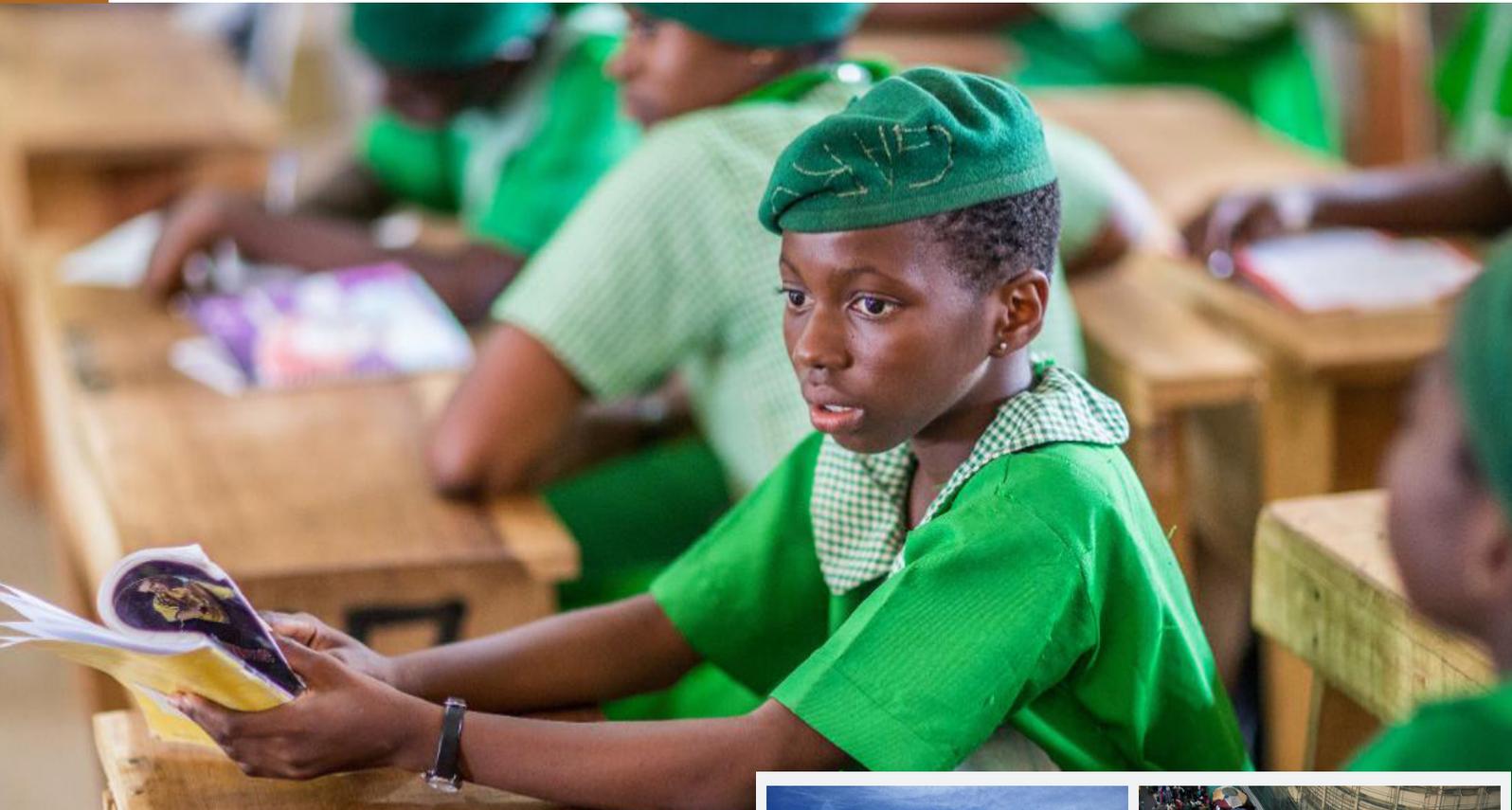


ATHENA PERSPECTIVES

Fresh and Deep Dimension to the News

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BY KOSISOCHUKWU KINGSLEY

1.1 Under-18 Students' Admission Denial; Prioritising Pertinent to Keep the Educational Sector Afloat.

On the 25th August 2024, the Honourable Minister of Education, Prof. Tahir Mamman reiterated his commitment in implementing the policy prohibiting prospective tertiary students under the age of 18 from gaining admission into tertiary institutions such as universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. He opined 'that Information has revealed that the enrolment of underage candidates is inflicting serious damage on the university and the education system, hence, the need for enforcement of extant rules'. This decision has sparked widespread discussion and controversy regarding its implications on the education system and students' academic progression.

