EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: A CASE OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA

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by

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DEDICATION

Thanks, glory and gratitude is due first to Allah (S.W.T) who has always provided me with the wisdom, strength and determination to carry on despite the obstacles. May peace, blessings and glorification of Allah be upon our noble prophet Muhammad (SAW), his companions and who ever follows in their footsteps till the day of resurrection, Amen.

I dedicate this dissertation to the one who provided me with the creative spark and to those precious to me. These were the people who have given me the inspiration to move beyond that spark. This thesis is the result of Allah's creative spark within me and my quest to bring something new and imaginative to the body of knowledge. I found the writing of the thesis to be a rewarding mission because I initially doubt my capability in undertaking such a task.

This research is in honour of my father Jibirin Salihu, my mother the late Hajia Aishatu, my stepmother Hajiya Fatima, and the late Hajiya Hauwa'u (may Allah reward the lates with His Jannatul Firdaus). Thank you to all of you for your untiring belief in my capabilities. I am eternally grateful for your encouragement, support and selfless sacrifices. You have actively supported me in my determination to find and realise my true potential, and make this contribution to our world.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASUU   Academic Staff Union of Universities

FCC   Federal Character Commission

FG   Federal Government

FGN   Federal Government of Nigeria

FME   Federal Ministry of Education

JAMB   Joint Admission and Matriculation Board

NCNE   National Commission for Nomadic Education

NOUN   National Open University of Nigeria

NUC   National Universities Commission

UMP   University Marticulation Program

UPE   Universal Primary Education

KESAMAAN PELUANG PENDIDIKAN DALAM CAPAIAN KEPADA PENDIDIKAN UNIVERSITI: KAJIAN KES TENTANG PELAKSANAAN POLISI DI NEGERI SOKOTO, NIGERIA

ABSTRAK

Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji pelaksanaan dasar ke arah kesamaan peluang pendidikan yang memberi tumpuan kepada konteks pendidikan tinggi di Sokoto State, Nigeria, dengan perhatian khusus kepada isu capaian kepada pendidikan universiti. Selaras dengan matlamat utama ini, kajian ini melihat beberapa isu yang berkaitan dengan pelaksanaan dasar ke arah capaian kepada pendidikan universiti. Ini termasuk pandangan para pembuat dan pelaksana dasar terhadap dasar kemasukan universiti yang sedia ada, keadaan amalan pelaksanaan dasar dalam menangani isu ini, pandangan tentang amalan polisi lain, cadangan untuk perubahan atau penambahbaikan kepada dasar sedia ada dan pelaksanaan dasar berkaitan capaian kepada pendidikan universiti. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang mendalam tentang isu yang dikaji dengan menggunakan temubual separa berstruktur dan analisis dokumen dasar sebagai cara untuk mendapatkan data dan maklumat yang berkaitan kajian ini. Para peserta kajian telah dipilih secara bertujuan terdiri daripada beberapa individu dari organisasi yang bertanggungjawab dalam proses pembangunan dan pelaksanaan dasar-dasar dalam sistem pendidikan tinggi Nigeria. Dapatan utama kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa pelaksanaan dasar dalam menangani permasalahan tentang kesamaan peluang capaian kepada pendidikan universiti bertujuan merapatkan jurang antara wilayah-wilayah utama (selatan dan utara) di negara ini. Walaupun terdapat dasar yang memastikan kuota bagi negeri-negeri yang dianggap terbelakang dalam pembangunan pendidikan, masih wujud jurang yang besar antara wilayah selatan dan utara negara ini berkaitan peluang dalam capaian kepada pendidikan universiti. Kajian ini juga telah mengenal

pasti beberapa masalah dan cabaran dalam pelaksanaan dasar, termasuk kegagalan beberapa negeri untuk mengisi kuota yang diperuntukkan kerana kekurangan calon yang layak, dan juga keadaan di mana beberapa negeri lain yang menyediakan calon yang layak mengatasi kuota diperuntukkan kepada mereka. Beberapa inisiatif telah diambil pada peringkat pelaksanaan polisi untuk menangani masalah ini termasuklah memperkenalkan Program Matrikulasi Universiti sebagai laluan alternatif untuk meningkatkan peluang capaian kepada pendidikan universiti.

EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN SOKOTO STATE, NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

The overarching aim of the study is to investigate the policy implementation towards the equality of educational opportunity which focuses on the context of higher education in Sokoto State, Nigeria, with specific attention to the issue of access to university education. In line with this principal aim, this study looks into several issues in relation to policy implementation towards access to university. These include the policymakers and policy implementers' views on the existing university admission policy, the state of practice of the policy implementation in addressing the issue, the views on other policy practice and the recommendations for changes or improvement on the existing policy as well as its implementation on access to university education. The study adopted qualitative approach to gain insightful understanding on the issue of the study employing a semi-structure interview and policy documents as the means for obtaining the data and other relevant information for the study. The participants of the study were purposively chosen which comprise of a number of individuals from related organisation which responsible for the policies development and implementation of Nigerian higher education system. The major finding of the study indicate that the policy implementation in addressing the problem of equal opportunity to access to the university education was intended to bridge the gap between the two main regions (southern and northern) of the country. Despite the policy granted the quota for the states which considered being educationally less developed, there still exists a huge gap between the southern and the northern region of the country in relation to the opportunities in access to the university education. The study has also identified a number of problems and challenges in the implementation of the policy,

including the failure of some states to fill the allocated quota granted due to the lack of qualified candidates, as well as the situation where some other states produced multiple qualified candidates beyond their allocated quota. Several initiatives have been taken in the policy implementation stage to address this problem including the introduction of the University Matriculation Program as an alternative route for enhancing opportunity to access to the university education.

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

> Nigeria's philosophy of education, therefore, is based on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, both inside and outside the formal school system.
>
> The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981, p. 7)

1.0   Introduction

Education has been universally acknowledged as a potent and dynamic instrument for national development and social transformation. It is an important instrument for the development of the individuals and the society as it is a weapon against poverty, illiteracy, and disease (Wolfensohn, 1999). Education according to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2003) is a fundamental human right and the key factor to promoting sustainable development. Similarly, Erese (1983) sees education as "a birth right and not a privilege of every citizen of any country". The right to education according to Demeuse, et al, (2001); Chandrappa, (2014); Kumar, (2004); Tomasevski (2003), among others, implies that everyone has the right to education; it shall therefore be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory; technical and professional education shall be made generally available; higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit; and parents should have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be provided to their children. By this, governments are obligated to make education available, accessible, acceptable, equitable and adaptable (Imam, 2012). Education in general and higher education in particular, are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations (World Bank, 1999). In his own words, Tierney (2006) says, "Higher education is no

longer just the most direct route to a middle-class life; it has become essentially the only route" (p. 8).

Higher education has been recognized as a fundamental instrument for the construction of a knowledge economy and the development of human capital all over the world (World Bank, 1999). According to Peretomode (2007), higher education is the facilitator, the bed rock, the power house and the driving force for the strong socio-economic, political, cultural, healthier and industrial development of a nation. This is because higher education institutions are key mechanisms increasingly recognized as wealth and human capital producing industries which only human capital can sustain growth most especially in developing countries (Kors, 2008). Besides, it is fundamental to all developing countries if they are to prosper in a world economy where knowledge has become a vital area of advantage (World, 2004).

The quality of knowledge which is generated in institutions of higher learning is critical to national competitiveness. Basically it is only higher education that can sharpen the minds of the individuals and help transform the society economically, socially and politically (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Similarly, Amandi (2010) emphasises that countries can only achieve sustainable development by improving through training in higher level, and acquisition of the skills of their human capital. Fundamentally, higher level manpower training has been recognised as a primary tool for national development, and such high level educational provision enables the citizens to acquire skills and techniques which are ploughed into human productivity, creativity, competence, initiative, innovation and inventiveness (Ehiametalor, 1988).

However, this higher educational opportunity needs to be made available to individuals who wish to pursue it, while the government should make its access equitable. In this regard, the 1981 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

guarantees equality and equity for all citizens. However, the educational gap between Northern and Southern Nigeria is a consequence of the trace of educational inequality in Nigeria, which began since the inception of Western education in the country (Okoli, 2007; Umukoro, 2014). To address this problem, the Nigerian policy of access to higher education is aimed at equalization of educational opportunities to all citizens of the country. The policy aims at giving equal educational opportunities at the higher education level (Chimombo, 2005).

As concurred by Phillips (2005), the process of educational policy development begins with its guiding philosophy or ideology influencing the ambitions and goals of the education system. However, this access to higher education and the specific notion of widening participation is predicated on the awareness that particular groups are underrepresented in higher education. As the higher education system expands, the question of who benefits from the participation, and the consequent privileges it offers, becomes critical. As Watson suggests, 'the one absolutely iron law about widening participation is that if you want the system to be fairer it has to be allowed to expand' (Watson, 2005, p. 56.)

In practicing an equal opportunity of access to education for all people, Nigerian government finds it very important to ensure a policy on access to Higher Education (HE) to ensure that all students have equal access and opportunities within the system, presuming that individual competencies and desires to learn should be equally distributed throughout the society. Education will only be truly equal if all people can participate in educational programmes, which is accessible to all and which acknowledges and responds to the diversity of the student body in terms of access, progression and outcomes (Nkoane, 2006). This research therefore seeks to investigate the policy implementation towards equality of educational opportunities

in access to higher education in Sokoto State, Nigeria. Accordingly, public policy implementation consists of organized activities by the government directed towards the achievement of goals and objectives articulated in authorized policy statements (Durlar &Dupre, 2008).

