RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADMISSION POLICIES AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-EAST GEOPOLITICAL ZONE OF NIGERIA (2010-2024)

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Abstract
This study investigated admission Policies and academic performance of undergraduate students in federal universities in South East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria (2010-2024). The Specific objectives of the study were to: examine the extent to which Merit-based admission policy relates to academic performance of undergraduate students; assess the extent of relationship between catchment area admission policy and academic performance of undergraduate students; and to ascertain the extent of relationship between educationally less developed states (ELDS) admission policy and academic performance of undergraduate students. The study was guided by three research questions and hypotheses. The population of the study comprised 21153 teaching and senior administrative staff of the five Federal Universities in the South-East Nigeria. Cross-sectional descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. A sample size of 377 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) statistical formula. The data required for the study were collected through a questionnaire instrument. Data analysis was done using descriptive and inferential statistics. Research questions were answered using mean, while hypotheses were tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation at the 0.05 level of significance. Among the findings of the study were; Merit-based admission policy significantly and positively relates to academic Performance of undergraduate students; Catchment area admission policy significantly and positively relate to academic performance of undergraduate students; and ELDS admission policy significantly and positively relates to academic performance of undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. Based on the findings, the researcher therefore recommends among others; that Federal universities in the South-East geopolitical zone should prioritize merit-based admission policies; universities should maintain and strengthen these policies; ELDS (Educationally Less Developed States) admission policies, institutions should continue to support and enhance these initiatives

Key words: *Admission Policy, Students' academic Performance, Federal Universities, Undergraduate Students*

Introduction

Education in Nigeria serves as a vital tool for promoting national development. It has garnered active participation from non-governmental organizations, communities, individuals, and government initiatives. Therefore, it is crucial for the nation to clearly define the philosophy and objectives that underpin its investments in education. The National Policy on Education is designed to address this need. Policies are essential for maintaining order, fairness, and consistency in decision-making. They assist organizations and governments in navigating complex environments and can also safeguard the rights and welfare of individuals (Lasswell, in Weimer & Vining, 2017).

Policies are the laid down rules and regulations on how admissions are sought and obtained in higher institution like universities. Although, the goals and objectives set to achieve through education were stated in clear terms, but the worry is on the disparity between policy and the realization of the stated objectives. According to Ogbonnaya (2009), students' admission is the formal acceptance into school or program of study for which certain requirements must be met. It is aimed at selecting the best from the pool of those qualified; hence, prospective students for admissions register and write Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) coordinated by the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) after which some universities conduct an internal screening for the final selection and placement (Omeje, Egwu & Adikwu, 2016).

Admissions into the various institutions of higher learning were initially being handled by each institution. But with the establishment of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) in 1978 admissions into universities began to be handled by the Board through what was then known as University Matriculation Examination (UME) that later metamorphosed to Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) when all entrance examinations to higher institutions of learning being conducted by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) were unified in 2010. The Board was established to execute the policies that are concerned with admissions into Nigeria's higher institutions. The Board is empowered to carry out its functions, which among others include using government approved admission guidelines to conduct matriculation examinations for entry into all degree-awarding institutions in Nigeria; to place suitably qualified candidates in the available places in the tertiary institutions.

To achieve this mandate, the Board stipulated that the first 45% of admissions to any university should be based on merit irrespective of the candidates' state of origin, while the other 55% is to be distributed according to quota factor of catchment area or locality, discretional factor; and Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) in the proportion of 25% 10% and 20% respectively (Ogoke & Abiogu, 2020). The merit-based admission policy focuses primarily on academic performance, measured through

standardized examination scores and previous educational achievements. Merit-based admission policy is designed to select candidates strictly based on academic achievement, typically through standardized examinations and previous academic records (Afolabi & Loto, 2012).

Catchment area policies prioritize candidates from specific geographical regions to promote local representation within universities. Catchment area policy allocates a certain percentage of admission slots to the host communities or indigenes of the areas in which universities are located. FGN cited in Orike (2019), while the ELDS quota is designed to support applicants from states identified as educationally less developed. The classification of states as "Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS)" highlights the disparities in educational resources and outcomes across Nigeria.

