

## **THE NEXUS BETWEEN POLITICS AND EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS ON THE QUALITY OF NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

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### **Abstract**

It is safe to assert that everything in Nigeria is decided at the political terrain, this leads to political office holders determining who get what, when and how in the society. The influence of politics on all spheres of life is so overwhelming. This leads to the masses and even the most educated ones mingling around politicians to get their demands met. Education on the other hand is the process of acquiring skills and knowledge for the development of physical and mental abilities of people to enhance their personalities for the development of mankind. Education in this context is viewed as the bedrock of any nation and tertiary institutions becomes the highest citadel that delivers this knowledge. Quality education is that education that is relevance and adapted to meet the needs of the society in health, growth, and survival in a complex and globalized world. It implies education that is worthwhile. Quality education galvanizes and sustained national development. Politics of education involves inter-relationship among interest groups, politicians, bureaucrats and knowledge brokers. Across the whole educational structure these actors want schools to serve particular goals and needs as they define them, even the establishment of tertiary institutions in the country appeared political. This creates the awareness that education in Nigeria is an extension of politics and the quality of Nigerian education is determined at the political domain. This research also envisages the functions of tertiary institutions, temptations that beset them, areas of influence on education and some notable recommendations.

**Keywords:** Politics, Education, Quality, Nigeria tertiary Institutions

### **Introduction**

Critically examined, politics determine virtually everything in Nigeria. The location of institutions, what kind of education we receive, the economic system of a country etc. are all decided at the political spheres, but unfortunately most individual are unaware of the influence of politics in their day- to - day activities. Politics is a critical issue for the development of humanity. The questions of who gets what, when, and how are political questions that define and influence the wellbeing of people in a society. These issues are influenced and determined

by the political behaviours and actions of the ruling class. In Nigeria education is one of the vital tools utilized by the political class to enhance their legitimacy and control the machinery of government and administration. Okunamiri<sup>1</sup> assert that educational system and politics are symbiotically linked. Many countries across the world have developed on the wings of their intellectual capacity. For several decades past governments in Nigeria have made futile efforts through several policies and the reshaping of institutional mechanism to revamp the education system. The current deterioration of the Nigerian education sector proves no less good. Several literatures on the education system in Nigeria attributes the deploring condition of the education sector to extreme political influence. As politics influences human being so also are the social institutions. Political actions and conducts are pronounced in the educational system. Thus, the subject of politics of education becomes essential in determining the nexus between politics and education.<sup>2</sup>

This research will also do justice to the functions of tertiary institutions, temptations that beset them, but focus more on the aspect of politics that has been an impediment to educational growth in Nigeria.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### **The Concept of politics**

Politics is a popular concept, scholars have conceived it differently. Okunamiri<sup>3</sup> assert politics is “unbridled struggle for power among individuals or groups”. Dyke<sup>4</sup> Cited in Ahukanna, R. A Unu, M.I and Chukwudebelu, C.N, opined “politics as, consisting of struggle among actors pursuing conflicting desires on public issues”. These definitions perceive politics as struggle for power which results in unhealthy competition among individuals or the groups involved. Uchendu<sup>5</sup> in Ahukanna R.A etal defined politics as a science and art of securing and advancing the temporal welfare of community organized as a state. The business of politics therefore involves both laying down of general principles and their application to concrete problems. Politics is concerned with the relations of the members of the community between themselves and the things of the world. Again, it is concerned with the right and duties of citizens to each other and to state. From the above definition, politics is all embracing, hence, Aristotle acclaimed that man is a political animal by nature. Uchendu<sup>6</sup> stated that one should not look at politics just as a subject taught in the classroom but it should be seen in a wider perspective than that. It is true that politics has to deal with power, and power involves so many things like

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<sup>1</sup> Okunamiri, P. O. The Politics of Education: The Nigerian Experience Okigwe: Fasmen Communication, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Chinyere n. Alimba. Politics of education: implications for conflict initiation and mitigation in education: european journal of training and development studies vol.4 no.5, pp.74-90, u.k, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Okunamiri, P.O. Op. Cit.

<sup>4</sup> Ahukanna, R. A Unu, M.I and Chukwudebelu, C.N. Nigeria Education and Politics of Federalism: International Journal of Research Development, 2020

<sup>5</sup> Ahukanna R.A op. cit

<sup>6</sup> ibid

decision making, allocation of resources, settlement of conflicts and provision of social amenities.