1.1   Background of the Study

The need to investigate the implementation of equality of educational opportunities is now generally accepted as one of the tools of educational reforms (Biodun, 2000). Much of the development of education in the modern era has been brought about in the name of equality of educational opportunity. This slogan has been used to justify the expansion of accessibility, facilities and the expenditure in education in a very imaginable way (Flaming, 1974 cited in Imam, 2012). Despite the fact that the equality of educational opportunity argument is generally recognised as one of the main justifications to sustain public education, national unity and development, this concept is far from having a single definition (OECD, 2009). Its meaning has developed over the years, thanks to the contribution of distinguished philosophers, sociologists and economists such as Gupta and Verhoeven, (2001), Jung and Thorbecke, (2003) Grimm, (2005), Hanushek, (2009) who have given equality a sense of understanding within the debate of its perception. For this reason, it is common to refer to the different concepts when talking about it. Traditionally, it was understood as the absence of legal barriers in the full access to education, the equal distribution opportunities among societies within certain area (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, & Macpartland, 1966).

In the Nigerian context, it is recalled that the equal educational objective contained in the Constitution is of the philosophy to provide educational opportunities at all levels to all citizens (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1981).

Sequentially, as it is also indicated in the introduction that the higher educational gap between Northern and Southern Nigeria, as pointed out earlier, is a trace of educational inequality in Nigeria, and that is what gave rise to the idea of equality of educational opportunities in the country (Aderounmu, & Ehiametalor, 1985; Adeyemi, 2001). According to Kosemani (1995), the education disparities between northern and southern zones of Nigeria, which result in the policy on equality of educational opportunities, are evident in terms of universities, teaching and learning resources, as well as the participation of males and females in education. There are also disparities between urban and rural schools and between education institutions owned and controlled by the Federal Government and those owned and controlled by the states and private agencies (Okobia, 2002).

Another dimension to the principle of equality of educational opportunities in Nigeria higher education is the clear absence of uniform or equal facilities throughout the higher institutions in Nigeria. This leads the Northern States Chamber of Commerce and Industry in 2012 to organize a conference titled "State of Education in the North". The conference proceedings were concluded when they noted ridiculously that "there are fears that unless the Federal Government declares a state of emergency in education in the North, attempts to solve the imbalance will remain futile". One of the conference's reports exposes the figures of enrolment for polytechnics and universities between some states of the Nigerian federation. According to the report, for the polytechnics enrolment in 2010, Ogun state recorded 73,679 students; Oyo state received 46,695 students; Sokoto State recorded 7,894 students; Zamfara state recorded 5,573 students. Meanwhile in 2011, a total of only 65,916 students enrolled for polytechnics selection examination from six states in the North in contrast to 210,834 from six states in the south. As for the university

undergraduate enrolment, the gap between the North and South in total university enrolment was 284,351 and by 2012, the gap increased to 301,629 (Adeyemi, 2012).

1.2. The Research Focus

This section of this introductory Chapter will discuss the focus of the study, the policy on the research investigation and the development after this policy which is the policy on equality of educational opportunity on access to university education.

1.2.1. Focus of the Study

As indicated above in the background of this introductory chapter, the focus of this research is on the issue of equality of educational opportunity with specific attention on access to university education in Sokoto State, Nigeria. The research confines itself to the investigation of policy implementation on access to university education in the context of the study, which is referred to as university entry or admission policy whose aim is to ensure equality of educational opportunity. The research is aimed at investigating how the policy is being implemented as identified by the Constitution of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and the Federal Character Policy of equality of educational opportunity on access to university education in Nigeria.

1.2.2. The Policy

Before 1976, there was no specific education policy on equality of educational opportunities in access to higher education to address the existing inequalities in Nigeria (Adesina, 1988). As indicated in the background, before 1976, individual universities conducted their entrance examinations and admitted students into programmes. One of the greatest problems of that system was the promotion of the already existing inequalities, leading to a situation whereby admission was

dominated by few candidates, mostly from the other parts of the country thus displacing others who would have gotten the admission (O'Neil, 1984). To solve this problem, the Federal Government of Nigeria took an initial initiative stage by establishing the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in 1976 to conduct a central Universities Matriculation Examination (UME) in order to control and ensure equal distribution of the available vacancies in the existing universities (Nwana, 1981; Obioma & Salan, 2007; & JAMB, 2005)

The Federal Character Policy (FCC) 1996, in respect to access to university education, provides as follows:

1- Catchment areas policy mandates that a certain percentage of admission places must be reserved for the indigenous of the areas in which universities are located.

2- Backward factor policy ensures that a certain percentage of admission chances must be reserved for the indigenous of the States considered as being educationally disadvantaged or backward.

