EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION IN A POLITICAL CONTEXT: WHOSE INTERESTS ARE SERVED?

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the politicisation of educational evaluation in Nigeria and its effects on education quality, governance, and social justice. Educational evaluation, which aims to assess programmes, policies, and institutional performance, is often influenced by political interests that determine what is measured, who conducts the evaluation, and how results are used. Policymakers, senior administrators, and politically connected actors tend to benefit from these evaluations, while teachers, learners in rural or under-resourced areas, and low-income communities are frequently excluded. Nigerian case studies from primary, secondary, and tertiary education show how political considerations affect evaluation goals, methods, evaluator selection, data interpretation, and dissemination of results. Politicised evaluation distorts educational priorities, produces inequitable resource allocation, undermines institutional credibility, reduces teacher morale, and limits student learning. These outcomes reinforce social inequalities and weaken the capacity of education to promote fairness and opportunity. The paper argues that evaluation should be transparent, independent, merit-based, and inclusive, allowing meaningful participation from all stakeholders. Evidence-based evaluation can improve educational quality, enhance accountability, and provide equitable learning opportunities. It is suggested, among others, that depoliticising evaluation is essential for ensuring that education serves public interest rather than political expedience, and for supporting reforms that address structural inequalities in Nigerian education.

KEYWORDS: Politicisation, accountability, transparency, social justice, education quality

INTRODUCTION

Education is often described as the foundation of progress and equality, yet it can also become a tool through which power and privilege are maintained. In principle, educational evaluation is meant to strengthen accountability and improve the quality of learning. In practice, however, it can serve as an extension of political authority rather than an independent process of educational improvement.

The question of whose interests educational evaluation serves has therefore become central to current debates about fairness, transparency and justice in education (Roshid et al., 2025; Ziegler et al., 2021).

Evaluation determines what counts as success or failure in education (Anagbogu, 2025). It informs curriculum reform, resource allocation and teacher appraisal. It guides who receives recognition or sanction and which programmes are scaled up or discontinued (Owan et al., 2023).

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Because these decisions often affect large budgets and political reputations, evaluation rarely occurs in isolation from political influence (Mavrot & Pattyn, 2022). In many educational systems, the criteria for judging effectiveness are established by those in power, and the evidence produced is interpreted in ways that reinforce existing hierarchies. When this happens, evaluation ceases to serve learners or communities; it becomes an instrument of political survival.

Education plays a vital role in national development (Offem et al., 2017). It prepares citizens for productive participation in the economy and civic life. It also determines the extent to which societies uphold social justice and inclusion (Bassey et al., 2019). For evaluation to fulfil this transformative role, it should remain credible, independent and offer genuine feedback about what works and what needs improvement. Yet, political control over evaluation agencies, the appointment of evaluators and the dissemination of results often compromise objectivity. When findings are filtered through political lenses, poor performance can be disguised, and ineffective policies may continue unchecked.

In Nigeria, political interference in educational evaluation exist in several ways. Evaluation reports are sometimes influenced by government interests, especially when they concern flagship projects or high-profile reforms. Evaluators may face pressure to produce results that justify existing expenditures or policy choices (Head, 2016). In such situations, evidence becomes selective, and the evaluation process loses integrity. Similar concerns have been documented in other developing nations, where evaluation is tied to donor funding or partisan accountability rather than educational improvement (Clinton & Grissom, 2015).

At its core, this paper argues that educational evaluation is deeply political, often structured to protect the interests of dominant groups rather than to advance equitable learning opportunities. This argument builds on the view that evaluation is not merely a technical exercise but a social practice embedded within relations of power. Political actors, policymakers and administrators use evaluation outcomes to legitimise their authority, secure resources and manage public perception. Meanwhile, the interests of teachers, students and marginalised communities receive limited attention. This paper seeks to expose how political control over evaluation distorts educational priorities and undermines accountability by interrogating these dynamics. The discussion in this paper is organised under different thematic focus. The first part clarifies the meaning, purpose and significance of evaluation in education. It reviews key ideas in contemporary evaluation theory and traces how evaluation has evolved from a tool for measuring performance to one for legitimising policy. The second part analyses the political nature of evaluation by examining power relations, stakeholder interests and the policy process. It considers how decision-makers influence what is evaluated, how results are interpreted and which findings are made public. The third part interrogates the question of whose interests are served by current evaluation practices, identifying how dominant groups such as policymakers and administrators benefit, while marginalised groups are often excluded from the conversation. The final part discusses the wider implications for education and social justice and proposes principles for a more transparent and inclusive approach to evaluation.

This paper is a timely discussion because educational evaluation can strengthen democracy when it is transparent and participatory (Rey & Fortin, 2023). It can also reinforce inequality when it privileges the views of a few. In the Nigerian setting, there is a pressing need to rethink evaluation as a collective responsibility rather than an administrative ritual. Re-centring evaluation on learners and communities requires political will, professional ethics and institutional independence. These issues are essential if evaluation is to contribute to genuine educational transformation rather than to the preservation of status and control. This paper therefore is a re-examination of how political interests influence what is valued, measured and rewarded in education. It challenges educators, policymakers and researchers to move beyond the assumption that evaluation is neutral. It argues instead for an ethical approach that acknowledges its political dimensions and seeks to align evaluation with the goals of justice, equality and sustainable development. Through this lens, educational evaluation becomes not a tool of dominance but a process of democratic learning that serves the public interest.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

1.   Education

The term education has been defined variedly by scholars over time and across contexts. For instance, Enukola et al. (2010) propose that education involves deliberate human efforts to facilitate beneficial learning encounters. Education is the conscious or unconscious process of gaining knowledge and abilities and disseminating cultural beliefs and practices from one generation to the next within a society (Asuquo et al., 2010). On the other hand, Obot (2015) argues that education encompasses any experience that can shape an individual learner's mind, character, or physical abilities. The author emphasises that education is not limited to intentionally transferring a society's accumulated knowledge, skills, and values from generation to generation. It also includes the learner's accumulated experiences throughout their lifetime.

