

## ISSUES OF POLITICAL INTERFERENCE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this paper is to investigate the political interference on personnel management of local governments in Nigeria. Such interference has led to the politicization of appointments, placement, promotions, and general human resource management at the local government, and this militates against the effective performance of personnel functions. A quantitative research was conducted with 360 questionnaires distributed to the staff of Nkanu-West Local Government Area of Enugu State and 336 were returned representing a 93 percent return rate. The frequency table and mean were the statistical measures employed for the data analysis. The findings revealed that the constitutional contradiction tends to provide the impetus for unscrupulous state officials to nurse the excessive desire for hedging in the local government personnel management. The findings also revealed that political interference denies local governments administrative autonomy over their personnel management. The outcome of this will enable the population of Nkanu-West to have better understandings on why Nkanu-West local government faces several personnel problems, which militate against the effective performance of their functions.*

**Keywords** Political interference, Personnel management, Local governments, Nigeria

**Paper type** Research Paper

## **Introduction**

Local government administrative autonomy can be defined as the degree of freedom accorded to the local government concerning administrative independence within constitutional limits to perform specific functions without reference to any other level of government (Okibe, 2020; Asaju, 2010). One of such functions is the personnel management role in the local governments. It is the personnel management that takes charge of the administrative functions in the area of recruitment, selection, placement, and promotions of the local government staff and general human resource management at the local government. So local government personnel management autonomy is an administrative clause.

The local government's major problem is political interference in personnel management, leading to the politicization of appointments and general human resource management at the local government level. Nigeria's local government has become a politically polarised organization where employees are very likely to a large extent owe their employment to political interference rather than competence. Although local government has a direct relationship with Local Government Service Commissions (LGSCs), the state government constitutes the commission to conduct recruitment, appointment, promotions, and posting of local government staff with all the negative consequences in the process; that is why politically connected people are likely the ones securing employment with the local governments. They do this in connivance with recruitment officers of LGSC. This scenario obtains because LGSC officials are appointed by the governor, who expect them to be loyal to him (takes dictates from him (the governor) and act accordingly) and his party, thereby denying qualified members of employment into the local government

system. Administratively, the state determines, discipline, recruit, promote, etc. the local government staff and thereby denying administrative autonomy over personnel management. Furthermore, most chairman, caretaker committee members, and sole administrators recruit and place their relatives, friends, and political sympathizers or party members without due regard to rules and regulation or in keeping with manpower requirements. Similarly, local governments in Nigeria, particularly Nkanu-West local government has to witness incessant changes in their administrative management to favour the political powers of the day. However, several studies have revealed that the problem of personnel is attributed to undue political interference and unwarranted operational control of local governments by the politicians and state governments, and these tend to affect productivity (Agbor and Akpan, 2019).

Few studies have been conducted to examine the political interference on the management of local government. This study is amongst the first to empirically examine the political interference on personnel management of local governments in Nigeria. Political interference in the context refers to the actions by state governments and politicians, particularly elected and appointed public officials, to influence or impose their will in violation of duly established local government administrative autonomy over their personnel management such as recruitment, selection, disciplinary cases, training, promotions, appointments as well as posting, and other personnel matters.

This study examines the political interference on personnel management of local governments in the Nkanu-West Local Government Area of Enugu state of Nigeria. In the light of the above, the following problems will be addressed:

1. What are the effects of politicization on personnel management productivity?
2. To what extent has interference in personnel management caused the inefficiency and ineffectiveness in local government?
3. To what extent does the local government service commission apply due process in staff recruitment and posting processes?
4. To what extent is personnel management autonomy for local government practiced in Nigeria?

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Determine the effects of politicization in personnel management's productivity.
2. Find out the extent to which the interference on personnel management has caused ineffectiveness and inefficiency of local government.
3. Determine the extent to which local government service commissions apply due process principles in the recruitment and posting of civil servants into the local government.
4. Investigate the level of personnel management autonomy in Nigeria's local government system in the Nkanu-West Local Government Area.

