

Quota System, Federal Character Principle and Admission to Federal Unity Schools: Barriers to Learning in Nigeria

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Abstract

While the quota system came into being prior to Nigeria's independence in 1960, the federal character principle became officially recognised in the 1979 constitution. These policies were aimed at addressing the issues of ethnic representation in the public sector. The implication of these was that issues of admission, recruitment, promotion and appointment became based on these principles. In other words, advancement in the country's public institutions, which ought to be the drivers of development, is neither based on merit nor competence. Where these principles have played out visibly is in the admission system into Federal Unity Schools. With the adoption and analysis of secondary data, the paper observes that the inclusion of the quota system and federal character principle in the educational sector creates a scenario of discrimination against Nigerians in their own country by virtue of their ethnic identification, which is contrary to the provisions of the constitution. This paper therefore recommends, among others that Nigeria needs a review of her educational policies and an extensive educational infrastructural development to accommodate its growing student population. It concludes that the quota system and federal character principle have been the major barriers to learning in Nigeria.

Keywords: quota system, federal character principle, federal unity schools, education, Nigeria

Introduction

The heterogeneous configuration of the Nigerian state has since inception generated series of issues that have continued to engage the government in tinkering ways of preserving the existence of the system. These issues have divided the country along ethnic, religious, majority-minority, advantaged-disadvantaged lines. Unfortunately, education has had its fair share in the struggles resulting in an educationally imbalanced society, where the south is educationally advantaged and the north is disadvantaged. In the light of this, the introduction of quota system and federal character principle in education became pivotal in extinguishing the already looming class conflict, as they were aimed at fostering national integration, sense of belonging and a wholesome development of the entire parts of the state.

Despite the immediate successes recorded by these policies in widening the opportunity of quality education to the educationally disadvantaged states, merit and competence is being sacrificed on the altar of the twin policies.