From the preceding, education can be defined as the process of acquiring knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and beliefs through various means (such as instruction, training, mentoring, experience, and exposure to different environments and cultures) and from formal settings (where structured curricula, standards, and assessments are used to impart knowledge and skills), non-formal settings (where learners have more flexibility and autonomy in choosing what, when, and how to learn) and informal settings (where learning does not follow a specific curriculum or syllabus but tends to be more spontaneous, experiential, and learner-driven, as it responds to the interests, needs, and goals of individual learners). Moreover, education can be self-directed, where learners take responsibility for their learning and seek resources and opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills. It can also be collaborative, where learners engage in group projects, discussions, and activities that promote social interaction and shared learning. Education aims to equip learners with the competencies and capabilities to navigate and contribute to society, solve problems, make informed decisions, and pursue personal and collective goals. Therefore, education is essential to personal and societal growth and transformation.

2.   Politics

According to Hobbes (1894), politics is primarily concerned with maintaining consistent obedience to the power and laws of the sovereign for a peaceful and orderly society, requiring individuals to surrender their natural rights to the sovereign who must possess unrestricted power to maintain control, stability, prevent a state of war, and ensure a civilised society. Weber (1946) argued that politics centres around domination, obedience, and the use of legitimate force and that all political institutions, including the state, exist as social spaces for men to assert dominance over one another. The absence of unwavering obedience to the sovereign and laws threatens the validity of our social contracts, potentially leading to a return to the primitive state of nature (Zemba, 2018). Therefore, politics is a multifaceted decision-making process involving power and authority to allocate resources, establish laws, and shape public policies. It encompasses a range of actors, including elected officials, civil servants, interest groups, activists, and citizens. It involves various forms of political activity, such as electoral politics, social movements, interest group lobbying, public opinion formation, and policymaking. Politics is closely tied to justice, equality, and democracy, as decisions made through political processes can significantly impact these values. It is a dynamic and constantly evolving field that plays a vital role in shaping the direction of societies and nations.

UNDERSTANDING EVALUATION

Evaluation is a deliberate process of judging the value or effectiveness of an educational activity, programme, or policy. It involves the systematic collection and interpretation of evidence to determine how well objectives have been achieved and what improvements are necessary. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021), evaluation in education provides structured information about performance and supports decisions that enhance quality, accountability, and transparency. Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014) define evaluation as the process of identifying, obtaining, and applying information to make informed judgements about the merit and worth of an educational intervention.

Within this broad conception, evaluation goes beyond testing or measurement; it examines both outcomes and the processes that lead to those outcomes. It therefore includes the appraisal of curriculum implementation, teacher effectiveness, student learning, institutional management, and policy delivery.

In simple terms, evaluation answers three essential questions: What was planned? What was achieved? What can be improved? These questions reveal evaluation as both a technical and a value-driven exercise. It is technical because it involves systematic methods of data collection and analysis, and value-driven because the criteria for judging success depend on human goals and societal expectations. Evaluation connects evidence with decision-making, ensuring that educational policies and programmes remain responsive to national development needs (Owan et al., 2022). When applied with integrity, evaluation promotes accountability, learning, and continuous improvement within educational systems.

The purpose of evaluation in education can be viewed from several perspectives. First, it provides feedback for improvement. Teachers, administrators, and policymakers depend on evaluation results to understand what is working and where reform is required. Continuous evaluation prevents schools and programmes from relying on assumptions, replacing guesswork with evidence derived from performance indicators (Mohan, 2023). Second, evaluation supports decision-making about resource allocation. Education budgets are often limited, and evaluation helps determine which initiatives deliver value for investment. Third, evaluation strengthens accountability. Public institutions must justify their performance to learners, parents, and funding bodies. Through evaluation, stakeholders gain insight into how educational objectives are being pursued and achieved (OECD, 2022). Fourth, evaluation contributes to policy learning by generating lessons that inform future planning and innovation. In addition to these practical functions, evaluation performs symbolic and ethical roles. It communicates a society's priorities and values. What is evaluated, how it is evaluated, and who carries it out all reveal what education is understood to mean. For example, when evaluation focuses narrowly on examination results, it suggests that success is defined mainly by cognitive achievement. Conversely, when it includes creativity, social responsibility, and community engagement, it broadens the vision of what constitutes quality education (Bassey et al., 2019). Evaluation is therefore not value-free; it reflects the aspirations and assumptions of those who design and interpret it.

The importance of evaluation lies in its ability to strengthen both learning and governance. At the classroom level, it helps teachers adjust instructional strategies and identify learners who need additional support. At the institutional level, evaluation provides evidence for accreditation, curriculum review, and quality assurance. At the policy level, it informs national standards and ensures alignment between education and broader development goals (OECD, 2021). In Nigeria, effective evaluation can be a pathway to evidence-based improvement and renewed public trust due to the persistent challenges of quality, equity, and accountability in our educational system.

Educational evaluation, as a subset of general evaluation, focuses specifically on assessing the quality, effectiveness, and impact of educational programmes and initiatives. It involves collecting and analysing data on goals, objectives, curriculum, teaching, learning outcomes, and overall impact. Joshua (2012) defines educational evaluation as the systematic process of gathering qualitative or quantitative information to judge the value of educational projects, subjects, curricula, or teaching procedures. Similarly, Durán (2010) and Lindsay (2015) emphasise that evaluation provides evidence-based justification for whether educational interventions improve learning outcomes. Educational evaluation may take various forms, including formative (ongoing), summative (end-of-cycle), and impact evaluation (long-term). Mathison (2010) identifies two central functions of evaluation: the amelioration function, which seeks to improve educational practice and encourage reflection, and the accountability function, which judges outcomes, efficiency, and cost. In the amelioration function, evaluation is formative and diagnostic, involving internal stakeholders such as teachers, students, and curriculum designers. In contrast, accountability evaluation is summative and external, conducted independently for policymakers, administrators,

and funding agencies. Smith (2005) further explains that ameliorative evaluations typically rely on informal internal reporting, while accountability evaluations employ formal, externally validated processes.

However, evaluation can only serve its developmental purpose if it remains credible and independent. When political influence dictates evaluation priorities or suppresses unfavourable findings, its capacity to improve education is compromised. The OECD (2022) stresses that transparency and stakeholder participation are essential for ensuring the legitimacy of evaluation outcomes. Likewise, UNESCO (2021) advocates that inclusive approaches be adopted during educational evaluations to amplify the voices of teachers, learners, and communities in defining educational success. Without such inclusiveness, evaluation risks becoming an administrative routine rather than a catalyst for learning and reform.

