admission as influenced by politics of zone/region via differences in cut off marks, federal character, and catchment policies. They acknowledged that while quota and ELDS policies were an inclusion mechanism, they do not believe it encourages the spirit of meritocracy and fairness. Respondents favor Southwestern universities because of its perceived quality of education, stability in academic calendar and future employment opportunity. Conclusion of the study shows that although the JAMB admission procedure has been an improvement in term of transparency and efficiency in admissions into universities, concerns about equity, quality and number of admission places and disparities among regions are evident in the admission process. It recommends that government should try and uphold merit based admission, periodically review policies in relation to the stated objectives and carry out necessary upgrade to existing infrastructure as well as continually monitor the process.

Keywords: JAMB, university admission, regional politics, quota, meritocracy, Southwest university, Nigeria.

I. INTRODUCTION

The historical progression of university admissions in Nigeria is tied to the country's past politics and the inequalities of the Nigerian regions, coupled with rapid growth of university education in the country. Previously, all Nigerian universities undertook the task of university admission independently. This led to duplicated admissions, uncoordinated procedures, biased admissions and regionally disproportionate admissions into Nigerian universities. As a consequence, it led to the establishment of the Joint Admissions and

Matriculation Board (JAMB) in 1978 by the Federal Government of Nigeria through Act No 2 of 1978 to streamline, integrate and conduct admission into Nigerian universities, polytechnics and colleges of education on an annual basis. Its objectives were to encourage fair, national, uniform and standardized procedures in university admissions (Ajayi & Ekundayo, 2010). However the politics in Nigeria are not detached from the admission procedure of the Nigerian universities; admission is still characterized by ethnicity, federalism and regional competition. admission to

Nigerian universities has increasingly been subject to the politics of zone/regions as various sections of the nation grapple with the desire to have an equal chance at university education in Nigeria.

The historical basis for the disparity in admission into Nigerian universities can be linked to colonial education in Nigeria where the development and introduction of western education differed between regions in Nigeria. The Southern region of Nigeria and particularly the South West adopted the missionary and Western Education relatively earlier and therefore had an advantage in the competition for university education in Nigeria due to larger number of candidates available from that region than from others (Fafunwa, 1974). By the time Nigeria was granted independence, her citizens from the Southern region had attained a higher level of education than those from other parts of the country, consequently prompting the need to create a balancing effect on the pattern of university admission with introduction of a quota system and catchment areas. The principle of Federal Character was enshrined in the 1979 Nigerian Constitution to give all regions equal representation in public institutions (Suberu, 2001) as such quota system and Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) are factored into the admission process.

The admission quota system into the Nigerian Universities is another prominent controversial aspect of the JAMB admission system. Under the quota system, university admission into federal universities are determined by merit, catchment area and ELDS consideration. While it could be said that it's one way of leveling the educational gap among the regions of the country, many believe that it has compromised meritocracy in the admission process to the disadvantage of candidates from the most educationally progressive regions in Nigeria, mainly the South-West and South-East(Okeke, 2012). It is sometimes argued or demonstrated that at some instances the differences between cut-off marks between states and within states for specific courses range widely in Nigeria's admission exercise that candidates from some Northern parts gain entry into specific course with a much lower score than their counterparts from Southern regions for same course and this fact has raised arguments about fair treatment and the politicization of opportunities available to citizens of Nigeria. However those in support of quota system argue that such disparity between regions is still relevant and has not been entirely overcome.

From the inception of JAMB to the present day, Southwestern universities have consistently remained the most preferred institutions among Nigerian students (JAMB, 2022). Universities such

as University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, Obafemi Awolowo University, University of Ilorin (though in North central Nigeria), and recently Lagos state University have built reputations for academic excellence, stable academic calendars, quality infrastructure, and strong graduate employability. These universities attract candidates from all geopolitical zones regardless of ethnic, regional or whatever background. According to JAMB annual admission reports, universities located in Southwestern Nigeria consistently rank among the most sought-after first-choice institutions in the country (JAMB, 2022; 2025). The preference for Southwestern universities is also influenced by urbanization, economic opportunities, better security conditions, industrial linkages, and international recognition associated with universities located in the Southwestern region.

The increasing preference for Southwestern universities has intensified competition for admission and further exposed the politics surrounding regional allocation of educational opportunities in Nigeria. Highly competitive institutions such as the University of Lagos, Lagos State University, Obafemi Awolowo University, and the University of Ibadan among other soften require exceptionally high UTME scores and post-UTME performance for admission into courses like Medicine, Pharmacy, Law, Engineering, and Mass Communication, Accounting etc. Consequently, many candidates from Southern states argue that the quota and catchment policies unfairly limit their chances despite superior academic performance compared to their northern counterparts (Adebayo, 2019). Conversely, the political figures and stakeholders of the educationally disadvantaged regions still stand to have regional balancing in admissions for national inclusiveness and participation in the higher education system of Nigeria.

