# POLITICAL MORALITY AND NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM:
## A Critical Evaluation

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**Abstract**

*Political corruption is a social problem found in various degrees and forms, and in the education system where it is not exempted, it has become almost endemic. This paper takes a critical observation regarding the conduct of educational bureaucrats, administrators of various educational institutions and Nigerian political structure. It appears that there is a symbiotic relationship between the educational culture and the socio-political culture of the Nigerian society and this has grossly affected the education system. Nigerian educational system over the years has been politicized. This calls for an attention, because no country thrives socioeconomically and politically above the quality of her education system. Using the method of critical analysis, this paper examines the concepts of politics, education and the relationship between politics and education in Nigeria and therefore, advocates for the curbing of the menace of political corruption in the education system with a sense of urgency, since education is fundamentally the most powerful and effective instrument of socialization. The researchers, therefore, remind us that the security and development of any nation depend greatly upon the product of her educational system.*

**Keywords**: *Politics, Education, Corruption, Administration*

**Introduction**

Politics and education are very important aspects of educational management practices in Nigeria in the sense that education is an off-shoot of the political system. Politics fashions education and education modifies politics. The influence politics has exerted on education over the years has caused a fracture. Interaction between politics and education arouses passion in secularists, civic leaders and educators, parents and tax payers. It is a known fact that no one can take politics out of education. The problem is intractable, in large part, because the debate is not limited to a narrow sector of society; it is not just an academic problem or a legal one; rather, each citizen is a stakeholder in the issue. As a result, bringing light rather than heat to the debate requires examining the positions and views by various scholars.

Many countries across the world have developed on the wings of their intellectual capacity. For several decades past governments in Nigeria have made futile efforts through several policies and the reshaping of institutional mechanism to revamp the education system. The current deterioration of the Nigerian education sector proves no less good. Several literatures on the education system in Nigeria attributes the

deploring condition of the education sector to poor financing, implementation, and monitoring, as well as the copy- syndrome. This paper argues on the contrary that, the problem with the education sector in Nigeria is beyond the identified bottlenecks. The paper contends that politicisation of the education sector-based on primordial identities such as ethnicity, religion and the conduct of academic bureaucrats and administrators are rather responsible for the deploring condition of the education system in Nigeria, which have multiplier effect on national transformation.

## Concept of Politics

The term politics has been well articulated by educators and social scientists. They have both agreed that politics is not just restricted to political parties but it is also there in the Nigerian banks, markets, educational institutions, churches, sports, business, private companies, military establishments, commercial and industrial sectors of our economy. According to the American political scientist, Harold Lasswell, politics is defined as who gets what, when and how. This definition can easily be remembered because it is in the form of a slogan. It further represents reality to a good extent especially in Africa. Politics involves the allocation of scarce social, economic and cultural resources to individuals, groups, regions and classes. Politics has also been defined as the governing of men/women. Nnoli (2003) citing Ranney, discusses the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed, between ruler and the ruled. He argues that this relationship is central to political life. Among academics, politics is often defined as the authoritative allocation of values. Emphasis is placed on how resources are allocated by the system of authorities in the society. Politics could also be defined as all activities that are directly or indirectly associated with the emergence, consolidation and use of state power. Okeke (2007) sees politics as a civilizing agent and a way of ruling in divided society without violence. Therefore, whether defined in terms of man being a political animal; the art of the possible 'who gets what, where and how' the struggle for power; or the authoritative allocation of resources and values, politics has the state as its centre-piece. Researchers have drawn a distinction between two types of politics in schools. The term *micropolitics* refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. Cooperative and conflictive processes are integral components of *micropolitics*. *Macropolitics* refers to how power is used and decision making is conducted at district, state, and federal levels. *Macropolitics* is generally considered to exist outside of the school, but researchers have noted that micro- and *macropolitics* may exist at any level of school systems depending on circumstance.

