

THE STATE OF GENDER PARITY, UNDERPRIVILEGED AND MINORITY ENROLMENTS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN GHANA

(BPI RESEARCH REPORT)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the state of gender parity, underprivileged and minority enrolments in public universities in Ghana. Five public universities, namely: University of Ghana (UG), University of Cape Coast (UCC), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), University of Education, Winneba (UEW), and University for Development Studies (UDS). The study utilized qualitative research method to collect data. One of the key findings from the study is the non-existence of well-tailored unified policy for the admission of the less-endowed students into public universities in Ghana. The study also found that even though the issue of gender equity in university admissions seems to be a concern to all respondent universities, the male/female ratio is still largely inequitable. In view of the findings of the study, the study recommends among other things that authorities responsible for university education in Ghana such as the Ministry of Education, the National Council on Tertiary Education and the University Councils as well as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection should as a matter of urgency initiate the process of putting in place a binding and coherent national policy that ensures equitable admission process for the vulnerable and underprivileged in society.

Keywords: *University, Education, Gender, Underprivileged, Less-endowed, Admissions,*

Introduction

University education is an immutable avenue for skills development and enhancement of respectable social status¹. It enables the individual to realise and develop his or her intellectual potentials with the view to developing one's own socio-economic capacities. It also affords the individual the opportunity to positively contribute to national development. It therefore goes without saying that every child, irrespective of his or her circumstances, should be able to aspire without hindrance to access quality university education especially in public universities. However, with an increasing Ghanaian population and increasing demand for tertiary education in Ghana, it is obvious that if no interventionist measures are taken, the stiff competition to enter public universities in Ghana will throw out the poor and the underprivileged in our societies who would have normally gained admissions into universities with the minimum requirement. In the face of this stiff competition, students from poor communities and the vulnerable can only get access to university education when interventionist measures are applied.

It is in the light of the above that this study was carried out between October 2015 and August 2016 (10 months duration), with the core objective of finding out how much university admission space is available in public universities in Ghana for the less-endowed students and the vulnerable in society. Moreover, such students from poor communities are likely not to afford the full fee- paying regimes established in our public universities today. However, for a

meaningful engagement with policy-makers on equitable enrolments into our public universities, there is the need to have empirical evidence on the state of enrolments in the universities.

Moreover, it is important to understand why certain admission decisions are taken especially with regards to certain category of people who need to be encouraged. These include disabled persons, students from poor communities and less-endowed schools, and the women population. It is also legitimate to inquire about the number of underprivileged students who are enrolled in our public universities each year on the average. On what criteria and requirements are they admitted into our public universities? Are the requirements the same as those being applied to students from well-endowed homes and schools? And is the number of underprivileged students increasing or decreasing over the last five years? Are we committed as a nation in achieving gender parity in university admissions? It is due to the quest to seek answers to these questions that the present study became imperative.

Methodology

The study utilized both in-depth interviewing and desk-based research techniques to collect data. In this regard, both primary and secondary data were collected for analysis. For primary data, heads of academic directorates of the five (5) universities sampled for this study were interviewed. With regards to secondary data, enrolment and graduation data between 2010/2011 and 2015/2016 academic years were collected from the five (5) respondent public universities namely: University of Ghana (UG), University of Cape Coast (UCC), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), University of Education, Winneba (UEW), and University for Development Studies (UDS). All the admission statistics and graduation pamphlets (graduation lists) used in our analysis were obtained from the admission offices and public affairs sections of the above-mentioned universities. Additionally, other data were from other relevant agencies including the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE).

However, graduation lists from the five universities between the period of 2011 and 2015 were thoroughly scrutinised in order to get statistics on minority admissions with the Muslim group in Ghana as a case study. In this regard, Muslim names in graduation lists were counted. The key criterion for this particular exercise was that any name that contains at least one Muslim name is considered as a Muslim student. However, we excluded ambiguous names that contain both typical Muslim and Christian names such as *'John Musah Adabre'* for example. This notwithstanding, it is important to state that this data collection technique is a bit cumbersome and problematic. For instance, some seeming Muslim names may not refer to Muslims at all, and some perceived non-Muslim names may be Muslims. However, it was anticipated that this part of the research will at least serve the purpose of providing preliminary insight into the state of university admissions for the minority case study selected under the study.