Hence, the JAMB admission process has transformed from an educational phenomenon into an important political tool reflecting the problem of Nigeria in National unity, federalism and resource distribution. It is noteworthy that close to a decade ago, JAMB initiated various reforms to enhance equity and curb examination malpractice, including computer based testing which has commenced fully since 2015 after being initiated in 2013 and pilot tested in 2014(theable.ng, 2015), Central Admission Processing System (CAPS) and biometric verification. Even with all these technological advancements, issues surrounding regional inequality, quota allocation and admissions equality have remained unresolved(Okojie, 2021), and have demonstrated that the admission processes to universities in

Nigeria is indeed political as well as an educational venture, the argument which stands to inform this paper on historically appraising the JAMB admission process in the Nigerian Universities considering the politics of zones and regions and factors that accounts for the choice of Southwestern Universities by Nigerian students over the years as well as their consequences.

Statement of the Problem

The establishment of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in 1978 was with the intention of ensuring fairness, standardization, and equal access to universities and higher education opportunities in Nigeria. Nevertheless, despite several reforms introduced over the years like transition from PBT to CBT, CAPS, Biometric, etc., the admission process into Nigerian universities continues to generate controversies relating to regional imbalance, quota allocation, ethnic, religious, catchment policies, and unequal admission opportunities among candidates from different geopolitical regions and or zones. The adoption of the quota system and the Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) policy, aimed at reducing educational disparities across regions has had some stakeholders arguing that these policies have weakened and are weakening meritocracy and creating perceptions of injustice in university admissions (Okeke, 2012). Candidates from educationally advanced regions, especially the South-West and South-East, often complain of bias and imbalance as they are being required to obtain significantly higher scores for admission into competitive courses than candidates from some other regions, particularly the north, thereby raising questions about equity and national integration in the admission process.

Also, another foremost difficulty, associated with the JAMB admission process is the persistent regional preference for universities located in Southwestern Nigeria. Due to the perceived academic quality of these universities (University of Lagos, University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, etc.), stable academic calendars, existing infrastructures and their subsequent employment prospects (JAMB, 2022) they have, by and large, continue to record the highest number of applicants. It is because of the increased appeal and quest for these schools that there has been increased rivalry for admission into them, thereby putting extra pressure on existing spaces available in such universities. The result has been numerous qualified candidates who are unable to get into schools in this region annually, and also some schools in other regions with few numbers of applicants and students, which again, have further exacerbated the discourse on inequality across

Nigerian regions and inequality in development. Previous researches in Nigeria have delved into issues surrounding the university admissions system, quota system and educational inequality, but little focus has been paid to the history of JAMB admissions in relation to the politics of zones and regions right from its inception till date. The works published on educational inequality have mainly revolved around discussions of policy issues rather than detailed historical accounts on the role of politics, federal character and regional disparity in university admissions patterns and institutional preferences, among students, and among schools (Suberu, 2001). Hence, a historical analysis is warranted to show how JAMB admissions into Nigeria's higher institutions, from their beginnings, to date, has been shaped by the politics of zones and regions, as well as what factors contribute to the current preference of students in Nigeria for schools in the Southwestern region of Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the historical assessment of jamb admission process in Nigerian universities: stakeholders' perceptions on the politics of zones and regions. The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the historical development of the JAMB admission process in Nigerian universities from inception till date;
2. investigate the influence of regional and zonal politics on university admissions in Nigeria;
3. assess the effects of quota system, catchment area policy, and Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) policy on university admissions;
4. examine the factors responsible for students' preference for Southwestern universities in Nigeria;
5. investigate the implications of regional admission policies on equity, meritocracy, and national integration in Nigerian universities; and
6. evaluate the reforms and challenges associated with the JAMB admission process in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the historical development of the JAMB admission process in Nigerian universities from inception till date?
2. In Nigeria, how do regional and zonal politics affect the admission to the university?
3. What is the impact of quota system, catchment area policy and ELDS policy on university admission??

4. What factors are responsible for students' preferences for Southwestern universities in Nigeria?

5. What are the implications of regional admission policies on equity, meritocracy, and national integration in Nigerian universities?
6. What reforms and challenges are associated with the JAMB admission process in Nigeria?

II. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a historical research design to examine the evolution of the JAMB admission process in Nigerian universities with emphasis on zones, regions, and preference for Southwestern universities. The population comprised JAMB records, government documents, university admission statistics, policy papers, and relevant stakeholders, while purposive sampling was used to

select key documents and participants, including JAMB officials, admission officers, and education experts. Data were collected through researcher designed questionnaire which was validated via measurement and evaluation experts at the department of social sciences education, faculty of education, university of Ilorin, Nigeria. A reliability coefficient of 0.84 was established using Cronbach Alpha. The collected data were analyzed using mean and frequency counts for research questions and demographic characteristics respectively. A benchmark of 2.50 was considered valid while any mean scores less than that were seen as not meeting the set standard.

III. RESULTS

Table1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Level	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Gender	Male	281	41.8%
	Female	391	58.2%
	Total	672	100.0%
Category	Jamb officials/Lecturers/Parents/etc	344	51.2%
	Students	328	48.8%
	Total	672	100.0%
Qualification	OND	144	21.4%
	NCE	81	12.1%
	B.A/B.A(Ed)/B.Sc/B.Eng,etc	124	18.5%
	HND	104	15.5%
	M.A/M.Ed/MSc, etc	112	16.6%
	PhD	107	15.9%
	Total	672	100.0%
State	AkwaIbom	102	15.2%
	Ebonyi	111	16.5%
	Kebbi	97	14.4%
	Kwara	141	21.0%
	Oyo	107	15.9%
	Taraba	114	17.0%
	Total	672	100.0%

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 672 respondents involved in the study. The results indicate that female respondents constituted the majority with 391 (58.2%), while male respondents accounted for 281 (41.8%). Regarding respondents' categories, 344 (51.2%) were JAMB officials, lecturers, parents, and other stakeholders, whereas 328 (48.8%) were students, showing a fairly balanced representation of both groups. In terms of educational qualifications, respondents with OND qualifications were the largest group, comprising 144 (21.4%), followed by those with B.A/B.A(Ed)/B.Sc/B.Eng and related degrees with 124(18.5%), M.A/M.Ed/MSc holders

with 112(16.6%), PhD holders with 107(15.9%), HND holders with 104 (15.5%), and NCE holders with 81 (12.1%). Concerning state distribution, respondents from Kwara State had the highest representation with 141 (21.0%), followed by Taraba State with 114 (17.0%), Ebonyi State with 111 (16.5%), Oyo State with 107 (15.9%), Akwa Ibom State with 102 (15.2%), and Kebbi State with 97 (14.4%). Overall, the demographic data reveal a diverse sample in terms of gender, respondent category, educational qualification, and geographical distribution across the six selected states.

Table 2: Historical development of JAMB admission process from 1978-2026

S/N	Items	Mean
1	JAMB was established in 1978 to centralize and coordinate admissions into Nigerian universities	3.17
2	Before the establishment of JAMB, universities conducted separate admission examinations	2.87
3	The introduction of UTME standardized university entrance examinations in Nigeria	3.21
4	JAMB introduced CBT to reduce examination malpractice and improve efficiency	3.88
5	The CAPS system improved transparency in university admissions	2.43
6	JAMB admission policies have evolved to include merit, catchment area, and ELDS considerations	3.51

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE JAMB ADMISSION PROCESS

THEME	INDICATORS (ITEMS)	S/N	MEAN
 1. ESTABLISHMENT AND CENTRALIZATION OF ADMISSIONS	1. JAMB was established in 1978 to centralize and coordinate admissions into Nigerian universities	1	3.17
	2. Before the establishment of JAMB, universities conducted separate admission examinations	2	2.87
 2. STANDARDIZATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL REFORMS	3. The introduction of UTME standardized university entrance examinations in Nigeria	3	3.21
	4. JAMB introduced CBT to reduce examination malpractice and improve efficiency	4	3.88
	5. The CAPS system improved transparency in university admissions	5	2.43
 3. EVOLUTION OF ADMISSION POLICIES	6. JAMB admission policies have evolved to include merit, catchment area, and ELDS considerations	6	3.51

THEMATIC INTERPRETATION

1 ESTABLISHMENT AND CENTRALIZATION OF ADMISSIONS Respondents recognized the establishment of JAMB in 1978 as a major reform aimed at centralizing and coordinating university admissions in Nigeria. They also acknowledged that before JAMB, universities conducted separate admission examinations, which often led to multiple admissions and lack of uniformity.	2 STANDARDIZATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL REFORMS Respondents acknowledged the important role of UTME, CBT, and CAPS in modernizing the admission process. CBT received the highest level of agreement, indicating strong recognition of its effectiveness in reducing examination malpractice and improving efficiency. UTME was also seen as a major step toward standardizing entrance examinations.	3 EVOLUTION OF ADMISSION POLICIES Respondents agreed that JAMB admission policies have evolved to incorporate merit, catchment area, and ELDS considerations. This indicates recognition of efforts to promote equity and inclusion in admission opportunities across different regions and educationally disadvantaged states.
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*Note: Mean scores are on a 4-point Likert scale. Decision Benchmark: 2.50
(Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agreement/Valid; Mean < 2.50 = Disagreement/Not Valid)*