3- Quota system policy establishes that allocation of certain percentages of admission places into Nigerian Universities must be based on populations, ethnic considerations and States of Origin.

4- Discriminatory fees policy permits for lower fees to be paid by the indigenous of the localities where Universities are established.

On the interpretation, Catchment area also refers to the geographical context or factors of the area concerned according to the policy text, while Quota system and Backward factor denote the social factors of the area prompted by the policy. Likewise, Discriminatory fees policy states that low fees will be paid by certain

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categories of people. It is, therefore, grounded at economic factors of the people involved.

1.2.3. Development after Formation of the Policy

After the creation of the 1996's policy of equality of educational opportunity, and in response to the strong social demand of higher education and to fill up the huge existing inequalities in the country, the Federal Government has progressively taken every step to expand access. Among its more notable actions have been: Increasing the numbers of Federal Universities; expanding enrolments; constructing new students' residence halls, launching a scholarship programme for needy students by some of the states of the federation; approving the establishment of Private Universities; and the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). The latter two actions are particularly significant. They signal the steps towards the expansion and actualization of the policy goals of given equality of educational opportunity in access to university education (Adeyemi 2011; Moti 2010)

1.3 Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that policy implementation is one of the major problems confronting developing nations. The focus of this research is on Nigeria, which happens to be one of the developing nations. Stripped of all technicalities, implementation problem in most developing nations is a result of the problem of a widening gap between intentions and results (Honadle, 1979; Bruno, at el 1996, Chimombo, 2005; Zajda, 2005).

One of the major constrains of the implementation gap is the failure of the policymakers to take into consideration the social, political, economic and

administrative variables when dealing with policy formulation. This can be clearly seen in the case of Nigerian Policy on Education for it ineffectiveness and failure. Adesina (1977) confirms the non-effectiveness of this policy when he admits that the policy on education has failed to be effective as a result of defective planning process, political constraints, financial constraints and statistical deficiencies. In illustrating the case, he cited an example with Universal Basic Education policy of Nigeria of 1976 as well as that of 1999, both of which are yet to result in any significant development (Billingham, 2008; Olubadewo, 2006). It is however a paradox that most of these public policies only exist on paper and are never implemented to actualize their objectives. The trend of non-implementation of public policies is therefore in a very high degree in the country and virtually affects all levels of government, not only education (Ball, 1999; Clarke & Newman, 1997, reprinted 2005)

Raising the issues of equality of opportunity in education, both in law and fact, is a continuing challenge for all States for giving full effect to the fundamental principle of non-discrimination and equality of opportunity in education (Samuels & Galles, 2003; Hasnas, 2002). This requires not only the elimination of discriminatory practices, but the adoption of special promotional measures aimed at supporting all those who remain deprived of their right to education as a fundamental human right (Craissati, al et. 2007; Hasnas, 2002). The application of the principle of equality of opportunity in education calls for greater emphasis upon the fulfilment of State obligations. As the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century: "Learning: The Treasure Within" (UNESCO, 1996) states, "Education is a human right and an essential tool for

achieving the goals of equality, development and peace (UNESCO, 1996, p.13-14 and 118).

Despite the universal State's obligations to provide universal primary education and fair access to secondary and higher education through all appropriate means, education is not fully accessible for many people around the world. The promotion of equality of opportunity in education is of paramount importance for the full realization of the right to education, as attaining de facto equality of opportunity in education remains a permanent challenge for almost all countries in the world (Bellamy, 1999; Colclough, 2005; McCowan, 2010; UNICEF, 2009; Wilson, 2004). Understanding and removing obstacles that impede the universal enjoyment of the right to education are urgent challenges for the entire international community. Developing countries face particularly acute challenges with regard to great social and economic inequalities. Similarly developed countries also encounter challenges when attempting to ensure equal educational opportunities for all. Consequently, concerns relating to equality of opportunity in education are understood as relating both to guaranteeing equal opportunities in access to different levels of education as established by human rights norms as well as equal opportunities to evolve within education systems (Alston, 2005; UNICEF, 2009).

Challenges faced in achieving equality of opportunity in education have been described in reports submitted by nations including Nigeria regarding the implementation of the UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education, even in countries where educational opportunities are in general widely available; inequalities remain in the ability of all social groups to fully avail themselves of such opportunities. Social and cultural barriers and unequal opportunities manifested in

access to quality education remain one of the most serious difficulties of national educational policies (UNESCO, 2010; UNESCO, 2013).