Enrolment Trends in Public Universities

The right to higher education has been emphasized in many national and international legal jurisdictions. Article 25 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana states that: *"Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate mean and in particular, by progressive introduction of free education"*.² This constitutional provision is in

line with the demands of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of the United Nations which guarantees equal access to higher education.³ This implies that every individual has the right to access education to any level he or she desires. Therefore, the right and access to education at any level should be taken seriously by governments and policy-makers, as the full realization of that right boosts national development.

One would expect that the increase in the number of public universities in Ghana over the years will increase access to university education for a broad array of students including the under-privileged and the vulnerable. However, the story seems to be different as many qualified applicants are unable to get admissions into public universities in the country. The statistical analysis below sums up the state of university admissions for some of the competitive programmes being offered at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), and University of Ghana (UG):

**Table 1: Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi
Full-time Students' Admission Statistics: 2010/2011 – 2014/2015**

Faculty		Academic Year				
		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015
Law	Qualified	428	1930	1501	2025	124
	Admitted	98	164	102	122	212
	Percentage Admitted	22.9%	8.5%	6.8%	6.0%	58.5%
Engineering	Qualified	2240	2669	3193	4241	1064
	Admitted	1588	1623	1878	1997	1402
	Percentage Admitted	70.9%	60.8%	58.8%	47.1%	75.9%
Architecture	Qualified	480	902	982	1086	268
	Admitted	309	344	418	385	272
	Percentage Admitted	64.4%	38.1%	42.6%	35.5%	98.5%
Planning	Qualified	1296	1240	1652	1848	444
	Admitted	439	403	554	515	345
	Percentage Admitted	33.9%	32.5%	33.5%	27.9%	77.7%
Medicine	Qualified	2469	5054	5980	7900	2102
	Admitted	995	1124	1317	1406	1133
	Percentage Admitted	40.3%	22.2%	22.0%	17.8%	53.9%

Source: Planning Department, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, 2016

**Table 2: University of Ghana, Legon
Full-time Students' Admission Statistics: 2010/2011 – 2014/2015**

Faculty		Academic Year				
		2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015
Medicine	Qualified	-	2,154	2,676	4,990	780
	Admitted	-	536	263	297	277
	Percentage Admitted	-	24.9%	9.8%	6.0%	35.5%
Engineering	Qualified	1,804	2,031	4,018	6,405	733
	Admitted	232	284	477	731	402
	Percentage Admitted	12.9%	14.0%	11.9%	11.4%	54.8%
Law	Qualified	2,170	311	3,948	6,581	569
	Admitted	135	178	217	225	195
	Percentage Admitted	6.2%	57.2%	5.5%	3.4%	34.3%
Business	Qualified	4,705	7,096	10,381	15,979	5,854
	Admitted	2,020	3,021	3,592	4,666	3,034
	Percentage Admitted	42.9%	42.6%	34.6%	29.2%	51.8%

Source: Institutional Research and Planning Office, University of Ghana, 2016

As shown in the above data (tables 1 and 2), between 2010/2011- 2014/2015 academic years (five-year duration), the average admission percentage for qualified applicants for many of the competitive programmes such as law, medicine, engineering, architecture and planning at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) is not more than 50%. It is also significant to note that admissions for Law have the lowest percentage intake of qualified applicants at KNUST over the period. The intake was even abysmally lower in 2011/2012 and 2014/2015 academic years, as less than 9% of the qualified applicants were admitted. The usual explanation given is that there are not enough facilities and resources to enable the university to admit more qualified students. This limited accessibility problem is not only peculiar to KNUST. The University of Ghana in the same period did not offer admission to more than 50% of qualified applicants on the average who applied to read medicine, law, engineering, and business. And in some of the academic years, less than 10% of qualified applicants were admitted for certain competitive programmes. For example, in 2012/2013 academic year, the University of Ghana admitted only 297 applicants representing 6% out of 4,990 qualified applicants admitted for medicine. Again, lack of facilities was given as the reason for the abysmally low admission numbers. This limited access to university education has implications for the poor who may not be able to climb the social mobility ladder.

