



# **National Open University of Nigeria: Has the Intervention Made a Difference?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study employed the Time Series Evaluation Design (TSED) in assessing whether the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) has made a difference as an intervention from 2003 to 2017. The study compared the position before the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria and the position after the intervention to ascertain whether or not the intervention has made a difference. The sample size was 18,494,551, which was the same as the population because the study adopted the census sampling technique which directly investigates the totality of the population. The study found that with the admission by NOUN of an abysmally low average of 1.77% of candidates who wrote the UTME between 2003 and 2017, the objective of wider access to university education is a mirage; and that going by this trend, it will take the next 70 years (2087) to realise the intervention for which NOUN was established. It was recommended among others that for the National Open University of Nigeria to be able to provide higher education for all in need (or be able to mop up the unabsorbed candidates by the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education), a special regulatory body knowledgeable on Open and Distance Learning (not National Universities Commission) has to be establishment to be responsible for providing relevant institutional network for relevant standardisation; supervising the development and production of instructional materials; acquiring of both soft and hard ware necessary for the smooth running of both the administrative and academic units of the NOUN; establishing essential mechanisms for quality assurance and monitoring of NOUN.

**Keywords:** Intervention, Distance Learning, Wider Access, Regulatory Body, Time Series Evaluation Design

## **INTRODUCTION**

Education in Nigeria at all levels - primary, secondary, and tertiary - has suffered immense degradation and neglect in curriculum content, environmental issues, funding, supervision, and administration (including structure, admission, and enforcement of relevant laws and regulations). Worst hit are funding and admission. Famurewa (2014) asserted that inadequate funding of the education sector in Nigeria is a source of serious impediment to the benefits of education, adding that government's allocation to the sector is grossly inadequate to meet the challenges of enrolment explosion and attendant staffing/other infrastructure. On admission, Kpolovie and Obilor (2013) opined that government's policy of "higher education for all in need through the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)" is merely a paradox in policy practice because in its present state, NOUN has only admitted 0.03% to 1.89% of the candidates seeking higher education between 2003 and 2012.

Over the years, admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria through the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) has been grossly irregular, abused, and maligned. Records abound that only about

15% of demands for higher education is met in Nigeria (Jegede, 2004). To manage this apparent inadequacy, the Federal Government in 1983 enacted an act establishing the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), an Open and Distance Education institution, to meet the yearnings of numerous Nigerians for higher education. Specifically, the vision, mission, and goal of NOUN as well as the policy establishing it are to guarantee quality “higher education for all in need” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1980).

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is any form of learning in which the provider enables individual learners to exercise choice over any one or more of a number of aspects of learning. According to UNESCO (2002), any educational process in which all or most of the teaching is conducted by someone removed in space and/or time from the learner, with the effect that all or most of the communication between teachers and learners is through an artificial medium, either electronic or print, is classified as distance education. It is an educational process which involves the use, for presentation of information and communication between participants, of a range of media, such as print, audio, video, computer based media, and networks, as well as multimedia facilities.

The National Open University of Nigeria, an Open and Distance Learning institution, an intervention into the Nigeria Education System, was established in 1983 (but started full operation in 2001) to mop up all those qualified for higher education but who could not be admitted through the UTME owing to the carrying capacity of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the National Open University of Nigeria include to:

- (a) Ensure equity and equality of opportunities in education but specifically in university education.
- (b) Provide a wider access to education generally but specifically university education in Nigeria.
- (c) Enhance Education for All (EFA) and lifelong learning.
- (d) Ensure the entrenchment of a global culture.
- (e) Provide educational resources via an intensive use of Information and Communication Technology.
- (f) Provide flexible and qualitative education.
- (g) Reduce the cost, inconvenience and hassles of education delivery (FGN, 2004).

The National Open University of Nigeria, since its inception, according to Jegede (2004), is providing education that is accessible to people who cannot attend regular classes due to social, structural or personal situations; flexible education that allows study at any time and place; specialized training for professionals; efficient academic assessments and tutor interactions; excellent learner support services; and good quality learning materials that are provided with the interest of the learners as the focus, and giving support to ensure that learners have a good chance of successful completion of their programmes. Despite the flowering statement by Jegede (2004), the objective of NOUN of “wider access to education” is still an illusion. In other words, the National Open University of Nigeria is yet to mop up the excess candidates resulting from the carrying capacity of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This study sought to find solution to the challenges confronting “wider access to education” for which NOUN was established.

Obilor (2014) informed that the National Open University of Nigeria was timely with a huge hope of survival and growth because of the large population of Nigerians seeking higher education for better job with higher wages, employers’ requirements for promotion and job security, education for its sake (knowledge, information, and power), and a lot more. The problem is whether the National Open University of Nigeria is truly providing a wider access to education, thus mopping up all those who seek tertiary education but who could not be admitted into the regular institutions.

