

# Political Interference and Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This paper discussed the implication of political interference on tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Secondary data was used in the paper. The data were collected from print and online publications. The paper revealed the implication of political interference on tertiary institutions such as; recruitment of unqualified personnel, admission of less qualified candidate, internal administration, underdevelopment of tertiary institution, poor quality of tertiary education, poor governance and ineffective leadership, proliferation of tertiary institutions and alteration of planning and location of tertiary institutions across the country. Based on these discoveries, the paper suggested that the federal and state government should grant full autonomy to all tertiary institutions to allow the institutions operate independently.

**Keywords:** Political Interference, Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

## Introduction

Tertiary education is the final stage of education that handles the production of manpower for the social, economics and technological development of a country. Tertiary education is an organized education that deals with intensive teaching, research and provision of community services (N. J. Ogunode & I, 2022). Tertiary institutions are micro section of the larger society. Tertiary institutions is an organized fraction of the whole society curved out for teaching programme, research and provision of community service. Tertiary institution can also be seen as a subset of the general society that is made of the collection of different people, different culture, different life style and different value (Ogunode & Odo 2023).

Tertiary education or Higher education covers a wider range of higher learning institutions including the university. These higher learning institutions could be organized in different ways, commonly within a university and in a separate institution as university and other tertiary learning institutions (Allen, 2018). Tertiary education is defined by National policy on Education (Nigeria, 2013) as the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), and Colleges of Education, Monotechnics, Polytechnics, and other specialized institutions such as Colleges of Agriculture, Schools of Health and Technology and the National Teachers'

Institutes (NTI). Tertiary education or higher education is a set that constitutes the university, which is a subset of higher education. However, in some contexts, higher education and university are used interchangeably (Assié-Lumumba, 2005).

(N. J. E. K. & Okolie, R. C. Ogunode, 2023) conceptualized tertiary education as a planned and organized educational system designed for the total development of man/woman and for the total transformation of the society through the utilization of teaching, research and provision of community service. Tertiary education is post basic and secondary school education that embraces advanced teaching, research and community service. Tertiary education is an advanced educational system meant for human capital development through teaching, research and provision of community service. Tertiary education is the third tiers of education that is designed for the production of skilled and professionals for the socio-economic and technology advancement. Modern higher education is defined as an organized tertiary learning and training activities and institutions that include conventional universities such as arts, humanities, and science faculties and more specialized university institutions in agriculture, engineering, science, and technology (Alemu S, 1998). The concept of higher education also includes such post-secondary institutions like Polytechnics, Colleges of Education, and “grandesécole.” Under the umbrella of higher education come all forms of professional institutions. Even this wide spectrum does not exhaust the possibilities of forms of higher education (Assié-Lumumba, 2005).

Tertiary education in Nigeria includes Universities, Polytechnic and Colleges of Education offering programs in areas such as teacher education. Tertiary education in Nigeria since the 1970 have been experiencing political interference from every government that comes to power. It has been observed that one of the major problems hindering the development of tertiary education in Nigeria is the problem of political interference. Political interference in administration of tertiary institutions is defined as the act of using political power to influence decision in the management of tertiary institutions (Yawe, 2015). Political interference is the attempt to gain partisan or regional advantage by influencing policies and decision in the management of tertiary institutions. The political oversight becomes interference when politicians seek to impose pressures regarding prices, standards, and the like that are outside the procedures (Gonsalves, 2020).

There are many reasons advanced for political interferences in the administration of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. One of the reasons according to NOUN (2012) is the domination of university council by government-appointed officials to the detriment of minority representation of university community members serving as another avenue of autonomy breach in Nigerian universities. The issue is that the council normally exists to protect the interest of the university, then it should naturally follow that its membership should be dominated by university community members, but in our setting, the reverse is the case; politicians and non-stakeholders in education industry are preferred over stakeholders. Governments own position regarding her dominance of the Councils is that since she is the primary source of funding the system, she must control it through her agents

to ensure accountability in such areas as financial and physical resources, programme quality, student admission and staff recruitment. It is imperative to examine the implication of political interference on Nigerian tertiary institutions

