
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GODFATHERISM IN CHOOSING EDUCATIONAL LEADERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

This study presents a rigorous analysis of the constructive impacts of godfatherism on the appointment of leaders in educational institutions. It investigates the historical background of godfatherism in human societies, with a particular focus on Nigeria. Despite its contentious nature, godfatherism has been argued to yield certain advantages in educational leadership. This research delves into the potential benefits associated with godfatherism, including improved access to resources, streamlined decision-making, networking prospects, mentorship opportunities, and enhanced alumni engagement. These contributions have the potential to foster better educational practices, encourage collaboration, and establish a conducive learning environment. Nonetheless, this study acknowledges the concerns surrounding godfatherism, such as favoritism and corruption. To optimize the positive aspects while mitigating the negative implications, the research underscores the significance of transparency, accountability, and merit-based selection processes. By conducting

a comprehensive evaluation of the merits and drawbacks of godfatherism in educational leadership, this research provides valuable insights for policy formulation and advance effective governance to educational institutions.

Keywords: God-fatherism, Educational leaders, Effective leadership, Educational institutions.

Introduction

The concept of “god-fatherism” refers to a phenomenon in politics where a powerful individual or group exerts significant influence over the political system, often through a patronage network built on personal loyalty and favors (Ojukwu & Olaifa, 2011). It is commonly associated with African politics, particularly in countries like Nigeria, where it has had a profound impact on the political landscape (Adebanwi & Obadare, 2011). While the term “god-fatherism” itself may not have a universally recognized origin, its usage and implications have been discussed and analyzed by scholars, journalists, and political commentators.

The concept of god-fatherism does not have a direct origin in the broader context of the human race. However, certain sociological and anthropological perspectives can shed light on the origins of power dynamics, influence, and hierarchical structures that are often associated with god-fatherism. In early human societies, power and influence were often consolidated in the hands of individuals who possessed certain qualities or attributes, such as physical strength, intelligence, or wisdom (Weber, 1978). This concentration of power could have laid the foundation for hierarchical structures and the emergence of influential figures who acted as leaders, guides, or protectors within their communities. Anthropological studies suggest that early human societies relied on kinship ties and familial relationships as a basis for social organization (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1940). Within these kinship-based systems, elder members or patriarchs often played central roles in decision-making, conflict resolution, and resource distribution. This can be seen as a precursor to the concept of god-fathers, as these figures held significant authority and provided guidance and support to their family

members or clans (Schneider & Gough, 1961).

Over time, as societies became more complex and expanded beyond immediate kinship groups, power dynamics and hierarchical structures evolved. The consolidation of power in the hands of a few influential individuals or families continued, but the basis of authority expanded beyond familial ties to include factors such as wealth, military strength, or religious standing (Eisenstadt, 1973).

Historically, various cultures and civilizations have had individuals or groups who wielded significant influence and acted as patrons to others. In ancient Rome, for example, the concept of patronage was integral to social and political life. Patrons, often wealthy and influential individuals, provided protection, resources, and support to their clients, who, in turn, offered loyalty and services (Saller, 1982). This relationship was hierarchical and reciprocal, with the patron guiding and influencing the actions and decisions of their clients. Similarly, feudal systems in medieval Europe involved powerful lords who acted as protectors and providers for their vassals. The lord-vassal relationship established a hierarchical structure where loyalty and service were exchanged for land, resources, and protection (Bloch, 1961). These relationships of dependency and patronage bear similarities to the concept of godfatherism.

It is essential to note that the specific term “god-fatherism” may not be applicable in these historical contexts. Still, the underlying dynamics of power, influence, and patronage can be identified as precursors to the concept as it is understood in today’s world (Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997). The objectives of this study therefore, are to:

- i. explore the historical origins of godfatherism in Nigerian politics and its influence on educational leadership appointments;
- ii. analyze the impact of godfatherism on educational leadership, highlighting both its positive and negative implications;
- iii. assess the potential benefits of godfatherism, including resource allocation, mentorship, and networking, in enhancing educational institutions;

- iv. evaluate how godfatherism affects governance in educational institutions, focusing on leadership continuity and institutional success; and
- v. provide recommendations for balancing the positive aspects of godfatherism with transparency, accountability, and merit-based leadership selection.

Historical Origin of god-fatherism in Nigerian Politics

In Nigeria, the origin of god-fatherism can be traced back to the country's political history, particularly the post-independence era and the subsequent military rule. During this time, political leaders sought to consolidate power and maintain control by establishing networks of loyal supporters who would help secure their positions. These networks often operated through a system of patronage, where political godfathers would provide financial and logistical support to their chosen proteges in exchange for loyalty and political favors.

One notable example of god-fatherism is the Nigerian state of Lagos, where political figures like Chief Bola Tinubu have emerged as influential power brokers. Tinubu's political career and his control over Lagos politics have been extensively analyzed. According to political analyst Oluwaseun Tella, Tinubu built a vast patronage network, allowing him to wield significant influence over the state's political affairs. His ability to strategically position his protégés in key positions has been a defining characteristic of God-fatherism in Nigeria (Tella, 2017).