## **Literature review**

The issue of political interference in personnel management of local governments in Nigeria has been a bone of contention for some time as it affects Nigerian democracy as well as its governance. Local governments in

Nigeria experience varying levels of interference from politicians and state governments (Usang and Salim, 2016). Political interference occurs when the political leaders interfere with decision-making in public administrative matters such as staffing, planning, organizing, directing, coordinating as well as reporting (Allan *et al.*, 2018). Political interference is a deviation from prescribed rules and procedures. Ninkab (2019) refers political interference as influences imparted on the administrative system of public sector organisations by members of the higher echelons of government. Political interference also refers to the influences exerted by the higher tier of the government or politicians on the administration of local governments. Although state governments have a supervisory role in ensuring the proper functioning of local governments, their influences have become overwhelming (Asaju, 2010). Interference in local government affairs has reached an alarming rate as state governments control the personnel management of local governments. State government, either directly or indirectly and without regard for some constitutional provisions and other extant regulations of the administrative autonomy clause (Okibe, 2020) employs personnel of local government, in addition to their promotion, transfer, and discipline. These meddling roles by the state government deprive the local government of the conducive environment to operate freely without encumbrances.

Political interference in the personnel management of local government has been on the rise leading to a high rate of corruption and adverse performance. According to Obadiah (2014), political interference constituted one of the major problems and is responsible for the poor performance of personnel in Nigeria. This interference gives room to administrative corruption and other

irregularities characterizing local governments in Nigeria. This situation has given concern to successive governments particularly in Nigeria on ways of reducing this dilemma to enhance effective personnel management of local governments. According to Duch *et al.* (2000) politicization of the personnel management of local government involves the appropriation of administrative structures and the displacement of administrative goals by organized political interests. Bendor *et al.* (2003, cited in Allan *et al.*, 2018) noted that when the administrative institution is politicized, chances for corruption increase and the appointments to key posts are made not based on merit but extraneous considerations.

This interference in the running of local government affairs influences against the effective performance of personnel function. According to Ezeani (2004), one such problem is the politicization of recruitment, selection, and placement. Charlton (1985) opined that politicization is a process by which politicians control bureaucracy by means of manipulating recruitment, education, training, and promotions to imbue bureaucracies with overt explicit commitments to the political goals of the government. This problem has been noted by Onah (1995), for instance, since the inception of the democratic local government system in the former eastern region of Nigeria in 1950, early recruitment into the local government service were mainly “sons of the soil”, party stalwarts, or relations of counsellors. As Orewa and Adewumi (1983) rightly stated, recruitment practices based on patronage, have created problems of redundancy in local government where stern measures like termination of appointments and suspension of staff are rarely contemplated. Therefore, politically connected people are likely the ones securing employment with the local governments.