The Less-Endowed and Public University Admissions

One of the objectives of the study was to find out whether there is a specific policy for admitting students from less-endowed schools into our public universities. Mahama Duweijua defines Less-Endowed Senior High Schools (LES) in Ghana as schools “which are located in rural areas with poor facilities”.⁴ Data collected from the Ghana Education Service on less-endowed public senior high schools in Ghana suggests that the number of less-endowed schools (LES) as listed by the Ghana Education Service (GES) has increased from 303 in 2004 to 393 in 2016. Interestingly, most senior high schools classified as less-endowed by the Ghana Education Service in 2004 are still less-endowed after twelve years. Also, more schools have been added to the less-endowed list since then. What this means is that as at September 2016, 393 out of the 608 public (government-assisted) Senior High Schools (SHSs) in Ghana⁵, representing 65%, are less-endowed. Consequently, there are many questions begging for answers. Why is it that over two-thirds of the country’s senior high schools which prepare students for tertiary institutions are less-endowed? Are these schools able to churn out qualified students to higher institutions? If not, what happens to these students after their secondary education? The figures provided below (table 3) gives a comparative picture of the less-endowed school situation in Ghana:

Table 3: GES Regional distribution of less-endowed SHS in Ghana between 2004 and 2016

REGION	NO. OF LESS-ENDOWED SCHOOLS IN 2004	NO. OF LESS-ENDOWED SCHOOLS IN 2016
GREATER ACCRA	7	25
EASTERN	49	56
CENTRAL	34	39
WESTERN	27	33
ASHANTI	43	64
BRONG AHAFO	39	48
VOLTA	51	62
NORTHERN	25	31
UPPER EAST	13	19
UPPER WEST	15	16
TOTAL	303	393

Source: GES 2004 and 2016 Less-Endowed Senior High Schools in Ghana Lists.

It is significant to state that the study found that Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), has been using the GES less-endowed list prepared in 2004 for less-endowed admissions. This seems to suggest that for twelve years, none of the 303 listed less-endowed schools across the country has improved in terms of facilities and resources. Or is it that an updated list exists and it is released only when institutions request for it? In any case, if there was a national unified policy on less-endowed admissions which is enforced by relevant agencies, the Ghana Education Service (GES) would have been in the picture; and therefore would have been obliged to update its list of less-endowed schools every year and distribute to

relevant institutions. However, a 2016 list of less-endowed schools obtained from the Ghana Education Service for the 2016/17 less-endowed admissions at the University of Ghana shows that some schools have been removed and others have been added. However, in most cases, the number of less-endowed schools per regions has increased, with the national figure totalling three hundred and ninety-three (393) schools.

On the substantive question of whether the universities have a unified policy for admitting students from less-endowed schools, the study found out that there is an understanding in all the five participating universities that a percentage of undergraduate admissions must be allocated to students from less-endowed schools or deprived communities. In fact, some public universities such as Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), University of Cape Coast (UCC) and University of Ghana (UG) have been featuring the concept of less-endowed admissions sporadically in annual admissions. However, the study did not find a specific national policy that stipulates how such admissions should be done. Instead, individual universities have local conventions agreed upon by local admission boards for the admission of these students. For instance, by admission board decision, University of Ghana has been doing less-endowed admissions every year. The admission board offers admission to one best student from each less-endowed school listed by the Ghana Education Service, who meets the minimum requirements.⁶ The list of less-endowed schools is requested each admission year by the University of Ghana from the Ghana Education Service. For Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), five schools from the GES 2004 less-endowed list are selected and three best students from each of the five schools are given admission once the minimum admission requirements are met.⁷ Again, the admission board of University for Development Studies has never consciously admitted students from the less-endowed school list prepared by the Ghana Education Service⁸; and the University of Cape Coast has stopped doing less-endowed admissions since 2010 except for few special requests it receives from certain deprived schools.⁹

This way, the individual public universities decide on annual basis how many of such students should be taken and how many should be taken from the schools listed by the Ghana Education Service as less-endowed. In fact, the study found that in some years, some of the public universities decided not to offer less-endowed admissions. For example, in the 2011/2012 and 2014/2015 academic years, there were no less-endowed admissions at KNUST.¹⁰ Also, University of Cape Coast stopped doing less-endowed admissions since 2010/11 academic year as indicated earlier.