## The Concept of Education

Education is an age long concept. It is as old as man. According to Anuna<sup>7</sup> in Ahukanna R.A etal education is the systematic socialization of the younger members of the society into learning, about the religion, morals, beliefs feelings of nationality and collective opinion of all kinds. This definition suggests that there is a relationship between education and socialization. Education is the bedrock of a society. Any society that wants to survive in real term must be committed to the education of his people.

## Quality Education

Education is a veritable instrument for societal development. For it to achieve this development, it must be quality. quality education is one that is relevant and adapted to the needs of the society and such needs must meet the standards in health, growth, and physical survival in a complex and globalized world. It implies education that is worthwhile and which empowers the recipients with relevant skills, knowledge, ideas, values and attitudes needed for him /her to make informed

decisions and live a self-sustaining life. Majasan cited in Emmanuel 2019<sup>8</sup> maintained that quality education is expected to address critical issues like the dignity of labor, quality leadership and committed citizenship, industrial harmony, political stability, religious tolerance, self-reliance and security. This shows that quality education as the products of institutions of learning should be able to perform according to expected standard and compete favorably with their peers in other countries of the world. It is the education that produces a complete person. Complete in the sense that the person is intellectually, morally, physically, emotionally and socially developed<sup>9</sup>. Akinpelu<sup>10</sup> argued that education without quality can even be more dangerous than no education, stressing that without quality, education has no value. The public perception in the country is that the quality of education offered is low and that

standards have dropped. These perceptions are based on lack of adherence to acceptable educational practices. Teacher qualifications are low, the learning environment does not promote

effective learning, and basic facilities, teaching and learning resources are generally not available. Teacher-students ratios are high while general performance in examinations is poor and the graduates have low levels of competencies in the work environment. When quality education measures up to the set standard, the end product should be able to perform well in the world of activities in real life situations, but if quality is denied, performance

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<sup>7</sup> Ahukanna R.A op. cit

<sup>8</sup> Emmanuel O. impact of corruption on nigerian educational sector:implications for sustainable socio-economic development: African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies, Vol. 12(1); 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel O. op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Akinpelu, J.A. An Introduction to Philosophy of Education; London: Macmillan, 1981.

cannot meet the set standard. Quality determines how much and how well people learn and the extent to which education translates into a range of personal, social and developmental benefits. One who has obtained quality education should be able to remain relevant and adapt to the needs of the society.

### **Politics and Education**

Politics and education are key concepts that require critical emphasis when they are to be linked. It is against this background that Uchendu<sup>11</sup> noted that politics and education involves a complex inter-relationship among interest groups, politician, bureaucracy and knowledge brokers; he added that across the whole educational structure these actors want schools to serve particular goals and needs as they define them. The mission of power is the right of the politicians who are empowered by the society to make public policies and in this context educational policy. In recent times, it is generally accepted that the success or failure of any educational system depends on the political system of the area concerned. Education cannot be separated from politics because it is an aspect of political needs of the society. Education is a vital instrument for national unity and integration in Nigeria. That is one of the reasons why the federal government is involved in education at primary, secondary and university levels in Nigeria. The political system has influenced educational system over a long period even during the period of Socrates and Plato. Rowley<sup>12</sup> in Ahukana R.A et al observed that “educational plans are political in their nature and effect”. Haven known this, it will be unreasonable to say that education is far from politics<sup>13</sup>. The fact remains that education and politics are inextricably related. The policies adopted by any educational system are essentially drawn by the government in power. On the other hand, educators need the support of the ruling power, the public and other governmental in order to carry out their functions. Toyo<sup>14</sup> posits that no educational system can survive without the financial support and the protection of the government in power. In Nigeria, the educational policies of successive governments have always reflected and often portray the political creed and social views of each government both at state and federal levels.<sup>15</sup>

### **Research Methodology**

Qualitative research design was used for this study. This study adapted the three major discrete methods of philosophy. The speculative, prescriptive and analytic modes were integrated in this study and used simultaneously. This strikes a balance between the three traditional ways of doing philosophy. Speculative method is applicable in this research where the issues, problems and concepts are metaphysical in nature. This is to say that the causality and rationale behind the deplorable state of Nigerian tertiary institutions is examined. The prescriptive approach enables the researcher to make possible recommendations that will help to re-orient the end product of our education system as they go through the process of education; this is to