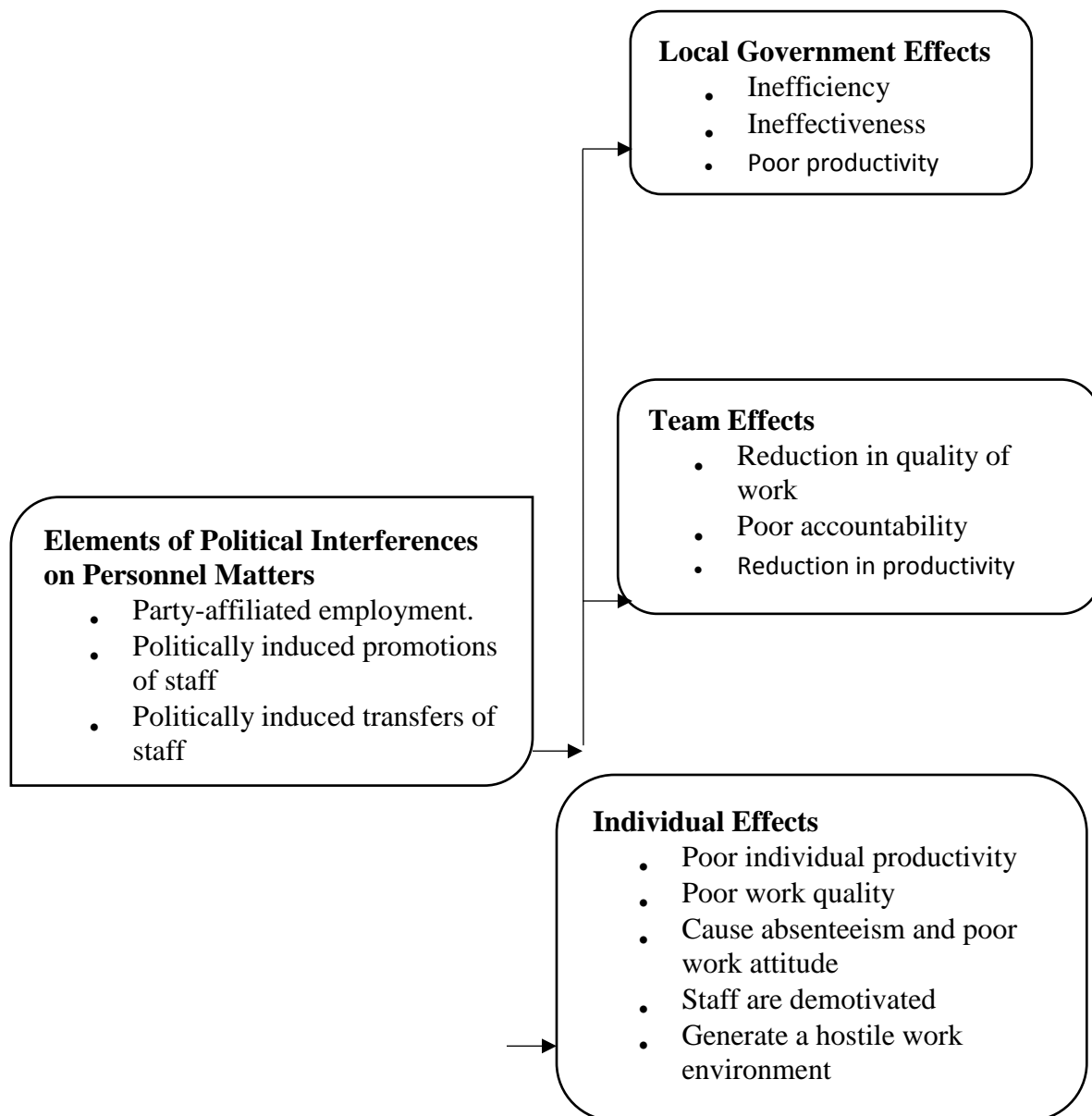
The problem of interference falls under the discourse of corruption and political interference could be understood as a form of political corruption that involves politicians interfering in administrative processes or the actions of those in the administration. It is also worth noting that political interference is likely facilitated by the ability of politicians to secure positions for their people within the civil service (Batalla *et al.*, 2018). The recruitment malpractices that can be linked to political interference include nepotism, favouritism, erratic appointments, promotions, posts being filled without advertisement in local governments, “jobs for friends” based on political affiliation, as well as the openly admitted to so-called “cadre deployment”. The problem with cadre deployment, according to Kanyane cited in *news24.com* (2021), is that it is a deployment strategy that systematically places loyalty ahead of merit and competence. The civilian rule 1979-1983 and 1999 are still witnessing unprecedented total neglect of local government system. Appointments were made to the administration of local government on partisan patronage thereby instituting corrupt and unqualified personnel to man the affairs of local government (Eme *et al.*, 2017). These acts of political interference have been observed to affect personnel appointments at local levels of government. But the question now is, does this third tier of government enjoy its administrative autonomy without interference.

### **Methodology**

In the literature discussed, the authors indicated some evidence of the detrimental effects on the performance of the local government personnel caused by politically-based activities. These issues of political interference are reality within the Nigerian local governments; coming to light on the back

of reports of employment based on nepotism, promotions based on political affiliations, and not on peoples' competencies have surfaced (Ninkab, 2019). A conceptual framework was drawn in Figure 1 to indicate the relationships between the performance of local government personnel and political interference.