By and large, the study found that there is no unified national policy either prepared by the Ministry of Education or the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) on public university admissions for students from less-endowed schools and the vulnerable in society. Again, the research established that even though there are commitments in some of our public universities towards less-endowed admissions, there is the lack of co-ordination among the various public universities in this regard. This brings about multiple admission offers to the same sets of less-endowed students from different universities. This situation results in wasted admission places that would have been filled by other equally qualified less-endowed students. For example, the figures for less-endowed admissions from KNUST in the table below depicts a typical multiple admissions problem:

Table 4: Less-endowed Admissions Statistics- KNUST

NO	ACADEMIC YEARS	UNDERGRADUATE LES ADMISSIONS	
		ADMISSION OFFERED	REGISTERED
1	2010/2011	539	244
2	2011/2012	-	-
3	2012/2013	547	130
4	2013/2014	1,507	754
5	2014/2015	-	-

Source: Basic Statistics, Quality Assurance and Planning Unit, KNUST, 2016.

From the above table, it can be seen that in 2013/2014 academic year, the university (KNUST) offered 1,507 admissions to students from less-endowed and only about half of the offer was taken. A similar situation occurred in 2010/2011 and 2012/2013 academic years for less-endowed admissions. This might imply multiple admissions for those who did take the offer at KNUST. Moreover, it could mean that the students did not even know that they had been given admissions since less-endowed admissions at KNUST are not based on admission applications where addresses and contacts of individual students can be retrieved.

Gender Parity Policy in Public University Admissions

As indicated earlier, access to public university education is relatively limited especially when it comes to competitive courses. And this has implications for the quest for gender parity in public university admissions. In Ghana there exists a wide disparity between men and women as men have consistently enjoyed an advantage over women in educational attainment. Although women consist of about 51 percent of Ghana's population, women (67.1%) experience higher illiteracy than men (31.5%)¹¹. Moreover, higher educational attainment among women is appalling as compared to men. According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, the number of women with post-secondary education was more than twice that of active women (namely 7.6% against 3.5%) The proportion of men who had post-secondary diploma and higher education was almost twice that of women (5.5% as against 3.1%).¹² For instance, in Accra, the capital and the most cosmopolitan city in the country, only 3 percent of women have bachelor degrees and 0.8 percent with post graduate degrees as against 6 percent for men with bachelor degrees and 2% for men with post-graduate degrees.¹³ This shows a great gender disparity in post-secondary education. As one of its objectives, the present study sought to examine the extent of gender parity in public university admissions in Ghana. The study found out that even though the issue of gender equity in university admissions in Ghana seems to be a concern to all respondent universities, the ratio for male/female is still largely inequitable. The study also found out that despite the intense advocacy for gender parity in public university admissions, there is no unified national gender admission policy for our universities. However, some of the universities have developed local gender policies with segments on gender admissions. In this regard, University of Education Winneba deserves a special commendation. The university has developed a comprehensive gender policy to guide all endeavours of the university including admissions. However, the section on admissions does not reflect positively gender percentages for admission between 2010/2011 and 2014/2015 as admissions are still largely in favour of the male gender. Interestingly, the study established that the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) has

a protocol on gender admission which entreats public universities in Ghana to aim at 50-50 for male and female public university admissions.

The following admission tables for some selected competitive courses sum up the gender admission situation in public universities in Ghana:

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA
2010/2011- 2014/2015 ACADEMIC YEAR

Table 5: MEDICINE

YEAR	TOTAL OF STUDENTS	GENDER		PERCENTAGE	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE %	FEMALE%
2010/2011	25	15	10	60.0	40.0
2011/2012	187	120	67	64.1	35.8
2012/2013	239	150	89	62.7	37.2
2013/2014	265	174	91	65.6	34.3
2014/2015	337	229	108	67.9	32.0

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST
2010/2011- 2014/2015 ACADEMIC YEARS

Table 6: EDUCATION

YEAR	TOTAL OF STUDENTS	GENDER		PERCENTAGE %	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
2012/2013	1155	693	462	60	40
2013/2014	1607	961	646	59.8	40.2
2014/2015	1468	923	545	62.9	37.1

