

Perceived Influence of Politics on the Management of Higher Institutions in Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated politics and management of higher institutions in Benue State, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 3,895 academic staff from nine public higher institutions. A total of 450 academic staff from four of the higher institutions was sampled using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. A 4-point structured 10-item rating scale questionnaire titled Politics and Management of Higher Institutions Questionnaire (PMHIQ) was developed by the researchers and used to collect data for the study. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while chi-square (χ^2) test of goodness-of-fit to was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that politics has significant influence on appointment of principal officers and students' admission process in higher institutions in Benue State. It was recommended among others that higher institutions should develop and follow the laid down guidelines on the appointment of principal officers to bring about productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.

Keywords: Politics, Management, Higher Institutions, Appointment of Principal Officers and Students Admission

INTRODUCTION

Education remains the largest among the prioritized industries in Nigeria, hence government strives hard to increase the funds allocated to the sector to improve its development. The educational sector is not only regarded as a very important instrument of socialization and reform, but as a means of laying the foundation for a strong and united nation. This idea had been accepted by all levels of government in Nigeria, as an instrument for achieving social, economic, political, scientific and technological development.

The general awareness of the values of education both to the individual and the country has led to the growing demand for all types and levels of education all over the country. However, since Nigeria is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-linguistic in nature, these various sections have continued to play politics with the various policies that have not really advanced the course of education in the country (Kolma, Etebu, Charles & John, 2011). According to Ogbonnaya (2009) in Usman (2012), the extent to which politics is used to cater for national wellbeing in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. Those in power seem to have abused the good intention of politics for fair representativeness and equitable distribution of resources among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. This misuse of power by

political office holders through the use of catchment areas, quota system or federal character in order to control and manage scarce resources leaves much to be desired.

The term politics according to Okunamiri (2005) and Okwori and Ede (2012), consists of the struggle between and among actors pursuing conflicting interest on public issues, interest and values. Okwonkwo (2014) in Yawe, Ivagher and Ijov (2015) defined politics in terms of three interrelated component. These are: activities focused on the acquisition and use of power through control of institutions of government, activities in which public issues are discussed and demands upon governments expressed through political parties, interest groups, mobs or solidarity individuals and activities of the formal institutions of government which make laws, interpret them, allocate resources and carry them out. Okeke (2007) also defined politics as the mechanism used to lasting solutions to social, economic, political and educational problems.

According to Okeke (2007), politics play a great role in decision making and controls the management and the administration of educational establishments. Okeke further pointed out that politics in education may be seen as the means for resource allocation to different ethnic groups to achieve their set educational goals. The role of politics is heightened in the educational sector in view of the fact that an educational system has political goals which are essential to justifying the existence of the system and the political order of society. While education develops an individual to participate effectively in politics, politics in turn initiates quality education at all levels of education within a country.

Politics as a concept is not restricted to political parties but it is present in every social setting as one can find traces of politics in the market settings, industrial sector as well as educational sector. Therefore, politics as used by the researchers in this study is a situation where political preference is given to certain individuals rather than due process in which case the running of a school is influenced by the wishes of those in power rather than by established guidelines. In other words, it is a situation where due process is shortchanged by pressure from people in powerful positions. Such undue influence may result in school management deviating from the laid down procedures and guidelines, hence, the appointment of principal officers and admission of students in higher institutions are influenced by government interference.

The Nigerian government and its people seems to continuously sacrifices their educational needs on the altar of political affiliations, nepotism, ethnicity and selfishness by creating situations where people of no substance are being catapulted into positions of importance in the school management. In such circumstances, the spirit of hard work and excellence becomes truncated or aborted. Omemu (2015) observed that qualification and hard work which are supposed to be the parameters for the appointment of principal officers in higher institutions of learning are hardly adhered to when political forces sets in. Yawe, Ivagher and Ijov (2015) also noted that the political interference in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria has degenerated so much that credibility is completely eroded, as principal officers of higher institutions such as vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, provosts, rectors and registrars among others are appointed on the basis of political affiliations, sectionalism, nepotism, tribalism as well as religious beliefs. The implication of qualification not been the yardstick for the appointment of such principal officers is that any Tom-Dick and Harry can be given such sensitive positions which may make the entire system ineffective and inefficient. Dun (2003) and McClendon (2003) in Abu (2015) observed that state governors often do handpick principal officers in higher institutions based on party affiliations. In most cases, such appointments may not necessarily result in the selection of qualified candidates in management positions to have positive influence on the affairs of these institutions. Most often when the Senate of such an institution rejects these kinds of candidates from the government, it creates an unhealthy relationship between the government and the management of these institutions to the extent that government does withdraw its support to the school.