It was also evident from Table 2 that generally respondents believed that JAMB admission process has been greatly transformed with the advent of Computer Based Testing, receiving the highest mean score (M = 3.88), while changes in the admission policies to take care of merit, catchment area and ELDS has a mean score of 3.51. Respondents also believed that the UTME was introduced to give uniformity to university admission process with a mean score of 3.21 while JAMB was introduced in 1978 to centralize

admission with a mean score of 3.17 and university conducted separate admission examinations before introduction of JAMB with a mean score of 2.87, while the lowest mean score was recorded for CAPS (M = 2.43). This was attributed to a general moderate agreement with CAPS' role in the improvement of JAMB admission processes. Hence, the results indicates that respondents have agreed with the historical development of JAMB admission processes.

Table 3: How regional and zonal politics influence university admissions in Nigeria

S/N	Items	Mean
1	Regional politics influence the allocation of admission slots among states and zones	3.11
2	Candidates from some regions benefit from lower admission cut-off marks	3.79
3	The Federal Character Principle affects admission decisions in federal universities	3.16

4	Political pressure from regional stakeholders influences admission policies	3.13
5	Catchment area policies favor candidates from neighboring states	3.01
6	Regional considerations create perceptions of in equality in admissions	2.93

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF HOW REGIONAL AND ZONAL POLITICS INFLUENCE UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS IN NIGERIA

THEME	INDICATORS (ITEMS)	S/N	MEAN
 1. REGIONAL POLITICS AND ALLOCATION OF ADMISSION OPPORTUNITIES	1. Regional politics influence the allocation of admission slots among states and zones	1	3.11
	2. Candidates from some regions benefit from lower admission cut-off marks	2	3.79
 2. POLICY FRAMEWORK AND FEDERAL CHARACTER CONSIDERATIONS	3. The Federal Character Principle affects admission decisions in federal universities	3	3.16
	4. Political pressure from regional stakeholders influences admission policies	4	3.13
 3. CATCHMENT AREA POLICIES AND REGIONAL ADVANTAGE	5. Catchment area policies favor candidates from neighboring states	5	3.01
 4. PERCEPTIONS OF INEQUALITY AND UNFAIRNESS	6. Regional considerations create perceptions of inequality in admissions	6	2.93

THEMATIC INTERPRETATION

1 REGIONAL POLITICS AND ALLOCATION OF ADMISSION OPPORTUNITIES Respondents agreed that regional politics influence how admission slots are allocated among states and zones, and that candidates from some regions enjoy lower cut-off marks. This indicates that political considerations play a major role in shaping admission opportunities beyond academic performance.	2 POLICY FRAMEWORK AND FEDERAL CHARACTER CONSIDERATIONS Respondents acknowledged that the Federal Character Principle and political pressure from regional stakeholders significantly affect admission decisions in federal universities. This shows that national policies aimed at inclusiveness continue to shape admission outcomes.	3 CATCHMENT AREA POLICIES AND REGIONAL ADVANTAGE Respondents agreed that catchment area policies give admission advantages to candidates from neighboring states. This suggests that geographic proximity remains an important determinant in university admission decisions.	4 PERCEPTIONS OF INEQUALITY AND UNFAIRNESS Respondents indicated that regional considerations create perceptions of inequality in admissions. This reflects the public concern that admission practices may not always be seen as fair or merit-based.
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Note: Mean scores are on a 4-point Likert scale. Decision Benchmark: 2.50
(Mean ≥ 2.50 = Agreement/Valid; Mean < 2.50 = Disagreement/Not Valid)

Research Question 2, where the perception that politics of regions and zones influence Nigerian university admissions is tested for, respondents generally agreed. The highest mean score of 3.79 was the belief that the marks expected for candidates from some regions are cut lower, indicating a strong consensus on this matter. They further agreed that Federal Character Policy is applied to admissions in Nigerian federal universities, political pressure from regional actors influences admissions policy in universities, as well

as regional politics playing a role in admission allocation to states and zones, all with mean scores of 3.16, 3.13 and 3.11, respectively. Similarly, they agreed that catchment areas promote the cause of nearby states' candidates (M=3.01) while the statement that regional politics makes admission policy inequitable had the lowest mean score (M=2.93). In general, though, respondents view that regional and zonal politics influences admission into Nigerian universities.