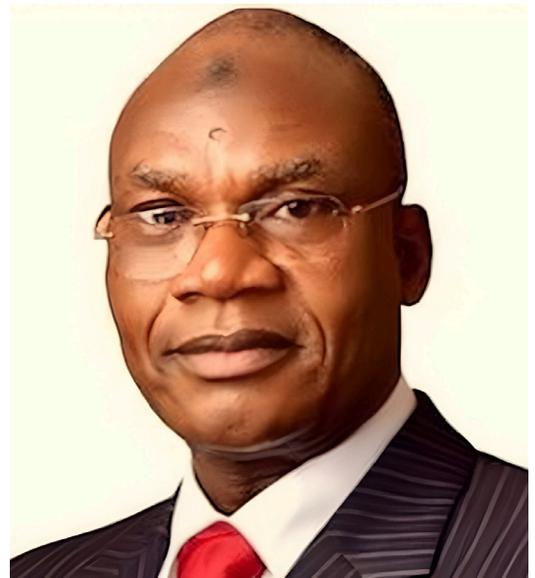
The policy aims to address concerns about the readiness and maturity of younger students entering into institutions of higher learning. Government officials argue that students younger than 18 may not be adequately prepared for the rigorous demands of university life, And this can affect their academic performance and overall university experience. Those who find succour in this proposition argued that it is a proper square peg in a square hole as it does not only give room for adequate maturity but as well create time for prospective undergraduates to be armed with relevant skills to be problem solvers and job creator which pertinently is in high deficit in our society.

Historical Perspective

Prior to the announcement by the Honorable Minister of Education that generated uproar, there was no formal national policy prohibiting underage students from gaining admission into universities in Nigeria. In spite of that, many universities, particularly first-generation institutions like the University of Lagos and the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, had an informal guideline that set the minimum age for admission at 16 years. This practice was not legally mandated but had become a standard within these institutions.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) established a framework for education in Nigeria, which included a timeline for primary, secondary, and tertiary education. While it did not explicitly state an age limit for university admission, it implied that students would typically be 18 years old upon completing secondary education. Nigeria follows the 6+3+3 system of primary-secondary education. Six years of primary education are followed by three years of junior secondary education and three years of senior secondary education.

Elementary education in Nigeria is six years in duration, and runs from grade one through six (ages 6-12). Students are awarded the Primary School Leaving Certificate on completion of Grade 6, based on continuous assessment.



Junior Secondary Education is 3 years (ages 13-16) Grades 7-9. Students are awarded the Basic Education Certificate (BEC) on completion of Grade 9. Students must achieve passes in six subjects, including English and mathematics, to pass the Basic Education Certificate Senior Secondary Education is 3 years (ages 16-19) Grades 10-12.

Practical Implications and International Comparisons

The implications of the policy extends beyond Nigeria's immediate educational settings and touches on broader issues of educational equity and youth development. The obvious repercussions of what seemingly comes off as a rush into the university is almost crushing our educational system and the economy at large. We now have litany of graduates in varying areas who are armed with theories but lack the ability to create a problem-solving platform, hence, the high rate of unemployment. While a lot needs to be done on levelling up our education system



to international paradigm, the policy promises well if the proponents of the policy create a scheme that saturates the aged/ underage students who had completed their secondary education with contemporary skill set that is geared towards problem-solving. This will undisputedly change the unemployment and school drop-out rate.

The zero caps on age limit for university entrance has indeed created graduates with the mind set of landing at a juicy job offer upon graduation which is far from the reality, this indeed creates frustration. Its effects is tired to high crime rate.

Moreover, other countries with no restriction on university entrance age mapped a way to run the studies simultaneously with sound skill acquisition. In Germany, Students typically enter university at ages 19 or 20 after completing a 2-year preparatory program called "Vorkurs" or "Studienkolleg". In the United Kingdom, each university, oversees its own admission policies, some universities like Swansea, Southampton, Cardiff admit students at age 16. It is noteworthy that the paramount thing shouldn't be centred around age but the quality and level of preparedness by these students to be productive after graduation.

Recommendations

Our position is that given Nigeria's deficit in job creation and the seeming primitive nature of our educational sector, the following should be implemented:

Restructuring our Educational System: Courses like Data Sciences and Analytics, Robotics and Artificial Intelligence, Graphic Design and UI/UX, Block Chain Technology and Cybersecurity are few of contemporary skill sets that have been developed into courses and could be injected into the Nigeria education system.