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<sup>11</sup> Ahukanna R.A op. cit

<sup>12</sup> ibid

<sup>13</sup> Maclaren, P.C. Education and the Politics of Human Resistance. Essex Publishers, New York, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Toyo, E. Federalism and Educational Leadership in Nigeria. Penguin Books, London, 2009

<sup>15</sup> Ikegbusi Leadership in Educational Sector and Government Interest. University Press, Ibadan, 2014

develop people with virtues for the needed development of Nigeria in the 21st century. Analytical approach is used to analyze concepts in order to reduce misconception that could arise and also states the relationship between variables. Data of this research were collected from books, journals/periodicals, the internet, oral interviews, and unpublished lectures.

### **The Functions of Tertiary Institution**

After in-depth research, Audu, I. S.<sup>16</sup> suggested that tertiary institution has three functions. These functions are meant to impart manpower skills; involved in the pursuit of knowledge in organized research; and it is engaged in contributing to national and international dialogue and criticism.

### **Teaching Function**

Teaching is the most obvious tertiary institutions function and the one around which the other elements of tertiary institutions organization and work revolve. Tertiary education is where the highest skills of a community are imparted. The university system grew up in Europe in the middle ages to impart such skills. But by the early nineteenth century the tertiary institutions began to experience some changes as a result of scientific revolution. Development in technology was an eye opener, people began to see the role that tertiary institutions could play in organizing the communication of knowledge. There is no alternative these days to these institutions in which young men and women are taught to confront the world in rational scrutiny, to learn those skills that permit contemporary technology to function and to progress, and to beget those social attitudes that enable a highly organized world to cope with the complexity of social change and to move ahead with a sense of direction. This function of teaching is even more obvious on the African continent. The lack of practical experience in African schools has indeed been a challenge in various aspects of education, this include healthcare and engineering. There has been a shortage of skilled professionals in science, technology, engineering and other fields which has been a persistent challenge in many African countries. Africans are short of the higher skills needed for the contemporary world. It is on this note that we need skilled people who can operate at one and the same time on the plane of modern technology. For that reason we have no alternative to tertiary institutions of our own that draw on the heritage of world culture and that also remain sensitive to the communities towards which their graduates will go.

### **Research Function**

Research goes on in other institutions besides tertiary institutions. But tertiary institutions offer special opportunities for many forms of research. Not only does their teaching function and the dialogue it engenders between teachers and students nourish research, but it suggests research emphasis and structures which are related to its communication to others. Moreover, tertiary institutions atmosphere and the security of tenure given to its scholars foster a longer-term approach to learning. In other words, governments, for example, can carry on much of their own day-to-day research, research institutes can readily take on medium term research, but

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<sup>16</sup> Audu Ishaya S. A Philosophy for Nigerian Education: proceedings of the Nigeria National Conference: Nigerian Educational Research council, 1972.

only tertiary institutions as a rule are free from pressures in such fashion as to be able to develop profoundly speculative attitudes and to carry out the fundamental, long-term and disinterested research that underlines all expansion of knowledge. Again this, function of research means a great deal to new countries.

Where teaching functions alone serve their purpose, an economic case might conceivably be made against various institutions and faculties in developing countries. But without such faculties - medical faculties, for example many forms of research relevant to local conditions would never be carried out. Not only are we geographically remote from the research centres of the industrial world but we also cannot as yet move these countries by offers of immediate gain. If we are to respond to human concern for our own people and cope with conditions peculiar to our nation, we have no choice but to create locally the conditions under which certain forms of research can be carried out and to undertake a great part of the research ourselves. Finally, in relation to this function of research, it is important also to point out that no high level teaching is normally well carried out except where research is going on. A Speculative attitude underlies both the communication and pursuit of knowledge.