Table 4: Effects of quota system, catchment area policy, and ELDS policy on university admissions?

S/N	Items	Mean
1	Quota system promotes access to higher education for disadvantaged regions	2.44
2	Catchment area policy gives admission advantage to neighboring states	2.63
3	ELDS policy increases educational opportunities for less developed states	2.67
4	All the admission policies promote national unity and regional inclusion	2.58
5	The quota system undermines meritocracy in admissions.	3.24
6	Differences in cut-off marks across states generate public criticism	3.31

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF QUOTA SYSTEM, CATCHMENT AREA POLICY, AND ELDS POLICY ON UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS

THEME	INDICATORS (ITEMS)	S/N	MEAN
 1. INCLUSION AND ACCESS FOR DISADVANTAGED REGIONS	1. Quota system promotes access to higher education for disadvantaged regions	1	2.44
	2. Catchment area policy gives admission advantage to neighboring states	2	2.63
	3. ELDS policy increases educational opportunities for less developed states	3	2.67
 2. NATIONAL UNITY AND REGIONAL INCLUSION	4. All the admission policies promote national unity and regional inclusion	4	2.58
 3. CONCERNS ABOUT MERIT AND FAIRNESS	5. The quota system undermines meritocracy in admissions.	5	3.24
 4. PUBLIC CRITICISM AND PERCEPTIONS OF INEQUALITY	6. Differences in cut-off marks across states generate public criticism	6	3.31

THEMATIC INTERPRETATION

1 INCLUSION AND ACCESS FOR DISADVANTAGED REGIONS Respondents moderately agreed that quota, catchment area, and ELDS policies enhance access to higher education for disadvantaged and less developed regions by giving admission advantages and increasing opportunities.	2 NATIONAL UNITY AND REGIONAL INCLUSION Respondents moderately agreed that these admission policies contribute to national unity and regional inclusion by ensuring representation of all regions in higher education institutions.	3 CONCERNS ABOUT MERIT AND FAIRNESS Respondents agreed that the quota system undermines meritocracy, indicating concern that these policies may compromise merit-based admission and fairness in the selection process.	4 PUBLIC CRITICISM AND PERCEPTIONS OF INEQUALITY Respondents agreed that differences in cut-off marks across states generate public criticism, reflecting widespread perceptions of inequality and unfairness in university admissions.
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Note: Mean scores are on a 4-point Likert scale. Decision Benchmark: 2.50
(Mean $\geq$ 2.50 = Agreement/Valid; Mean < 2.50 = Disagreement/Not Valid)

Table 4 shows findings from research question 3, which indicate mixed perceptions regarding the effects of the quota system, catchment area policy, and Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) policy on university admissions. Respondents moderately agreed that differences in cut-off marks across states generate public criticism (Mean = 3.31) and that the quota system undermines meritocracy in admissions (Mean = 3.24), making these the highest-rated effects. They also expressed moderate agreement that ELDS policy increases educational opportunities for less developed states

(Mean = 2.67), catchment area policy gives admission advantages to neighboring states (Mean = 2.63), and that these policies promote national unity and regional inclusion (Mean = 2.58). The lowest mean score was recorded for the view that the quota system promotes access to higher education for disadvantaged regions (Mean = 2.44). By and large, this finding suggests that, while respondents recognize the inclusionary benefits of these policies, they are more concerned about their perceived impact on merit and fairness in university admissions.

Research Question 4: What factors are responsible for students' preference for Southwestern universities in Nigeria?

S/N	Items	Mean
1	Southwestern universities are perceived to provide more quality education	3.34
2	Stable academic calendars attract students to Southwestern universities	3.11
3	Better infrastructure attract students preference for Southwestern universities	2.61
4	Southwestern universities enjoy strong national reputations	2.76
5	Employment opportunities in Southwestern states attract students	3.03
6	Graduate employability influences students' choice of Southwestern universities	2.81