Academic performance of students on the other hand is seen as the measure of the students' level of knowledge, skills and achievements in various disciplines. It is an important parameter in measuring students' learning outcome in various school disciplines. Academic performance is based on the degree of intellectual simulation that the student could receive from learning situations. The desire to achieve something of excellence is inherent in all human beings. Mbam and Olusanya (2025) regarded academic performance as excellence in all academic disciplines, in class as well as in co-curricular activities. It is an academic achievement by students in both curricular and co-curricular activities.

Statement of Problem

The poor academic performance of students in most of Nigerian universities has been attributed to poor academic background and lack of goal and institutional commitment on the part of students, while the institution's negligent attitude in providing and fostering an academically healthy environment for its students, lack of quality teaching and learning activities that will motivate students in their study programme. Also, the inconsistent admission policy of the government that fails to comprehensively assess student attributes in order to identify early students quality at inception among others have been adduced for the seemingly low quality of students.

Furthermore, studies have been conducted to determine whether new students are adequately prepared for post-secondary education. Most recent studies also revealed that retention at the first-to-second year stage is very crucial since increasing attrition rates were observed among the freshmen at this stage at all levels of education. However, little attention has been focused on the process (admission policies) through which the students (major input) came into the university. Admission policies such as the merit-based admission policy, catchment area quota, educationally less developed

states (ELDS) quota, and discretion quota are implemented to address issues of equity, access, and national integration (Odukoya, Chinedu, & Chinedu, 2018). However, these policies have generated debates regarding their impact on student academic performance. There are concerns that the implementation of catchment area and ELDS quotas may compromise academic standards and reduce the overall quality of graduates (Adeyemi, 2011). In some cases, these policies have been linked to increased academic probation and poor performance in core courses (Odukoya et al., 2018). However, proponents argue that such policies are necessary to promote national unity and social justice, highlighting the complex balance between equity and excellence. In the light of the above, this study examined the relationship between admission policies and academic Performance of Undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria from 2010-2024.

Objectives

The broad objective of this study was to examine the relationship between admission policies and academic Performance of Undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

1. Examine the extent to which Merit-based admission policy relates to academic performance of undergraduate students.
2. Assess the extent of relationship between catchment area admission policy and academic performance of undergraduate students.
3. Ascertain the extent of relationship between educationally less developed states (ELDS) admission policy and academic performance of undergraduate students

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. To what extent does Merit-based admission policy relates to academic performance of undergraduate students?
2. To what extent does catchment area admission policy relate to academic performance of undergraduate students?

3. To what extent does educationally less developed states (ELDS) admission policy relate to academic performance of undergraduate students?

Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following null hypotheses

1. **H^o:** Merit-based admission policy does not significantly relate to academic performance of undergraduate students.
2. **H^o:** Catchment area admission policy does not significantly relate to academic performance of undergraduate students
3. **H^o:** Educationally less developed states (ELDS) admission policy does not significantly relate to academic performance of undergraduate students

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Concept of Admission Policies

Policies are laid down rules and regulations that govern the affairs of a particular activity. Also, Admission policies on the other hand are laid down rules and regulations on how admissions are sought and obtained amid rigorous process in higher institutions like Universities, Colleges of Education and Polytechnics among others (Abbas et al., 2023). Policy is a plan of action that entails the broad statement of future and ways and methods of achieving them. It connotes a guide or blueprint of certain operationalised philosophy, principle, law, mission, order, injunction to be translated into various programmes and actions.

Admission refers to a systematic process of offering a study slot(s) to a particular student(s), in this research admission also, is the process where admission slots are offered to students to study various courses in Teacher Training Colleges. Several definitions were given by different scholars to what admission means. According to Joe et al (2014) cited in Abbas et al. (2023) see admission as the acceptance of a candidate on meeting some basic criteria to study a programme at any level of an educational institution. Admission policies on the other hand are laid down rules and regulations on how admissions are sought and obtained amid rigorous process in higher institutions like Universities, Colleges of Education and Polytechnics among others. The prime aim of these policies was to select the best students who are intellectually sound and robust to undergo their studies irrespective of their backgrounds: gender, social, racial, religious and financial considerations (Abdullah & Mirza, 2018).

