

POLITICIZATION OF APPOINTMENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS AND ELUSIVE SEARCH FOR QUALITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The authors call for reexamination of appointments and promotion processes in the Nigerian tertiary educational system. Tracing the meaning, origin, and development of politics in education, as well as politicization of appointments in tertiary institutions, they question today emphasis on ethnic, political, and primordial considerations in terms of appointments and promotion in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. They see the revigoration of the entire process and a conscious and conscientious change to a more proactive process of employment which allows for competition and excellence as a way out of the academic quagmire in Nigeria; else, the search for quality education will simply be a mirage.

Keywords: Nigeria, politicization, education, elusive, quality.

INTRODUCTION

Politics has to do with the distribution of stakes within a society or group. Stakes means jobs, money, prestige, influence, status or even acceptance of ideas (Lasswell in Olubor, 2012). Education refers to the transfer of information, knowledge and skills from the teacher to the students who constitute the learning population. There are three levels of education in Nigeria. They are the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Tertiary education covers the post-secondary section of the national system of education which is given in universities, polytechnics, Colleges of technology, Colleges of education, Advanced Training Colleges and such institutions as may be allied to them (Ojogwu, 2012). Western education in Nigeria started when Thomas Birch Freeman, a mulatto Missionary sent by Wesley and Methodist society settled at Badagry on September 24,1842, accompanied by an assistant, William De Graft. On his arrival, Freeman had established the first primary school in Nigeria. The Church Missionary

Society (CMS) under Rev. Ajayi later Bishop Ajayi Crowther, with Mr and Mrs Gollmer arrived four years later at Badagry and established a primary school and another one in Abeokuta. In 1885, the south Baptist convention sent out Thomas Jefferson Bowen from United States of America who came to Nigeria and opened two schools at Lagos and Ogbomosho. In 1860, the Roman Catholic Church to meet the educational needs of African ex-slaves in Nigeria from Brazil opened a school at Lagos.

The United Presbyterian Church of Scotland under Rev. Hope waddell opened a school at Calabar in 1846 and another one in Bonny in 1847 (Anuna,2004). In 1955, regional governments established and managed schools alongside private individuals and missionary societies (Ogonor, 2017). The first university in Nigeria was opened in 1748 by the Colonial administration as a college of the University of London; but this metamorphosed to University of Ibadan; after independence in 1960. Today, university constitutes a major aspect of applicants seeking tertiary institution in Nigeria. The polytechnic came into existence as a second string for secondary school leavers. They however have an unsubstantiated lower level rating by the students who say they accept places in polytechnics only if they fail to qualify for a university place. The colleges of education some of which have the status of running degree programs to cater for would –be-teachers of primary and junior secondary schools. A large number of the teachers graduate with an NCE (National Certificate in Education), a qualification Government has decreed would be the minimum for the teaching profession; Colleges of Education are rated even lower than the polytechnics by students who seek admission into tertiary institutions (Bajah, 2001).

Education in its broadest sense provides the backdrop against which development acquires its meaning. Nigerian governments are not oblivious of this critical need for balanced and sustainable human and national development.

Hence, the position which is clearly articulated in the National Policy on Education , that any existing contradictions, ambiguities, and lack of uniformity in educational practice in the different parts of the country should be removed to facilitate an even orderly development of the country. The Nigeria of our collective dream is one that is free and democratic, just and egalitarian, united strong and self- reliant; with a great and dynamic economy, and above all, a land full of bright opportunities for all the citizens. These national goals underlie the philosophical ideals of Nigerian education (TETF Project, 2012).

However, the Nigerian educational system has, for some time now, been a source of concern to Nigerians and non-Nigerians alike. The concern focuses essentially on the quality of education in the country which many believe has nosedived to an ignoble state. Various causes have been attributed to this rapid decline, ranging from grossly inadequate funding, collapse of the

educational infrastructure, poor salaries of educationists, decline of a reading culture, wide spread examination malpractices, as well as admission of people who are not capable of doing the necessary academic work amongst others (Olakunri, 2012). Even when the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and some states governments tend to proffer solution to these problems through TET fund intervention and other packages, there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnels as the downward trend continues especially in the face of politicization of appointments in tertiary institutions which invariably affect the standard of education in Nigeria. There is therefore the need to find out the origin of politicization of appointments in tertiary institutions, the changing face of politicization of appointment in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and its concomitant effects in the search for high standard education in Nigeria.

Origin of politicization of Education in Nigeria

In the pre-colonial times, educational development was closely linked with the social development and was in conformity with the successive stages of physical and mental upbringing of the child (Lenshie, 2013). Education then was basically carried out by the family which constitutes the first agent of socialization and in conjunction with the general society.

With the traditional education special kind of education and training were given to children from royal homes. In the traditional education preference was given to colonialism in Nigeria as an historical epoch deliberately brought together different ethnic groups to signal that Nigeria was going to emerge as a multicultural state formation. In the process, they liquidated the internal harmony and fragmented them by generating primordial loyalties (Lenshie, 2013). Thereby entrenching politics in traditional Nigerian educational system.

