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The influence of Politics on the Freedom of Educational Administration and Management in Higher Educational Institution

¹ Therese M.S. Tchombe

¹ Emeritus Professor Therese M.S. Tchombe, UNESCO Board Chair, Faculty of Education, University of Buea

Abstract

This paper argues that education leaders in universities allow politics to impact their leadership to the extent that quality and science are compromised. I address the character, nature and function of university; begging for a thinking of its role in creating scientific knowledge to offer service humanity and how the misappropriation of this authority is negatively affecting the quality of education outcomes and manpower turn out to the world work. Evidently much is being compromised; sustainable education, sustainable learning and sustainable development on account of poor leadership.

Keywords: Politics, Freedom, Education administration Authority, University Lecturer and quality

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Introduction

This paper attempts to explore the main influences of politics on university lecturers' and administrators' academic freedom and their independence to perform their three primary duties of teaching, research and outreach. On this solemn occasion, I cannot but reflect on how party-political inclinations have jeopardised our prestigious portfolios as academicians to exercise our duties impartially for service of our beloved students and country. According to Berihu and Mewcha (2015), education is one of the main instruments for fostering human capabilities and overall freedoms so that individuals can lead the kind of lives they have reason to value. If we have a well nurtured and balanced education system, then half the task of the country's development is done.

The socio-economic development of many countries has been strongly linked with education. Higher education is the key for optimal utilization of research for the development of human capital. Higher education therefore stands as the ultimate liberator, empowering people to make personal and social choices. Moreover, it is a tool to enable human being to make all rounded participation in development process by acquiring knowledge, skill and attitudinal change. Education is also one of the basic human rights. According to Mewcha and Ayele (2015), education is one of the most important investments in building human capital in a country and makes a nation technologically innovative and a good path to economic growth. Hence, any nation committed to economic growth and fair treatment of its citizens has to organize and provide an efficient educational system.

Characterisation of University Education

Strictly speaking challenges to effective leadership in our institutions at all levels draw our attention and beg for a change of mind sets by thinking about the ethos of university education and its expectations and aspirations. Let me give you some highlights drawn from Fonlon's (1978) reflections on his perceptions of university education as:

- higher studies that should be orderly, with well-defined structures, systemic, imbued with principles of life and growth.
- animated by a spirit of inquiry that thirsts for learning
- provide students with a body of facts, principles and learning skills that are coherent, organised and well-integrated.
- well informed and with a problem-solving spirit epitomised by being analytic, critical, creative, imaginative, innovative and flexible.
- enable students to reason and be independent learners

My question is, do we as leaders in academic address these critical issues that focuses on the quality of knowledge offered?

Fonlon's views are also highlighted by Vermetten, Y.J., Vermunt, J.D. & Lodewijks, H.G. (1999), who posited that an important purpose of tertiary education is that students develop more advanced academic and independent ways of learning, more self-regulated learning and higher levels of critical thinking thus self-efficacy. Permit me close this characterisation, with this quote from John Masfield cited by Robinson and Katulushi (2005, pp, 1):

“The university is a place where those who hate ignorance may strive to know;; where seekers and learners alike banded together in search for knowledge, will honour thought in all its finer ways....”

From all of the aforementioned, clearly, the university has the responsibility to uphold the dignity of thoughts and learning and establishes standards. The basis of values in university is humankind's capacity to reflect and ultimately become aware of their own learning. Learning about learning is at the heart of personal and social development. With all of these, the

question is how effective and efficient is our leadership in directing this process without conflict of interest that is political and financial?

In thinking about expanding capacities for leaders, we must reflect on how leaders at all level misuse their power and authority. I am very concern with authority and so will not attempt to address conceptual definitions and analysis of these concepts. At the same time I will like to focus our attention on authority with support from the scriptures on the following leadership qualities:

- Authority involves much love and a great deal of patience, Isaiah 40 v 11;
- Authority requires courage, I Samuel 25 v 7;
- Authority requires ability, Proverbs 27 v 23;
- Authority requires meekness as well as quickness, I Peter 5 v 2;
- Authority requires a great sense of responsibility, Matthew 18 v 12.

I will like to add honesty, integrity, wisdom, loyalty and prudence. These are very important values that play in all our activities at the university. So, reflections on these qualities require self-examinations in order to ask ourselves where we stand in all these and how misuse of authority is misuse of power thus weak leadership.

From the aforementioned, corporation political interests in school leadership, administration and management is fast becoming the order of the day in Cameroon. It is not uncommon that university lecturers and administrators openly seek for membership in political parties so as to gain favours for promotion. Such systematic application of party ideology has seriously undermined academic freedom and quality of education in the country and injected an atmosphere of fear in the education system. Unless the regime guarantees administrative autonomy to the university institutions and refrains from politicizing education, the quality of education in the country will continue to deteriorate in the coming years.

The need to for university educational administrators to remain neutral to unhealthy party-political inclinations

According to post-2015 agenda (UNESCO, 2015), sustainable development cannot be achieved by technological solutions, political regulation or financial instruments alone. Sustainable development can only be achieved via cross-sectorial efforts that recognise education as the key and starting point, thus justifying the establishment of the stand-alone SDG4 as a pivot in the realization of all the rest of the 16 SDGs. This kind of education must be the type that “addresses the interdependence of environment, economy and society, and helps bring about the fundamental change of mind-sets needed to trigger action for sustainable development” (UNESCO 2015: 11). Because of this striking relationship between education and sustainable development, Cameroonian needs a new kind of mind-set that would liberate higher education from the ills of political imprisonment.

Mewcha and Ayele (2015) affirm this position when they clearly state that education is the basement of overall development in any country since it develops human capital. It is impossible to imagine that change can come in a country without expansion of its educational system. But simply expanding education without assuring its quality does not have any effect on the countries’ development. Moreover, effective and quality of education in a country will sustain when the stakeholders became free of from any political intervention.

Politics and education are two different concepts. Off course, education has a great contribution on politics through generating

good politicians and political institutions can also help education through providing materials. However, intervention of politics on educational institutions and its activities makes schools to engage in inappropriate educational activities making wrong curriculum decisions that usually affect pedagogical practices

The role of university administrators in nation building and negative impact of party politics

Universities are meant to be free from political inclinations. University administration should adopt a liberal approach to learning that is directed at self and individual growth. In contemporary “knowledge societies” and in a globalised world with constant rapid change, critical inquiry are important for people and communities to adapt to new situations and to consistently upgrade and renew knowledge and skills (Pyle and Forrant, 2002). This also relates to maintaining academic values and standards. Liberal approaches to education also include innovative curricula and pedagogies as well as providing opportunities for lifelong learning and learning for life (Yeaxlee, 1929).

Unfortunately, political intervention on academic institution deteriorates education quality. This is reflected when:

- University administrators focus more on party politics rather than their primary duties of teaching, research and outreach.
- As a result, others are discriminated to get benefits
- Political activities are exercised in the school
- Evaluation of colleagues is based on political activities

Conclusion

As a result of administrators’ engagement in partial political practices, teaching is not effective, they lose their confidence, they do not use their time appropriately on academic issues and they are not able to help their students. Thus, lecturers do not have academic freedom and the university is not independent from political burdens. There is no strong institution which protects lectures’ freedom from political influence.

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Author Details

Emeritus Professor Therese M.S. Tchombe
UNESCO Chair, Faculty of Education, University of Buea
Mobile: 00237677783635
Email: tmtchombe@yahoo.co.uk