Furthermore, inequalities in education have also been a persistent constraint on the EFA process. In 2009, the EFA Global Monitoring Reports stated that "Progress towards the EFA goals is being undermined by a failure of governments to tackle persistent inequalities" based on income, gender, location and ethnicity, language etc. (UNESCO, 2004, p.4, 7 and 29). In the subsequent year, the report indicated that "Governments are failing to address the root causes of marginalization in education" (UNESCO, 2012, p. 22) and showed how the mutually reinforcing layers of disadvantage create extreme and persistent deprivation that undermines equal opportunities in education (p.137). In all such circumstances, different types of barriers emerge as central factors for the limited enjoyment of the right to education of these various population groups. Understanding these different obstacles and their inter-relations is a permanent challenge for developing effective education policies to ensure non-discrimination and equal opportunities in education.

A statement of the Joint Expert Group UNESCO (CR) and ECOSOC (CESCR) on the Monitoring of the Right to Education (2008) highlights that in overcoming inequalities and eliminating disparities in education, emphasis should be placed on the inclusive dimensions of the right to education which does not admit of any discrimination or exclusion. The work of human rights treaty bodies over the last years has indicated areas of action at national and international levels to ensure equality of opportunity in education (United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, 2013). As described by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education in his Report on the Promotion of Equality of Opportunity in Education (April, 2011), equal opportunities in education on the basis of a human

rights framework can be promoted in a number of ways which include policy implementation, and that is what this research principally seeks to do.

Contextually, the educational access objective contained in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as earlier cited is aimed at "equal and adequate" educational opportunities to all citizens. However, despite the goal of equalizing the educational opportunity between the advantaged in the south and the disadvantaged in the north, the gap between the high demands of access to higher education continues to pose a serious problem, especially in the north. These disparities on equality of educational opportunities between Northern and Southern zones are evident in terms of university distribution, and enrolment rates (FCC, 1994; Okoli, 2007; Dada, 2004; Bakare, 2012)

Also, Okoara, (2003), Lane, (1999) and Makinde, (2005) posit that the county's state of economy has a direct influence on the policy implementation process. Even in developed nations, matters of higher education policy implementation problems have been the financial-related issues as indicated in "the western countries issues on higher education policy report". In Australia, the budget allocated by their universities is merely on recurrent expenditure; however, the budget does not provide additional funding to enable universities to implement new policies and programmes to improve access (Kaiser, et al., 2007). In Austria, Germany, Portugal and Sweden, the implementation of higher education policies has been directly linked to the poor funding, according to Kaiser et al. (2007).The state of funding higher education in Germany is quite in danger and per from achieving the desired goals of higher education policies. According to the report, this problem has persisted because the funding of education is predominantly a federal government matter neglecting their responsibilities and contributions. In many

developing countries, the intended results cannot be achieved due to the state of the countries' economic status. In reflection of this statement to Nigeria, it could be realised that Nigerian educational policies implementation is subject to the country's economic status.

According to Ehiemetalor (2010), Nigeria has the least number of Universities serving a large number population when compared to other countries. The observed inadequacy in the number of universities in Nigeria, coupled with the high demand for University education, has created the problems of access and equality of educational opportunities into the available universities and the sustenance of good standards (Okoroma, 2008). For example, India has a population of 1 billion people with 8,407 universities, USA with 290 million people with 5,758 universities, Argentina, 38.7 million people with 1,705 universities, Spain with 40.2 million people with 145 universities, Bangladesh with 138 million people with 1,341 universities, South Africa with 43.6 million people with 26 universities, Kenya with 41.7 people with 28 universities, Ghana 34.7 million people with 18 universities, while Nigeria with 160 million people with only 104 universities and 110 by 2014 (Ehiemetalor, 2010; NPC, 2013; NUC, 2014)

In terms of enrolment between 2002-2011 the enrolment rate of university in Nigeria was 21.9%, 28.4%, 10%, 20.1% 29.2%, 16.7%, 21.8%, 18.0%, 23.6% and 22.4% respectively, this data indicated that between 2003-2011 the Nigerian did not at once accommodate up to 30% of the applicants due to several factors effecting the equality, access to university education in the country. Regionally, data from Joint admission and matriculation board (JAMB, 2013) shows that between 2009-2012- South East Region has 31.9%, 44.0%, 33.4%. South West Region 22.4%, 15.9%, 18.7%. South South Region 2.4.1%, 28.4%, 29.2%. North East Region 3.0%, 2.5

3.7% North West Region 5.0%, 1,3%. 4.2%, North Central Region 13.6, 7.0. 18.8. This data reveals the disparity rate of access to university education in Nigeria across the six geo-political zones, from the data North West Region (including Sokoto State) has the lowest enrolment rate compare to other five geopolitical zones of the country.