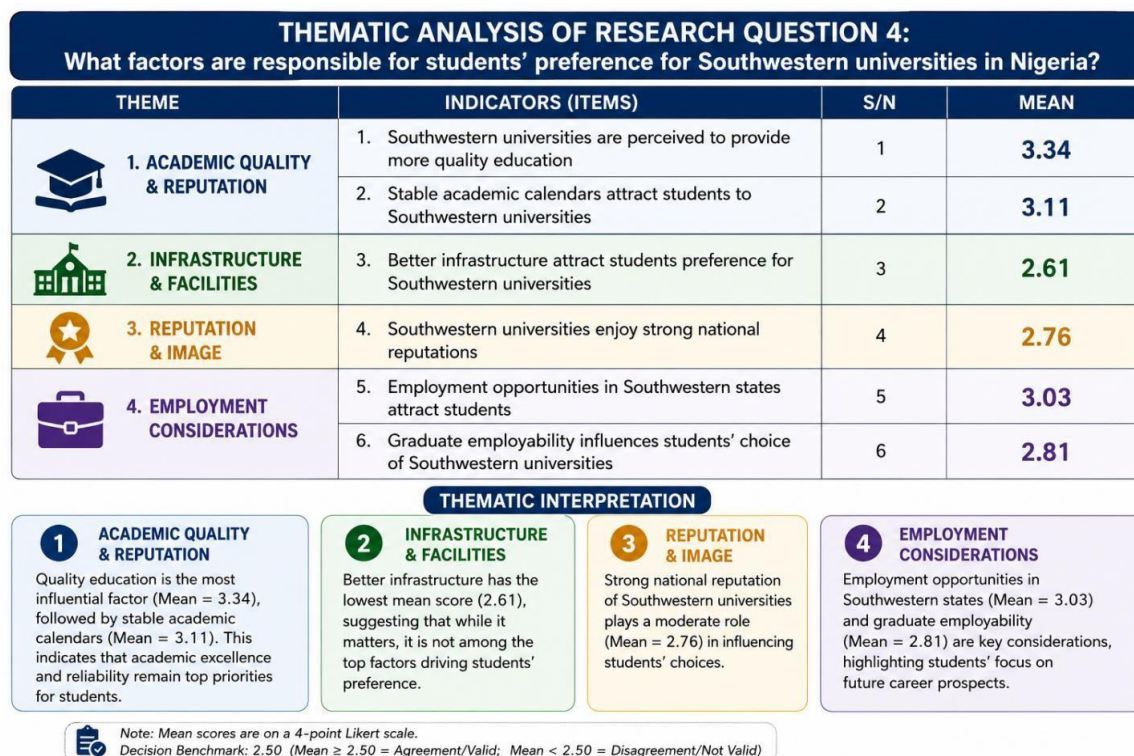


Table 6 shows the findings of research question 4, which revealed that respondents generally agreed that several factors contribute to students' preference for Southwestern universities in Nigeria. The perception that Southwestern universities provide higher quality education received the highest mean score (Mean = 3.34), followed by the attraction of stable academic calendars (Mean = 3.11) and better employment opportunities in Southwestern states (Mean = 3.03). Respondents

also agreed that strong national reputations (Mean = 2.76) and graduate employability prospects (Mean=2.81) influence students' choices. Better infrastructure recorded the lowest mean score (Mean = 2.61), although it was still considered a contributing factor. By implication, the results revealed that, perceived educational quality, academic stability, and employment prospects are the major factors driving students' preference for Southwestern universities.

Table 6: The implications of regional admission policies on equity, meritocracy, and national integration in Nigerian universities?

S/N	Items	Mean
1	Regional admission policies promote representation of all regions in universities	2.41
2	The policies help reduce educational imbalance among regions	2.39
3	Differences in admission requirements weaken meritocracy	3.08
4	Admission in equality creates dissatisfaction among candidates	3.12
5	Regional policies strengthen national integration	2.47
6	Admission disparities contribute to ethnic and regional tensions	2.51