UNIVERSITY FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
2010/2011- 2015/2016 ACADEMIC YEARS

Table 7: INTERGRATED DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

YEAR	TOTAL OF STUDENTS	GENDER		PERCENTAGE %	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
2012/2013	363	221	142	60.8	39.1
2013/2014	369	241	128	56.3	34.6
2014/2015	823	506	317	61.4	38.5

KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
2010/2011- 2015/2016 ACADEMIC YEARS

Table 8: ENGINEERING

YEAR	TOTAL OF STUDENTS	GENDER		PERCENTAGE %	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
2010/2011	1116	980	136	87.8	12.2
2011/2012	1153	966	187	83.8	16.2
2012/2013	1402	1211	191	86.4	13.6
2013/2014	1325	1111	214	83.8	16.2
2014/2015	1061	986	75	92.9	7.1

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION-WINNEBA ADMISSIONS
2011/2012- 2014/2015 ACADEMIC YEARS

Table 9: EDUCATION

YEAR	TOTAL OF STUDENTS	GENDER		PERCENTAGE %	
		MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
2011/2012	4231	3035	1196	71.7	28.3
2012/2013	4887	3585	1302	73.4	26.6
2013/2014	7797	5440	2357	69.8	30.2
2014/2015	9908	6891	3017	69.5	30.5

It can be seen from the above table analysis that admitted female students in most of the selected competitive programmes in our public universities are not up to 40 percent on the average. For example, for five consecutive academic years (between 2010/2011 and 2014/15), female admission for Medicine at the University of Ghana was averagely less than 40 percent of the total admissions made for the programme as table 5 shows. In the same period, female admission for Engineering at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) was less than 17% of the total admission registered for the programme as shown in table 8. It is also significant to note that the flagship programme of the University for Development Studies, Integrated Development Studies (IDS) is registering lower female students as compared to the male registered students. It can be seen from table 7 that between 2012/2013 and 2014/2015 academic years, less than 40 percent of students admitted to offer IDS were females. The inequitable public university admission trend for the female is the same for Education at University of Education, Winneba and University of Cape Coast (see tables 6 and 9).

However, it is heart-warming and commendable to see from the above data that female enrolments for Law at the University of Ghana recorded more than 50 percent on the average between 2010/2011 and 2014/2015 academic years (See Tables 7 and 17). This trend should be maintained and replicated in other equally competitive programmes across public universities in Ghana in order to at least attain the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) protocol of 50-50 admission on gender.

University Admissions for Persons with Disability

The Persons with Disability Act, Act 715; the 1992 Constitution; the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948); and the UN Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1994) all position education as a basic human right for persons with disabilities (PWDs). These legal documents are particular about access to education including tertiary education for PWDs. Rule 6 of the UN Standard Rules for Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities mandates states to provide an integrated setting for the education of the PWDs. The standard rule states: *“States should recognise the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities in integrated settings. They should ensure that the education of persons with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system”*. The UN document also states: *“Education for persons with disabilities should form an integral part of national educational planning, curriculum development and school organisations”*.

In view of the above legal commitments towards education for persons with disabilities (PWDs), the present study sought to explore the extent to which persons with disability (PWDs) are

factored into the general admission process in public universities in Ghana. The study particularly wanted to know whether there was a policy for admissions for PWDs into public universities. And as part of data collection, we requested for information on admissions for PWDs from the universities. The study found that none of the five respondent universities had in place special admission concessions for PWDs. However, all officials of the participant universities have policies for PWDs already admitted to the institutions especially in the area of appropriate infrastructure.

Minority Access to University Education in Ghana (The Muslim Community in Ghana as a Case Study)

As indicated in the introduction of this paper, education enables individuals to enhance their personal development and social mobility. And one of the catalysts for social mobility is having access to education as it limits the perpetuation of social stratification and inequalities. Gaining access to education contributes to the re-distribution of national resources. This requires that the under-privileged and deprived should not be excluded in competitive educational opportunities. This study attempted to ascertain the number of vulnerable and underprivileged students from identifiable minority groups who have graduated from public universities in the last five academic years in competitive programmes. Using the Muslim Community in Ghana as a case study, the study discovered that the deprived and the under-privileged have limited access to competitive programmes in public universities.

