

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS AND ADMISSION POLICIES FOR NCE CANDIDATES: THE POSITION OF MOST FEDERAL COLLEGES OF EDUCATION (TECHNICAL) IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The quality of the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) depends on the potential academic competence of the recipients of instructions, the availability of adequate materials and equipments to facilitate effective teaching and learning as well as on the quality and disposition of teachers. One factor that determines the quality of the students admitted into NCE Programme in the Federal Colleges of Education (Technical) is the mode of recruitment. This paper discusses requisite entry qualifications vis-à-vis the admission policies in these colleges in Nigeria, highlighting certain implications of these policies and making useful suggestions that might beef up the quality of the Certificate in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Introduction

The 6-3-3-4 system of education was interpreted as the launching pad for the take off of industrialization in Nigeria that would bequeath on the Nigerian child of school age, the basic technical/vocational skills that would actualize the national dream for self-reliance, accompanied by a drastic reduction in youth unemployment. However, the implementation of the 6-3-3-4 encountered one major problem in its wake – the problem of availability of competent personnel to teach the different vocations, especially at the JSS level. As a step towards solving this problem, the Federal Government of Nigeria had embarked on the establishment of Technical Colleges of Education. The first of its kind is the Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, which metamorphosed from the National Technical Teachers College Akoka established in 1967.

The high demand for the products of this institution led to the establishment of another such College near one decade later in Gombe, Bauchi State in 1976 (Ikwuagwu, 1992). The dearth of technical teachers encouraged the Federal Government to increase the number of these colleges to eight by 1987, across the country. The successful implementation of the Universal Basic Education in the country depends largely on a well-motivated, professionally competent workforce. The ability of the products of these Colleges to attain the institutional and individual goals depends on a number of factors, as outlined in this sketch:-

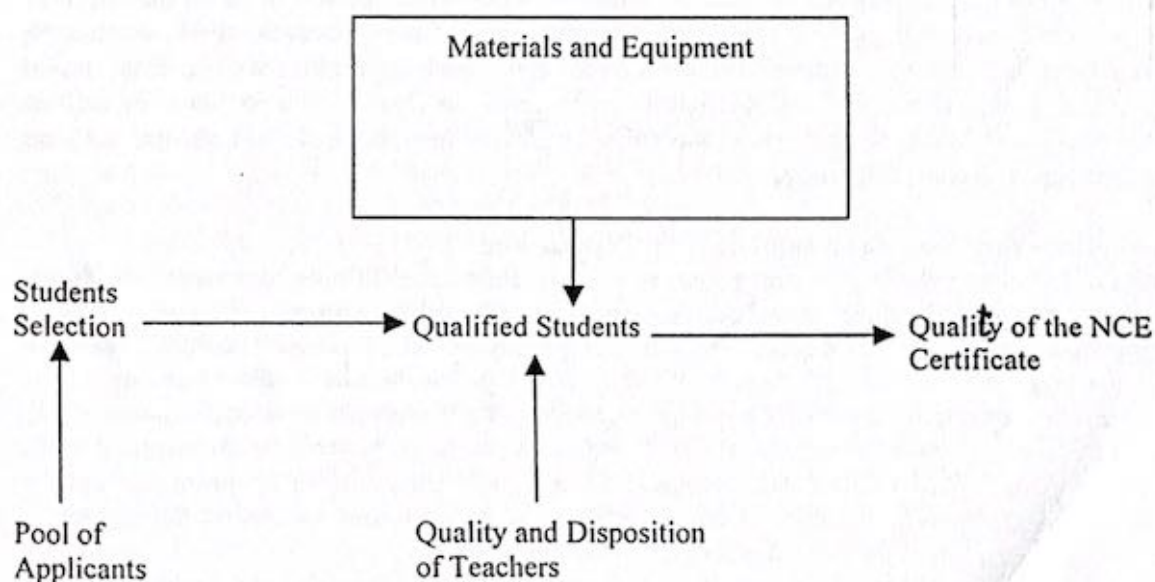


Fig. 1: Variables Affecting the Equality of the NCE Certificate

Notable among these factors is the stage where students are selected. Awotunde (1989), in Ihiegbulam (1992), reports that students who lack requisite entry qualifications are susceptible to academic bankruptcy in terms of performances.