Quota system of admission

The quota system is the formula used in the equalization of educational opportunity through its influence on admission matters. Obielumani in Ndu (2022) defines quota system as any selection method for school admission whereby a certain set of percentage of those selected must be of a given ethnic or racial background and/or of a particular sex or state/ local government area. With the quota system policy, universities are under obligation to admit students not entirely on merit but on quota of states as stipulated by the government. The federal government came up with quota system and catchment area policies in the bid to create equitable access to universities, bridge the educational gap, and meet the surging demand for higher education.

The quota system of admission guidelines provides for forty-five percent (45%) of students' admissions to be based on merit as determined by the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) scores, twenty (20%) for applicants from educationally disadvantaged states and thirty-five percent (35%) for applicants from catchment areas (Salim in Ogoke and Abiogu, 2020). The above according to Omeje, Egwa and Adikwu, (2016) as cited in Tyokyaa and Mahmud (2022), imply that forty-five percent (45%) of the available spaces are reserved for applicants with very higher marks with no recourse to state of origin or gender. These applicants are first given considerations for first choices of course and institution before others. Twenty percent (20%) of admission slots is to be reserved for applicants who are from states designated as educationally disadvantaged areas which are predominantly made up of states in the northern part of Nigeria. The catchment areas have thirty five percent (35%) of the admission slots, and this is for applicants within the geographical and sociocultural area hosting or contiguous to the institution of the applicant's choice.

Catchment Policy

Catchment area refers to the locality which in most cases is the geographical and socio-cultural area contiguous to the institution for which a candidate has applied. Ogbonnaya cited in Tyokyaa and Mahmud (2022) defines the catchment area as the locality for which a university is established. Akpakwu in Tyokyaa and Mahmud (2022) states that catchment area is the area which a university draws its students from, which some people are given special preference by virtue of the location of the institution in the area. Consideration is given to students who fall within the catchment areas of the tertiary institution. Some institutions have all the states of the federation as their catchment area while some state-owned tertiary institutions have all local government areas of their states as their catchment area. According to the admission guidelines, twenty-five per cent of the available spaces are reserved for applicants from such states or locality (Adeyemi in Tyokyaa and Mahmud, 2022).

Specifically, the catchment criterion of the Nigerian Quota Policy means 35% of university places can be offered to indigenes of the university catchment. A federal university's catchment includes around six states in either geographical or socio-cultural proximity (Adeyemi in Agbaire and Dunne, 2024). To be eligible on the basis of the catchment criterion applicants to a university must be indigenous, that is, native to one of the states within the catchment. However, they are not required to reside in the area. Non-native residents in the area are not eligible for the catchment quota although they may be offered a university place through other access criteria – for example, on merit if they ranked among the top 45%o of applicants overall or through the ELDS quota if they ranked to 25% of eligible applicants to that university who did not get admitted on merit. Each university has certain autonomy to further breakdown the 35% catchment quota into smaller percentages spread among the local government areas within their state and beyond that to other states in order of the level of proximity. These exact proportions of the dispersed catchment quota is neither specified nor closely monitored (Wahab & Uwandu, 2019).

Academic Performance

There are a lot of definitions of students' performance based on previous works of literature. Usamah et al in Abdulkadir and Ogwueleka (2019) stated that students' performance could be obtained by measuring the learning assessment and co-curriculum. However, most of the studies mention graduation being the measure of students' success. Academic performance or sometimes known as an academic achievement is defined by Kumar cited in Abdulkadir and Ogwueleka (2019) as "Knowledge attained or skill developed in the school subjects, usually designated by test scores or by marks assigned by teachers".

A student's academic performance usually is measured in either examinations or continuous assessment tests, and this is expressed in various ways depending on what the scores should be used for. The numerous ways of reporting academic performance include raw scores, percentages, transformed scores, or even as categorical variables such as Excellent, Merit, Very Good, Pass, First Class, Distinction, A1, B2, C4, F9, and others. Students' academic performance which is a function of many variables, could be classified as a student, home, school, teacher, cultural and legal factors (Joe et al., in Abdulkadir & Ogwueleka, 2019).