Politics has always been at the fore front of education in Nigeria during the colonial era. For instance, there was a partnership arrangement between church and state in education. Under the partnership arrangement the missionary societies used the establishment of schools for purposes of conversion, the production of lay readers, catechists, teachers and literate personnel for commercial houses (Ogbonanyan, 2009). The British government only restricted the study to Arithmetic's, classic, writing and reading to produce clerks and catechists who perform liturgical roles and sometimes assists with teaching. It was not for the good of the Africans; but to enable them have access to their goods. Moreover, education of the Nigerian people was basically restricted to the south and those living in littoral part of the country, under the pretext of its desire to respect the northern oligarchy. This view was graphically presented by Igwe in Ogbonnaya (2009) thus:

The chief function of government in primary and secondary schools among primitive communities is to train the more promising boys from the village schools as teachers for those schools, as clerks for local native courts and as clerks for the administration.

Just as the political tendencies dominated the colonial educational politics; the same was the case of some chiefs who accepted education and the Christian religion in the Niger Delta area; especially in Duke town, where Eyo Honesty the paramount ruler accepted Christianity not because he wanted to be a Christian, but because of the benefits to be derived from such “marriage of convenience”.

Changing Face of Politicization of Education in Nigeria

A cursory look at the Nigerian universities today, portrays that all is not well. Politics in education has a dangerous dimension which has negatively affected the functionality of the university education. These are visible in the areas of establishment of universities, appointments into lecturing positions, appointments into key positions, promotion, etc.

With regard to appointment and promotion in the first two decades after independence, the first and second generation universities applied criteria which ensured that good quality teachers, administrators and technical personnel from anywhere in the world were appointed. Promotion was also based on well established international standards. Thus, quality of staff was assured through a regime of transparent and objectively applied criteria for appointment and promotion (Okebukola, 2015). But today, the story has changed.

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Regrettably, in Nigeria today, evidence abound that vice chancellors, provosts, as well as other education managers are motivated by primordial factors. This situation reveals itself to the extent that today, certain positions must be kept for the indigenous people of the institution’s host communities. If the positions are occupied by non-indigenes, the process of institutional governance/administration becomes frustrated. In some circumstances they go to the extent of watering down the criteria for recruitment in order to accommodate their primordial interests.

Such system is never healthy for the development of education in Nigeria because it excludes those who merited the positions (Lenshie, 2013).

Another dimension to this ugly development occurs when the governor of a state decides to appoint a provost or vice chancellor based on interpersonal connection, tribal or religious considerations without respect for merit. Typical examples abound across the nation, especially in states owned universities, where interviews are conducted and those who emerged as the overall best are most times not taken, yet, second runner-up are appointed to the position of the vice chancellor or provost without any explanation. This is supported by the view of Akor [2012], that political and interpersonal connections, God-fatherism and nepotism as major criteria for recruitment and placement in federal polytechnic, Idah. He further noted that the institution do not advertise vacancies neither does it engage in proper planning. This situation is not restricted to the federal polytechnic Idah, but most universities and colleges of Education where employment to different positions is paternalistic in nature. It is no longer the case of the best getting the job, but how close you are to the vice chancellor, Rector or provost or worse still, the political class (including chairmen of council). There are always pressure from family members, relatives, in-laws and friends to be given employment when any members of their family, relation or close associate is privileged of being in position where jobs could be offered in institutions of higher learning. This pressure leads to the perversion of rules in order to satisfy parochial interest at the expense of competence and overall interest (Ogunmola in Akor, 2012). In some universities, being a 'son of the soil' ranks higher than merit in appointment to management and academic position such as Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Dean of Faculty or Head of Department (Okebukola, 2015). Though, it could easily be assumed that the Governor who is the visitor to the university has a right to pick any of the top three, yet, the most worrisome of the issue is that no clearly defined parameter for appointing whosoever is appointed by the Governor. This tends to compromise the ideal of excellence and democracy which ought to guide the tertiary institutions. This may also have contributed to a sharp decline in the quality of staff and vice visa, students that graduate from the universities. Thus, as noted by Okebukola (2015), from 1960 to 1980 staff appointment and promotion processes were assumed to range impressively between 75% and 84% however, was 1990, a drop to 63% had occurred, further dropping to an all-time low of 43% in 2010. The observation of Okebukola, may definitely have sludded downward. To ensure that such misfit are kept in the system, different methods are adopted to keep them growing on the job. As noted by Okebukola (2015), this has led to a situation where appointments are made into professional positions of persons with academic credential much lower than what obtained in the good old days' thereby leading to the emergence of crop of professors within the last ten years that would hardly merit a lecturer grade 1 position in any of the first generation universities in the 1960s and 1970s. No doubt, Okebukola's observation is not restricted to the university alone, but the academic nudity has

