

The Impact of Political Interference on ... Ekwueme, J. N. (2025)

The Impact of Political Interference on Secondary School Administration and Fiscal Management in Nigeria

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Abstract

The role of politics in the administration of secondary school in Nigeria is always affected by the government interference. The reason is because politics cannot be separated from school management. This political interference undermines educational equality, accountability and institutional effectiveness. It is on this basis that this paper examined the leadership selection, fiscal management, delegation of duties. The paper further highlights how political patronage often determines school leadership appointments, influencing decision-making and resource allocation. Similarly, fiscal management in schools is affected by politically motivated funding delays and inequities, compromising infrastructure development and academic delivery. The politicization of delegation processes and student admissions further entrenches inefficiencies and exacerbates regional inequalities. The paper finally concludes that unless political interference is minimized and merit-based practices are enforced, the goals outlined in Nigeria's National Policy on Education will remain unattainable. Recommendations were preferred among them are to promote transparency, professionalism, and equity in the administration and governance of secondary schools.

Key words: Political interference, Administration, Fiscal Management & School Leadership

Introduction

The concept of politics has been well articulated by educators and social scientists like Ogunode and Musa(2022). They both agreed that politics is not restricted to political parties alone, but to other sectors of the economy and also the educational sector. However, the scope of politics is the temporal wellbeing of any community as a whole. It is obvious that no society can have an establishment government without politics. It is the interference of the government, communities, Parents teachers association (PTA) in establishing schools that brought about the establishment of secondary school. Hence, politics cannot be separated from school management. Education, as a crucial public service, cannot exist in a vacuum. It is inherently influenced by the political structures and ideologies of the society in which it operates.

In Nigeria, the role of politics in the administration and funding of secondary education has become increasingly prominent. As earlier mentioned, no educational system can be entirely insulated from the socio-political environment, as educational policies and structures are often shaped by political mandates and national objectives. Over the years, the Nigerian government has recognized education as both a fundamental human right and a national necessity. This recognition is rooted in democratic ideals, where every citizen is entitled to equal opportunities for self-development and societal contribution. Adeyemi (2000) observed that the strong correlation between educational attainment and employability has led many nations, including Nigeria, to adopt inclusive education policies. Politics, is defined as the process of influencing decision-making, resource allocation, and power dynamics, plays a significant role in shaping educational outcomes. Robbins (in Okorie, 2012) described politics as self-serving behavior aimed at influencing organizational structures and outcomes, which can also be observed among educational administrators and policymakers. This paper explores how politics influences secondary school administration, including policy implementation, leadership appointments, infrastructural development, school siting, and admission practices. It also examines the implications of political interference in funding and fiscal management. The objective is to understand how politics has both positively and negatively impacted the effectiveness and equity of secondary school administration in Nigeria.

The impact of politics in Secondary School Administration

Secondary education serves as a bridge between basic and tertiary education and plays a key role in preparing students for productive adulthood. According to the National Policy on Education (2004), secondary education aims to equip students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and values for higher education or direct entry into the labor market. However, these goals are often hindered by political interference in administrative functions.



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Political interference in secondary school administration manifests in areas such as appointments of principals, delegation of responsibilities, decision-making, and curriculum implementation. Abraham (2015) argued that schools have become extensions of political systems, where administrative decisions are influenced more by political considerations than merit or educational priorities. However, Olayinka (2018) opined that political influence on education is seen in the success of good educational policies issued by the government on the citizens as formulation of policies are sometimes influenced by the political parties in power which sometimes is being criticized by the opposition parties. A typical example is the politicization of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program, which aimed at restructuring Nigeria's educational system into the 6-3-3-4 format. While the program sought to enhance quality and accessibility, it suffered from inadequate planning and resource mismanagement due to political interference. Moreover, political decisions often override technical expertise in curriculum implementation, staffing, and evaluation processes. This not only undermines professionalism but also disrupts the academic progress of students. The disarticulation of secondary education into Junior and Senior categories (JSS/SSS) is another politically driven development. Although well-intentioned, its execution lacked the infrastructural support required, leading to poor learning environments and increased instances of examination malpractice due to inadequate coverage of the curriculum.

Effects of Politics on School Leadership

The appointment of principals has increasingly become a political affair. Abraham (2015) noted that promotions are often based on political allegiance, ethnicity, or geographical origin, rather than competence or administrative experience. This practice results in a lack of visionary leadership and hinders effective school governance. According to Kochhar (2007), the principal should be a facilitator, motivator, and leader who fosters collaboration among staff and students. When leadership positions are politicized, such expectations are rarely met, leading to poor morale among staff and weak institutional performance. In some cases, political considerations prevent the timely transfer or reassignment of principals, allowing some individuals to remain in office for decades, often to the detriment of school development. This stagnation can breed inefficiency and nepotism, with ripple effects across teaching quality, student outcomes, and institutional reputation. Ethnic favoritism is another challenge. In many states, only individuals from certain ethnic backgrounds are considered for leadership roles, regardless of qualifications. This undermines national unity and demotivates competent staff from minority groups. Furthermore, politics influences school siting. Some schools are established in remote or ill-suited locations simply to appease political interests, without considering environmental, demographic, or infrastructural factors necessary for a viable learning environment. A case in point is the siting of the Federal University in Otuoke, Bayelsa State, which critics argue was politically motivated.