### **Dialogue and Criticism Function**

The first two functions of tertiary institutions are easily discerned in any thorough analysis of the role of a tertiary institution. There is a third function which in the long run is as important as the first two, especially in the developing countries, but which has not always received as much attention as it deserves. The university employs skilled persons, offers them security of tenure, and removes them from the market place. In return a country can expect social criticism of a constructive kind from such persons. University teachers cross the generations as they teach: they can remain sensitive to the impatience of the young as they remain aware of the responsibility of the mature. They can translate into social integrity that disinterestedness which belongs to all scientific work. Belonging to a world community as well as to the community of their own country, they can cut across the national and communal differences that have caused much harm in the contemporary world. And given the security of an institution of scholarship and the fellowship of scholars they can more easily make necessary public criticisms that are directly dependent on political patronage or exposed to economic pressures. In other words tertiary institutions teachers and students, play an invaluable role in forming public opinion. There are other elements also that go to form such opinion. But it is a poor country whose tertiary institutions scholars do not bring their attention, talents, integrity and their courage to bear on the articulation and promotion of the public interest.

### **Temptations That Beset Nigerian Tertiary Institutions**

After critical examination, Audu<sup>17</sup> made a submission that temptations facing tertiary institutions are those of Withdrawal, self-interest and communalism.

### **The Temptation of Withdrawal Is Manifold.**

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<sup>17</sup> Audu Ishaya S. A Philosophy for Nigerian Education: proceedings of the Nigeria National Conference: Nigerian Educational Research council, 1972.

Its most often remarked form is where scholars simply concern themselves with scholarship to the detriment of social concern. It is not just that they stay in their studies and laboratories and ignore the world outside. Rather there is the danger that their teaching and their research may ignore the problems of the communities around them and not take into account the resources of these communities. Moreover, the scholars may also refuse to recognize the nature of the difficulties that confront political leaders and social planners and come out with unfair criticisms or naive proposals that add to the difficulties of already over harassed practical men. There are two ways of coping with this temptation. One is for tertiary institutions scholars to strive constantly to maintain links with non- university people, to share the company and join in the organizations of groups outside the walls, and so not to forget what the world looks like and to maintain fellowship with it. The other is for a continuing dialogue on the allocation of resources to go on between tertiary institutions and government. This dialogue will permit the tertiary institutions to lengthen the time perspective of politicians and bureaucrats. But it will also open up tertiary institutions scholars to a sense of the proportion that must always remain in the allocation of scarce national resources.

### **The Temptation of Self-Interest**

This is at its worst when tertiary institutions personnel see the institutions structures as a means of livelihood only and not as structures within which scholarship is pursued, teaching carried social service given. This temptation degenerates into its worst form where communities of mediocre scholars close ranks against the better scholars in their midst, or when they even try to prevent the recruitment of men who will endanger their entrenched indolence and scholastic apathy. There is no safeguard against this temptation except the eternal vigilance of the genuine scholars, the proper demands of the students, and the sensitive concern of the national community. It may mean that good scholars give part of their time to tertiary institutions organization, that students take care to indulge only in responsible criticism of their teachers and that governments handle with care their right to bring certain forms of pressure on the institutions they pay for.

### **The Third Temptation Is That of Communalism**

Temptation of communalism is particularly grave in developing, multi-national states. It threatens the universalism that is built into all science and it spoils the fellowship without which tertiary institutions cannot function. This temptation can link up with the temptation of self-interest as members of tertiary institutions seek advancement more on the basis of ethnic affinity than on scholastic competence, and decide university issues by particularistic rather than institutions criteria. This temptation is particularly strong during moments of tension within a country, since those tensions tell on elite groups in the changing sectors of society more than on members of traditional communities where the pace of change is slower and less demanding. It was no accident that members of our tertiary institutions here in Nigeria were among the foremost proponent of secession during the period 1966-67. The only adequate resistance to this temptation is found where strong-minded and disinterested members of tertiary institutions communities with reputable character and scholarship move across communal boundaries to maintain confidence when confidence is threatened. Secondly, true



scholars and upright men who need no patronage and who accept the trans-ethnic character of learning can stir themselves to overcome the limitations of particularism.