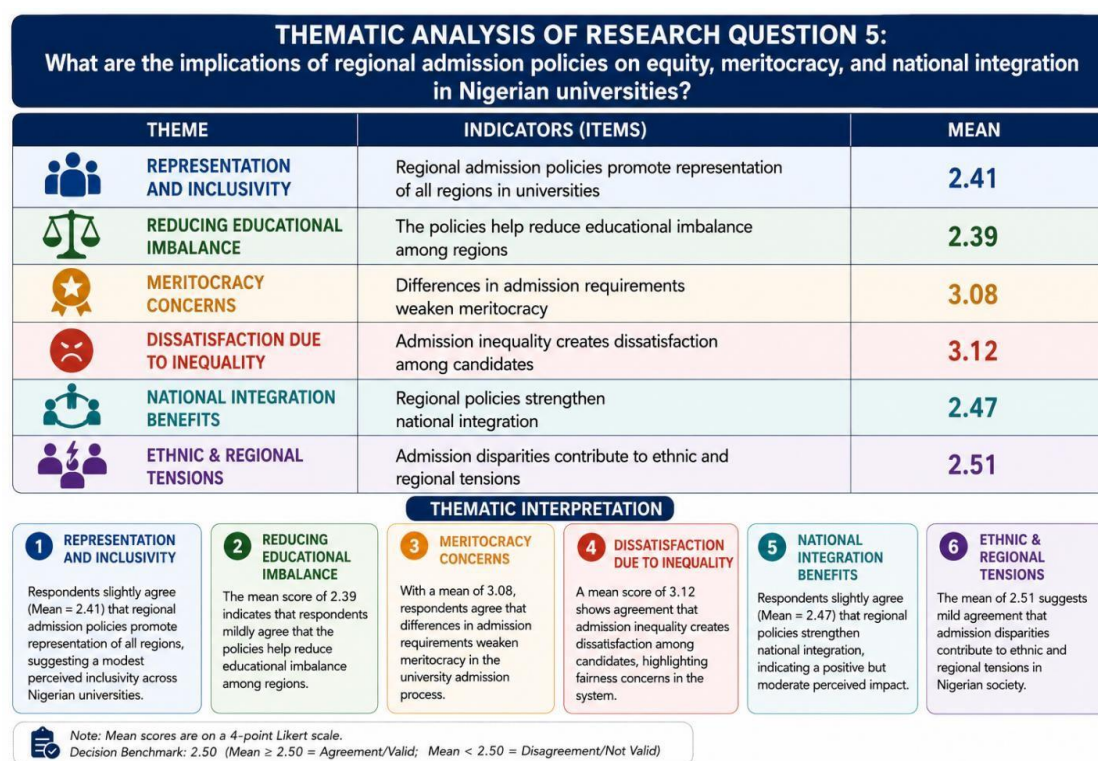


Table 6 contained the findings for research question 5, indicating that respondents perceived both positive and negative implications of regional admission policies on equity, meritocracy, and national integration in Nigerian universities. The highest mean scores were recorded for the views that admission inequality creates dissatisfaction among candidates (Mean = 3.12) and that differences in admission requirements weaken meritocracy (Mean = 3.08), suggesting greater concern about fairness in the admission process. Respondents showed lower agreement that regional

admission policies promote representation of all regions in universities (Mean = 2.41), help reduce educational imbalance among regions (Mean = 2.39), and strengthen national integration (Mean = 2.47). They also moderately agreed that admission disparities contribute to ethnic and regional tensions (Mean = 2.51). Accordingly, the results suggest that respondents are more inclined to view regional admission policies as posing challenges to meritocracy and equity than as effective tools for promoting balanced representation and national integration.

Table 7:Reforms and challenges are associated with the JAMB admission process in Nigeria?

S/N	Items	Mean
1	The introduction of CBT has reduced examinationmal practice	3.04
2	CAPS has improved transparency in university admissions	2.86
3	Technical problems remain a challenge during CBT examinations	2.94
4	Limited admission spaces prevent many candidates from gaining admission	3.00
5	Allegations of favoritism affect public confidence in the system	2.68
6	Poor infrastructure hinders smooth admission operations in some areas	2.63

Table 7 findings for research question 6 indicate that respondents recognized both reforms and challenges associated with the JAMB admission process in Nigeria. The highest mean score was recorded for the view that the introduction of Computer-Based Testing (CBT) has reduced examination malpractice (Mean = 3.04), followed closely by the concern that limited admission

spaces prevent many candidates from gaining admission (Mean=3.00). Respondents also agreed that technical problems remain a challenge during CBT examinations (Mean = 2.94) and that the Central Admission Processing System(CAPS) has improved transparency in admissions (Mean = 2.86). There were however lower means in the allegations of favoring certain people in admission

of candidates into universities causing doubt about the credibility of the system (Mean = 2.68) and in the poor infrastructure in certain regions of the system that inhibits the speedy admission processes (Mean = 2.63). In summary, the reforms introduced into the admission process by CBT and CAPS have influenced the admission process positively but in admission spaces, technicalities and infrastructure-related issue still remains.

IV. DISCUSSION

This study examined the historical evolution of the JAMB admission system and its impact on university admissions in Nigeria. The respondents agreed to the significant transformation of the admission system since its inception in 1978. The high score in the impact of CBT on the admission process and its standardization on the Nigerian universities admission through UTME points to the fact that the admission process has successfully transformed over the years in a way that is centralized and technology-oriented, consistent with JAMB's claims on the introduction of CBT and CAPS, meant to ensure efficiency and reduce examination malpractice in admissions; in line with Abubakar and Adebayo (2014) who also noted that the CBT was introduced to reduce examination malpractices and ensure the reliability of the university admission system in Nigeria. A lower score in the rating on CAPS suggests either low awareness about the CAPS system, the policy's effectiveness has not gained acceptance among majority or some may not be convinced on its positive impacts as projected by the JAMB.