As at the 2016/2017 academic year, NOUN has student enrolment of over 254000 (Adamu, 2017); of this figure, only 60000 students are from the UTME list. The riddle is what happens to the rest candidates who are not able to obtain admission into the conventional tertiary institutions in Nigeria and into the National Open University of Nigeria? Why is the NOUN not able to absorb the excess candidates after the conventional tertiary institutions have met their carrying capacities? Does it lack capacity in terms of

distance education operators, virtual libraries, technology infrastructure, community resources, public enlightenment campaign, and study centres.

The National Open University of Nigeria has eight Schools and 55 Study Centres in the six geopolitical zones of the country (NOUN, 2017). Study Centres are resource places where students can pick up course and other study materials, as well as interact with Instructional Facilitators, Tutors, Student Counsellors, Centre Directors, and with fellow students. The Schools include Centre for Lifelong Learning, School of Agricultural Sciences, School of Arts and Social Sciences, School of Education, School of Law, School of Management Sciences, School of Science and Technology.

#### **Statement of problem and research questions**

One of the objectives of the National Open University of Nigeria is to provide a wider access to education generally, but specifically university education in Nigeria. The establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria was necessitated by the dearth of adequate absorption of all those qualified and ready to go through tertiary education by universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. According to Kpolovie and Obilor (2014), the National Open University of Nigeria's programme was established for and on the sole principle or theory of providing higher education for all who need but are not admitted by the conventional higher education programmes in Nigeria. Kpolovie and Obilor (2014) found that only one percent (precisely 0.93%) of all the candidates who sat for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) was absorbed by NOUN, with a whopping 78% (precisely 77.64%) still roaming the streets longing for tertiary education.

This study examined what has happened five years after the last evaluation. To know how well the National Open University of Nigeria has provided wider access to university education in Nigeria, for the period 2012 – 2017, the study posed the following research questions:

1. To what extent has the National Open University of Nigeria provided wider access to university education in Nigeria?
2. What has changed since the last evaluation in 2013?
3. When will the National Open University of Nigeria ever mop up the excess candidates (those who sat for the UTME but could not be absorbed by the conventional tertiary institutions)?
4. What can be done to enable the National Open University of Nigeria provide wider access to university education in Nigeria?

#### **METHOD**

This study employed the Time Series Evaluation Design (TSED) which collects data over regular intervals of time for the purpose of assessing an intervention or programme. This design compares what is with what was. In other words, the TSED seeks to compare the position before the intervention and the position after the intervention to ascertain whether or not the intervention has made a difference. The design is adopted mainly for determination of the extent to which the programme or intervention is succeeding or failing, and to provide direction for improvement of the programme or intervention (Kpolovie, 2012). The TSED is used in this study to determine how well the National Open University of Nigeria has fared over time in providing wider access to university education in Nigeria, particularly absorbing all those not absorbed by the regular tertiary institutions in the country. The TSED went further to predict how long it will take to provide "higher education for all in need through the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)" employing Linear Regression Analysis.

Only secondary data (already existing information collected by some individual(s) organisation(s), government department(s) and others) was used for this evaluation. Yearly UTME records were obtained from Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) for the period 2003 to 2017, and also records of admission into the conventional tertiary institutions in Nigeria (Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education) and the National Open University of Nigeria (nonconventional tertiary institutions). Data collected were analysed using percentages and trend analysis. Trend analysis is a mathematical technique that uses historical results to predict future outcome. In this study, trend analysis was used to predict when the National Open University of Nigeria will mop up the excess candidates (those who sat for the UTME but could not be absorbed by the conventional tertiary institutions).

Census sampling method which directly investigates the totality of the population (Kpolovie and Obilor, 2014) was used to study the entire 18,494,551 candidates who sat for the UTME from 2003 to 2017 in Nigeria. The sample for this study is the same as the population which is 18,494,551 candidates who sat for the UTME from 2003 to 2017 in Nigeria.

## RESULTS

Table 1: Trend of Admission into Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