POLITICISATION OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION

Evaluation in education rarely exists in a political vacuum. The process of judging programmes, policies and institutions always involves choices about what to value, how to measure success and who reads the results. When those choices respond more to political interest than to educational considerations, evaluation becomes politicised. This section discusses five themes that explain how and why this happens: power dynamics; stakeholder interests; the policy-making process; resource allocation and patronage; and ideological and value biases.

Power dynamics

Those who hold power often also control the rules of evaluation. Ministries, supervisory agencies and political actors set priorities, fund evaluations and appoint panels. Where evaluative bodies lack formal independence, their judgements rarely align with the interests of those who funded or appointed them. The literature on evaluation practice shows that evaluators routinely encounter political pressures at stages such as stakeholder identification and public reporting, and they adopt strategies, such as framing findings to avoid conflict, to survive in politically charged contexts (Azzam et al., 2021). The problem is institutional:

without safeguards that separate evaluative authority from programme delivery, evaluation becomes a tool for legitimising incumbent decisions rather than a check on policy (Jankauskas & Eckhard, 2023).

Stakeholder interests

Multiple stakeholders engage with evaluation because it affects reputations, budgets and careers. Politicians often want positive signals that can be used for electoral or rhetorical advantage; administrators want manageable criticisms; donors want evidence that their investments show returns; and teachers seek protection from unfair appraisal. These competing interests distort what evaluation measures and how results are used. In fact, Azzam et al (2021) have shown that evaluators in contested environments frequently face pressures to produce findings that appease powerful stakeholders, leading to selective emphasis or cautious language in reports rather than candid appraisal.

Policy-making process

Evaluation sometimes functions not as a critique of policy but as a retrospective endorsement of policy choices. When policy goals are set before independent evidence is gathered, evaluation becomes a device for confirmation. International and national reviews observe that when governments use evaluation primarily to demonstrate compliance or success, they may choose indicators that make favourable comparison likely (OECD, 2021). In such scenarios, evaluation feeds policy narratives instead of challenging weak programmes. The effect is particularly acute when high-stakes accountability, such as performance targets or public rankings, drives evaluation design, prompting actors to prioritise what is measurable over what is educationally meaningful.

Resource allocation and patronage

Evaluation outcomes influence how resource, such as funding and staffing flows, with infrastructural priorities frequently depending on reported performance. This makes evaluation a lever for patronage in politicised systems. When political actors prefer certain regions, institutions or interest groups, they may encourage evaluations that justify preferential allocations.

Evidence from governance studies and education policy reviews suggests that without transparent, rules-based budget processes, evaluation can be repurposed to rationalise political distribution of resources rather than to direct funds to greatest educational need (Idiong et al., 2023; OECD, 2022; Ogunode et al., 2024).

Ideological and value biases

Finally, what is measured often reflects the values of dominant actors. Quantitative indicators such as test scores and enrolment ratios are attractive because they appear objective and comparable (Bassey & Owan, 2020). Yet they privilege narrow forms of learning and international comparability, often sidelining local goals such as civic formation, indigenous knowledge or community relevance. International studies have documented that global assessment regimes and donor priorities influence national evaluation agendas, sometimes imposing standards that fit external models more than national aims (Jankauskas & Eckhard, 2023). This simply suggest that evaluation magnifies the values of those who define its measures. Thus, to reclaim the developmental purpose of evaluation, countries need institutional arrangements that protect evaluators, broaden stakeholder participation in defining success, require transparent reporting, and link resource decisions to transparent criteria. International organisations and donors also bear responsibility to support locally driven evaluation frameworks rather than importing narrow metric systems.

POLITICS IN EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION

Educational evaluation is a socially and politically embedded process reflecting the stakeholders' values, interests, and power relations. Mertens (2010) argues that politics significantly shapes educational evaluation goals, methods, and outcomes. The politicised environment in which researchers operate and their personal experiences and views influence their political stance, raising concerns about defining objectivity according to conventional science standards. Political interference can come from various sources, such as policymakers, politicians, interest groups, donors, and other stakeholders who seek to advance their agendas. These influences can affect various aspects of educational evaluation, including the selection of

evaluation questions, the choice of methods, the interpretation of results, and the dissemination of findings. Despite this, the purpose of educational evaluation remains to provide valid and reliable evidence to inform decision-making, improve program quality, and increase accountability.

Politics in the Selection and Prioritisation of Evaluation Goals

The evaluation goals represent the desired outcomes of a program, policy or project intended to be measured and evaluated to assess its effectiveness. Political considerations can influence the selection and prioritisation of evaluation goals by shaping the priorities of decision-makers, the interests of stakeholders, and the allocation of resources. In Nigeria, where the population is heterogenous, most political leaders can select or prioritise goals that favour or are aligned with the interests of the ruling party or government officials rather than the needs of the Nigerian people. This can lead to evaluation goals that are not necessarily aligned with the actual needs of the target population, leading to a mismatch between evaluation goals and program objectives. Similarly, political considerations may influence the prioritisation of evaluation goals by focusing on those that are easier to measure rather than those most critical for assessing program effectiveness. This can result in a preliminary evaluation that fails to capture the full range of outcomes associated with a program, policy or project.

Moreover, political considerations can influence the allocation of resources to evaluation activities, limiting the scope and rigour of the evaluation process. For instance, a lack of resources can result in inadequate data collection or analysis, leading to incomplete or inaccurate evaluation results. To address this, it is essential to establish transparent and accountable processes for decision-making. This can involve ensuring that evaluation goals are developed based on evidence and guided by the best interests of the Nigerian people rather than political considerations. Additionally, the selection and prioritisation of evaluation goals should be overseen by independent bodies free from political interference. This can ensure that evaluation goals are aligned with the actual needs of the target population, that they are comprehensive

and accurate, and that adequate resources are allocated to the evaluation process.