Another challenge facing the management of higher institutions in Nigeria is the involvement of political forces in admission process. It is evident that much preference has been given to political considerations rather than due process and merit system in students' admission into higher institutions in Nigeria (Osuji, 2011). Although it is expected that admission into tertiary institutions should be conducted on merit and quota system. Ajayi (2005) noted that in any institution of learning, there are specific admission policy requirement. For instance, from secondary schools to university level, prospective applicants are expected

to possess some minimum qualification before they could be considered for admission. However, it is still doubtful if the chances for admission are entirely based on stipulated guidelines. It is often suspected that some students who have already gained admission into the universities go back to rewrite the same entry examination that qualified them for the admission into these universities. The question that normally comes to mind is what qualification do they use for the admission?

Aboh (2014) noted that in Nigeria and other corrupt countries of the globe, admissions are sometimes given to students on the grounds that such students are from the same family, religious background or political affiliation with the person in authority. Abu (2015) added that female students do gain admission into institutions where their state of origin has no catchment area; this is basically because of favour either from their loved ones or family friends. This anomaly is attributed to undue involvement of those in power to bend the rules to favour their candidates. It is in relation to the above background that the researchers deemed it necessary to find out the influence of politics in the management of higher institutions in Benue State of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Considerable concerns have been expressed by relevant stakeholders over the much preference given to political considerations rather than due process and merit in appointment of principal officers and admission of students into tertiary institutions in Benue State and Nigeria at large. Given the sensitive nature of such institutions in the development of skilled manpower that would boost the economy of the nation, it is expected that appointment of principal officers and admission of students into institutions of this magnitude ought to be conducted on merit. However, it is doubtful if the vacancies and chances for the appointment of principal officers of higher institutions and admission of students are entirely based on stipulated guidelines. It is against this background that the researchers investigated the influence of politics in the management of higher institutions in Benue State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to find out the influence of politics in the management of higher institutions in Benue State of Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. find out the influence of politics in the appointment of principal officers in higher institutions in Benue State.
2. ascertain the influence of politics in students' admission process in higher institutions in Benue State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does politics influence the appointment of principal officers in higher institutions in Benue State?
2. To what extent does politics influence students' admission process in higher institutions in Benue State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance:

1. Politics has no significant influence on appointment of principal officers in higher institutions in Benue State.
2. Politics has no significant influence on students' admission process in higher institutions in Benue State.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population comprised 3,895 academic staff from nine higher institutions in Benue State. A sample of 450 academic staff representing 12% from four out of the nine higher institutions in Benue State was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. A self-structured questionnaire titled "Politics and Management of Higher Institutions Scale (PMHIS)" was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into two Sections A and B. Section A sought the personal data of the respondents, while Section B had two clusters: 1 and 2. Cluster A contained items 1-5 that bordered on influence of politics on the appointment of principal officers in

higher institutions. While Cluster 2 contained items 6-10 on the influence of politics in students' admission process in higher institutions. Responses were based on a modified 4-point Likert scale with response mode of Very Great Extent (VGE), Great Extent (GE), Little Extent (LE) and Very Little Extent (VLE). The questionnaire was validated by three experts, two in Educational Management and one in Measurement and Evaluation from Faculty of Education, Benue State University, Makurdi.

The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. Any item with less than 2.50 was regarded as having an influence to a little extent, but as having an influence to a great extent if it was 2.50 and/or above. Chi-square test of goodness-of-fit was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. If the calculated chi-square table value is equal to or greater than the critical table value, the null hypothesis of no significant value was not reject, if not it was rejected.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The results are analysed and interpreted in line with the research questions and hypotheses as follows:

Research Question One: *To what extent does politics influence the appointment of principal officers in higher institutions in Benue State?*

Table 1: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of the Respondents on the Extent to which Politics Influence the Appointment of Principal Officers in Higher Institutions in Benue State

Item No	Item Description	VGE	GE	LE	VLE	X	SD	Decision
1	Governors do handpick principal officers of higher institutions base on political affiliations.	134	215	40	61	2.94	0.96	GE
2	Tribal sentiments influence the appointments of principal officers of higher institutions.	176	168	50	56	3.03	1.01	GE
3	Sectional sentiments influence the appointment of principal officers of higher institutions.	163	192	51	44	3.05	0.93	GE
4	Religious sentiments influence the appointment of principal officers of higher institutions.	153	205	45	47	3.03	0.93	GE
5	Favouritism has led to the appointment of principal officers of higher institutions.	110	182	116	42	2.80	0.92	GE
Cluster mean						2.97		GE

Table 1 showed that the mean ratings of items 1-5 are 2.94, 3.03, 3.05, 3.03 and 2.80 respectively with the corresponding standard deviations of 0.96, 1.00, 0.93, 0.93 and 0.92. The standard deviations are small showing that the respondents' responses are closely clustered around the mean and as such are homogeneous. The table also showed that the respondents had a cluster mean of 2.97. This is above the cut-off point of 2.50. Thus, the answer to research question one is that the appointment of principal officers in higher institutions in Benue State is influenced by politics to a great extent.