Moreover, the availability (mere existence) of higher institutions in Nigeria does not guarantee their accessibility to all citizens. Politics, politicians and Godfathernism (who do you know, who knows you) have marred the attainment of equality of access to university education in Nigeria (Uvah, 2005; Okebukola, 2002; Moti, 2010). Clearly for example, the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board has reported that 61 percent of the 1,375,652 candidates who sat for the examinations in the 2011/2012 academic session scored 180 (required minimum score) out of 400, which means 839,147 candidates were eligible for admissions into conventional higher institutions. Undoubtedly and accurately, it is a common knowledge that all the tertiary institutions combined cannot accommodate more than about 500,000 new students. This means there is an excess of about 339,147 candidates who are qualified but will not be admitted because of the considerably limited vacancies, plus another estimated 370,000 who do not make up to 180. It is disheartening to note that more than half of those who sat for the examinations, about 700,000 will be left in the cold (JAMB, 2013; NUC 2013). Furthermore, the escalating concern among researchers is that the growing number of students with no equivalent increase in physical facilities has led to more decline in access to university education in Nigeria (Ogboru, 2008).

However, despite the fact that some Nigerian researchers have explored various scholarly works on access to university education (Okebukola, 2006; Moti

2010; Agboola, & Ofoegbu, 2010; Bakare, 2012; Esomonu, & Adirika, 2012; Dada, 2004), they mainly focus on constitutional rights of having access to university education. The available literature indicates that there are apparently very scarce number of related studies on equality of educational opportunity and educational policy in Nigeria. This shows that the duo is highly neglected despite their significance in promoting the present world of education (Amos &Abdulkarim, 2013; Onwuameze, 2013; Amaele, 2003). In fact, none of the studies above has so far explored the implementation of the federal character policy of access to university education. In this view, there appears to be a gap in literature on education policy implementation in Nigeria, and a huge knowledge gap in equality of educational opportunity as identified in the works of Baidon (2000); Oyedeji, (2011) and Imam, (2012) further declared a need for further studies to be explored in this area of study. This is the gap that this study primarily seeks to fill.

1.4 Research Objectives

The overarching aim of the study is to investigate the policy implementation towards the equality of educational opportunity, which focuses on the context of higher education in Sokoto State, Nigeria, with specific attention on the issue of access to university education. In line with this principal aim, the specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the policymakers' and policy implementers' views on the existing university admission policy, its intent and implementation in Sokoto State, in relation to the issue of equality of educational opportunities on access to university education

2. To investigate the state of practice of the implementation of the Federal character Policy in addressing the issue of equality of educational opportunity in access to university education

3. To explore the policymakers' and policy implementers' views on alternative policy practices in addressing and promoting equality of educational opportunity on access to university education

4. To provide recommendations for changes or improvements on the existing policy and its implementation on access to university education, in relation to equality of educational opportunity

1.5   Research Questions

In order to achieve the above objectives, the following research questions are posed:

1. What are the policymakers' and policy implementers' views on the existing university admission policy, its intent and implementation in Sokoto State in relation to the issue of equality of educational opportunities on access to university education?

2. What is the state of practice of the implementation of the Federal character Policy in addressing the issue of equality of educational opportunity in access to university education?

   2.1 What are the problems associated with the implementation of the policy on equality of educational opportunities on access to university education?

   2.2 How do the university policy players address these problems?

3. What are the perspectives of policymakers' and policy implementers' views on other policy practice in addressing and promoting equality of educational opportunity on access to university education?

4. What are the recommendations for changes or improvement on the existing policy and its implementation on access to university education, in relation to equality of educational opportunity?

Tables 1.1 provide information on the focus of the research, the research objectives and the research questions.

Table 1.1
Research Focus, Research Objectives, Research Questions.

Research Focus	Research Objectives	Research Questions
1- To explore the policymakers' views on the policy and its state of practice	1- To explore the policymakers' and policy implementers' views on the existing university admission policy, its intent and implementation in Sokoto State in relation to the issue of equality of educational opportunities	1- What are the views of the policymakers and implementers on the existing university admission policy, its intent and implementation in Sokoto State in relation to the issue of equality of educational opportunities?
	2- To investigate the state of practice of the implementation of the Federal character Policy in addressing the issue of equality of educational opportunity in access to university education	2- What is the state of practice of the implementation of the Federal Character policy in addressing the issue of equality of educational opportunity to access to universities?
		2.2 What are the problems associated with implementation the policy of equality of educational opportunity on access to university education?
		2.3 -How do university policy players address these problems?
2- To explore alternatives policy practices and recommendation on the existing policy	3-To explore the perspective of policymakers' and policy implementers' on other policy practices in addressing the issue of equality of educational on access to university education	3-What are the perspective of policymakers' and policy implementers' on other policy practice in addressing the issue of equality of educational on access to university education
	4- To provide Recommendation for changes or improvement on the existing policy and it is implementation on access to university education in relation to equality of educational opportunities?	4-What are the recommendations for changes or improvement on the existing policy and it is implementation on access to university education in relation to equality of educational opportunities?