Politics in Programme Formulation/Development

Politics plays a significant role in program formulation and development in Nigeria, as it involves allocating resources and distributing benefits among different stakeholders. Political factors such as power, ideology, and interests can shape the design and implementation of programs and their intended and unintended consequences. One clear example of politics in program formulation and development in Nigeria is the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), which the federal government launched in 2016. The NSIP aims to provide social protection and economic opportunities for the poor and vulnerable through four components: the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme, the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), and the N-Power Programme. However, implementing the NSIP has been subject to political controversies, with some critics alleging that the program has been politicised and used to reward political loyalists. For example, there have been reports of discrepancies in selecting beneficiaries for the CCT and NHGSFP programs, with allegations that some beneficiaries were selected based on political affiliations rather than genuine needs. Furthermore, there have been concerns about the sustainability and effectiveness of the NSIP, as it relies heavily on external funding and may be unable to address the root causes of poverty and vulnerability in Nigeria. The program has also faced challenges in monitoring and evaluation, which can limit its ability to track and measure its impact accurately.

Politics in Educational Programme Implementation

The government's education policies can be influenced by political considerations, with decisions based on political priorities rather than educational needs. This can result in inadequate or ineffective policies, with limited resources being directed towards education or allocated in a manner that does not address the most pressing needs. Political considerations can also affect the implementation of educational programs. In some cases, political interference can disrupt the implementation process, leading to delays, budget cuts, or changes in program objectives. This can result in the program failing to achieve its intended outcomes, leading to a waste of resources and missed opportunities for improving education in Nigeria. Furthermore, implementing educational programs can be influenced by patronage and favouritism. Politically connected individuals or groups may be given preferential treatment when allocating resources or positions, leading to a lack of equity and fairness in program implementation. This can result in some communities or groups receiving inadequate support while others receive more than they need, leading to disparities in education outcomes.

To mitigate the impact of politics on educational program implementation, it is essential to establish transparent and accountable processes for decision-making and resource allocation. This can involve ensuring that educational policies and programs are developed based on evidence and guided by the best interests of the Nigerian people rather than political considerations. Also, the implementation of educational programs should be overseen by independent bodies free from political interference, with clear performance metrics and reporting mechanisms to ensure that progress is tracked and evaluated. This can help ensure that resources are allocated equitably and transparently, focusing on achieving the program's intended outcomes.

Politics in the Selection of Evaluators

Nigeria's diverse and complex political landscape has contributed to the challenge of selecting evaluators who can provide objective and accurate assessments. One of the main issues with the selection of evaluators in Nigeria is the tendency for government officials and other influential individuals to prioritise personal or political connections over qualifications and expertise. Furthermore, evaluators could be chosen along ethnic or religious lines even when they are suitably not qualified candidates. This often leads to the appointment of individuals who may not have the necessary skills or experience to provide an impartial evaluation, which can undermine evaluations' credibility.

There have been instances where evaluators have been appointed based on their willingness to provide favourable assessments rather than their ability to provide an accurate and unbiased evaluation. The politicisation of the selection of evaluators can also lead to a lack of trust in the evaluation process. If stakeholders believe that evaluations are being conducted in a biased or inaccurate manner, they may be less likely to accept the findings or recommendations of the evaluation. This can further social divisions and undermine efforts to address key issues such as poverty, inequality, and social justice.

Therefore, it is important to establish transparent and merit-based selection processes for evaluators. This can involve setting clear criteria for selection, such as specific qualifications or experience in a particular field, and establishing independent selection committees to review and assess potential candidates. In addition, mechanisms should be in place to ensure that evaluators are not subject to political pressure or influence during the evaluation process. This can involve establishing safeguards such as whistleblower protection and ensuring evaluators can report their findings without fear of reprisal. Ultimately, the selection of evaluators should be based on their ability to provide objective and accurate assessments rather than their political affiliations or connections. By establishing transparent and merit-based selection processes and safeguarding the independence of evaluators, Nigeria can ensure that evaluations are conducted fairly and impartially.

Politics in the Selection of Evaluation Methods and Metrics

The choice of evaluation methods and metrics can significantly impact the conclusions and recommendations of an evaluation. As such, they must be chosen transparently and objectively. However, political considerations may influence the selection of evaluation methods and metrics. For example, suppose a government or political party has a particular agenda or interest. In that case, they may select evaluation methods and metrics that support their goals rather than provide a more accurate or comprehensive assessment. In addition, there may be pressure to select evaluation methods and metrics that are easy to implement or provide a more positive assessment.

This can be driven by concerns about the potential impact of negative evaluations on political or economic interests or by a desire to avoid accountability for poor performance. One potential consequence of politicising the selection of evaluation methods and metrics is that evaluations may not provide a comprehensive or accurate assessment of a particular policy or program. This can result in policies or programs that are ineffective, inefficient, or even harmful and can lead to a waste of resources and missed opportunities for improvement.

To address this, it is important to establish transparent and objective processes for their selection. This can involve consulting with various stakeholders, including experts in the field and those affected by the policy or program being evaluated, to identify the most appropriate methods and metrics. Furthermore, ensuring that those involved in the selection process are free from political pressure or influence is important. This can involve establishing independent bodies to oversee the selection of evaluation methods and metrics and providing them with the resources and authority necessary to carry out their work effectively.

Politics in Data Collection and Interpretation

Accurate and reliable data collection is crucial for effective policymaking and program evaluation as it provides the necessary evidence to identify issues, design interventions, and track progress. However, politics can influence data collection and interpretation, with government officials or influential individuals manipulating or suppressing data that poorly reflect their performance or policies. This can result in incomplete or inaccurate data, leading to flawed conclusions and ineffective policies or programs. There may also be pressure to interpret data to support a political agenda. Certain data points or metrics are emphasised or downplayed to present a more positive assessment of a policy or program. The politicisation of data collection and interpretation can erode public trust in government and other institutions, leading to a lack of accountability and hindering the design and implementation of effective policies and programs.

To mitigate the impact of politics on data collection and interpretation, it is important to establish transparent and objective processes for both.

This can involve ensuring that data collection efforts are conducted rigorously and scientifically, with appropriate safeguards to prevent manipulation or suppression of data. Moreover, data interpretation should be guided by established principles of scientific inquiry, such as the need for replicable and verifiable results and objective and transparent criteria for selecting data points and metrics. To achieve this, it may be necessary to establish independent bodies to oversee data collection and interpretation and to provide them with the resources and authority necessary to carry out their work effectively.