Year of Examination	Number of Candidates that sat for Examination	Total Admission by Universities (A)		Total Admission by Polytechnics and Colleges of Education (B)		% Admission by (A) & (B)		Admission by National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)		Candidates not Absorbed by National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN)	
		Number	%	Number	%	%	%	Number	%	Number	%
2003	1,056,030	127,786	12.10	91,143	8.63	20.73	79.27	4,942	0.47	832,159	78.80
2004	846,028	147,134	17.39	47,996	5.67	23.06	76.94	-	0.00	650,898	76.94
2005	1,002,763	122,491	12.22	33,682	3.36	15.58	84.42	11,140	1.11	835,450	83.31
2006	1,068,894	114,650	10.73	25,511	2.39	13.12	86.88	-	0.00	928,733	86.88
2007	1,014,692	135,912	13.39	73,373	7.23	20.62	79.38	19,143	1.89	786,264	77.49
2008	1,247,657	168,971	13.54	100,351	8.04	21.58	78.42	358	0.03	977,977	78.39
2009	1,450,641	199,110	13.73	128,090	8.83	22.56	77.44	4,821	0.33	1,118,620	77.11
2010	1,327,366	197,057	14.85	155,049	11.68	26.52	73.48	19,705	1.48	955,555	72.00
2011	1,428,461	225,766	15.80	107,935	7.56	23.36	76.64	23,122	1.62	1,071,638	75.02
2012	1,468,394	233,911	15.93	117,251	7.98	23.91	76.09	27,045	1.84	1,090,187	74.25
2013	1,644,110	248,123	15.09	148,134	9.01	24.10	75.90	33,211	2.02	1,214,668	73.88
2014	1,606,753	257,575	16.03	150,713	9.38	25.41	74.59	36,634	2.28	1,161,843	72.31
2015	1,475,477	252,144	17.09	150,941	10.23	27.32	72.68	38,953	2.64	1,033,424	70.04
2016	1,589,175	267,603	16.84	181,960	11.45	28.29	71.71	48,629	3.06	1,090,969	68.65
2017	1,736,571	297,127	17.11	210,472	12.12	29.23	70.77	59,912	3.45	1,169,060	67.32
Total	18,494,551	2,530,700	13.68	1,722,601	9.31	22.99	77.01	327,615	1.77	13,915,300	75.24

Source: Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), Bwari, Abuja

**Research Question 1:** *To what extent has the National Open University of Nigeria provided wider access to university education in Nigeria?*

Table 1 provides information on admissions by the Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and National Open University of Nigeria. It further provides information on all candidates not admitted by Universities, Polytechnics, Colleges of Education and National Open University of Nigeria: the percentages of unabsorbed candidates from 2003 to 2017 were respectively 78.80, 76.94, 83.31, 86.88, 77.49, 78.39, 77.11, 72.00, 75.02, 74.25, 73.88, 72.31, 70.04, 68.65, and 67.32. These un-admitted candidates were supposed to be absorbed by NOUN but were not. Although the percentages of unabsorbed candidates declined over the years, unfortunately the percentages of candidates admitted by NOUN were grossly inadequate: 0.49, 0.00, 1.11, 0.00, 1.89, 0.03, 0.33, 1.48, 1.62, 1.84, 2.02, 2.28, 2.64, 3.06 and 3.45 from 2003 to 2017 respectively. There is no doubt that at this rate of admission by the National Open University of Nigeria, the objective of wider access to university education (the goal of

absorbing whatever is left due to carrying capacity of the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education) is a mirage.

**Research Question 2:** *What has changed since the last evaluation in 2013?*

As at 2013, the National Open University of Nigeria had five Schools and 49 Study Centres in the six geopolitical zones of the country (Obilor, 2014). At the time of the present evaluation, the National Open University of Nigeria has eight Schools and 55 Study Centres in the six geopolitical zones of the country (NOUN, 2017). The changes from five to eight Schools, and 49 to 55 Study Centres are ridiculously low. Also admission by NOUN increased from 2.28% in 2014 to 3.45% in 2017: again, a very insignificant change. It is obvious that such negligible changes are not such that can cause meaningful impact in the promise of wider access to university education. The implication is that except something drastic is done and promptly too, the objective of a wider access to university education shall continue to be illusory.

**Research Question 3:** *When will the National Open University of Nigeria ever mop up the excess candidates (those who sat for the UTME but could not be absorbed by the conventional tertiary institutions)?*

**Table 3: Prediction of year NOUN would absorb all those not absorbed by Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education**

Year of Examination (x)	% of Candidates not Absorbed by NOUN (y)	xy	x <sup>2</sup>
2003	78.80	157 836.40	4 012 009
2004	76.94	154 187.76	4 016 016
2005	83.31	167 036.55	4 020 025
2006	86.88	174 281.28	4 024 036
2007	77.49	155 522.43	4 028 049
2008	78.39	157 407.12	4 032 064
2009	77.11	154 913.99	4 036 081
2010	72.00	144 720.00	4 040 100
2011	75.02	150 865.22	4 044 121
2012	74.25	149 391.00	4 048 144
2013	73.88	148 720.44	4 052 169
2014	72.31	145 632.34	4 056 196
2015	70.04	141 130.60	4 060 225
2016	68.65	138 398.40	4 064 256
2017	67.32	135 784.44	4 068 289
<b>Σx = 30 150</b>	<b>Σy = 1 132.39</b>	<b>Σxy = 2 275 827.97</b>	<b>Σx<sup>2</sup> = 60 601 780</b>

Using the equation of a linear regression  $y = mx + b$  and the data in the table 3, values of **m** and **b** were obtained ( $m = -0.9855$  and  $b = 2056.348$ ). Solving the resulting linear equation in x and y (where x = year of examination, and y = percentage of candidates who sat for the examination but not absorbed by NOUN), the value of  $x = 2087$  was obtained which implied that by 2087, the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) shall be able to absorb all candidates not admitted by Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education in Nigeria. In other words, it shall take the next 70 years to realise the intervention for which NOUN was established.