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on System Theory propounded by a biologist Ludwig Von Bertanlanffy in 1920. Bertanlanffy asserts that a system is an interrelated and interdependent set of elements functioning as a whole. The theory suggests the

functionalist approach as the best way of examining the role of a subsystem in a larger system. Bertanlanffy posits that it was not enough to understand the parts, that it was also important to understand the relationship among the parts. Bertanlanffs' idea behind system theory is that nothing can be explained by isolating a component of system. The theory attempted to view university as unified purposeful organisation or as a system composed of interrelated parts. This was based on the insinuation that the activity of any part of the system has a direct bearing on every other parts of the educational system.

A system theory has open system which relatively highly permeable boundaries while the closed system has relatively rigid impermeable boundaries thus subsystem is a system that exist within a large system. Every system, supra system or subsystem has an environment. System theory also rests on beliefs that in all system like the society, the university, education has different parts performing different functions but in a way that each part interacts and is interdependent with the other parts and with the system (environment) around it. Therefore, what affect one part; affect the other parts in the system and its environments. Applying Ludwig von Bertalanffy's Systems Theory to the analysis of admission policies and academic performance in federal universities within Nigeria's South-East geopolitical zone provides a holistic understanding of how various interconnected components influence the educational system.

Methodology

The study employed the cross-sectional descriptive survey research design. The study area was South East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study focused on five federal universities selected from the five states in the eastern part of Nigeria – The Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), Abia State; Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU), Awka, Anambra State; Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike (ALE-FUNAI), Ebonyi State; University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State; and Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO), Imo State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised of academic and senior administrative staff of MOUAU stand at 5800; NAU - 4284; FUNAI- 1866; UNN - 5278, and FUTO -3925. The total population of staff of these institutions was therefore 21, 152.The sample size of the study was 377was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula. The instrument used for the study was a structured questionnaire. The response scale was structured on a 5-point modified rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), and Undecided (U) with values 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Mean was used to answer the research questions with a criterion mean of 3.0. Questionnaire items with ratings below 3.0 denoted "Disagreement" while 3.0 and above signified 'Agreement'. The null hypotheses were tested using the inferential

statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical tool at .05 level of significance, through Statistical package for Social Sciences (SPSS) tool.

Results and Discusion

A total of 377 copies of the questionnaire were distributed while 356 were returned showing a 94.4% instrument return rate.

Research Question One: To what extent does Merit-based admission policy relates to academic performance of undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria?

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Data on Merit-based admission policy and academic Performance of Undergraduate students

S/N	Items on Merit-based admission policy and academic performance	$\sum Fx$	X	Remarks
1	Merit-based admissions encourage a competitive academic environment among applicants.	1384	3.88	Agreed
2	Students admitted through merit-based policies adapt well to university-level coursework.	1349	3.78	Agreed
3	Merit-based admission policies motivate students to work harder during their high school years to achieve better academic results.	1303	3.66	Agreed
4	I am satisfied with the implementation of the merit-based admission policy in this university	1354	3.80	Agreed
5	Students admitted through merit-based criteria have better retention rates throughout their undergraduate studies	1479	4.15	Agreed
6	Students who are admitted through merit-based policies demonstrate better study habits and academic discipline.	1285	3.60	Agreed
7	Students admitted through a merit-based admission policy tend to have higher confidence in their academic abilities and competencies.	1307	3.67	Agreed
8	Undergraduate students admitted on merit generally demonstrate higher academic performance.	1338	3.75	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 displays the mean ratings from respondents regarding the relationship between Merit-based admission policy and academic performance of undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. The analysis showed that all the eight items related to Merit-based admission policy and academic performance of undergraduate students received a mean score above the benchmark of 3.0.

Research Question Two: To what extent does catchment area admission policy relate to academic Performance of Undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria?