1.6   Significance of the Study

Muodumogu (2006) asserts that education plays a crucial role in national development as well as efficiency and effectiveness of individuals. In recognition of this fact, the Federal Republic of Nigeria observes in its National Policy on Education (2004) that "education in Nigeria is an instrument "par excellence" for

affecting national development". Evidence for the importance of policy implementation research has been obtained in multiple areas including education (Joseph &Durlak, 2008). Education policy decisions should be based on strong evaluation of the policies, that is, those that reflect quality implementation, as well as information on their impacts. Otherwise, we cannot determine the relative value of such policies.

According to Imam (2012), it is through an examination of the current state of implementation of policies that could help to identify what areas need to be improved, and what problems deserve to be given a higher level of emphasis in order. This is to drive the equality of educational opportunity in higher education a possibility in the future, and therefore be more effective towards reaching the goals of an improved education system in Nigeria.

This study would make an intellectual and practical contribution to the discourse of equality of educational opportunities to access to higher education in a specific context in Nigeria which is Sokoto State. The study would make an investigation on policy implementation to find out how successful the implementation process is according to the Federal Character Policy. The study would also trigger the creation of awareness on the policy right of access to university education to the prospective students and parents. Furthermore, the findings of this study would have a significant implication for higher education policy in Nigeria and policy on access to university education. Consequently, the researcher will incorporate that as a basis to make the necessary recommendations to administrators, policymakers, and stakeholders in education, and those overseeing the implementation process based on the research findings.

1.7 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Limitations are generally accepted as the potential weaknesses of the researchers' study and are out of his or her control (George, & Bennett, 2005). Wiersma (2000) defines limitation as matters and occurrences that may arise in the study, which are out of the researchers' control, and which also limit the extensity to which a study can go and sometimes affect the end result and conclusion that can be drawn. On the other hand, delimitations of a study are those characteristics that arise from limitation which will define the boundaries of the study. The delimitations are in the researchers' control which are usually resulted from specific choices of the researcher, such as the choice of research objectives, the research questions, variables of interest, theoretical perspectives adopted and the population chosen to be investigated, as well as the study areas (Nenty, 2009; Wiersma, 2000),

Policy research as a case study can be conducted within institutions or classroom, as well as within local education authorities or government departments, for example, in relation to class size or setting or the operation of choice of school, college or university (Ozga, 1999). Furthermore, policy research is driven by the policymakers, and is thus preoccupied with implementation studies. According to Ritchie and Spencer (2002), the limitation of policy research as a case study has proven to be an effective tool for documenting the contextual process by which policymaking and implementation are into practice or scaled up into public policy. Whether for policymakers', practitioners' or a broader audience, case studies are more likely to reveal the richness and specificity of the practice to enable the researchers to make enriched and valuable recommendations for its improvement.

The limitation of policy research as a case study includes its inability to answer a large number of questions, despite the small amount of space given to it.

This reservation is arguably the most important of them all. Policy case studies are neither ubiquitous nor a universal panacea. There are many important policy research questions that cannot be answered this way. Also, the complexities in examining policy research as case study are often difficult to represent simply, and this situation can make the findings of such research considerably difficult to summarize (Colley, & Diment, 2001; Hodkinson, & Hodkinson, 1997)

Moreover, both qualitative research paradigms and the interview process which are one of the major instruments of policy research themselves have some limitations as well as the documents to be obtained for analysis. Methodologically, qualitative research studies focus on differences in quality, rather than differences in quantity, and it usually has fewer participants than quantitative studies because the depth of the data collection does not allow for large numbers of participants (Yin, 2011). It is also interesting in meaning how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world, and researchers as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. In qualitative research, the data are mediated through human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines (Atieno, 2009).

From the interview aspect, these limitations involve the likelihood of response distortion (especially written interviews) with such human factors as personal bias, nervousness and even politics (Patton, 2002); and being distracted in the interview process could limit the accuracy of this significant data collection activity. An additional dimension of the research's limitations includes the possible lack of honesty and possible exaggeration of facts by the participants. It should be made precisely clear here that the results may be skewed due to various personal factors on the part of the participants.

Documents also have some limitation quite beyond the capacity of the researchers, including their anticipated disclosure by the respective officers which could have been manipulated, perhaps to conceal scandalous happenings or illegal manoeuvrings, or to maintain the image of the government concerned. It is not unusual for the government to only disclose what they desire the public to know. Moreover, the written record may lack a standard format because it is kept by different people. Furthermore, the researcher will not be able to control the quality of data being collected and must rely on the information provided in the document(s) to assess his or her research investigations (Henczel, 2000; Hertzum, Andersen, & Hansen, 2002).

The contextual delimitation of this study is in terms of carrying out an investigation on policy implementation of equality of educational opportunities by Federal Government of Nigeria in Sokoto State with regard to access to University education. Sokoto State, Nigeria, herein referred to as study area, and The University as the case study, is the only Federal University founded by the Federal Government of Nigeria for the citizens of Sokoto State and other three States as catchment areas namely: Zamfara, Kebbi and Niger States.