**Research Question 4:** *What can be done to enable the National Open University of Nigeria provide wider access to university education in Nigeria?*

The number of study centres should be increased and equipped for wider access to education to be achieved. In a country where over 75% of persons seeking university education are not admitted and NOUN has only 59 Study Centres in the whole country, is absurd to say, the least. A minimum of one Study Centre in each Local Government Area of the country (giving a minimum of 774 Study Centres) and six (6) in Abuja giving a total of 780 Study centres shall go a long way in realising the objective of education for all and wider access to university education.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

As at 2013, the National Open University of Nigeria had five Schools and 49 Study Centres in the six geopolitical zones of the country (Obilor, 2014). At the time of the present evaluation, the National Open University of Nigeria has eight Schools and 55 Study Centres in the six geopolitical zones of the country (NOUN, 2017). The changes from five to eight Schools, and 49 to 55 Study Centres are ridiculously low. Also admission by NOUN increased from 2.28% in 2014 to 3.45% in 2017: again, a very insignificant change. It is obvious that such negligible changes are not such that can cause meaningful impact in the promise of wider access to university education. The implication is that except something drastic is done and promptly too, the objective of a wider access to university education shall continue to be illusory.

The study found that the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) shall be able to absorb all candidates not admitted by Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education in Nigeria by 2087. In other words, it shall take the next 70 years to realise the intervention for which NOUN was established. This position is definitely defeatist to the goal of mob up by NOUN of all those seeking tertiary education but who could not be absorbed by the conventional tertiary institutions.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The “carrying capacity” of universities in Nigeria imposes limitations to access to university education. The efforts to meet changing pressing demands for tertiary education and training, led to the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria in 1983. Unfortunately, the number of Study Centres and number of Schools are grossly inadequate to attend to the ever increasing number of persons seeking tertiary education. The study further found that it shall take the next 70 years to realise the intervention for which NOUN was established. This is not only disappointing but defeats the purpose of the National Open University of Nigeria.

To mitigate this poor performance of NOUN and possibly reduce the number of years to realise its objectives, the number of Study Centres and Schools must be increased. In fact it is recommended that every Local Government Area in Nigeria should have a Study Centre of the National Open University of Nigeria.

In addition to increasing the number of Schools and Study Centres, resounding television and radio jingles should hit the air waves, flyers, posters, and billboards distributed and placed at strategic places to inform and educate the public on the numerous benefits of the National Open University of Nigeria. This will have the effect of endearing NOUN to Nigerians, especially those seeking university education: the result shall be improved perception of NOUN as an Open and Distance Education institution, leading to higher student enrolment and subsequent mob up of those not absorbed by the conventional educational institutions.

For the National Open Nigeria to be able to provide wider access to university education in Nigeria (or be able to mop up the unabsorbed candidates by the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education), a special regulatory body, order than National Universities Commission (NUC) has to be established to be responsible for providing relevant institutional network for relevant standardisation; supervising the development and production of instructional materials; acquisition of both soft and hard ware necessary for the smooth running of both the administrative and academic units of the National Open University of Nigeria (Obilor, 2014).

Funding of the National Open University of Nigeria should be increased. The minimum budget recommended for education by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is 26% of a nation’s budget. The highest budgetary allocation to education in Nigeria was 17.59% in 1997. In 2013 it was 8.70%, 10.63% in 2014, 10.75% in 2015, by 2016 it declined to 7.92% and by 2017 it has dropped further to 7.41%. For a developing country like Nigeria, budgetary allocations to education should be rising (or at worst remain at the minimum of 26% recommended by UNESCO). What we have instead are allocations that declined from 17.59% in 1997 to 7.41% in 2017. For ODL to thrive in Nigeria, improved funding is not negotiable.

Nigerians perceive the National Open University of Nigeria is very poorly (Kpolovie & Obilor, 2014). For improved access to NOUN thereby making it able to meet its objective of wider access to university education,

The National Open University of Nigeria is an Open and Distance Learning institution. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions thrive on adequate power supply. Unfortunately, power supply in Nigeria is “a tale of woe”. For the National Open University of Nigeria to achieve its objective of wider access to university education, power supply in the country must be improved upon. Open and Distance Learning is an illusion in any place with the type of power supply Nigeria has. The National Open University of Nigeria cannot reach its bloom with the present state of power supply that is regularly irregular.

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