Below are the data summaries of Muslim graduation ratios from the five participant universities on selected competitive programmes:

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA- GRADUATION LIST MUSLIMS RATIO: 2011-2015

Table 10: SCIENCE EDUCATION

YEAR	NO. OF GRADUANDS	NO. OF MUSLIMS	PERCENTAGE %
2011	546	26	4.76%
2012	589	34	5.77%
2013	444	26	5.85%
2014	537	37	6.9%
2015	383	22	9.22

UNIVERSITY FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES- GRADUATION LIST 2011-2015 (MUSLIM RATIO)

Table 11: INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

YEAR	NO. OF GRANDAUNTS	NO. OF MUSLIMS	PERCENTAGE %
2011	1021	350	34.3
2012	1529	183	12.0
2013	1233	316	25.6
2014	--	--	--
2015	560	178	31.8

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST GRADUATION LIST (MUSLIM RATIO)

Table 12: EDUCATION

YEAR	NO. OF GRANDAUNTS	NO. OF MUSLIMS	PERCENTAGE %
2011	1,265	85	6.71
2012	1,308	82	6.3
2013	1334	60	4.5
2014	1187	53	2.0
2015	1012	55	5.4

UNIVERSITY OF GHANA GRADUATION LIST – 2011-2015 (MUSLIM RATIO)

Table 13: LAW

YEAR	NO. OF GRADUANDS	NO. OF MUSLIMS	PERCENTAGE %
2011	122	5	4.1%
2012	73	3	4.1%
2013	-	-	-
2014	71	1	1.4%
2015	72	3	4.2%

**KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
GRADUATION LIST MUSLIMS RATIO: 2011-2015**

Table 14: SCHOOL OF MEDICAL SCIENCE

YEAR	NO. OF GRADUANDS	NO. OF MUSLIMS	PERCENTAGE %
2011	440	7	1.6 %
2012	445	9	2.0 %
2013	455	10	2.2 %
2014	458	12	2.6 %
2015	463	13	2.8 %

From the figures provided above, it can be seen that Muslims represent less than one-third of students who graduate from public universities in Ghana over the last five years. For instance, in University of Ghana School of Law, in the academic year 2013/2014, only 1.4 percent of Muslims were part of those who graduated. However, the graduation figure for Muslims who pursued Law at the University of Ghana appreciated to 4.2% in the 2015 graduation list even though the percentage is still abysmal (See Table 13). At the University of Cape Coast, the percentage of Muslims who graduated in Education between 2011 and 2015 ranges from 2.0 to 6.7 percent (See table 12). At the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the percentage of Muslim granduands in Medicine ranges between 1.6 percent and 2.8 percent from 2011 to 2015 (See Table 14). However, at the University for Development Studies (UDS), the Muslim graduation percentages seem to be a bit higher than that of the other public universities. For example, the percentages of Muslim students who graduated in Integrated Development Studies between 2011 and 2015 range between 12.0 and 34.3 percent (See Table 11). It must be stated that the higher graduation percentage of Muslims from UDS is understandable since the communities in its catchment areas are predominantly Muslim. In spite of this, it is highly expected that UDS will do better since one of the core objectives of establishing the university was to increase accessibility for university education among the northern folks.

By and large, it can be deduced from the above data on Muslim university graduation that the numbers for the Muslim admissions (as a minority case study) in competitive programmes such as Medicine, Education, Engineering, and Law were abysmally low. Access to education at all levels contributes to the re-distribution of national resources and serves as a catalyst for social mobility. Therefore, lack of access to higher education for the underprivileged can perpetuate social stratification and widen the already existing inequalities among communities in the country. This has practical implications for social integration and national cohesion.

Key Findings

Five key findings can be summarized from the analysis of the data collected for the study. Firstly, inadequate infrastructure at public universities is a barrier to university education for many average students who qualify but are not admitted due to stiff competition and limited teaching and learning resources at the disposal of public universities in Ghana. This can breed disillusionment among the youth especially those from deprived communities.