## Concept of Education

Education is one of the concepts that is very difficult to understand fully even among philosophers of education. As Hospers (1972) puts it:

> The more we come to know or understand a particular concept, the richer our facts of the concept become; hence our facts about the concept of education are in no doubt richer now than they possibly were some

> *hundred years ago. Hence we are in better position to discuss the concept much better than we could have done two century back.*

It is vital for every society to develop a system of education through which it can inculcate to the young ones the vital things necessary for the survival of the society and the individuals in particular. Hence a discussion of the concept of education cannot be anything meaningful without reference to the society. Peters in Asemah (2010) sees education as a process whereby society inculcates the worthwhile things of the society into its people to be better able to cope with the problems of the society and contribute meaningfully to its wellbeing and development. Ajaegbo and Ibezim (2001) define education as the training of the mind and character for effective performance. Ortyoyande (2005) views education to include all experiences and knowledge, acquired through formal (Schooling) or informal (fork stones) settings. According to Aliu (2001) education is said to be the method by which a society transmits from one generation to the next its knowledge, culture and values. He further stressed that education, in the eye of an individual, is the process by which a person learns facts, acquires skills and develops abilities and attitudes necessary for the work place and survival. According to Olayiwola (2001) educational programmes could be said to be functional if it consistently justifies that purpose for which it was adopted, despite all odds. Emayo and Eligie (2001) posit that education is a powerful agent of progress and development. Fafunwa (2004) has defined education as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. From the foregoing, it can be inferred that education is necessary for economic and social development.

**The Relationship Between Politics and Education in Nigeria**
In the past, politicians and educators perceived their roles as completely separate and independent. The myth had been propagated that politics and education do not mix. The reality however, is that there is no apolitical education system and, no educational system can be separated from the political system that engenders and supports it. The proposition here is that considering their societal responsibilities and objectives, education and politics are inextricably related (Nwankwo, 2014).

The politics adopted by any educational system is essentially drawn by the government in power (the political system). Educational policies are therefore those guidelines expedient both for political socialization and for national socio-economic and cultural development. Every government or political party is conscious that to ensure its political, social and economic success, the schools must be involved in the promotion of the interests of the governing power. Some handy examples of how the political system used the education system to promote the political programmers may be drawn. We have Hitler's Germany, Lenin's Russia Victorian England, the Mao-Tse Tong China, the French Revolution and some Military Governments in Africa. On the other hand, the education system and educators need the support and patronage of the ruling political system, the public and other governmental agencies in order to carry out their functions of socialization and training of the people. No educational system can survive

without the financial support and protection of the government in power. Therefore, by having to unavoidably depend on successive governmental support and protection, education finds itself used for the promotion of political creeds and social views of successive government and political leaders (Nwankwo, 2014). According to Ogbonnaya (2009), politics has always been at the forefront of education in Nigeria. 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 purposes. When the British colonial government became involved in education, its own purpose was mainly to produce literate and clerical staff who would keep the colony in a subordinate position for continued exploitation. The Nigerian government believed very much in the education of her citizens. This can be illustrated from her use of education for social, economic and political development, for equalization of educational opportunities and for ethnic harmony.

Another way of perceiving the education politics relationship is by arguing that while each government uses the educational system to achieve its mission, the educational system tends to replicate the political structures and creeds within its structures, programmes and management. It seems that those who tended to separate education from politics have tended to take a restricted definition of politics. Other notable reasons for the relationship between politics and education as enumerated by Ogbonnaya (2009) are:

a) Education is a basic human right and its function is to develop the talents of individuals to the fullest possible extent
b) Every education system has political goals
c) Politics comes before education
d) Politics determines the type of education to be adopted
e) The education of the youths is probably the most fundamental takes of society
f) The political order of society sets the pace for education
g) Politics is an aspect of the political needs of the society
h) Education is the servant and product of politics
i) Education is regulated by government politics and politics
j) The rising costs of education are largely met from the public purse.

Nwankwo (1984) has deposed that "education itself is the means by which values, customs, beliefs, traditions and culture of the society are transmitted to the young." The educational system therefore, provides all the procedures and methods whereby the larger society (the socio-political system) gives its members organized and controlled socialization in the various field and institutions of human endeavours. This is done for the purpose of the maintenance (functional and technical) and acceptance (ethical) of the social structure and the values which justify them. In line with this thinking, Okunamiri (2005) citing Richard (1968) asserts that:

*There is no such thing as neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the youngest generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom" the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. Education therefore is socialization. (P. 7)*

The political functions of determination and allocation of values (materials or symbolic) in the society is carried out by the political system through the several social institutions and agencies in the society, one of which is the educational system.