**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

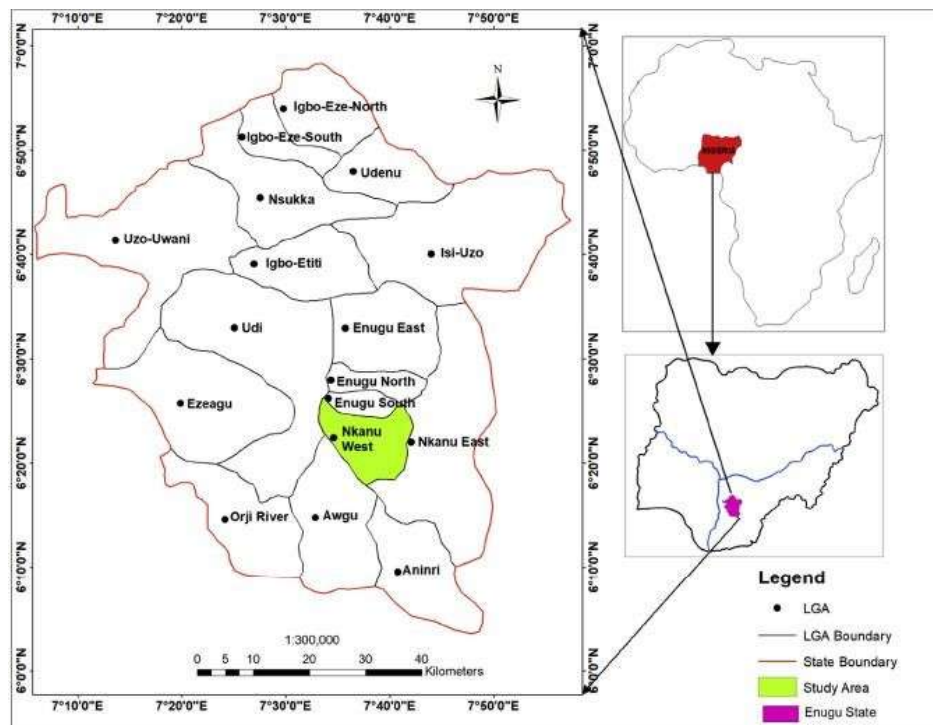




### Location of study

Nkanu-West Local Government Area (N-WLGA), the study area of this paper is located in the south-eastern part of the Enugu metropolis. It is bordered to the north by Enugu-south LGA, while to the northwest and west by Udi LGA. To the southwest, it is bordered by Awgu LGA and to the northeast, east and south, by Nkanu-East LGA as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Location of the study area (adapted from Ibuotet *et al.*, 2019)

