

POLITICS AND POLITICKING IN ADMINISTRATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA: A SOCIAL SYNOPSIS

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Abstract

The administration of secondary schools cannot be devoid of the influence of the politicians because education is the substructure of the superstructure which the political system represents. This paper strives to critically unveil the effects and role of politics and politicking in the administration of secondary schools in Nigeria. Various researches have revealed that the demand and supply of resources, both human and material, have always been carried out according to the dictates of the political class. Most principals of secondary schools in Nigeria seem to be stooges in the hand of politicians thereby disabusing the academic autonomy which secondary schools are supposed to enjoy. There is also politics in every other sphere of the administration ranging from planning of the schools' curriculum to provision of fund. To avoid the continuous decline in the standard of education, which is the after effect of the political intervention, it is therefore recommended that Government should ensure that schools are completely free from political interference. Administrators and teachers should sit up to their challenges and responsibilities not allowing themselves to be used by the selfish and greedy politicians.

Key words: Politics, Politicking, Administration, Secondary Schools, Social, Synopsis, Nigeria.

Politics is associated with the act and process of running a government organization or a movement. These activities could impact either positively or negatively on the administration of secondary schools. In Nigeria, the administration of secondary schools is bedeviled with corruption and high level of ineptitude. Secondary schools in Nigeria are divided into two categories: three years of junior secondary schools (JSS) and three years of senior secondary schools (SSS). In SSS three, the candidate now writes the West African Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSSCE) which will be under the supervision of Schools Board.

Secondary school administration is divided into four depending on the ownership. The Federal Colleges are owned and managed directly by the Federal Ministry of Education. They are two in each state and are supposed to be model schools, carrying and maintaining the ideals of National Common Entrance Examination taken by all final elementary school pupils. At the state level, there are also secondary schools that are managed by the state Ministry of Education and the Schools Board. The mission secondary schools are also there managed by the church authorities and finally we have private secondary school dotted all over the place in recent times and managed by the proprietor/proprietress (Wikipedia, 2013).

Secondary education in Nigeria can be considered as the intellectual factory that churns out products for higher education. The capacity of the secondary school system to achieve this most especially in developing countries is often debilitated by vicious politicization in funding, quality assurance and control, equity, access to secondary education and so on. Globally, the provision of quality secondary education is imperative because the post-primary education sector is the precursor for the production of manpower needed for national development and for scientific and technological advancement (Nzepueme, 2011).

The secondary education is the fulcrum of all political reforms in the entire education system and any form of dysfunction in secondary education level will eventually affect other levels of education. The funding of secondary schools in Nigeria seems to have been bastardized for several years. This is evidenced in the Administration of the Universal Basic Education (UBE). The funding of this laudable educational programme was hijacked by political patronage and lobbyists. Nwafor in Maduagwu (2011)(ed) decried the rate of politicking in administration of UBE when he summarized that most of the contract works on school buildings and facilities are in the hands of politicians who are enriching themselves with the money meant to be invested in the scheme. He pointed out that in some areas, officials who were given money to ensure that principals and head teachers execute the projects gave them money far below the cost of the job.

Therefore, this paper seeks to reveal the political maneuverings in the administration of secondary schools and bring to bear the possible strategies which will be employed to curb the negative effects of politics and politicking in secondary school administration in Nigeria. The paper therefore has the following thrusts as its guide: School Administration, politics and administration, policy making, budgeting and financing of secondary schools curriculum/instructional programmes, ascension to leadership (principalship), effects of politicking on secondary school administration and so on.

School Administration

For every organization to achieve, its desired objective efforts have to be harnessed and put together, resources be it human, material or both have to be utilized adequately. In school administration however, the administrators endeavour to look at all the variables like the job of teaching, the man for it and the environment. He also looks at the facilities/equipment needed to ensure the enhancement of teaching and learning and for the actualization of goals. Unfortunately, external influences are his bane and cogs to the wheel of his progress. In line with the above, Abraham (2013) defined administration as what the man at the head of an organization does to achieve the goals of such organization. Jointly he defined school administration as the coordination of the human and material resources within the school for the optimal achievement of the pre-determined objectives of education.

