



The Admissions Gap: Who Gets Into Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions, and Why It Matters

Five Evidence-Based Recommendations to the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board for the 2027 UTME Cycle

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2026, 2,243,816 candidates registered for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination, the gateway to Nigeria's universities, polytechnics, and other tertiary institutions. Only a fraction gained a place. In the completed 2025 cycle, JAMB's own capacity-utilization data show 1,009,736 of the approved places filled and 706,418 left empty; within degree-awarding universities alone, 785,180 of 1,060,919 approved places were filled, leaving 275,739 seats unused. The shortfall is not simply a shortage of capacity. It is a mismatch between where places sit and what candidates want, qualify for, and can reach, and it is one JAMB's own data could help resolve.

A separate, applicant-level JAMB table complicates the picture further: it puts admissions at 1,009,044 of 2,007,312 applicants for the same cycle, a figure close to but not identical to the capacity-utilization count above. The two measures come from different tables and should not be treated as interchangeable. Until JAMB publishes clear definitions and reconciled figures, policymakers, institutions, and researchers will keep reading the same admissions cycle two different ways.

Performance tells a similar story. After JAMB's corrective 2025 resit, 565,988 of 1,931,467 candidates with released results, 29.3

percent, scored 200 or above; the rest did not. JAMB has not yet published a comparable breakdown for 2026, and without one, government, institutions, and communities are left to guess where preparation gaps run deepest.

The same gap in evidence shadows JAMB's plan to let candidates Bring Your Own Device to the 2027 UTME. JAMB describes the BYOD as optional, subject to its security controls, but has not published standards covering device eligibility, cybersecurity, or provision for candidates who lack a suitable computer. A phased, independently evaluated pilot would build the evidence base that immediate national rollout cannot.

This brief recommends that JAMB:

1. Publish admissions and performance data, with candidates' privacy protected and terms clearly defined.
2. Publish the evidence behind the collectively agreed cut-off mark.
3. Publish an annual Admissions and Access Report that brings JAMB's different data tables together.
4. Test the BYOD option independently for fairness, accessibility, privacy, and security before rolling it out nationally.
5. Expand fair access to CBT preparation, mock tests, and accredited exam centres across all six geopolitical zones.

2. INTRODUCTION

In 2026, 2,243,816 candidates registered for JAMB's Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination. Because the 2026 admission cycle was still underway when this brief was prepared, its registration figures cannot be compared directly against the completed 2025 cycle, but the 2025 evidence is instructive on its own. Substantial unused national capacity coexisted with substantial unmet demand, even as particular institutions, programmes, locations, and modes of study may still have run short.

Professor Segun Aina took over as Registrar at the end of July 2026, following the expiry of Professor Is-haq Oloyede's tenure on 31 July.

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

3.1 The Scale and Structure of the Admissions Gap

JAMB recorded 2,243,816 registrations for the 2026 UTME, up from 2,030,627 in 2025, an increase of roughly 10.5 percent. Measured against a rounded 1.72 million in 2017, registrations have grown by approximately 30 percent over nine years.

JAMB's own capacity-utilization data, presented as of 11 May 2026, listed 1,716,154 available places for the 2025 cycle. Institutions filled 1,009,736 of them, 58.8 percent, leaving 706,418 places, or 41.2 percent, unfilled. Within degree-awarding institutions specifically, the fill rate was higher, at roughly 74 percent: 785,180 of 1,060,919 available places filled, 275,739 left empty.

A Professor of Computer Engineering at Obafemi Awolowo University with an MSc in Internet Computing and Network Security and a PhD in Digital Signal Processing, he arrives with the technical grounding to weigh the institutional, technical, and governance questions this brief raises.

iRead To Live Initiative is Nigeria's independent higher education policy think tank, and this is the first publication in our Admissions and Access Policy Brief Series. The analysis draws principally on JAMB's own publications, official government sources, and clearly identified secondary reporting of JAMB data.

A separate JAMB table, built from applicant-level rather than place-level data, puts the 2025 count at 1,009,044 of 2,007,312 applicants admitted, with 998,268 not admitted. That figure sits close to the filled-places figure above but is not identical; the two differ by 692 and should not be used interchangeably until JAMB publishes reconciled tables.

At the aggregate national level, the gap cannot be explained by a shortage of approved places alone. Read together, the datasets point to a structural mismatch among candidate preferences, programme demand, institutional location, eligibility requirements, and the distribution of available places.

3.2 Performance Data and the Transparency Deficit

JAMB's initial 2025 result distribution put 420,415 of 1,955,069 candidates, approximately 21.5 percent, at 200 or above. After a corrective resit prompted by identified errors, the revised figures show 565,988 of 1,931,467 candidates with released results, or 29.3 percent, scoring 200 or above. The remaining 70.7 percent scored below it.

As of 5 August 2026, a review of JAMB's public materials did not identify a consolidated 2026 score distribution comparable to the 2025 table. Absent routinely published data at this level of detail,

government, researchers, institutions, and families have no reliable way to identify where preparation and access gaps run deepest.