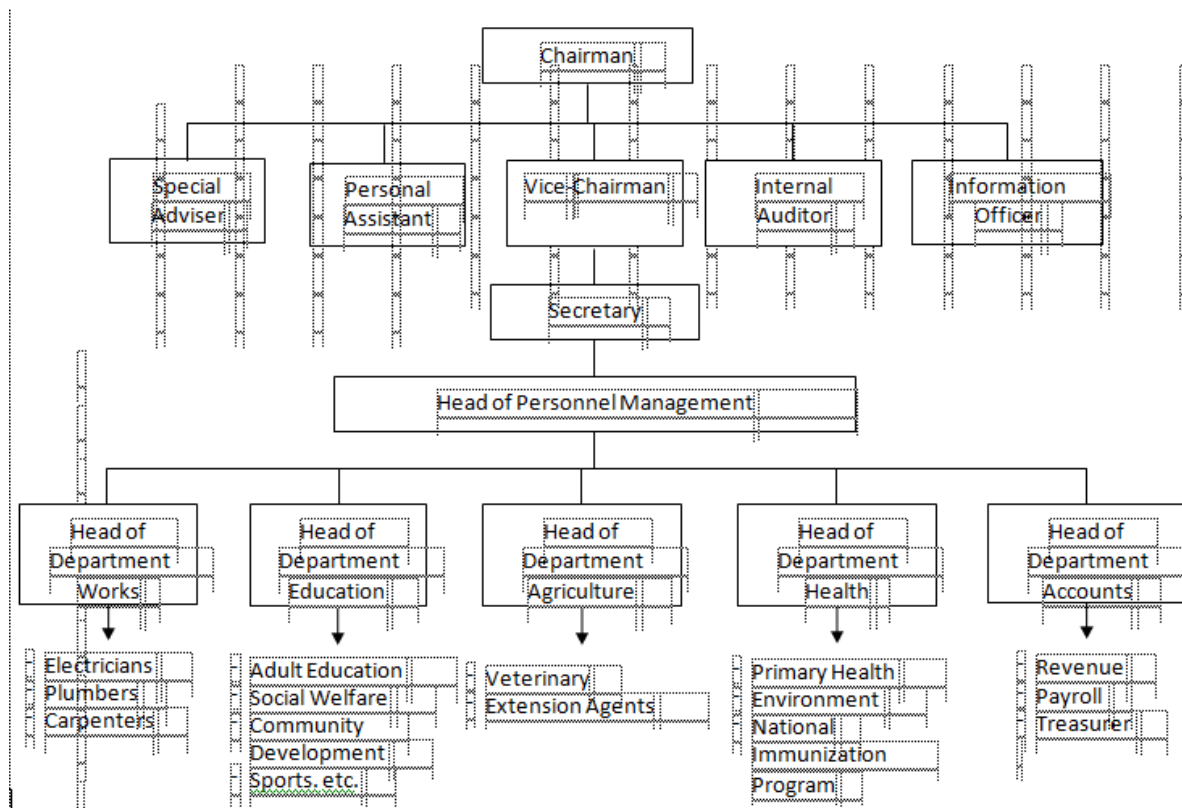


Nkanu-West LGA is one of the local governments carved out from Nkanu local government. The area (Nkanu-West) lies between longitudes 7.47° and 7.93° East and latitudes 6.20° and 6.60° North, and comprises Agbani, Akpugo, Amodu, Amuri, Ugboauka, Nara, Obe, Obuoffia, Ozalla, Mburumbu, Ubahu, Akegbe-Ugwu, Umueze, Nkerefi. The Nkanu-West local government headquarters is located at Agbani (Anayochukwu and Ani, 2021).

*Organizational structure of Nkanu-West Local Government Area of Enugu State*

According to Ugwu (2000), the administrative organigram of the local government system in Nigeria has undergone series of reforms and mutations from the colonial era, through the period of the military administration to the present experiment on democratic civilian administration. Indeed, a lot of water has passed through the bridge. However, the emphasis is the present local government administrative organigram in Nkanu-West local government. The management structure of the Nkanu-West local government area of Enugu State is derived as contained under the 1976 local government reforms enshrined in the 1999 constitution of Nigeria (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1976; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). At the apex of the hierarchical structure of the organigram of the local government is the chairman, who is the chief executive of the local government. Then, next to him is the vice-chairman followed by the secretary to the council, whose office is political (Odo, 2006). The next in the structure are the supervisors and then the head of personnel management, who is the head of the service in the local government. The above set of offices constitutes the executive committee.

The next in the hierarchy are the various heads of departments. Under the heads of department are other categories of subordinate staff as can be seen in the organigram. These categories of staff are spread in the various units and sub-units. Administratively, the vicechairman, the secretary, supervisors, internal auditors, information officer, head of personnel report to the chairman through the secretary. But in some cases, these chains or lines of communication are abused as a result of political patronage, search for undue favour from the chief executive, or the nature of the issue at stake. The organization chart is shown at Figure 3.

**Figure 3. Administrative Organigram of Nkanu-West Local Government Area**

**Source:** Nkanu-West Local Government Secretariat (Manual)

*Sources of data collection*

Considering the effects of political interference on personnel management of local governments in Nigeria, data collection for this study was mainly from primary and secondary sources.