Politics in the Dissemination and Use of Educational Evaluation Results

Educational evaluation results can be politically sensitive, particularly if they are critical of government policies or programs. In such cases, there may be pressure to suppress or downplay negative findings or to interpret them in a way that minimises their significance. Conversely, positive evaluation results may be promoted or publicised to support a particular political agenda or to justify a government's actions. This can result in an incomplete or biased representation of the evaluation findings, which can mislead stakeholders and the public about the effectiveness of a policy or program. Furthermore, the use of evaluation results can be influenced by political considerations. For example, a government may choose to ignore or reject evaluation findings if they conflict with its political priorities or if they would require significant changes to existing policies or programs. This can lead to a lack of accountability and hinder the development of evidence-based policies and programs.

To mitigate this, it is important to establish transparent and independent processes for both. This can involve ensuring that evaluation reports are made available to the public and stakeholders in a timely and accessible manner, with clear explanations of the methodology, findings, and limitations. In addition, evaluation results should be guided by objective and transparent criteria, with decisions based on the best available evidence rather than political considerations. This may require the establishment of independent bodies to oversee the use of evaluation results, with authority to ensure that policies and programs

are developed and implemented based on evidence. Ultimately, the dissemination and use of evaluation results should be driven by a commitment to transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making, rather than political considerations. By establishing transparent and independent processes for both, Nigeria can ensure that evaluation results are used to inform effective policies and programs that meet the needs of its citizens.

Politics in the Funding of Evaluation Efforts

Evaluation efforts in the public or private sector are critical for determining the effectiveness of programs and initiatives. Funding evaluation efforts are important to ensure accountability, transparency, and improved outcomes. However, the politics surrounding the funding of evaluation efforts can be complex and varied. Politics can play a significant role in funding evaluation efforts. Political priorities and agendas can influence which programs and policies are evaluated, how they are evaluated, and what outcomes are emphasised. This can have positive and negative implications for evaluation efforts, depending on the specific political context and the evaluation goals. One potential positive impact of politics on evaluation funding is that it can bring greater attention and resources to certain programs or policies deemed a priority by policymakers. For example, suppose a particular government agency is tasked with implementing a new program to address a pressing social issue, such as homelessness or education reform. In that case, policymakers may allocate additional funding for evaluation efforts to ensure the program is effective and efficient. In this way, politics can drive investment in evaluation efforts that might not otherwise receive sufficient funding. However, politics can also negatively affect evaluation efforts, particularly if it leads to manipulation or distortion of evaluation findings to fit a specific political agenda. In some cases, political actors may try to influence the design or implementation of evaluations in ways that bias the results or limit the scope of the evaluation. For example, a politician may want to demonstrate the success of a particular program to secure re-election and may pressure evaluators to design the evaluation in a way that produces positive findings,

even if this compromises the integrity of the evaluation. Another potential challenge of political influence on evaluation funding is that it can create a situation in which evaluations are only conducted for programs or policies that align with the political priorities of those in power. This can limit the scope of evaluation efforts and may prevent important programs or policies from being evaluated simply because policymakers do not see them as a priority. Additionally, politics can create a situation in which evaluation findings are ignored or dismissed if they do not align with political priorities, even if those findings are based on rigorous evaluation methods and robust evidence.

It is important to ensure that evaluation efforts are designed and implemented independently and impartially to alleviate the negative impacts of political influence on evaluation funding. This may involve establishing clear evaluation standards and protocols and ensuring evaluators have the resources and support necessary to conduct rigorous evaluations. It is also important to foster a culture of evidence-based policymaking that prioritises using evaluation findings to inform policy decisions rather than allowing political agendas to dictate which findings are accepted or ignored. Overall, politics can positively and negatively impact the funding of evaluation efforts. While political priorities and agendas can drive investment in evaluation efforts, they can also lead to bias, manipulation of findings, and limited scope of evaluation efforts. To ensure that evaluation efforts are conducted independently and impartially, it is important to establish clear evaluation standards and foster a culture of evidence-based policymaking.

POLITICAL INFLUENCE ON EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION STAKEHOLDERS

The relationship between politics and education is complex and multifaceted, influencing every aspect of the educational system, including evaluation. Educational evaluation stakeholders such as students, teachers, administrators, parents and families, community members, policymakers, funders, advocacy groups, researchers, and evaluators can be influenced by politics in various ways. Below are some of the ways politics can influence each of these stakeholders in educational evaluation:

1.　　**Students:** Politics can influence the way students perceive their education and the value they place on it. For instance, politicians may prioritise certain subjects in the curriculum, such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and allocate more funding towards them. This can create a perception among students that STEM subjects are more important than others. Politicians may also use educational evaluation to measure the success of their policies and use the results to advocate for further reforms or to justify cuts to education funding. This can pressure students to perform well on evaluations, leading to high-stakes testing.

2.　　**Teachers:** Politics can influence how teachers are evaluated, and their performance is measured. For instance, policymakers may mandate the use of standardised tests to evaluate teacher effectiveness, or they may tie teacher pay and promotions to student test scores. This can create a focus on teaching to the test, neglecting other important aspects of education, such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. Additionally, politics can influence the professional development opportunities available to teachers and the curriculum materials they are expected to use in the classroom.

3.　　**Administrators:** Politics can influence how administrators are evaluated and run schools. For instance, policymakers may use educational evaluation to determine whether administrators meet certain benchmarks or goals, such as increasing graduation rates or reducing discipline incidents. Politics can also influence administrators' autonomy in school operations and budgeting decisions. Similarly, politics is used to appoint individuals to administrative positions to protect their interests and for selfish reasons.

4.　　Parents and Families: Politics can influence the way parents and families perceive the quality of their children's education. For instance, politicians may use educational evaluation to demonstrate the effectiveness of their policies and use the results to justify their decisions. This can pressure parents and families to enrol their children in schools that perform well on evaluations or to pressure their children to perform well on tests.

5.　　**Community Members:** Politics can influence how community members perceive their community's education quality.