Conceptual Evaluation of Requisite Entry Qualifications

To ensure that the Federal Colleges of Education (Technical) attain their corporate goals, two major sources of recruitment of students for training in the Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) Programme are observed. In addition, selected Technical Colleges in the country run a one year Technical Teacher Certificate for graduates from Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Technology, who, hitherto, had no teaching qualification. The focus of this paper is the NCE Programme. The two major sources of students for the NCE Programme are:-

- 1) Direct entry admission through the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB); and
- 2) A One Year Preliminary – NCE (Pre-NCE) Programme.

JAMB (1997) requires a minimum of O/level passes in at least five (5) subjects at one sitting, three of which must be at credit or four credits at two sittings (Two of the credits must be relevant to the proposed field of study. However, a pass in English Language is required for all Science, Social Science, and Business Education courses); Teachers Grade II Certificate with credit or merit passes in at least three subjects, which must include Mathematics or Arithmetic and two other physical science subjects; City and Guide / NTC or WAEC Tech / Craft / Intermediate Part II course B Certificate in Building and Woodwork, Mechanical or Electrical Trade respectively, plus the Federal Craft Certificate (FCC) with at least four passes in Mathematics, Science, English Language and Social Studies; WASC (Commercial) / NBC or RSA stage II Group Certificate with passes in five subjects at not more than two sittings. The passes should include English Language and two subjects relevant to the course of study.

In addition to the requisite entry qualification prospective candidates take a qualifying / selection examination from which those that meet the required cut of marks are posted to colleges of their choice for final selection. In a few cases however, some students succeed in the qualifying examination but fail to secure placement due to lack of departmental requirements.

The Pre-NCE Programme on the other hand is designed to cater for students who do not meet the requisite entry qualification for direct entry admission through JAMB, but at the same time show enough evidence in their credentials that their academic deficiency could be improved upon. Primarily, the Pre-NCE courses are intended to prepare Ordinary level / SSCE holders with insufficient relevant credits or other qualifications to obtain the required credits before they are allowed to proceed to the first year of the NCE Programme (FCE(T) Bichi, 2000). Here, the requisite entry qualification is four passes or its equivalent in the Senior School Certificate Examinations, General Certificate in Education, National Business Certificate, National Technical Certificate, Royal Society of Arts, City and Guide as well as Federal Craft Certificate. Two of the passes must include English Language and Mathematics, while the remaining two must be from among the subjects relevant to the proposed course of study.

Admission Policies for Candidates Into the NCE Programme

Despite "watering down" the admission requirement into these colleges to a mere four passes for admission into Pre-NCE, most of the colleges for a long time has witnessed a slow growth in students population occasioned by lack of basic entry requirements (because qualified ones crave for University or Polytechnic Education), failure of the Secondary School curriculum of instruction to adequately prepare students for advanced training in technical, but vocational courses (Ukpene, 1993). This trend, if allowed to continue unchecked would negate the huge investment by government in the provision of infrastructural facilities and machinery for technical education in Nigerian Colleges of Education (Technical). Hence, there has been a need by the colleges to re-examine their mode of recruiting candidates so that their institutional goals might be attained.

This need motivation has culminated in colleges adopting a populist recruitment policy as opposed to the earlier elitist posture (emphasis mine). Under the populist dispensation, a large number of students are admitted so that a reasonable number can still remain after the first and second

semester examinations from which candidates are expected to make a grade point average of one (1) or above to proceed to the proper NCE Programme.

As the Pre-NCE admission is organized by the respective Colleges concerned and as this does not involve any qualifying examinations, the admission policies are often manipulated to satisfy the yearning and aspirations of the local communities. Some colleges have adopted this government formular, or a similar one in their admission exercises.

Merit 20%, Catchment Area 30%, and Equality of States 50%. From this formular, it is indicated that candidates that actually possess the requisite entry qualification form a contemptible 20% of total number of students admitted into Pre-NCE Programme every session. This percentage is randomly distributed to qualified candidates irrespective of state of origin. Equality of States (ES) enjoys a whopping 50% of the total Pre-NCE admission yearly.