Primary Sources - To supplement data from this source, data were gathered from primary sources such as questionnaires. Three hundred and sixty (360) questionnaires were administered to the staff of the Nkanu-West local government area.

Secondary Sources - Secondary sources formed a major source of data collection. This was collected from the libraries, personal textbooks, and internet extracts.

### ***Population***

The local government has six departments namely, Agriculture, Accounts, Education, Health, Personnel Management, and Works. These departments comprise a workforce of seven hundred and twenty (720). This number makes it convenient for the researcher to select 360 respondents for the local government.

### ***Sampling technique***

In this study, a stratified random sampling technique was used to select respondents to be included from each department. The use of this technique enabled the researcher to pick those who met the purpose of this study.

### ***Sample size***

Sixty (60) respondents were chosen from each of the departments, giving a total of three hundred and sixty (360) respondents. Three hundred and thirty-six (336) were properly completed and returned, and twenty-four (24) were unreturned. The analysis is based on the 336 valid questionnaires.

### ***Method of data analysis***

A five-point Likert scale was used for analysis. The “Agree-Disagree” response pattern was employed. Weights were assigned to responses as indicated in the tables. The mean scores were calculated. The decision rule was to accept the item that has a mean score of 3.50 or above.

## Substantive data and analysis

The following presents the substantive data of the seven questions asked.

Question 1: Do you agree that the politicization of personnel management in Nkanu-West local government affects productivity?

**Table 1. Politicization of Personnel Management**

Options	F	X	%	FX
Strongly agree	5	118	35.1	590
Agree	4	100	29.8	400
Undecided	3	9	2.7	27
Disagree	2	67	19.9	134
Strongly disagree	1	42	12.5	42
Total	15	336	100	1193

**Source:** Analyzed from the questionnaire

$$\text{Mean (X)} = \frac{\sum FX}{\sum X} = \frac{1193}{336} = 3.55$$

The decision rule is to accept where the mean score is 3.50 and above and to reject where the mean score is less than 3.50. Table 1 shows that 118 respondents strongly agreed and 100 agreed that politicization of personnel management in Nkanu-West local government affects productivity. 9 respondents were undecided, 67 disagreed and 42 strongly disagreed with this view. The percentage of the respondents who supported this view was 64.9 percent as against 35.1 percent of those who disagreed and those who were undecided. The mean score is 3.55. Thus, it is accepted that the

politicization of personnel management in Nkanu-West local government affects productivity.

Question 2: Does political interference in personnel management account for ineffectiveness in local government?

**Table 2. Political Interference on Personnel Management**

Options	F	X	%	FX
Strongly agree	5	114	33.9	570
Agree	4	104	31.0	416
Undecided	3	17	5.1	51
Disagree	2	69	20.5	138
Strongly disagree	1	32	9.5	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1207</b>

**Source:** Analyzed from questionnaire

$$\text{Mean } (\bar{X}) = 3.59$$

Table 2 shows that 114 respondents strongly agreed and 104 agreed that political interference on personnel management accounts for ineffectiveness in local government. 17 respondents were undecided, 69 disagreed and 32 strongly disagreed with this view. The percentage of the respondents who supported this view was 64.9 percent as against 35.1 percent of those who disagreed and those who were undecided. The mean score is 3.59 and so it is accepted that political interference in personnel management accounts for ineffectiveness in local government.

Question 3: In your own opinion does political interference in the recruitment and posting of staff into the local government affect efficiency?

**Table 3. Effects of Interference in the Recruitment and Posting of Staff**

Option	F	X	%	FX
Strongly agree	5	119	35.4	595
Agree	4	107	31.8	428
Undecided	3	7	2.1	21
Disagree	2	41	12.2	82
Strongly disagree	1	62	18.5	62
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1188</b>

**Source:** Analyzed from questionnaire

$$\text{Mean } (\bar{X}) = 3.54$$

From the analysis in Table 3, 119 respondents strongly agreed and 107 agreed that political interference in the recruitment and posting of staff into the local government affect efficiency. 7 respondents were undecided, 41 disagreed and 62 strongly disagreed with this view. The percentage of the respondents who supported this view was 67.2 percent as against 32.8 percent of those who disagreed and those who were undecided. The mean score is 3.54. Thus, it is accepted that political interference in the recruitment and posting of staff into the local government affects efficiency.