6.   **For instance,** politicians may use educational evaluation to show the effectiveness of their policies and use the results to justify increased funding for schools in their community. Additionally, politics can influence the types of educational programs available to community members, such as after-school programs, vocational training, and adult education.

7.   **Policymakers:** Politics can influence the types of educational policies that policymakers prioritise and the funding they allocate to education. For instance, policymakers may prioritise funding for certain subjects, such as STEM, and allocate more resources. Additionally, politics can influence the types of evaluations used to measure the success of educational policies and programs.

8.   **Funders:** Politics can influence the types of educational programs and initiatives funders support. For instance, politicians may use educational evaluation to demonstrate the effectiveness of certain programs and use the results to secure funding for them. Additionally, politics can influence the types of evaluation methods used to measure the success of programs, such as randomised control trials, quasi-experimental designs, or qualitative methods.

9.   **Advocacy Groups:** Advocacy groups are essential in promoting educational policies and influencing public opinion. Politics can influence advocacy groups in various ways. Advocacy groups often have political ideologies that influence their education advocacy. For example, a conservative advocacy group may support policies that emphasise parental choice in education. Interest groups may influence advocacy groups with a stake in education policy. For example, a teachers' union may advocate for policies that benefit teachers, while a parent advocacy group may prioritise policies that support parents. Advocacy groups may also be influenced by public opinion on educational issues. For example, if the public strongly favours increasing school funding, an advocacy group may prioritise this issue in their advocacy efforts.

10.   **Researchers:** Researchers play a critical role in evaluating educational programs and policies. Politics can influence researchers in various ways.

First, researchers may be influenced by the funding sources for their

11.   **research studies.** For example, if a researcher receives funding from a political organisation, they may be more likely to produce research that aligns with that organisation's views. Second, researchers may have political ideologies that influence their research. For example, a politically conservative researcher may be more likely to produce research that supports conservative educational policies. Third, researchers may also be influenced by the academic culture in which they work. For example, if the academic culture emphasises the importance of standardised testing, researchers may be more likely to produce research that supports this approach.

12.   **Evaluators:** Politics can significantly influence evaluators in Nigeria, affecting the objectivity and impartiality of their assessments of policies and programs. One way politics can influence evaluators is through the appointment process. Nigerian politicians may appoint evaluators aligned with their political agenda rather than their qualifications and expertise, making evaluators more likely to produce favourable evaluations of programs and policies that align with the political agenda. This may result in important factors being disregarded in the evaluation process. Additionally, evaluators in Nigeria may face pressure from politicians, policymakers, or other stakeholders to produce evaluations that support their political agenda, which can influence evaluators' decisions and conclusions. Furthermore, the allocation of funding for educational evaluation in Nigeria can also be influenced by politics. Nigerian politicians may allocate funding to evaluators more likely to produce evaluations supporting their political agenda. This pressures evaluators to produce evaluations that align with the political agenda rather than being impartial and objective. This can result in biased evaluations that may overlook important aspects of the program or policy, leading to inaccurate and unreliable information being presented to decision-makers.

POLITICS AND THE VALIDITY/RELIABILITY OF EVALUATION RESULTS

Politics can significantly affect the validity and reliability of educational evaluation results in Nigeria.

This is because education is a critical tool for individual and national development, and as such, it is often used as a political tool to advance certain interests or agendas. In this context, politics can influence the educational evaluation process, the interpretation of the results, and the implementation of the recommendations.

Firstly, politics can affect the validity of educational evaluation results in Nigeria by influencing the selection of evaluators and the evaluation methods used. When political interests are at play, evaluators may be selected based on political affiliations rather than their expertise or experience in the field. This can compromise the quality and impartiality of the evaluation process, leading to biased results. For example, in 2018, the Nigerian government set up a committee to evaluate the implementation of the country's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The committee was made up of political appointees, many of whom had little or no experience in education. This compromised the quality of the evaluation, and the resulting report was widely criticised for being superficial and lacking in substance.

Secondly, politics can affect the reliability of educational evaluation results in Nigeria by influencing data collection. Data may be manipulated or distorted when political interests are at play to fit certain narratives or agendas. This can compromise the accuracy and reliability of the evaluation results. For instance, in 2020, the Nigerian government released the results of the National Examinations Council (NECO) examination for secondary school students. The results showed a decline in the overall performance of students compared to previous years. However, there were reports of irregularities in the data collection process, with some schools allegedly inflating their results to meet government targets. This compromised the reliability of the evaluation results and raised questions about the government's handling of the education sector.

Thirdly, politics can influence the interpretation of educational evaluation results in Nigeria. When political interests are at play, the interpretation of evaluation results may be skewed to fit certain narratives or agendas. This can lead to a misrepresentation of the data and a distortion of the evaluation findings. For example, in 2017, the Nigerian government released the National Common Entrance Examination (NCEE) results, determining admission to federal government colleges. The results showed a significant disparity between the performance of students from northern Nigeria and those from southern Nigeria. However, some politicians tried to downplay the significance of the disparity, arguing that it was due to cultural and environmental factors rather than systemic issues in the education sector. Some saw this interpretation of the results as an attempt to avoid addressing the root causes of the disparities.

Lastly, politics can affect implementation recommendations arising from educational evaluations in Nigeria. When political interests are at play, the recommendations may be ignored or selectively implemented, leading to a lack of improvement in the education sector. For instance, in 2014, the Nigerian government set up a committee to evaluate the country's education quality. The committee made several recommendations, including increasing funding for education, improving teacher training, and upgrading school infrastructure. However, many of these recommendations were not implemented, and the education sector continued to suffer from chronic underfunding, poor infrastructure, and low teacher morale. From the foregoing, politics can significantly affect the validity and reliability of educational evaluation results in Nigeria. To ensure that evaluations are impartial and effective, there is a need to depoliticise the process, ensure that evaluators are selected based on merit, and implement recommendations transparently and accountable. This will help to improve the quality of education in Nigeria and ensure that it is a tool for national development rather than political expediency.

WHOSE INTERESTS ARE SERVED IN EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION?