Secondly, there is no unified national policy on university admissions for the less-endowed students in Ghana. However, the study found out that universities which do less-endowed admissions have individual internal policies in place for applicants from schools classified as less-endowed by the GES. Most of these schools listed in 2004 are still found in a less-endowed list prepared by the Ghana Education Service in 2016. Again, the list is not consistently applied by the participant universities admission boards.

Thirdly, even though some of the public universities have local policies on the admission of persons with disability (PWDs), the study identifies that there is no unified national policy for admitting PWDs into public universities. This is

Fourthly, female admissions to public universities in Ghana are still generally low as compared with that of the male counterpart. However, the study established that the issue of gender equity in university admissions is a target for all respondent universities. All participant universities are making conscious effort for equalization of gender admissions. But with the different individual university policies to achieve gender equity, it is difficult to assess the overall impact of these gender equity efforts in public university admissions in the country.

And fifthly, the numbers for the minority admissions (Muslims as a case study) in competitive programmes such as Medicine, Nursing, Engineering, and Law were abysmally low. This has practical implications for social integration and national cohesion.

Core Recommendations

In view of the key findings of the study, and in order to enhance equitable university opportunities for all students including the underprivileged and vulnerable communities in Ghana, this paper makes three key recommendations. First, authorities responsible for university education in Ghana should as a matter of urgency initiate the process of putting in place a

binding unified and coherent national policy that ensures equitable admission process for the vulnerable and underprivileged in society. This way, the interest of qualified students from deprived communities and less-endowed senior high schools will be protected in order to enhance their social mobility and respectability.

Second, the National Council on Tertiary Education (NCTE) should go beyond its not binding 50-50 protocol and spearhead the formulation of a coherent national gender policy on admissions for the use of all public universities in the country. This will address the disparity of policies on gender that exists at individual universities. This will enable easy monitoring and evaluation of the policy with the goal of ensuring that it is achieving its objectives.

And thirdly, For the sake of social inclusion and national cohesion, the issue of the inclusion of minority interest in the overall educational policy of the country should be taken seriously by government and state institutions mandated to ensure educational equity and accessibility. Government should increase its efforts in addressing the infrastructural challenges in our public universities in order to increase access for many average students who qualify to be admitted. This we believe will inure to the rapid and sustainable socio-economic development of the country.

Conclusion

There is no doubt about the fact that the vulnerable and the underprivileged need social protection in order to achieve life goals which include attaining higher education. The protection of the vulnerable has become even more imperative in view of the fact that university admissions have become very competitive due to inadequate space for more enrolments. Moreover, as a result of the seeming commercialization of university education even in state institutions in Ghana, the less-endowed in society is left at the receiving end of the competitive market which further widens the gap between the rich and the poor.

This study has revealed critical concerns that impede access to university education by the underprivileged which need to be addressed by policy-makers as a matter of urgency. These concerns include lack of a unified national policy for university admissions for the less-endowed such as persons with disability and students from less endowed schools in the country. Moreover, the research also indicates that there is no social protection or affirmative action in terms of admissions for minority groups in the country. Furthermore, there is more to be done in the area of gender equity in university admissions as the intake percentage of women for competitive courses such as Medicine, Education, Law and Engineering among others is relatively low.

In view of the above, it is strongly recommended that authorities responsible for university education in Ghana such as the Ministry of Education, the National Council on Tertiary Education and University Councils as well as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection to collectively act to put in place a binding unified national policies which ensures equitable admission opportunities for the vulnerable and underprivileged in society. Moreover, government should increase its efforts in addressing the infrastructural challenges in public universities in the country in order to increase access for many average and poor students who qualify to be admitted. The exclusion of the underprivileged and the vulnerable from university

education has serious implications for national integration. Finally, it is important to state in line with the principle of social justice as espoused in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana that, it is imperative that every Ghanaian is given equal opportunity to access university education, irrespective of one's economic, gender, ethnic, or religious status.

Endnotes:

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4. Mahama Duweijua, *Access and Relevance of Tertiary Education in the Context of National Development*, The Baraka, 2016, p.15.
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9. Interview with Jeff Teye Onyame, Deputy Registrar, Division of Academic Affairs, University of Cape Coast, March, 2016.
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11. Ghana Statistical Service (2013) 2010 Population and Housing Census
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