Preparedness: Age is just numerical and should not stand out as a parameter for measuring who should/ should not be admitted into the tertiary education. What is keen is the readiness of students to handle university life and their willingness to contribute productively to the economy post-graduation.

Prioritization of Skill Development: A new educational policy should be created to foresee a compulsory certification of entrepreneurial skill. This certification should not be business as usual but should be awarded strictly on a student's ability to solve a contemporary problem using a skill. Nations that have successfully managed their youth bulge, such as Germany, integrate skill development programs alongside formal education. Nigeria can adopt similar strategies to create well-rounded graduates who are not only job seekers but job creators.

Mentorship: It is also imperative to strengthen career counselling and mentorship as overtime practiced in United States and UK. This is to guide the students chart a better path for their career.

Links for Further Reading:

¹<https://guardian.ng/opinion/the-cruel-18-year-varsity-admission-policy/>

²<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/731584-the-new-educational-policy-and-some-salient-issues-by-bolutife-oluwadele.html>

³<https://punchng.com/on-minimum-age-for-varsity-admission/>



2. Issues in the News:

Top four stories on our thematic areas in Nigeria

Politics: Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), which monitored the Edo State governorship election on Saturday, have issued a damning review of the exercise, declaring that the results from several polling units were altered at coalition centres. The civil society coalition, the Situation Room, said the conduct of the election lacked credibility. Similarly, Yiaga Africa, which said it deployed the Process and Results Verification for Transparency (PRVT) methodology for the Edo election, involving 300 stationary and 25 roving observers, covering a

representative sample of polling units (PUs) across all 18 local government areas of the state, faulted the conduct of the poll and the declared results as lacking integrity.

For more details: <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2024/09/24/csos-edo-guber-results-altered-lack-legitimacy-pdp-heads-to-court/>

Transport: Nigeria's E-Mobility Surge to Lower Emissions: A new report by the Nigeria Energy Transition Office and RMI highlights the potential for electric vehicles (EVs) in Nigeria to drive economic growth, reduce transportation costs, and improve public health outcomes. The report emphasizes the need for supportive policies and infrastructure to accelerate the transition to EVs.

For more details: <https://www.seforall.org/news/nigerias-e-mobility-surge-to-lower-emissions-cut-costs-and-spur-economic-growth>.



Security: The Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Ola Olukoyede, says collaboration with the media will strengthen the fight against corruption in the country. Olukoyede said this when the Managing Director of the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Malam Ali Muhammad Ali, paid him a courtesy visit in Abuja.

For more details: <https://nannews.ng/2024/09/24/media-importantly-in-anti-corruption-campaign-efcc/>

Health: Bill Gate has announced a \$2.8 billion investment in Nigeria to address key health challenges, focusing on improving healthcare, nutrition, and agriculture. He emphasized the need to increase healthcare spending, which is currently about N3,000 per person annually. His foundation aims to enhance primary healthcare and tackle child malnutrition, which is a leading cause of child deaths.

For more details:<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/09/nigeria-gets-largest-intervention-fund-spent-in-africa-bill-gates/>



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3. Regional Updates

Top stories from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger (BCCN)...

Niger Considers Oil Export Through Chad and Cameroon Amid Dispute with Benin Republic:

Niger is exploring options to reroute its oil exports through Chad and Cameroon due to ongoing diplomatic tensions with Benin following a military coup. The original pipeline, which



connects Niger to the port of Cotonou in Benin, has been stalled due to internal security issues and rebel attacks. The Nigeria's junta is now seeking solutions to maintain its oil export capabilities, which are vital for its economy.

<https://www.africanews.com/2024/06/26/niger-considers-routing-oil-through-chad-after-benin-dispute/>

Increased Threat of Jihadism in Benin:

There are growing concerns about the infiltration of jihadist groups from Nigeria into northern Benin. These groups are



reportedly recruiting young men and purchasing property, raising alarms about the potential for increased violence and instability in the region.

<https://africanarguments.org/2024/07/the-jihadis-are-stalking-benin/>



Benin:

Diplomatic tensions with Niger continues due to a dispute over oil exports via the Niger-Benin pipeline. In addition, Benin has reportedly blocked river crossings between the two countries, further escalating the situation.

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2024/06/27/niger-attack-kills-21-highlights-post-coup-security-troubles>

<https://punchng.com/fg-to-enforce-ban-on-underage-admission-in-2025-minister/>

<https://www.evaluationworld.com/school-education-systems/nigeria.html>

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