School administration is more pragmatic in outlook. It seeks to achieve results in record time. In a more succinct view, Ezimah (2004) averred that school administration implies the principal or administrator engaging vigorously in the process of operationalizing a programme design to translate it into a flow of human and materials through a coordinated system of activities. School administration in modern times, tends to be considered as assuming a more realistic function of creating and sustaining project operation. In other words, it is viewed primarily as an element of organizing. Ezimah concluded that the concept of administration is fast becoming a buzz nomenclature in the public bureaucracy, where the world “management” consequently, is gradually moving into oblivion in official parlance.

Politics

Politics tends to be the subject matter of every small talk since the existence of humans just as the weather is, for the English. Politics will be well understood and articulated when its wide spectrum of ideological values are laid bare. Scholars that belong to the Marxian School of Thought posit that politics is the science of who gets what, when, and how. To Odum (2007), politics is a conscious and systematic effort to reconcile divergent wills to ensure equitable distribution and allocation of values.

Politics implies that art of interest articulation, aggregation, collation and presentation in order to build a just and egalitarian society.

Politics was viewed by Okeke (2007) as a process of articulate organization of people to transform a complex group life existence into a more corporate “civil life”. This definition implies that there can be no group life without the substance of politics. Politics has suffered “anarchy of “perspectivism” for so long especially in underdeveloped regions of the world. It has been grossly misunderstood and misconstrued as an activity that is replete with dishonesty, lack of truth and discipline, falsehood and deceit. These perspectives are in favour of those who use gimmicks and unethical ways to deal with people around them. This gives credence and support to the choice of one of the paper’s variables which is “politicking”. However, politics is not the same thing as antagonism to political opponents or legitimate government. It is not governing human beings by deceiving them.

Policy Making

Policy making in an educational setting is a sole responsibility of the manager under an overwhelming influence of the politicians. Okeke (2007) saw it as essentially a political act of those responsible for goal achievement. In policy formulation the politics involved is of a high degree but in its execution, administration plays vital role. The interference of the politicians in policy making has unnerved the administrators who are now mere administrative puppets or stooges in their hands. These politicians make policies to suit their interest, culture, religion, tribe, politics, and what have you.

Educational system in this country does not have freedom from the clutches of domestic politics. The system of education has been completely politicized since the establishment of education from the time that the Whiteman arrived. Every decision taken in education has been under the dictation of political kings. There is no concept of institutional freedom. The main reason behind the problem of political interference is that in many cases the induction of secondary school teachers is made on political basis (Shah, 2003). The concept of merit is pushed behind in the process of professional appointments. Thus, politically elected teachers cannot work independently. This factor has grossly affected the smooth process of education. The teachers who do not listen to the dictations of the political actors are severely punished in social or financial terms. This absence of professional freedom of teachers in secondary schools has badly affected the degree of success of their duties.

Budgeting/Financing of Secondary Schools

From the budgetary allocation, a certain vote is for the principal for the administration of secondary school. Sad it is to say that these politicians divert this finance, the money is not always used for what they are meant for rather mismanaged or

siphoned and channeled into private uses and punishment for such offences committed becomes difficult to enforce.

In Nigeria however, education is the most neglected in terms of financial support from the government. Due to receiving less financial support, the sector has remained the most under paid and poor in performance. This fact has rendered the education sector as the most unattractive profession in the country (Farman, 2013). In secondary school where students at the end of their career are expected to be self-reliant; more money is suppose to be injected into this level but this is not the case as politicians are busy amassing wealth to themselves. Secondary school teachers are unable to lead a decent life within the salary provided to them by the government. This factor has affected the motivation level of teachers. The teachers as a whole do not take active interest in the performance of their duties. This situation has ultimately impacted the whole process of quality in teaching and learning in schools. In many cases teachers get salaries without attending schools. The ratio of teacher absenteeism in government secondary schools is higher. Many teachers run their own businesses apart from their professional duties. The secondary school administrators are helpless in this case. (Shahzadi & Perveen, 2002).