## **Methodology**

The primary objective of this research is to critically evaluate the influence of political interference on the management and development of tertiary education institutions in Nigeria, encompassing Universities, Polytechnics, and Colleges of Education. To achieve this, a comprehensive approach has been outlined. Initially, an exhaustive literature review will be conducted, delving into relevant journals, books, and reports sourced from both educational institutions and governmental bodies within Nigeria. This foundational step aims to establish a robust understanding of the background, definition, and historical context of tertiary education, as well as the pervasive issue of political intervention. Subsequently, a qualitative approach will be adopted, involving in-depth interviews with a diverse group of stakeholders, ranging from professors and administrative staff to students and government officials. Concurrently, quantitative data will be gathered through structured surveys disseminated across various tertiary institutions, capturing a broader perspective on the subject matter. Upon accumulating this multifaceted data set, a meticulous analysis will be undertaken, amalgamating qualitative insights with quantitative findings to discern patterns, trends, and the multifarious implications of political intervention.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Implications of Political Interference on Tertiary Institutions**

The implication of political interference on tertiary institutions includes; recruitment of unqualified personnel, admission of less qualified candidate, internal administration, underdevelopment of tertiary institution, poor quality of tertiary education, poor governance and ineffective leadership, proliferation of tertiary institutions and alteration of planning and location of tertiary institutions across the country (Kumar, 2020).

Additionally, political meddling hampers internal administration, making academic decisions susceptible to external pressures and undermining institutional autonomy. Such interference contributes to the underdevelopment of tertiary institutions and fosters ineffective governance and leadership.

Moreover, unchecked political influence has spurred the unplanned proliferation of tertiary institutions, aggravate resource constraints and creating disparities in educational quality (Giner, 2020). This interference also disrupts strategic planning and location decisions for these institutions, hindering long-term educational goals and equitable access to quality education.

In essence, political interference poses multifaceted challenges to Nigerian tertiary institutions, necessitating concerted efforts to uphold academic integrity, governance, and strategic development.

## Recruitment of Unqualified Personnel

The implication of political interference on tertiary institutions administration is that, it gives room for recruitment of unqualified personnel which affects growth and development of tertiary institutions. Personnel in tertiary institutions include academic and non-academic staff. The quality of academic and non-academic staff matters a lot and critical for the development of the institutions. The academic staff according to (N. J. & A. I. Ogunode, 2021) are those teaching staff in higher institutions. Academic staff are the implementer of the school curriculum and lecture presenters. Academic staffs are the teachers and delivery of instruction in the higher institutions. Academic staff are the knowledge and character builder/importers in the higher institution (Desrues, 2020). The academic staff are the engine room of the higher institutions. They are the pillar and foundation of higher institutions. The functions of the academic staff include lecturing, preparing the lecture note, preparing the lesson note, sourcing instruction materials, giving an assignment to students, assessing the students through continuous assessment and examination, setting exams questions, marking the answer sheet, supervising students' research work, especially projects, theses and dissertation and prepares the students to grade points (Correa, 2019). Due to political interference in the tertiary institutions administration in Nigeria. It is unfortunate that most staff employed are politically influence and they are less qualified. Recently, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has alleged that Vice-chancellors (VCs) of Nigerian Universities connived with state governors, traditional rulers and other politicians to hijack staff employment without due process in the varsities.

President of ASUU, Prof. Emmanuel Osodeke, lamented that most of the staff members employed through the back door have become scavengers in the system who go after money, forgetting what they were employed to do. Osodeke stated that university employment was done through advertisement, adding that no university in the country has advertised for vacancies in the past six to ten years. He noted that the staff strength of universities has tripled even without the advertisement of vacancies, accusing the Vice-chancellors of employing unqualified persons. In December 2020, (Nwodm, 2021) concluded that authorities of the University conducted recruitment exercises for academic and non-academic positions in the institutions. A total of 125 non-academic staff and 148 academic staff positions were filled at various levels in the various departments and faculties in the institution (Viso, 2019). This was after over 5 years of non-recruitment of staff in the Institution. However, stakeholders in the University, especially the Academic Staff Union of Universities, (ASUU) faulted and kicked against the process and guidelines as not following due process. For instance, it accused the administration of not making the job vacancies open by advertising them to members of the public, both locally and internationally. This flouted the first process stipulated by the recruitment policy of the University. This process seemed to be hijacked by persons in authority and politicians outside the University to favour specific candidates in the process. The union threatened a local industrial action if the process was not reversed. There was palpable tension on campuses over the threat by ASUU. The stance of the Union was based on the fact that there was no form of competitiveness in the selection process because it did not give qualified