The research would be delimited there because it is one single university to be studied but other organizations are involved, including: The Admission Body, and the University Commission. Moreover, the results of this study are not generalizable to any other universities apart from the study area. Also, this study would be confined to the actual data from the three organizations involved in the study: The University, The Admission Body, and The University Commission.

1.8.0 The Context of the Study

This section of the introductory chapter highlights the contextual background of the study area, the theoretical perspectives and the methodological context of the study.

1.8.1 Sokoto State as Context Background

Nigeria is composed of 36 states. Sokoto is located in the northern part of the country. The largest ethnic group in the state is mostly Muslims Hausa people, (sometimes grouped with Fulani as Hausa-Fulani). Sokoto comprises 23 local government areas out of Nigeria's 774 local government areas (Galadima, 2007; Ola, & Tonwe, 2003). Sokoto is the capital city, named after the said state and is considered as the largest city with a long history which occupies the seat of the Sokoto Caliphate. The state has a total land area of 25,973 square kilometres with a total population of more than 4 million people (NPC, 2006).

With respect to higher education institutions, The University this case study is located in Sokoto town, Sokoto State. Other institutions in the state include the Polytechnic of Sokoto State, Shehu Shagari College of Education Sokoto, the Sokoto State School of Nursing and Midwifery, Sokoto State College of Legal and Islamic Studies, and the newly established Sokoto State College of Agricultural Science, Wurno.

1.8.2 Theoretical Context

The theoretical position of this study is derived from three prominent theories, the first for equality of educational opportunity and the other two of educational policy implementation. The equality of educational opportunity in which this research seeks to investigate is derived from John Rawls' distributive theory of social justice (Rawls, 1971). The John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness is an ethical theory which argues that broad principles are able to capture the nature of

what constitutes a just society (Miller, 1999; Rawls, 1971; Roemer, 1998; Sen, 2009). Rawls argues that all that is required for a society to be just is for it to be fair. According to Rawls, a just society is one that is based upon principles. The principles are the best formulation of a social system which is not based upon personal interests or specific moral doctrines.

However, the essential components of this theory of social justice are used in this study to show how Rawls' hypothetical theory of justice as fairness is based upon a strong notion of equality. In the hypothetical situation, justice as fairness is best understood in terms of equality (Daniels, 1989; Stark, 2000; Van Lange, 1999; Rawls; 2009). According to Rawls (1971), all social primary goods - liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect - are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favoured.

The theoretical position of educational policy implementation is derived from the two major schools, approaches, paradigms or perspectives of policy implementation research, known as Top-down and Bottom-up models. (Hjern and Hull (1983), Barrett and Fudge, (1981), Elmore, (1980) Cerych and Sabatier, (1986, 2005); Lipsky 1971 &1980; Hjern (1982); Martha (1972); Eugene (1977); Matland, (1995); Bhola (2004), Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer, (2002), Hope (2002) Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer, (2002) Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973)

Top-down perspective: The top-down perspective assumes that policy goals can be specified by policymakers and that implementation can be carried out successfully by setting up certain mechanisms (Palumbo & Calista, 1990, p13). This perspective is 'policy centered' and represents the policymakers' views. A vital point is the policymakers' capability to exercise control over the environment and

implementers (Younis and Davidson, 1990, p5-8.) Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) and Mazmanian and Sabatier (1978) see implementation as concerned with the degree of the actions of implementing officials and target groups.

The bottom-up perspective: The bottom-up perspective directs attention to the formal and informal relationships constituting the policy subsystems involved in making and implementing policies (Howllet& Ramesh, 2003, p. 190). This perspective poses, as its starting point, a problem in society. The focus is on individuals and their behaviour, and in this respect, street-level bureaucrats are made central in the political process. Hull and Hjern (1987) focus on the role of local networks in affecting a given problem in the implementation process, and also propound a way of identifying the networks. It is a combination of a snowball and socio-metric methods (Quoted in Winter, 2003, p. 214). This method enables them to map a network that identifies the relevant implementation structure for a specific policy at local, regional and national level. It also allows them to evaluate the significance of government programmes vis-a-vis other influences such as market. It also enables them to see strategic coalitions as well as unintended effects of policy and the dynamic nature of policy implementation (Matland, 1995, p. 149). According to them, central initiatives are poorly adapted to local conditions. Programme's success depends in large part on the skills of individuals in the local implementation structure who can adapt the policy to local conditions.

1.8.3 Methodological Context

This study is aligned with the methodological paradigm which uses qualitative and in-depth investigation of the phenomenon being studied. The implementation of a national policy is a process in which different people from different contexts and persuasions are involved (Maharaj, 2005). This process entails,