Politics and Fiscal Management

The effective administration of secondary education requires adequate and transparent funding. However, fiscal management in schools is often compromised by political interference. Budget allocations are frequently influenced by patronage systems rather than actual needs or performance metrics. Adeyemi (2000) pointed out that education funding must be aligned with community involvement and accountable management. Unfortunately, most political appointees lack the training or will to manage school finances effectively. Corruption, diversion of funds, and ghost workers are recurring challenges. Political favoritism also influences which schools receive grants or infrastructure projects, often leaving rural or less-connected schools underfunded. This deepens educational inequality and frustrates national education goals. Another fiscal challenge arises in the mismanagement of funds intended for the implementation of national education programs like UBE. Politically appointed administrators sometimes misappropriate such funds, leading to poorly executed projects or total abandonment. Abraham (2015) emphasized that politics has turned many educational projects into revenue-generating avenues for political elites, with little concern for long-term educational outcomes. Schools are left with dilapidated facilities and inadequate learning materials. To ensure accountability, Ememe (2013) recommends that school financial decisions should be guided by clear policies and monitored by independent bodies. He argues that transparency in fiscal operations promotes trust and supports strategic planning.

Politics and Delegation of Duties

Delegation is an essential aspect of effective school management. Ememe (2013) outlines the principles of delegation as clarity, competence, willingness, impartiality, and follow-up. However, in politically influenced environments, duties are often delegated based on favoritism, not on these principles. Teachers with close ties to principals or political godfathers

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are sometimes assigned critical responsibilities they are ill-equipped to handle. This leads to poor implementation of school policies and a breakdown in institutional workflow. Shared decision-making, an important democratic practice in school administration, is also compromised by politics. Nevertheless, one major importance of politics in Nigeria is that politics plays a vital role in decision making and controls the management, administration of secondary school completely. Kajo and Mando (2023) pointed out that politics in education can be looked upon as a means for the allocation of resources to different groups in order to achieve their set of educational objectives/goals. The fact remains that an educational system has political goals, which are essential to justify the existence of the system and the political order of the society. However, education develops an individual to participate effectively in politics, while politics in turn adds quality to education. Okorie (2012), citing Bridges, emphasized the concept of the “zone of acceptance,” which refers to the range of decisions subordinates are willing to accept without resistance. When decision-making is politicized, this zone is disrupted, leading to conflict, poor morale, and inefficiency. Teachers become disillusioned when decisions are made without consultation or are based on political calculations. This undermines professional development and limits innovation in teaching and school management.

Political Influence on Admission and Equity

Political considerations also extend to student admissions. The quota system, geopolitical balancing, and positive discrimination are often used to allocate slots in federal unity schools and tertiary institutions. While these policies aim to promote national integration, they have generated controversy regarding merit and fairness. Students from educationally disadvantaged states (EDLS) are sometimes admitted with lower scores than their counterparts from educationally advanced states (EDAS), despite poor performance in entry examinations. While the policy has noble intentions, it raises questions about academic standards and equality of opportunity. Moreover, such politicized admissions often lead to classroom heterogeneity that is difficult to manage and may result in increased dropout rates, especially among underprepared students. Politics also affects student transfers, placement, and scholarship allocation. In some cases, students with political backing are given undue advantages, undermining the principle of meritocracy.

Recommendations

1. School leadership like the post of principals and vice principals appointment should be based strictly on qualifications, experience, performance and merit not on political or ethnic considerations. If this is done, it would bring about productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.
2. Budget allocations and disbursements should be transparent, with audits conducted regularly to prevent mismanagement.
3. Political leaders should prioritize school infrastructure development based on actual needs, not favoritism.
4. Teachers and administrators should be offered regular training to improve competence, especially in fiscal management.
5. Relevant stakeholders should be instituted to monitor to ensure equitable distribution of funds meant for the development of secondary schools.
6. Decision-making authority should be distributed within the school system to prevent over-centralization and political domination.
7. There is need for the quota systems to be evaluated, in order to balance equity with merit to ensure that all students receive support to succeed
8. State ministries of education should established independent merit based schools governing board (SGBs) comprising of community leaders, education experts and parents representatives to oversee the transparent recruitment and appointment of principals, insulating the process from direct political patronage.

Conclusion

It is obvious that politics has negative influence on funding, admission of students, leadership appointments. As such, politicians have significant influence on the management of secondary schools in Nigeria. Nevertheless, politics is inseparable from education, but its influence must be positively directed. When political interference becomes excessive or self-serving, it disrupts administrative efficiency, compromises educational quality, and undermines the objectives of national education policy. For Nigerian secondary education to achieve its full potential, politics must be guided by



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professionalism, transparency, and a genuine commitment to educational development. A depoliticized, well-managed educational system is essential for national growth and sustainable development.

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