In addition to its functions of political socialization of the young, the educational system through its merit system or accreditation processes performs the role of political selection and classification of the individuals in the society. In terms of merit, and in fact academic qualification, the educational system becomes a strong form for political selection where those who will rule and those who will be ruled are branded. The educational system does this in accordance with the tenets or creeds of the particular political-structure and societal expectations. Symbolically, the educational system relies on the political system for its fiscal support and definitions. The political leaders determine, especially in the developing societies, the direction, type, location and process of education. It cannot generate enough funds for itself and any attempt to do so through payment of fees and other charges will penalize the economically disadvantaged (Okwori & Ede, 2012).

**Corruption as a Product of Political Decadence in Nigerian Educational System**
Corruption in the education sector can be defined as "the systematic use of public office for private benefit, whose impact is significant on the availability and quality of educational goods and services, and, has impact on access, quality or equity in education" (Hallak & Poisson, 2002). Unfortunately, very little research has been carried out to compare the costs of corruption in the education sector.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2009 gave insight into how corruption in the nation's educational sector had weakened the sector, leading to low efficiency, wastage and misappropriation of resources, low quality service delivery. The ills were classified into different levels of occurrence such as policy level, Ministry/state and local government levels, schools and administrative levels, in which various forms of corruption are existing. For EFCC, corruption in education was a major hindrance to achieving the second Millennium Development Goals of comprehensive primary school education for all the world's children by 2015. They said the effects of corruption on the education sector were extensive and damaging because it endangers a country's social, economic and political future. Where personal effort and merit do not count and success comes through manipulation, favouritism and bribery, then the very foundations of society are shaken. According to EFCC, corruption in education affects more people than corruption in other sectors, both in rural and urban areas basically

because schools are the breeding grounds for future generations. Corruption threatens equal access, quantity and quality of education. Its consequences are particularly harsh for the poor who, without access to education or with no alternative. Low quality education limits their hope of escaping life of poverty, especially in a certificate crazy society like ours. Corrupt admission arrangement mean that the best students may not get admitted after all. Corrupt promotion policies mean that the best minds are not rewarded, and that many will not even wish to be part of the academic community as a result.

## Academic Fraud and Quality Assurance

More than ever before, educational institutions have become profit-oriented in their struggle to survive, neglecting their basic function – to train quality and adequate personnel, capable of coping with the crisis the modern world is faced with nowadays. Hence, we witness  that educational institutions emerge uncontrollably, offering the same or similar curricula in order to attract as large a number of students as possible, rather than curricula that are geared to the structure and needs of the labour market, both at the national and regional levels and at the global level as well. For example, in most Sub-Saharan African countries, enrolment in higher education has grown faster than financing capabilities, reaching a critical stage where the lack of resources has led to a severe decline in the quality of instruction and in the capacity to reorient focus and to innovate. In other words, in Africa's universities, quantity threatens quality. In addition, there are many fake universities, some of which advertise in the international press, circulate information by sending spam and rank high on the hit lists of search engines. We can also see that bachelor, master and doctoral theses can be bought at rather low prices via the internet, which entirely degrades the importance and sense of education. Accordingly, diplomas are degraded due to their hyper-production and insufficient knowledge and competence achieved through education to support them. Clearly, this hyper-production of diplomas cannot solve the problem of insufficient education level of population in many parts of the world, nor can it artificially raise the quota of the literacy level of a nation.

## The Implications of Politicising Nigerian Educational System in Nigeria

As from 1999, Nigeria has witnessed an unequivocal increase in the numbers of educational institutions, following the private sector driven economy in Nigeria. For example, the number of private universities in Nigeria now stands at over fifty. This is accompanied by quite a number of ever increasing states and federal universities and tertiary institutions in the country. In spite of the increase, the standard of education has been deteriorating, as the objectives for which they are established are much to be desired.