## **Specific Areas of Political Influence on Nigerian Tertiary Institutions**

### **Politics on Funding Of Tertiary Institutions**

It is rather unfortunate that the governments of Nigeria play politics with growths of tertiary institutions which in turn has affected the product and the outcome of these institutions. The evidences are everywhere in Nigeria. This is where you see the government not taking good care of the institution infrastructures, the welfare of staff, the required equipment needed, and even under staffing. Currently, the academic staff union of the university ASUU is battling with the government to see how they can drive home their points to improve the standard of the staff, students and that of the universities. The financial commitment of governments to these institutions is very low. It is on record that even the education budgets captured in the annual budgets of the country is not up to 15 % for over two decades now. When you compare other nations' budget to that of Nigeria, then will you know that the governments are not committed to the business of improving the standard of education in Nigeria.

### **Politics on Curriculum Design**

This may sound unreasonable to admit, political power over content, goals, learning experiences and evaluation strategies is enormous. Curricular materials are often used as a tool to shape a certain image and philosophy in the students mind: it is done so students will later be able to find their place in society and bring profit to the community. Politics can play a huge role in hiring suitable educators. The recent curriculum development that excluded philosophy, psychology, sociology, etc. as general education course is a political one. Politicians now decide what to be taught in the schools and the directions schools should go.

### **Politics on Location of Institution**

This is one of the areas where politicking is manifested in the educational sector. Here politicians have hijack any decision about the location of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The people in the political class are using the siting of tertiary institutions as political achievement. As such, they want it to be cited around their zones, villages, constituencies and senatorial districts Nwagwu<sup>18</sup>. According to Hallack<sup>19</sup>, school mapping can be perceived as the orderly procedure for-determining where to site education institutions to ensure proper coverage and maximum benefit to the communities they are intended to serve. Quite often, political influence and consideration override the tenets of school location and hence schools are sited without due academic consideration or suitability of location. Taking a close look at the location of some state and federal universities, it is clear that they located on political reasons. Politics rides rough-shod over school location principle.

### **Politics on Staffing and Appointment**

It is no longer news that who get what, when and how in the tertiary institutions are determined by the political class. Politicians infiltrate the educational institutions to the extents that the

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<sup>18</sup> Nwagwu, N .A. The politics of education policies in Nigeria. Lecture Series No. 1 University of Benin, Benin City, June 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Hallack S. Recent and future trend in education international institute of education planning Brochure. Paris: IJEP, 1997.

appointment of vice chancellors, pro chancellors, rectors, provost and staff are influenced by them and this negates standards. A system of this magnitude should be based on merits and not the other way round. Employments into Nigerian tertiary institutions have been hijack by politician and given to who pleases them. Nepotism, favoritism and ethnicity have been introduced into the system by the same political class, therefore, turning these institutions to a community or constituency properties.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study indicate that politics has infiltrated the educational system in Nigeria and have contributed to the deplorable conditions of tertiary institutions in the country. The staff, the students and the system itself are affected by this phenomenon. The findings also shows that politics determined who get what, when and how even in the education sector. We further discover that nepotism, favoritism and tribalism have taken the center stage in the system rather than merit. The influx of political influence on tertiary institutions has brought about falling standard in the education system. The society is adversely affected by the product of tertiary institutions in Nigeria because some of these institution products can not solved societal problems rather they cause more problem for the society. With these findings, we make some suggestions below for the purpose of re-fertilization and resuscitation of tertiary institutions.

### **Suggestions**

1. Politics should be played on ideological basis and not on ethnicity basis so as to enable leaders of tertiary institutions to be independent and work towards the actualization of institutional goals.
2. People in the political class should allow the education authorities to select leaders of schools with a stated standard; this will give chance for experts and qualified leaders to take leadership positions in schools.
3. Adequate funding of tertiary institutions by the government, this will give room for effective implementation of the educational policies.
4. Appointments on academic matters should be strictly on merit and experiences on areas of specialization; this will help to achieve the goals and objectives of education as the appointee is well grounded on the field of educational management and administration.
5. Quota system and godfatherism should be kept aside until professionals are filled in supposed positions as leaders in the institutions.

### **Conclusion**

Our summation is that politics has a huge impact on Nigeria education system. The politicisation of the sector is the major factor truncating Nigeria's match to socio-economic, scientific and technological development. Depoliticizing education System is imperative for our dear country. In order to rehabilitated and refertilize the Nigerian tertiary institutions, the political class should not influenced the system on the negative and politics should be played on ideological basis rather than on ethnic basis. Merit should be the driving force and not

nepotism and favoritism. There should be consistent and adequate staffing and funding of these institutions.

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