Educational evaluation is often presented as a neutral assessment exercise. In practice, it involves choices about what is judged, who performs the judging, and how the results are used. These choices determine whose interests are advanced and whose are overlooked. The discussion considers which groups typically benefit, which are marginalised, and the implications for education and social justice.

Dominant Groups: Who Gains?

Policy makers and senior administrators often benefit the most from how evaluation systems are designed and applied. They determine the indicators to be measured, select the evaluators, and decide how outcomes are reported. Research in Nigeria shows that political elites and education authorities use evaluation processes to legitimise policy decisions and sustain authority (Lawal, 2021). Evaluation criteria that prioritise quantifiable indicators, such as examination pass rates and enrolment figures, tend to serve administrative interests by producing data that justify policy choices and budget allocations (Ugwu, 2025).

Evidence from Rivers State demonstrates this pattern clearly. The spatial distribution of public secondary schools followed political rather than demographic logic, with evaluations and planning tools used to justify unequal resource allocation (Ibara, 2019). Evaluation here became a political instrument, enabling those in power to claim progress while neglecting underserved communities. Similar dynamics exist in higher education. Political interference in university administration, including appointments and admissions, often affects institutional evaluation. Such interference, as reported by Ogunode et al. (2024), allows governing elites to control outcomes, secure influence, and reward loyalists. The result is a weakened quality assurance process that benefits the few while undermining academic integrity. International agencies and donors also exert influence when evaluation frameworks are aligned with their priorities. When indicators reflect external funding conditions rather than national or community needs, evaluation reinforces dependency and redirects educational focus toward donor-defined objectives. This dynamic privileges institutional and political elites who can mediate access to such resources.

MARGINALISED GROUPS: WHO LOSES?

Teachers, students in under-resourced schools, rural dwellers, and low-income families are frequently excluded from determining evaluation priorities. Their perspectives are rarely sought when defining what constitutes educational success.

As Ibara (2019) showed in the Rivers State case, when evaluation systems favour political visibility over demographic need, rural communities are left with fewer schools and limited opportunities.

At the tertiary level, the dominance of administrative elites limits the capacity of lecturers and students to influence evaluation standards. Ogunode et al. (2024) observed that political appointments in universities result in reduced accountability, as evaluative processes serve bureaucratic control rather than institutional development. Similar patterns are seen regionally. Tirivanhu, Robertson, Waller, and Chirau (2020) found that weak evaluation capacity in African universities perpetuates dependence on central authorities. Limited independence prevents evaluators from challenging existing power relations, keeping evaluation a top-down exercise that privileges administrators and political leaders. In such settings, evaluation ceases to be an instrument for improvement. Instead, it becomes a means of preserving hierarchy. Teachers' professional competence and community experiences (that are usually key to understanding learning realities) are excluded, leading to policies that ignore structural inequalities. Evaluation therefore functions less as a diagnostic tool and more as a gatekeeping mechanism that protects dominant interests.

CONSEQUENCES OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION IN A POLITICAL CONTEXT

Educational evaluation is meant to guide improvement, accountability, and decision-making. However, in many education systems, particularly within developing contexts such as Nigeria, evaluation is often shaped by political interests. When evaluation is influenced by politics, its purpose shifts from promoting educational quality to serving administrative and partisan goals. This distortion carries several serious consequences for educational quality, resource allocation, institutional credibility, and social justice.

Distortion of Educational Priorities

A major consequence of political interference is the distortion of educational priorities. Evaluation frameworks are frequently aligned with political goals rather than educational needs.

Policy makers may define success in terms of easily measurable outcomes such as enrolment figures or examination pass rates because they produce quick and visible political gains (Lawal, 2021; OECD, 2021). Such metrics often conceal deeper problems of teaching quality, student learning, and equitable access. When evaluation is used primarily to showcase government achievement, it loses its role as a diagnostic tool for genuine improvement. This distortion is particularly visible in national assessments and accreditation exercises. Ogunode et al. (2024) observed that political appointments in Nigerian tertiary institutions compromise the credibility of evaluation committees. Evaluations become instruments for confirming political loyalty rather than measuring institutional performance. Over time, this weakens the culture of merit, discourages honest self-assessment, and reduces professional motivation among teachers and administrators.

Inequitable Resource Distribution

Another consequence is the manipulation of evaluation results to justify inequitable resource allocation. When evaluation is politicised, funding and infrastructure development tend to follow political loyalty instead of objective need. Ibara (2019) found that the spatial distribution of public secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria, was driven more by political considerations than by population or accessibility. Evaluation reports were used to legitimise these choices, presenting politically motivated projects as evidence-based decisions. Such practices reinforce structural inequality. Regions or communities that are politically marginalised often receive lower ratings and less funding, perpetuating educational disadvantage. The World Bank (2023) has warned that when data and evaluation are influenced by politics, the effectiveness of educational spending declines because resources are not directed to areas of greatest need. This leads to persistent disparities in access and quality across social and geographic lines.

Erosion of Institutional Credibility

Politicised evaluation also erodes institutional credibility. When evaluation results are manipulated or selectively released, public trust in educational data diminishes. Stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and civil society organisations, begin to doubt the authenticity of evaluation outcomes. Transparency and independence are essential to maintaining confidence in educational governance. When evaluation processes are opaque, they encourage corruption and weaken accountability mechanisms. This erosion of credibility extends to academic institutions themselves. Universities and schools may adopt superficial compliance behaviours, focusing on producing documentation and statistics that satisfy external evaluators rather than engaging in substantive improvement. As Tirivanhu et al. (2020) observed across African universities, weak evaluation capacity and political dependence have led institutions to treat evaluation as a formality rather than a genuine learning process.

Weakening of Teacher Morale and Student Learning

Political manipulation of evaluation outcomes affects teachers and learners directly. Teachers are often evaluated through rigid systems tied to administrative goals rather than pedagogical improvement. In Nigeria, performance assessments that prioritise examination results or political directives undermine teacher autonomy and morale (Lawal, 2021). This encourages short-term strategies such as "teaching to the test," rote learning, and grade inflation. For students, the consequence is a narrow learning experience that values memorisation over critical thinking and problem-solving. As the OECD (2021) emphasises, systems that reduce education to test performance neglect creativity, citizenship, and lifelong learning. Political interference therefore weakens the very foundation of educational development by substituting authentic learning with performative outcomes.