Question 4: Do you agree that there is no due process in the recruitment and posting of staff into the local government?

**Table 4: Existence of Due Process**

Options	F	X	%	FX
Strongly agree	5	126	37.5	630
Agree	4	102	30.4	408
Undecided	3	5	1.5	15
Disagree	2	71	21.1	142
Strongly disagree	1	32	9.5	32
Total	15	336	100	1227

**Source:** Analyzed from questionnaire

$$\text{Mean } (\bar{X}) = 3.65$$

Table 4 shows that 126 respondents strongly agreed and 102 agreed that there is no due process in the recruitment and posting of staff into the local government. 5 respondents were undecided, 71 disagreed and 32 strongly disagreed with this view. The percentage of the respondents who supported this view was 67.9 percent as against 32.1 percent of those who disagreed and those who were undecided. The mean score is 3.65. Therefore, it is accepted that there is no due process in the recruitment and posting of staff into the local government.

As mentioned earlier, LGSC is in charge of recruitment and posting of staff into the local government, and it is the state government that constitutes this commission (LGSC) and appoints its members. The state government as well uses the LGSC officials in manipulating recruitment and posting of staff into the local government, thereby making the process unreliable. This is in agreement with the majority of the respondents who held the view that there is no due process in the recruitment and posting of staff into the local government.



Question 5: Is political interference a constraint to the effective application of due process in the recruitment and posting of personnel into the local government?

**Table 5: Political Interference versus Due Process**

Options	F	X	%	FX
Strongly agree	5	113	33.6	565
Agree	4	117	34.8	468
Undecided	3	8	2.4	24
Disagree	2	55	16.4	110
Strongly disagree	1	43	12.8	43
Total	15	336	100	1210

**Source:** Analyzed from questionnaire

$$\text{Mean } (\bar{X}) = 3.60$$

Table 5 indicates that 113 respondents strongly agreed and 117 agreed that political interference is a constraint to the effective application of due process in the recruitment and posting of personnel into the local government. 8 respondents were undecided, 55 disagreed while 43 strongly disagreed with this view. The percentage of the respondents who supported this view was 68.4 percent as against 31.6 percent of those who disagreed and those who were undecided. The mean score is 3.60. And so it is accepted that political interference is a constraint to the effective application of due process in the recruitment and posting of personnel into the local government.

Question 6: Do you agree that there is a lack of personnel management autonomy for local government in Nigeria?

**Table 6. Existence of Personnel Management Autonomy**

Options	F	X	%	FX
Strongly agree	5	116	34.5	580
Agree	4	112	33.3	448
Undecided	3	7	2.1	21
Disagree	2	49	14.6	98
Strongly disagree	1	52	15.5	52
Total	15	336	100	1199

Source: Analyzed from questionnaire

$$\text{Mean } (\bar{X}) = 3.57$$

Table 6 indicates that 116 respondents strongly agreed and 112 agreed that there is a lack of personnel management autonomy for local government in Nigeria. 7 respondents were undecided, 49 disagreed while 52 strongly disagreed with this view. The percentage of the respondents who supported this view was 67.8percent as against32.2 percent of those who disagreed and those who were undecided. The mean score is 3.57. And so it is accepted that there is a lack of personnel management autonomy for local government in Nigeria.

Question 7: In your own opinion does interference by higher authorities account for a lack of personnel management autonomy for local government in Nigeria?