Curriculum/Instructional Programmes

Curriculum is all the legal activities going on, both programmed and non programmed, under the auspices of a school. Curriculum is developed and schools are supposed to implement it as it is without any manipulation. Before independence, as part of the curriculum, the government of the Western Region adopted a 6-3-3-2-3 system of education: 6 years primary education, 3 years Modern school, 3 years secondary school, 2 years Higher School Certificate and 3 years University Education. For Eastern and Northern Regions a 7-5-2-3 system of education was adopted: 7 years for primary education, 5 years secondary / Teacher Education, 2 years Higher School Certificate and 3 years University education (Lenshie, 2013). This inconsistency was as a result of adoption of the Federal Constitution in Nigeria which granted internal self-government to the three regions. The division did not only affect the political sphere, but also regionalized the education system.

The system in post-independent later changed to **6-5-4 which did not alter the year for the secondary school**, but the military government led by General Ibrahim B. Babangida changed the curriculum of education to reflect their own interest. History as a subject of study was introduced in secondary schools. Reasons being that it was considered as bedrock for the development of any nation. The regime later changed the system of education to 6-3-3-4 which altered the number of years one has to spend in secondary school and also divided it into two: 6 years for primary school, 3 years for junior secondary school, 3 years for senior secondary school and 4 years for university

education. At the moment the curriculum has changed to 9-3-4: which is 9 years for primary education, 3 years for secondary education and 4 years for university. However, this current system has not succeeded in producing entrepreneurial students which it was originally designed for.

Ascension to Leadership Position – Principal

To become a principal in a secondary school, the policy states that it will be based on hierarchy. From the level 13, the person can be made a vice principal beyond this level the teacher is qualified to serve as a principal. But today this position is motivated by primordial political factors. This means that certain leadership positions are kept for indigenes or those who can maneuver their way to the position. Somebody in level 14 can become a principal because he knows one of the senators. The senator now influences it by calling members of the schools' board and placing his request, in response the teacher is made a principal while some of his seniors with grade level 15 still don't have schools to manage.

Similarly, National Union of Teachers (NUT) which is pressure group for teachers has been weakened to look into the problems and interest of teachers. Primarily the members are there to dialogue with the government on issues on conflict or common interest of the teachers. Incredibly, election of teachers into this office is being influenced by the government. The government ensures that those who supported them and will be loyal to them found their way into these positions.

The administration of secondary schools now become stifled and scuttled as this body act on the dictates of the politicians against the nitty gritty of administration. The NUT is a professional pressure group like their counterparts Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) and Nigerian Medical Association (NMA). They promote the standards of the teaching profession, provided the code of conduct for teachers and strive to maintain high standard of professional discipline (Etim and Akani, 2016).

Recruitment and Transfer of Staff

Teachers of secondary schools are recruited through the directive of the politicians. Most at times, this exercise is carried out to reduce the number of liabilities they have. They start by watering down the criteria for recruitment in order to accommodate their primordial interest. This system is not healthy to the administration and development of secondary schools. The exercise brings in half-baked graduates to teach while the intelligent applicants who will merit the position may not be allowed or given the opportunity to serve. The teaching profession is never an all-comers venture. It has to do with technical and intellectual competence. Recruitment should be based on merit and not by favouritisms. Transparency and meritocracy in employment of teachers is so germane that any act of subject matter ineptitude or misinforming students will

amount to widespread “intellectual deformation”. It is humorously said that a medical doctor can make a grave mistake and kill one person, but if a teacher makes such a mistake, he or she can kill a thousand persons. Therefore, in recruitment for teachers, round pegs should be put in round holes for us to create and maintain a just society.

In the same vein, most teachers lobby supervisors in the school board to influence their posting and transfer in order for them to be permanent in urban schools. This has also resulted in structural disequilibrium in the posting and transfer of teachers thereby impoverishing the schools in the rural centres.

Adherence to Rules

A situation where education is seen as the birth right or business for the politicians, things are bound to go wrong. The appointment of the Board Members is done by the politicians. This Board members ensure that other leadership positions under them are being occupied by their loyalist. It results in flagrant abuse of the law.