At the 2026 Policy Meeting on 11 May, heads of tertiary institutions approved national minimum tolerable admission scores of 150 for universities and colleges of nursing, and 100 for polytechnics, monotronics, colleges of agriculture, colleges of education, and Innovation Enterprise Institutions. These are national floors, not universal cut-offs.

3.3 The BYOD Equity and Security Questions

At the 2026 Policy Meeting, JAMB announced plans to introduce a Bring Your Own Device option for the 2027 UTME. As of 5 August 2026, JAMB had published neither detailed implementation standards nor an equity assessment addressing candidates who lack a suitable device.

Nigeria's 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index found that 63 percent of the population is multidimensionally poor. That statistic underscores why candidate-specific evidence on device access, electricity reliability, connectivity, and affordability should precede scaling BYOD nationally, not follow it.

Allowing candidate-owned devices could widen the examination's cybersecurity exposure unless JAMB establishes and independently tests device-control, authentication, and incident-response safeguards. A remote-access incident at the College of Education, Warri, occurred under the existing CBT centre model; it does not, on its own, prove BYOD would be less secure, but it argues for controlled pilots and published security standards before national rollout.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of these actions can be initiated within JAMB's existing statutory mandate, though carrying them out will require administrative capacity and, in some cases, budget. Each needs clear institutional ownership, an implementation plan, adequate resourcing, and transparent reporting.

01 Publish Privacy-Protected Admissions and Performance Data

JAMB should publish aggregated, anonymized registration, performance, and admission statistics by state, LGA, geopolitical zone, gender, subject, and institution. In addition, JAMB should also publish:

- Registrations, examination participation, and released results, reported as distinct measures.
- Performance bands by geography and gender, with privacy-preserving aggregation.
- Applicant-level admission outcomes, reported separately from capacity utilization.
- Filled places and approved capacity, by institution type and programme.
- Year-on-year comparisons using consistent definitions.

02 Publish the Evidence Behind the Collectively Agreed Cut-Off Mark

Publish the evidence base behind the collectively agreed cut-off mark, so that Nigerians and applicants can understand what the data shows about STEM and Non-STEM access priorities nationally. The cut-off is set collectively at the Policy Meeting, and the evidence behind that collective decision should be public.

03 Publish an Annual Admissions and Access Report

JAMB should publish this report after each admission cycle, reconciling applicant-level admission data with capacity-utilization data and presenting consistent year-on-year tables:

- Registered candidates, participants, and candidates with released results.
- Applicants, admitted candidates, and applicants not admitted.
- Approved capacity, filled places, and unfilled places.
- Outcomes by institution type, programme, state, LGA, and zone, subject to privacy safeguards.

04 Pilot and Independently Assess the BYOD Option

Before national implementation, JAMB should commission independent equity, accessibility, privacy, and cybersecurity assessments, with candidate-specific research on device access, electricity reliability, connectivity, and affordability. Implementation should proceed through controlled pilots, independent penetration testing, and published security standards; candidate-owned devices should remain optional.

05 Expand CBT Access and Readiness Support

JAMB should publish a privacy-protected CBT centre coverage map, set measurable infrastructure targets across all six geopolitical zones, and provide a free, universally accessible CBT-readiness module. Completion should not become a barrier to registration unless JAMB can guarantee equitable access through secondary schools, accredited centres, and accessible formats for candidates with disabilities.

5. CAN JAMB GET THIS RIGHT?

JAMB has undertaken major institutional reforms before. What is clear is that the Central Admissions Processing System and the transition to computer-based testing provide an institutional foundation for the next phase: better data, better access, and better examination security.

Professor Aina's background in computer engineering, examination systems, and public-sector digital reform is directly relevant to several of the recommendations advanced here. His training and experience position him to weigh their institutional, technical, and governance implications on their own merits.

What remains is a transparent implementation programme linking data publication, minimum-score deliberations, annual reporting, BYOD evaluation, and CBT access, each requiring clear institutional ownership, implementation planning, adequate resourcing, and transparent reporting.

iRead To Live Initiative will publish an independent assessment of JAMB's progress in October 2026. Progress will be acknowledged where the evidence shows it, and gaps will be identified where they remain. The Initiative is available to JAMB as a research partner and an independent analytical voice.

METHODOLOGY NOTE

This brief distinguishes among UTME registrations, examination participation, released results, admission applicants, admitted candidates, filled places, and approved institutional capacity; these measures describe different populations and should not be compared without qualification. The review was completed on 5 August 2026; figures may be revised by JAMB after publication.

ABOUT IREAD TO LIVE INITIATIVE

iRead To Live Initiative is Nigeria's independent higher education policy think tank. It produces evidence-based research across four focal areas: university admissions and access, student affairs and campus welfare, financial aid and education financing, and career development and graduate outcomes. Founded 2012, repositioned 2026.

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