The respondents further indicated that zoning, political influence in admissions in specific regions still remain relevant in university admissions in Nigeria with candidates from regions enjoying lower cut-off marks; and catchment areas and Federal Character policy still having a lot of influence on admissions. This finding aligns with Omeje et al (2016) where they stated that quota, catchment area policy greatly influence university admission and are implemented for educational equality across the nation. This finding also correlates with current policies that have indicated the dominance of merit based admission, catchment area and ELDS policies as important factors governing the nature of access to university education in Nigeria.

Regarding the impact of quota, catchment areas, and ELDS policies, the respondents expressed a varied range of view although they all admitted its benefits in providing access and inclusiveness to all regions. The respondents generally have more concerns on the impacts these policies has on merit and fairness. This finding agrees with Atte and Imam (2024) that reported that quota and

catchment area policies were introduced to improve equality of education among candidates but there are still stakeholders with doubts on the fairness of the admission process and a more concrete response can only be seen when stakeholders accept the benefits the policy provides to all the less privilege states and ensure that it is only used to facilitate admission. Olaniyan (2025) however stated that current university quota admission framework balances between equal access and equal opportunities but tends to ignite controversies on fairness, discrimination and exclusion of meritorious candidate. The relatively low score on criticism over cut off points among states suggests public interest in the integrity of the admission process and its overall credibility.

The respondents also attributed students' admission into South Western institutions to some extent to their quality of education, consistency in academic session, and perceived higher job opportunities and relevance in education in those institutions, coupled with its credibility. This is largely consistent with what students always prefer, where institution with consistent session and better labor market has more appeal to students than those with incessant strike actions. The constant strike actions by Lecturers in most public universities has been discovered to have an impact on institution preference and mobility choices of the students within the nation.

Again, it was discovered that the policies on quota, catchment areas and ELDS has both positive and negative impacts on equity and meritocracy, and national integration; with greater public concern on the latter. This reiterates Olaniyan's (2025) that Nigeria's admission quota system faces continuous tension between inclusiveness and meritocracy and Omeje et al (2016) who identified the existence of conflicting opinions among stakeholders with regards the policies which he argues has been introduced to improve fairness and equal opportunities among candidates.

Lastly, the study identified both the positive impacts of reform measures and challenges that face the JAMB admission process, with respondents agreeing that CBT has reduce exam malpractices and CAPS improve transparency of admission, aligning with JAMB's claim and that of Abubakar and Adebayo (2014), that the technology based admission processes improved accountability, efficiency, and exam credibility and reduces the chances of exam malpractices, while they noted the negative impact of poor infrastructure, admission capacity limits and favoring certain individuals that influence the admission processes; this has also been the observation of other researcher(s) in prior studies regarding poor ICT infrastructure, network and electricity supply and increasing admission spaces

and number of candidates. In general, the admission processes in Nigeria has significantly been improved but still requires constant amelioration.

V. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that, since 1978 to date, the JAMB admission processes in Nigeria have undergone tremendous changes, resulting in more standardization, efficiency and improved transparency in the admission of candidates into Nigerian universities. Regional and Zonal politics along with catchment area policy, ELDS provisions and quota admission framework still have great influence on admission policies in Nigeria. Though these policies provide more representation to states and are considered beneficial for equality of educational opportunities among Nigerians but they are yet to reduce the complaints and doubts on issues that has to do with inequality in university admissions across different regions of the country and in most states students have the preference of admission into Southern Western universities based on perceived high educational standard, and continuous academic sessions, good jobs prospect and institutional image. Despite the advancement achieved by the introduction of CBT and CAPS to improve the admission system, challenges on infrastructure facilities, technical failures and admission space remain a burden for more successful admission system in Nigeria. Hence achieving balance between merit, equality and national integration has been a huge challenge to the Nigerian university admission process.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. JAMB and Federal Government should continue the practice of the admission processes based on merit, while keeping reasonable concession for disadvantaged regions in order to enhance equity and public confidence in the admission exercise.
2. The quota system, catchment area policy and the ELDS have to be periodically reviewed by Federal Government to ensure their continued equitable impact without much deviation from meritocracy.
3. Efforts at increasing investment in the quality and infrastructure of the system has to be done in all geopolitical zones but much more investment should be targeted at neglected regions and institutions so as to minimize the disparities that fuel the choice of certain universities.
4. Upgrading of the CBT infrastructure and technical support system has to continue by JAMB in order to reduce or eliminate disruptions during examinations and make for an optimal testing experience for candidates.
5. Continuous review and assessment of the admission policies should be done by the various

bodies involved in the admission exercise; JAMB, Federal Ministry of Education and NUC so as to be assured that the practices are indeed contributing positively to the ideals of merit, equity, national integration and educational development.

6. Efforts should be made by universities to achieve more stable academic calendar and increase employability of their graduates, as this have been some of the influencing factors in students' institutional choice.

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