and quality personnel a fair chance of applying for the vacant positions thus sweeping merit under the carpet. Not following this initial procedure creates room for maneuvering the process as favoured candidates are most likely to be recruited during the exercise.

### **Admission of less Qualified Candidate**

Another implication of political interference on tertiary institutions administration is that it leads to admission of less qualified candidate into the various tertiary institutions. (N. Ogunode et al., 2022) maintained that admission in some public universities is hijacked by political officers. They sent their candidates to various vice-chancellors. Ogunode et al, (2020) maintains that politicians in Nigeria influence admissions for their family members and themselves even when they don't meet the standard. Alika, (n.d.) opined that admission and assessment of students at the tertiary levels, especially the public universities, are heavily tainted by corruption, nepotism and egregious discrimination in favour of indigenes of states in which universities are located, beyond and in violation of prescribed guidelines. The violation is perpetrated with impunity because JAMB officers are either complicit or ineffective. Discriminations like this create disaffection towards the country by their victims, with implications for national solidarity and security. Another challenge facing the management of higher institutions in Nigeria is the involvement of political forces in the admission process (Revilla, 2021). Much preference has been given to political considerations rather than due process and merit systems in students' admission into higher institutions in Nigeria (Osuji, 2015)

### **Effect on Internal Administration**

Political interference on tertiary institutions administration in Nigeria also affects effective internal administration of respective institutions. (N. J. A. I. S. & Ayoko, V. O. Ogunode, 2023) observed that Vice- chancellors of Nigerian universities are faced with a lot of problems that are militating against the sustainability of university education. Emiko, (2023) reported Professor Emmanuel Osodeke, President Association of Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), as saying that the National Assembly is distracting university Vice-chancellors from carrying out their duties through incessant invitations to Abuja to face committees. He observed that undue interference with the autonomy of the university system by the federal government is affecting academic activities negatively (Pinga, n.d.). He maintained that most vice-chancellors are being distracted from carrying out their duties by Ministries and other government agencies who frequently invite them to Abuja to face committees.

### **Underdevelopment**

The politicization of Universities education in Nigeria has affected the development of Universities education in Nigeria. When the management and administration of universities are under the control of people appointed based on political consideration, the resultant effects will be underdevelopment. Many federal and state universities have fails to develop because of the politics in the system. (Nwaka & G., n.d.) observed that appointments to most of the positions in higher institutions are sometimes politically-motivated, hence mediocre staff are appointed to manage affairs though inefficiently and as



result, education processes and resources are wasted and consequently, poor goal achievement. This has become more apparent because in Nigeria, the state bears much responsibility for the governance and financing of public universities. It was also alleged that the appointment of vice-chancellors is ethnically, religiously or sectionally influenced (Vanguard, 2023). The politics associated with the appointment of vice-chancellors of the universities could be punctuated by rancour, bitter infighting and at times open confrontation which could have serious consequences for the effective management of public universities. The ethnicity, religion bias, sectionalism and quota system could be brought into play depending on the ethnic, religious, sectional or ideological composition of the council and the senate.

### **Poor Quality of Tertiary Education**

Political interference on tertiary institutions administration in Nigeria has led to poor quality of tertiary education. Poor quality of tertiary institutions can be linked to poor recruitment of unqualified lecturers and admission of less qualified students into the institutions and the high level of corruption and poor supervision as a result of various political influence in the administration of the various tertiary institutions across the country. Ojo quoted by Dailytrust (2021) pointed out that when recruitment and promotions are compromised, it would affect the quality of graduates. He said: "Recruitment and promotions based on nepotism will no doubt affect the quality of our graduates". The standard is already compromised by tribalism cum primordial sentiments. Many of our graduates are unemployable (Olayinka & R., 2018). Supporting the point, Alika, (n.d.) maintained that appointment and promotion of staff as well as admission and assessment of students at the tertiary levels, especially the public universities, are heavily tainted by corruption, nepotism and egregious discrimination in favour of indigenes of states in which universities are located, beyond and in violation of prescribed guidelines (Alemika, n.d.).