From the foregoing, could this problem be linked to the poor policy making process, poor financing, poor implementation of policies and programmes, and poor monitoring process of the programmes? Although, these could partly attribute to, and explain the reasons for the deteriorating standard of education in Nigeria, the problems in recent times could be highly associated with the ethnicity, religion and god-fatherism factors

in Nigeria, because in Nigeria where ethnicity is less pronounced, religion assumes dominance. This also applies to where religion is less dominant, ethnicity takes proceedings. In some other areas where ethnicity and religion assume moderate status, godfathering becomes operational. Within this setting, god-fatherism applies to determine 'who gets what, when and how.' The propelling factors for the manifestation of these identities in Nigeria education sector could be clannish or sectarian conception of social life in Nigeria societies which most people associate it to political elitism and manipulation of the mass mind. In Nigeria today, evidence abound that Vice Chancellors, Provosts and Rectors as well as other education managers such as Principals and Headmasters 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 length 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. Another factor that indicts such practices is that when primordial identities become prominent, established rules cease to function. 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. The managers shy away from asserting their proper disciplinary authority because of such affiliations. Those who would want to execute their primary responsibilities find themselves isolated and endangered. If care is not taken, they are dramatically eliminated or made to suffer sabotage for wanting to be just. Because of primordial dominance, systemic operation becomes subservient to poor policy design and implementation processes, poor financing and monitoring processes. Even while finance is available, they are not often used for the purpose assigned to them rather mismanaged or siphoned and channelled into private uses, and punishment for such offence(s) committed becomes difficult to enforce.

Cumulatively, since the people recruited to pilot the affairs of the sector is carried out on basis of primordial considerations of ethnicity, religion and political balancing, the system tends to produce poor leadership and followership in the society. The system ends up as a mere jamboree where grading of students is determined by such institutional misnomer and as such also tends to produce graduates that are unproductive to themselves, their immediate social milieu and the larger society. Many of such graduates because of clandestine connections are given consideration when it comes to employment far above those that are intelligent and can fit adequately into the given job. It is in this context that Timawus (2010) summits that "a political system that rewards school dropouts with more honours and income than a university professor in a whole lifetime is fit to breed Boko Haram." The politicisation 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 is because these institutions have been overtaken by ethnicity, religious bigotry and clandestine relationships. The implication is more visible now that ethnic and religious restiveness have reached the moon in Nigeria. Because of this situation, many Scholars are relocating to their 'indigenous homelands' or areas considered being relatively peaceful. Despite over fifty years of Nigeria's independence, the situation is ever alarming. The derogatory space for this development has expanded, for example, the renaming of the University of Lagos to Moshood Abiola University by the federal government of Nigeria led to violent demonstration among students in Lagos, majority of them were Yoruba. Tracing the problem, it will be revealing that it is associated with the memories of the 12 June 1993 Babangida's annulled election. Although, there were no demonstrations in Yola but the expression of the people showed that the renaming of the Federal University of Technology to Modibbo Adama University of Technology has succeeded in consolidating the domination of the Hausa-Fulani over the various ethnic groups in Adamawa State.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The relationship between politics and education has been discussed and we have come to the conclusion that there is a thin line unhealthy relationship between politics and education. Politics apparently directs education. We have also seen that politics has been at the forefront of education in Nigeria. Political morality can practically be obtained in the academic institutions when excellence as a major criterion in staffing and admission of students, is allowed to precede ethnicity, religious consideration and god-fatherism in Nigeria.

The governing councils of educational institutions should be given full control over the internal governance of the educational institutions in Nigeria. There should be limitations of government both at the federal and state levels on the political influence of educational institutions in Nigeria. The political variables such as sectionalism, ethnicity, religion, catchment area, quota system and partisan politics should have undue influence on the educational system above merits.

Nothing can ruin a country more than its poor and corrupt education system. Hence, this issue not only calls for special attention of the public, but largely touches the domain of international criminal law. Consequently, it is necessary that a massive campaign be launched to close quasi-educational institutions that produce "intellectual cripples". Education should be given back its original role, however, with a new prefix of creating education geared to the students' needs and new knowledge that will be synergic with the demand on the local, regional and global labour markets. More than ever before we need knowledge that can be applicable to the 21$^{st}$ century economy, a knowledge-based economy. It is for this reason that immediate attention be paid to education, because of its implications for poverty, unemployment and other problems which the world we live in is faced with today.

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