**Table 7. Interference versus Personnel Management Autonomy**

Options	F	X	%	FX
Strongly agree	5	165	49.1	825
Agree	4	127	37.8	508
Undecided	3	5	1.5	15
Disagree	2	32	9.5	64
Strongly disagree	1	7	2.1	7
Total	15	336	100	1419

Source: Analyzed from questionnaire

$$\text{Mean } (\bar{X}) = 4.22$$

Table 7 shows that 165 respondents strongly agreed and 127 agreed that interference by higher authorities accounts for a lack of personnel management autonomy for local government in Nigeria. 5 respondents were undecided, 32 disagreed and 7 strongly disagreed with this view. The percentage of the respondents who supported this view was 86.9 percent as against 13.1 percent of those who disagreed and those who were undecided. The mean score is 4.22. Therefore, it is accepted that interference by higher authorities accounts for a lack of personnel management autonomy for local government in Nigeria.

### **Findings and discussion**

After the in-depth analysis of the data collected, the following findings were revealed.

Lack of personnel management autonomy and undue interference on local government personnel recruitment and posting processes by the state governments and politicians, particularly elected and appointed public

officials are responsible for poor performance and productivity. This is due to constitutional loopholes or contradiction that tend to provide the impetus for unscrupulous state officials to nurse the inordinate desire for hedging in the local government left, right, and center; the insincerity of the three constitutions (1979, 1989, and 1999) claiming to provide a full tier local government is borne by our experiences since the local government reforms of 1976. Some of the areas where the local government's functions have been encroached upon by the state governments are recruitment, selection, and placement. These are areas that local governments have traditionally exercised exclusive authority. But over the years, the state governments have been interfering through their

LGSCs. The local governments on their part can do no more than accuse state officials of interfering in their administration, but they can hardly do more than this. It is interesting to note that the area of jurisdictional rivalry between the state and local governments is mainly the administrative management and control. However, going back to item No 12 in respect to the question "do you agree that there is a lack of personnel management autonomy for local government in Nigeria". The mean score is 3.57. So, it is accepted that there is no personnel management autonomy for local government in Nigeria.

The ineffectiveness and inefficiency of service delivery to the people at the local government in Nigeria is a product of lack of due process in staff recruitment and posting processes. This is in agreement with the majority of the respondents which were of the view that there is no due process in the recruitment and posting of staff into the local government.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, literature and experience have made it clear that political interference is undermining local government administrative autonomy over personnel management. The degree of external influence and intrusion in the local government personnel management by politicians and the higher levels of government is worrisome and needs to be addressed. One finds a situation where intellectually weak personnel with no exposure are employed through party affiliation to occupy sensitive positions in the local government. One cannot give what he/she does not have. The result has always been a failure in performance and an increase in the suffering of those who are meant to benefit from their services. The performance of politically induced appointments always leads to poor productivity, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness to the local government.

Therefore, the local government personnel management should be allowed a free hand to carry out its constitutional assigned function of recruitment, appointment, promotions, and posting of its staff. Constant interference in the issue of recruitment, appointment, promotions, and posting by political office holders and other top government functionaries should be minimized or completely stopped to ensure formidable recruitment, appointment, promotions, and posting that will lead to good governance in local governments and also ensures effective formulation and execution of government policies geared towards the betterment of the living condition of the populace.

## **Recommendations**

To enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the local government system, there is an urgent need to

1. review the constitution and delineate areas of inter-governmental frictions in the administrative management of local government especially in the areas of employment, selection, and posting of personnel.
2. give local government its full administrative autonomy.
3. strengthen the process of recruitment, selection, and posting by way of giving the function an enabling environment for enhanced competence and this can provide the needed buffer to guide against unnecessary interference from politicians and higher government officials.

In view of the above and to understand and appreciate the issue of political interference on personnel management of local governments in Nigeria, the authors believe that if the above recommendations are strictly adhered to, Nkanu-West local government, the study area of this work will benefit and perform its functions more efficiently and so justify its status as the third tier of government in a federal system.

### **Acknowledgement**

The authors are grateful to Mr. Innocent Okafor Ani of Onuafo-Aniede (Ishigwe) in Ogologo-EjiNdiagu Akpugo for introducing and taking them around the Nkanu-West Local Government Area of Enugu State.

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