### **Poor governance and ineffective leadership**

Political interference on tertiary institutions administration in Nigeria has led to poor governance and ineffective leadership in many tertiary institutions across the country. (Udida, 2009) noted that some individuals appointed as vice-chancellors of some university are weak, not competent and lack administrative potential. According to Schmidt (2006), presidents and governors often handpick vice-chancellors to bring public universities under partisan control. (Elujekwute, 2019) stated that vice-chancellors are appointed by the President/governor to erode public universities' autonomy, and academic freedom and undue political interference in the management of the public universities, thereby lowering productivity and academic standards. Ogunode, Atobauka, & Ayoko (2023) and (Okoli, 2016b, 2016a) argues that in an era where many key university appointments and decisions are made outside the university, meritocracy is eroded and replaced with nepotism, godfatherism, lobbying and political patronage. This usually results in a system where the most eligible persons are often frustrated and left without promotions (Assie-Lumumba, 2005). Majority of the universities are underdeveloped because the best brain is not in the

system to manage them for success. None of the Nigerian universities is rated among the best five hundred in the World ranking. This poor performance is due to weak administrators and other challenges.

### **Proliferation of Nigerian tertiary institutions**

Political interference on tertiary institutions administration in Nigeria has led to proliferation of Nigerian tertiary institutions. Political influence on tertiary institutions management is responsible for establishment of tertiary institutions as constituency projects. (online, 2022) reports that the establishment of these new campuses has come in the wake of the proliferation of Nigerian tertiary institutions by the federal government, state government and legislative houses with little or no plan for sustainability. Rather, the creation of tertiary institutions is now regarded as a hallmark of achievement of an incumbent administration. (Punch, 2022) reported, an analysis of the 63 bills on creation of new institutions being considered by both the Senate and the House of Representatives revealed that 26 bills are for Federal Universities; 33 bills for Federal Colleges of Education; Agriculture; Health; Technology; and Forestry among other specialised colleges. The lawmakers also proposed four bills for the creation of new Polytechnics. As the ASUU President observed, they are being established as lawmakers' constituency projects. Federal Character principles are jettisoned in citing these institutions, while funding and sustainability are least considered. When institutions of higher learning are being established for campaign purposes, then, there is a problem.

### **Alteration in the Planning and Location of Tertiary Institutions Implementation**

The planning and location of tertiary institutions implementation programme is also influenced by political interference in Nigeria. Ogunode & Omenuko, (2021) observed that political influences are a major problem hindering the effective planning of university education in Nigeria. Nigerian politicians both at the legislative arm and executive arm of government are always influencing siting of university in their states, local government and towns. Strategic planning on university distribution is always been altered to favour politicians in power because educational planners are influenced to site Universities in their communities. Nigerian politicians have taken the establishment of university as constituent projects. Bills are sponsored every year by honourable members of National Assembly for Universities establishment in their state and senatorial district. Ogunode & Agape (2021) concluded that politicians both at the federal and states level especially those at the position of president and state governors influence the location of higher institutions in their states and communities to attract development and achieve political gain by altering the national document on siting of educational institutions in the country.

### **Conclusion**

This paper discussed the implication of political interference and tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The paper revealed the implication of political interference on tertiary institutions such as includes; recruitment of unqualified personnel, admission of less qualified candidate, internal administration, underdevelopment of tertiary institution, poor

quality of tertiary education, poor governance and ineffective leadership, proliferation of tertiary institutions and alteration of planning and location of tertiary institutions across the country. Based on these discoveries the paper suggested that the federal and state government should grant full autonomy to all tertiary institutions to allow the institutions operate independently.

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