Reinforcement of Social Inequality

Ultimately, the political use of evaluation reinforces existing social inequalities. Marginalised groups, rural learners, low-income families, and under-resourced schools, suffer the most when evaluation frameworks ignore their realities. Evaluations that prioritise elite schools or urban centres perpetuate exclusion and deny vulnerable communities access to quality education.

This outcome contradicts the goals of social justice and equitable development emphasised by UNESCO (2023). When education is treated as a political resource rather than a public good, evaluation loses its transformative power. Instead of identifying inequities and driving reform, it legitimises inequality by presenting biased outcomes as objective evidence. The long-term consequence is a divided system where privilege determines educational opportunity.

IMPLICATIONS OF POLITICISED EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION

Politicised educational evaluation occurs when the assessment of educational programmes, institutions, and policies is guided more by political considerations than by pedagogical or developmental imperatives. This practice has profound implications for education quality, institutional governance, and the promotion of social justice, particularly in countries with fragile democratic and administrative systems such as Nigeria.

Implications for Education Quality and Governance

One of the primary implications of politicised evaluation is the distortion of educational objectives. When evaluation criteria are designed to satisfy political agendas, they prioritise easily measurable outcomes, such as examination pass rates, enrolment figures, or compliance with policy mandates, over deeper learning outcomes like critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills (Lawal, 2021). This leads to an educational culture that rewards superficial achievements rather than genuine competence, undermining the overall quality of education.

Politicised evaluation also undermines institutional governance. When administrators manipulate evaluation processes to align with political priorities, internal accountability mechanisms weaken. Research on Nigerian universities indicates that political interference affects recruitment, promotion, and resource allocation, resulting in underqualified personnel occupying critical positions and skewed performance assessments (Ogunode et al., 2024). Consequently, institutions lose credibility, and stakeholders (teachers, students, and communities) begin to question the legitimacy of evaluation outcomes. Additionally, politicised evaluation reduces the capacity for evidence-based decision-making. When evaluation results are selectively reported or interpreted to support political narratives, policymakers and educators cannot accurately identify areas in need of improvement (OECD, 2021). This compromises planning, curriculum development, and resource distribution, leading to inefficiencies and repeated policy failures. Over time, this diminishes institutional effectiveness and can entrench systemic weaknesses within education systems.

Implications for Equity and Social Justice

The consequences of politicised evaluation for social justice are particularly severe. Education is a fundamental tool for reducing inequality and promoting equitable opportunities. However, when evaluation processes prioritise dominant interests, marginalised groups, including rural learners, low-income communities, and under-resourced schools, are systematically disadvantaged (Ibara, 2019). Their concerns are often absent from the design and interpretation of evaluation, meaning that critical issues such as access, infrastructure deficits, gender inclusion, and special-needs education remain inadequately addressed.

Politicised evaluation can perpetuate structural inequalities. In contexts where resources are allocated based on political favour rather than actual educational need, schools in underprivileged areas continue to struggle with overcrowding, insufficient teaching materials, and poorly trained staff, while institutions aligned with political constituencies receive preferential treatment (Ugwu, 2025). This unequal distribution entrenches socio-economic and geographic disparities and limits the ability of disadvantaged students to achieve educational mobility.

Moreover, politicised evaluation erodes trust and undermines civic engagement. When stakeholders perceive evaluation as a tool to serve elite or political interests rather than a fair assessment mechanism, confidence in educational institutions declines. Parents, communities, and civil society actors become sceptical of reported achievements, weakening public oversight and limiting opportunities for participatory governance in education (Tirivanhu et al., 2020).

A lack of transparency also diminishes the capacity of civil society to advocate effectively for inclusive and equitable educational policies, undermining social justice.

Politicised evaluation also carries symbolic and ethical implications. It conveys messages about whose education matters and what constitutes success. Emphasising outcomes that align with elite or politically connected groups communicates that the educational needs of marginalised populations are secondary, thereby normalising exclusion and inequity (UNESCO, 2023). Such practices compromise the ethical foundation of education, which ideally should promote fairness, inclusivity, and empowerment for all learners.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

In conclusion, educational evaluation is an essential mechanism for improving learning outcomes, enhancing accountability, and informing evidence-based decision-making. However, when politicised, it ceases to function as a neutral tool for improvement and becomes a mechanism for advancing political, administrative, or elite interests. The evidence from Nigeria and other similar contexts illustrates that political interference in evaluation distorts educational priorities, undermines institutional credibility, compromises teacher morale, and perpetuates social inequalities. Marginalised groups, rural learners, low-income families, and under-resourced schools, are disproportionately affected, widening the gap between those with educational advantages and those without. Politicised evaluation also erodes trust in educational institutions, reduces civic engagement, and diminishes the potential of evaluation as a driver for social justice and equitable development.

To mitigate these challenges and restore the developmental purpose of educational evaluation, several steps are imperative. First, independence and transparency must be institutionalised. Evaluation bodies should operate free from political pressure, with clear legal mandates safeguarding their autonomy and authority. Merit-based selection of evaluators and oversight mechanisms that ensure impartiality are essential. Second, inclusive and participatory approaches should be embedded in evaluation processes. Stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and community representatives, must have a voice in defining evaluation goals, selecting methods, and interpreting results. Third, evidence-based decision-making must be prioritised. Evaluation findings should inform policy, resource allocation, and programmatic reforms rather than serve political narratives. Fourth, equity-focused frameworks should guide evaluation design. Metrics must account for the needs of marginalised groups and the socio-economic and geographic contexts of learners, ensuring that educational evaluation contributes to social justice rather than reinforcing inequalities. Finally, capacity building and professionalisation of evaluators is critical, ensuring that they possess the technical expertise, ethical grounding, and resilience to resist undue influence.

By implementing these measures, educational evaluation can reclaim its role as a transparent, accountable, and socially just instrument. It can become a tool for diagnosing challenges, rewarding genuine achievement, and guiding policy reforms that promote inclusive and equitable education. Ultimately, depoliticising evaluation strengthens not only the educational system but also the broader social contract, ensuring that education serves as a catalyst for development, empowerment, and social justice in Nigeria and beyond.

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