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Data on catchment area admission policy and academic Performance of Undergraduate students - 356

S/N	Items on Catchment Area Admission Policy and Academic Performance	$\sum Fx$	X	Remarks
9	The catchment area admission policy promotes regional representation among undergraduate students.	1398	3.92	Agreed
10	This policy helps create a diverse student body in the university.	1341	3.76	Agreed
11	The catchment area admission policy is implemented fairly and transparently.	1364	3.83	Agreed
12	Admitting students based on catchment area strengthens the university's relationship with local communities.	1322	3.71	Agreed
13	The catchment area policy does not lower the academic standard of admitted students.	1248	3.50	Agreed
14	Students admitted through the Catchment Area Admission Policy actively participate in classroom discussions and activities.	1322	3.71	Agreed
15	Undergraduate students generally demonstrate satisfactory academic performance.	1272	3.57	Agreed
16	The academic performance of undergraduate students reflects the quality of the university's educational programs.	1320	3.70	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 presents the mean ratings from participants regarding the extent of relationship between the catchment area admission policy and academic performance of undergraduate students in Federal Universities within the South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. The data analysis revealed that respondents rated all eight items associated with the catchment area admission policy and academic performance positively, as each item achieved a mean score exceeding the benchmark of 3.0.

Research Question Three: To what extent does educationally less developed states (ELDS) admission policy relate to academic Performance of Undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria?

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis of Data on ELDS admission policy and academic Performance of Undergraduate students

S/N	Items on Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) Admission Policy and Academic Performance	$\sum Fx$	X	Remarks
17	The ELDS entrance policy promotes equal educational possibilities for students from less developed states.	1386	3.89	Agreed
18	The policy facilitates national integration and diversity within the university.	1331	3.73	Agreed
19	Students admitted through the ELDS quota adapt well to the academic environment.	1364	3.83	Agreed
20	Students admitted through ELDS policies adapt well to university-level coursework.	1322	3.71	Agreed
21	The educational background of students admitted through the ELDS negatively effects their academic performance.	924	2.59	Disagreed
22	Students admitted through ELDS tends to show minimal participation in class discussions and activities.	958	2.69	Disagreed
23	The course completion rate for undergraduates admitted through the ELDS policy is satisfactory.	1272	3.57	Agreed
24	The academic performance of ELDS students improves as they progress in their studies.	1320	3.70	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 presents the mean ratings from participants regarding the extent of relationship between the educationally less developed states (ELDS) admission policy and academic performance of undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. The data analysis revealed that respondents rated six out of eight items associated with the ELDS and academic performance positively, as each item achieved a mean score exceeding the benchmark of 3.0. While two items received a mean score below 3.0

Test of Hypotheses

This section focuses on the testing of the four hypotheses formulated for the study. The hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at a significance level of 0.05, utilizing the Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) for analysis and interpretation.

Test of Hypothesis One

H^o: Merit-based admission policy does not significantly relate to academic Performance of Undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria

Table 4: Pearson Correlation for Hypothesis one on Merit-based admission policy and academic Performance of Undergraduate students

		Merit-based admission policy	Academic performance
Merit-based admission policy	Pearson Correlation	1	.957**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.032
	N	356	356
Academic performance	Pearson Correlation	.957**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.032	
	N	356	356

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
a. Listwise N=356
Source: SPSS, 2025

Table 4 reveals that the correlation coefficient (r) between Merit-based admission policy and academic Performance is .957. This means that a strong positive relationship exists between Merit-based admission policy and academic Performance. The analysis also showed that the probability value of the relationship between the variables is less than the critical value (i.e. $p = 0.03 < 0.05$). This suggests that Merit-based admission policy significantly and positively relates to academic Performance of Undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

H^o: Catchment area admission policy does not significantly relate to academic performance of Undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria

Table 5: Pearson Correlation for Hypothesis Two on Catchment area admission policy and academic Performance of Undergraduate students

		Catchment area admission	Academic Performance
Catchment area admission	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 356	.788** .012 356
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.788** .012 356	1 356

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
a. Listwise N=356
Source: SPSS, 2025

Table 5 reveals that the correlation coefficient (r) between Catchment area admission policy and academic Performance is .788. This means that a strong positive relationship exists between catchment area admission policy and academic performance. The analysis also showed that the probability value of the relationship between the variables is less than the critical value (i.e. $p = 0.01 < 0.05$). This suggests that that Catchment area admission policy significantly and positively relates to academic performance of Undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.