Equality of states is another caption for quota basis and in the sharing of this national "favour" some candidates with entry qualifications lower than the advertised minimum requirements are most often admitted so that the admission process would reflect character. Furthermore, each college has some states of the federation ascribed to them as catchment area. Candidates from such states enjoy in addition to the first two criteria, a special 30% placement in the total Pre-NCE admission offered. It seems plausible that the questionable ascribed statuses of "academically disadvantage" given to some states of the country is satiated through catchment area preferences.

Academic Implication of Entry Requirement and Admission Policies

The entry requirement for admission into NCE Programme is standard enough to foster qualitative learning of technical / vocational courses in the Colleges of Education (Technical). The precipitation in value of the certificate probably consequent upon job performances of NCE holders might be closely associated with the mode of recruitment of candidates. Little does one have to wonder on the agitation that NCE Certificate should be the base line teaching qualification for primary schools. Although the entry requirement and admission policies are positively disposed towards actualizing the crave for numerical and technological literacy among Nigerians in the millennium, merit is tremendously sacrificed on the alter of catchment area and equality of states. On the one hand, it is commendable to observe that the two pronged system of admission of candidates into the NCE Programme aims at drastically reducing the dearth of candidates willing to enroll into the Colleges of Education (Technical). But focusing on the problem of late arrival to colleges for resumption and the general problems of adjustment and adaptation faced by most JAMB admitted candidates, Akujo (1995) inferred that those admitted through JAMB show slightly better academic performance than most of their Pre-NCE counterparts when exposed to the same teaching and learning experiences. On the other hand, the priority given to catchment area and equality of states over merit in the admission of Pre-NCE candidates has often resulted in crowding of most Pre-NCE classrooms, with its attendant pressure on available materials, equipment and laboratory spaces. Effective class teaching and supervision suffer more so when most of the learners lack the basic admission requirements as well as the competence to acquire new instructions, skills and attitudes in technical and vocational education. Consequently, the rate of drop-out is usually higher at the Pre-NCE level than any other level of the NCE Programme.

Certificate racketing is more rampant in instances where there is no rigorous screening of candidates at the point of entry. Some desperate ones among them impersonate by mutual consent and collect other peoples' credentials and gain admission with it, in so far as there is no entrance examination or interviews to ascertain their competence in the acquisition of the result.

Because the Pre-NCE lacks a central qualifying examination at the point of entry, most college administrations are sympathetically motivated by pressure from candidates and guardians for placement, to organize multiple rounds of admission exercise. While this is intended to beef up students population (where it is small), it facilitates the resumption for classes at different times of the same semester which makes course teaching, organization, continuous evaluation and 75% attendance computation cumbersome, as one task might have to be laboriously repeated for the respective groups.

Recommendations

The government policy on Pre-NCE admission should be reviewed. Merit should receive a higher proportion, say 50% of total admission. This will ensure that candidates admitted possess and

exhibit a high sense of mental readiness for the programme. It will make teaching and learning challenging, interesting and productive. The quality of the NCE Certificate will also improve. If merit is given much credence in the admission policy it will further reduce the tendency of falsifying personal records by prospective candidates who, are though qualified, claim fictitious states of origin for fear of denial of placement by virtue of geographical disadvantages.

There should be qualifying examinations for prospective Pre-NCE candidates. Apart from helping to select competent and qualified candidates for the programme, it will minimize certificate fraud, as well as streamline the time of students' admission and resumption for classes.

Furthermore, introductory technology courses should be made compulsory for SSCE candidates wishing to take up future careers in the technical trades. This is intended to broaden the scope of their entry behaviours. Presently, introductory technology is not offered in the SSCE examination.

Finally, the whole states of the Federation should constitute the catchment area of all Federal Colleges of Education (Technical). This is because the effective acquisition and dissemination of technological and vocational education for national growth and development will become compartmentalized if the recruitment of candidates for training depends more on the lines of ethnicity or state of origin rather than merit.

Conclusion

The essentials of any meaningful academic programme is to produce citizens capable of contributing significantly towards national growth and development. Admission of unqualified candidates who do not show any potentials for improvement portends a gloomy future for the country. While effort should be made to sustain the advertised minimum entry requirements for Pre-NCE admission, merits should not be stifled for other preferences so that national, institutional and individual goals of education through the Federal Colleges of Education (Technical) could be purposefully attained in Nigeria.

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