Research Question Two: *To what extent does politics influence students' admission process in higher institutions in Benue State?*

Table 2: Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of the Respondents on the Influence of Politics on Students' Admission Process in Higher Institutions in Benue State

Item No	Item Description	VGE	GE	LE	VLE	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
6	Political affiliations have led to the admission of unqualified candidates into higher institutions.	129	180	74	67	2.82	1.01	GE
7	Religious sentiments have led to admission of students outside the catchment area.	110	180	102	58	2.76	0.97	GE
8	Governors' interference leads to admission of students without entry qualifications.	147	191	51	61	2.94	0.99	GE
9	Tribal sentiments have led to admission of students with less post-UTME scores.	154	175	61	60	2.94	1.01	GE
10	Favouritism results in admission of female students in higher institutions.	161	178	55	56	2.99	0.99	GE
Cluster mean						2.89		GE

Table 2 showed that the mean ratings of items 6-10 are 2.82, 2.76, 2.94, 2.94 and 2.99 respectively with corresponding standard deviations of 1.01, 0.97, 0.99, 1.01 and 0.99. The standard deviations are small showing that the respondents' responses are closely clustered around the mean and as such are homogeneous. The table also showed that the respondents had a cluster mean of 2.89. This is above the cut-off point of 2.50. Thus, the answer to research question one is that the students' admission process in higher institutions in Benue State is influenced by politics to a great extent.

Hypothesis One: Politics has no significant influence on appointment of principal officers in higher institutions in Benue State.

Table 3: Chi-square test of the Influence of Politics on the Appointment of Principal Officers in Higher Institutions in Benue State

Opinions	Observed frequency	Expected Frequency	df	Level of sig	χ^2 -cal	χ^2 -tab	P-value	Decision
VLE	39	112.5						
LE	68	112.5	3	.05	126.37	7.82	.000	Significant
GE	251	112.5						
VGE	92	112.5						
Total	450							

Table 3 shows that χ^2 cal. = 126.373^a > 7.815; P<.05 with 3 degrees of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that politics has significant influence on appointment of principal officers in higher institutions in Benue State.

Hypothesis Two: Politics has no significant influence on students' admission process in higher institutions.

Table 4: Chi-square test of the Influence of Politics on Students' Admission Process in Higher Institutions in Benue State

Opinions	Observed frequency	Expected Frequency	df	Level of sig	χ^2 -cal	χ^2 -tab	P-value	Decision
VLE	67	112.5						
LE	74	112.5	3	0.05	74.49	7.82	.000	Significant
GE	106	112.5						
VGE	203	112.5						
Total	450							

Table 4 shows that χ^2 cal. = 74.488^a > 7.815; P<.05 with 3 degrees of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis was not accepted. This means that politics has significant influence on students' admission process in higher institutions.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding of this study revealed that politics has significant influence on the appointment of principal officers in higher institutions of learning in Benue State. This is in line with Yawe, Ivagher and Ijov (2015) who noted that political interference in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria has degenerated so much that credibility is completely eroded, as principal officers of higher institutions such as vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, provost, rector and registrars among others are appointed on the basis of political affiliations, sectionalism, nepotism, tribalism as well as religion. Omemu (2015) also noted that qualification and hard work which are the parameters for the appointment of principal officers in higher institutions of learning are hardly adhered to when political forces sets in. With the current trend of political interference in our higher institutions of learning, the institutions will definitely breed ineffectiveness and inefficiency.

The study also found that politics has significant influence on students' admission process in higher institutions in Benue State. This finding is in line with Osuji (2011) who noted that much preference has been given to political considerations rather than due process and merit system in students' admission into higher institutions in Nigeria. The implication of this finding is that if this system of giving admission to unqualified candidates as against the guidelines of these institutions continues, sooner rather than later, these institutions would be producing questionable and unemployable graduates that may tarnish the image of these schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of this study, it was established that politics has significant influence on appointment of principal officers and students' admission process in higher institutions in Benue State. It is clear that with this nasty system of putting round pegs in square halls, the management of higher institutions have suffered in the hands of unprepared and unserious people. This system has also discouraged students from reading their books as they claim that they know their ways. If we must make our educational system better, the task ahead of us is so great and urgent that we cannot afford to waste time on frivolities like political affiliations, ethnic background or religious beliefs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it was recommended that:

1. Higher institutions should develop and follow the laid down guidelines on the appointment of principal officers to bring about productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.
2. Relevant bodies responsible for the control of the various tertiary institutions such as NUC, NCCE, and NBTE among others should monitor the process of admission strictly to be sure that admission is given to only qualified candidates.

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