extended to the polytechnics and the colleges of Education where appointments are made without aligning with ethical principles guiding appointments. A new and more dangerous aspect to politicization of appointment is “familiarisation” of appointment; a situation where it is now fashionable for husband, wife and children to be lecturers in the same school, even when in some cases more qualified people may be available. There is no doubt there are cases of husband and wife who can really deliver (having the knowledge and passion), but there seem to be a sharp departure in the recent times. In a situation where the rules and regulation for appointments are not followed, there is bound to be problem. This ugly development has led to a situation where ‘consensus’ promotion seems to be the order of the day. This is a situation where lecturers are promoted without the required number of publications or laid down standard, but based on “consensuses” and compensation. The only requirement for compensatory or consensus promotion is for a lecturer to make regular phone calls to the chairman of governing council on happenings” in the school or being an errand boy of the Rector or provost. What do you expect under such a situation? Lecturers are made chief lecturers and principal lecturers without meeting expected standard. As the saying goes, the student replicates his/her teacher. Can a lecturer who is not able to read widely and publish articles be able to give relevant information to his/her student? The answer is No! One can claim to be active lecturer by going to teach every period in the time table, but the relevance of such lecturer is also determined to a large extent by how widely published he is. You cannot publish without reading. This goes in line with cook in Omoregie (2004), that people may turn obsolete if they do not update themselves with new skills and knowledge about the environment in which they work. Thus, an entire organization may even become obsolete if it lacks a systematic means for continually developing original capabilities. What this means is that education should implant a will and a facility for learning and should produce a learning people. However, refusal to stick to excellence in appointments and promotion is already having its toll as the world university ranking 2015-2016, that listed the best global universities based across all of their core mission of teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook featured 147 of the top universities in the US-with 63, American universities making the top 200 of the list with Californian institute of technology as the world’s number one followed by UK’S oxford university in the second position. Asia has seen a varied performance with good news for Singapore, which now claims the top institution in the continent with National university of Singapore in 26th position (Times Higher Education, World University ranking, 2016). Sadly, in all these, no Nigerian university appeared even in the first 500. Yet, Singapore a relatively smaller than Nigeria and an island relatively the size of Eti-Osa and Ekpe local government areas of Lagos state and gained independence in 1965 as a third world nation, with limited land, has not only be able to transform itself from a third world nation to a first world, has continue to show that it is a force worthy of recognition in the world in terms of education.

The politicization of education in Nigeria has also led to the loss of intercontinental cross fertilization of scholarship in Nigerian universities. This is because of the unfriendly nature of the Nigerian societies to foreign scholars. Within Nigeria, the usual mixture of scholars from various ethnic, religious and philosophical backgrounds in most Nigerian universities are fast disappearing. The reason being that these institutions have been overtaken by ethnicity, religious bigotry and clandestine relationship (Lenshie,2012). Thus, it is now very difficult to find a northerner who is a lecturer in the south and vice versa.

Since the growth and effective running of the tertiary institution is not limited to the lecturers alone, it is worthy of note that the non- academic staff of the institutions are equally not left out in discussing this pathetic situation bedeviling the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It is no longer news to see a cleaner converting to clerical officer after bringing West African school certificate result from 'miracle centers' even if she cannot file document. Worse still ,are those who were appointed as clerical officers, later went in for sandwiched program and by strength of brain or finance goes in for their Masters' degree and because they are connected to the power that be, are given lecturing jobs even when they struggled to make a meaningful defense during presentation of thesis. The story of woe seems to be endless, but one fact is that square pegs are kept in round holes, an evidence that all is not well with the Nigerian educational system. Hence, Denga and Denga in a lamentation on the Nigerian educational system in Nweze (2009) stated inter alia:

The Nigerian educational system, when born was a virgin; no corruption nor pollution. The great men and women we have today were her products. is a pity her quality has been compromised. In all, we are hoping and believing that there are men and women who will take the bull by the horn and confront these ills in the education system so as to rehabilitate and reform the Nigerian education system. (paraphrased).

CONCLUSION

The rather grim picture clearly depicts the sorry state of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This is basically due to legions of factors militating against standard education in Nigeria and the worse being the issue of appointments, and promotion of lecturers and management staff in the recent times which had been politicized. There is no gain saying that the place of academically sound lecturers and management on strong learning systems is central to the attainment of vision 20:2020 and is a vital tool for transformation and the key to the sustainable development of the nation, Nigeria. In spite of this, it may not be out of place to say that though bedeviled by these teething problems, there exists a faint glimmer of hope which can be fanned into flame if there is courage to change, especially in the face of the much talked about change

mantra in Nigeria today. However, if this is allowed to go unchecked, it may not be out of place to say that the much search for quality education in Nigeria will simply be a mirage.

SUGGESTIONS

1. The National Assembly should make legislation forbidden secret and illegal employment in the tertiary institutions of learning.
2. Also, the government should set up special monitoring unit within the National Council of Colleges of Education (NCCE), and the National University Commission (NUC) to ensure strict compliance with the guiding rules and regulations governing promotion of lecturers in both the colleges of education and the universities.

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