Hypothesis Three

H^o: Educationally less developed states (ELDS) admission policy does not significantly relate to academic Performance of Undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria

Table 6: Pearson Correlation for Hypothesis Three on Educationally less developed states (ELDS) admission policy and academic Performance of Undergraduate students

		Educationally less developed states	Academic Performance
Educationally less developed states	Pearson Correlation	1	.888**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	356	356
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	.888**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	356	356

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
a. Listwise N=356
Source: SPSS, 2025

Table 6 reveals that the correlation coefficient (r) between Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) admission policy and academic Performance is .888. This means that a strong positive relationship exists between Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) admission policy and academic performance. The analysis also showed that the probability value of the relationship between the variables is less than the critical value (i.e. $p = 0.00 < 0.05$). This suggests that Educationally Less Developed States (ELDS) admission policy significantly and positively relates to academic performance of Undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.

Discussion of the Findings

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between admission policies and the academic performance of undergraduate students in Federal Universities within the South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. Using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, the analysis yielded significant insights regarding four formulated hypotheses.

The results from the test of hypothesis one revealed a strong positive relationship between the merit-based admission policy and the academic performance of undergraduate students. As shown in Table1, students admitted based on merit generally exhibit superior academic performance, higher retention rates throughout their studies, and greater confidence in their academic abilities. These findings are in agreement with the findings of Nkwomen and Ndumu (2024), which highlight that admission policies emphasizing merit-based selection positively influence academic

performance. This reinforces the idea that merit-based admissions can effectively identify students who are more likely to succeed academically.

The second hypothesis revealed a significant positive association between the catchment area admission policy and academic performance, with a correlation coefficient of ($r(356) = 0.788$) and a p-value = 0.001 ($p = 0.01 < 0.05$). Analysis presented in Table2, suggested that students admitted through this policy engage more actively in classroom discussions and activities. Moreover, the academic performance of these students appears to reflect the quality of the university's educational programs, suggesting that such policies could foster both community engagement and academic achievement.

The findings associated with the ELDS admission policy showed a significant positive correlation with academic performance, with a remarkable correlation coefficient of $r = .888$ and a p-value = 0.00 ($p = 0.00 < 0.05$). As depicted in Table 3, students admitted under this policy, despite showing minimal participation in class discussions and activities, do not allow their educational backgrounds to detrimentally affect their academic performance. This finding indicates that, although these students may not be as vocal in class, they can still perform successfully academically.

Summary of Findings

The following were the findings from the study:

1. Merit-based admission policy significantly and positively relates to academic Performance of undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.
2. Catchment area admission policy significantly and positively relate to academic performance of undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.
3. ELDS admission policy significantly and positively relates to academic performance of undergraduate students in Federal Universities in South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.

Conclusion

From the data collected and analyzed from the field, this study clearly establishes that admission policies significantly influence the academic performance of undergraduate students in Federal Universities within the South-East Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. The findings confirm that merit-based and catchment area admission policies notably relate with academic performance, as students selected on merit demonstrate superior performance, retention rates, and confidence in their abilities.. In contrast, the ELDS admission policy, while associated with high academic performance, reveals that students can succeed academically even with lower levels of classroom participation, suggesting resilience and capability despite varied backgrounds.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, these recommendations were made;

1. Federal Universities in the South-East Geopolitical Zone should continue to prioritize and possibly strengthen merit-based admission policies as they significantly improve undergraduate academic performance.
2. Universities should maintain or improve catchment area admission policies to ensure students from local areas still enjoy academic benefits, promoting regional development and inclusion.
3. The ELDS admission policy has a positive impact and should be supported and possibly expanded to provide more opportunities for students from less developed areas, improving their academic outcomes..

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