Recruitment of teachers, as shown above, is been influenced by the politicians. These teachers resort to I-don't-care character: they are truant, they come to school late any day that they even feel like attending. Principals is not given his due respect either because they belong to the same cabal or because the principal is accountable to the person who employed him. They are always found at the Board and get first hand information. They get promotion and allowances as at when due. The principal under this situation loses his administrative acumen and prowess as established rules seize to function. Administrators, who would want to execute their primary responsibilities, find themselves isolated and endangered. At times they are dramatically eliminated or made to suffer sabotage for wanting to be just.

The system of rewards and punishment are determined by primordial considerations or informal conventions. In such institutions, multiple layers of red tapes are created and the consequences of being caught and punished for corrupt practices are low relatively to the benefits.

Allocation of Schools

It is indeed disheartening about the roles of the politicians in handling some of the crucial matters like siting of schools in Nigeria. Some of the communities in Nigeria do not have secondary schools yet some other communities have more than three secondary schools. What is behind this? This is politically motivated. Politicians with their special interest can decide to build a school where one already exists. Most likely because that is where he will achieve his aim, or maybe as a compensation to the community for their support during the election period.

Effects of Politics on Administration of Schools

- Politics makes administrators of secondary schools mere robots in the dispensing of their job, since there will be synergy between the government and the school administrators. They begin to put up lackadaisical attitude towards their job, the use of discretion to achieve results will be greatly discouraged.
- In line with the nonchalant attitude of the principal over issues which leads to poor administration, the teachers now no longer go to school early and are not regular. Some chose to go to school only the days that they have class to teach and at the worst scenario, they enter class only when they chose to enter class.
- **Resource Diversion:** The demand and supply of resources are based on the orders of the politicians. This results in some schools having excess facilities while others do not have. At times some secondary schools may have so many teachers because the school is located in a good place but some important subjects may not have teachers to teach them. On demand the schools Board may decide to post some of the teachers to a particular school but because they have a politician this posting may be thwarted.
- **Cultism:** Students who observe that their teachers are neither interested in teaching them nor the affairs of the student begin to lead a care-free life. Some become truants, and even join cults. They no longer pay attention to their studies. They pick interest in bullying other students.
- **Examination Malpractice:** Under a situation where teachers are no longer interested in entering class, students enter classes to learn only when they wish to but the students are interested in passing their West African Examination. They achieve it by all means. Some pay the teachers to write the examinations for them. Others bring their relatives or pay mercenaries, as they call it, to write for them. The worst of it all is that a reasonable number of the principals are into this business. It now serves as one of their sources of income. Before the examination time, they have already told the students the amount to pay. Failure to pay this amount, in the examination proper, those who did not pay will be asked to enter a separate hall and he ensures that they do not receive any form of help. The supervisors are also not left out. The principals now tells the supervisor that those in hall “c” refused to pay, the supervisor now makes things difficult for them. At times he stops them before their time elapses. This makes the same students, after one or two papers still pay the money and join the queue.

- **Poor Academic Performance:** The idea of principals and teachers helping the students to pass examination these days has polarized the students. The students no longer read, in the hope that during the examination help must come either from within or they hire people outside. This eventually is leading to poor academic performance as when external supervisors refuse to compromise it results in mass failure. The annoying thing is that most of these young school leavers with good results cannot defend their results. They may have a credit or an alpha in literature yet cannot tell story of any of the text they read.

Conclusion

With a cursory observation of the politics and administration of secondary schools in Nigeria, a lot of challenges have been unfolded. It is associated with ethnicity, religion, godfatherism, nepotism and inefficiency. Whichever angle you look at it, overwhelming and undue influence from the politicians stultified the administrators. Within the setting, godfatherism applies to determine who gets what, when and how. Secondary education in Nigeria cannot be standardized until the government decides to increase its funding and also removes the hands of political hawks from the administration of secondary school in Nigeria.

Recommendations

- ✓ Government should ensure that schools are completely free from political interference.
- ✓ Administrators and teachers should sit up to their challenges and responsibilities.
- ✓ Government should continue to give impress to school heads and not allowing them to generate funds internally.
- ✓ School administrators should not be punished because they do what they are supposed to do even though it may be against the interest of the selfish politicians.
- ✓ There should be attitudinal rebranding and value re-orientation among politicians and secondary school administrators in Nigeria and this should be spearheaded by the National Orientation Agency.

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