General Perceptions of godfatherism

It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of literature and scholarly research on godfatherism focuses on its negative aspects, as it is widely seen as detrimental to democratic principles and fair governance. god-fatherism has been criticized for its negative impact on democratic processes and good governance. One major concern is that it perpetuates a system of corruption, as political office seekers often rely on the patronage of godfathers to secure nominations or win elections. This undermines the principles of

meritocracy and fair competition, leading to the emergence of leaders who may not be the most qualified or capable. Journalist Oladeinde Olawoyin highlights the detrimental effects of godfatherism on Nigeria's political development, arguing that it stifles innovation and prevents the emergence of new ideas and leadership (Olawoyin, 2019). Furthermore, godfatherism can hinder accountability and transparency in governance. Political office holders who owe their positions to a godfather may feel obligated to prioritize the interests of their benefactor rather than those of the public. This can lead to a concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals, limiting the ability of citizens to hold their representatives accountable.

Similarly, godfatherism is often associated with corruption and nepotism, as it involves influential individuals using their power and influence to secure political positions or favors for their protégés. This undermines fair competition and can result in the appointment of individuals who may not possess the necessary qualifications or skills for leadership roles (Heidenheimer, 2002). It was also argued that godfatherism tends to weaken democratic institutions by concentrating power in the hands of a few individuals or families. This concentration of power can limit political participation and perpetuate a system where decisions are made based on personal interests rather than the broader public good (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2008). Furthermore, the patron-client relationships formed through godfatherism can lead to a lack of accountability and transparency in decision-making processes. Leaders who owe their positions to a godfather may prioritize the interests of their patron rather than the needs and aspirations of the people they are meant to serve (Grzymala-Busse, 2007). It was further argued that godfatherism often undermines meritocracy, which is an essential principle in fair and effective leadership selection. When leaders are chosen based on personal connections rather than their qualifications and abilities, it hampers the development of competent and capable leadership, impeding societal progress (Ekiyor, 2015). In the same vein, it was posited that the practice of godfatherism can exacerbate social inequality and exclusion. It often perpetuates existing power

imbalances and restricts opportunities for those who do not have influential connections or financial resources, leading to a lack of social mobility and reinforcing a system of privilege (Falleti & Posadas, 2010).

Positive Contributions of Godfatherism in Nigerian Politics

While godfatherism is often criticized for its negative impacts, it is essential to acknowledge the positive contributions it can bring, particularly within the Nigerian context. One significant benefit is the mentorship and guidance godfathers provide to their protégés, helping them navigate the complexities of Nigerian politics (Tella, 2017). By sharing their personal experiences and political acumen, godfathers like Bola Tinubu, former Governor of Lagos State, have played a crucial role in grooming emerging leaders. Tinubu's protégés include influential figures such as governors and senators, and his mentorship has been instrumental in their rise to positions of power, where they have gone on to contribute positively to governance (Olawoyin, 2019).

In addition to mentorship, godfathers often possess substantial resources financial and otherwise – that they can deploy to support the careers of their protégés. In a nation like Nigeria, where political campaigns demand considerable financial investment, this support is invaluable (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2008). For example, Rochas Okorocha, former Governor of Imo State, benefited from the financial backing of his godfather, Arthur Nzeribe. This partnership provided the necessary resources for Okorocha's successful political campaigns and enabled him to implement key developmental projects during his tenure (Ekiyor, 2015).

Moreover, godfatherism can bring stability and continuity to political systems. By maintaining influence over their protégés, godfathers ensure a degree of consistency in governance, preventing frequent shifts in leadership and policy direction (Grzymala-Busse, 2007). This stability has been observed in Rivers State, where Governor Nyesom Wike's political rise was facilitated by his godfather, former Governor Peter Odili. The support of godfathers

can create a more predictable environment, enabling long-term planning and the execution of developmental projects that benefit the community (Falleti & Posadas, 2010).

The extensive networks godfathers build also provide an avenue for fostering cooperation and political alliances. These networks can be crucial in the formation of strong political parties and coalitions, bridging divides and resolving conflicts within political circles (Tella, 2017). A prime example is Bola Tinubu, who played a pivotal role in the formation of the All Progressives Congress (APC), bringing together diverse political factions and contributing to the party's success in both the 2015 and 2023 presidential elections (Olawoyin, 2019).

Furthermore, godfathers offer invaluable political expertise, which can be passed down to their protégés. With years of experience navigating Nigeria's complex political landscape, they can share insights on governance, policy-making, and political strategy (Heidenheimer, 2002). This transfer of knowledge enables emerging leaders to avoid common mistakes and make more informed decisions. A case in point is James Ibori, former Governor of Delta State, who benefitted from the guidance of his godfather, Chief Tony Anenih. Anenih's experience played a significant role in Ibori's successful governance, particularly in implementing developmental projects (Ekiyor, 2015).

Godfathers also serve as powerful advocates for their protégés, leveraging their influence to secure resources and drive policy decisions that benefit their constituents (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2008). For instance, Senator Bukola Saraki, former Senate President, relied on his father, Olusola Saraki, as his political godfather. Olusola Saraki's network and influence helped propel Bukola to the governorship of Kwara State and into prominent positions in Nigerian politics (Tella, 2017).

Finally, godfatherism contributes to the continuity of developmental projects, especially when a protégé shares a similar vision and agenda as their mentor (Grzymala-Busse, 2007). With the backing of a godfather like Bola Tinubu, former Lagos State Governor Babatunde Fashola was able to continue and expand upon

key initiatives started during Tinubu's tenure. This continuity has led to ongoing improvements in infrastructure, education, and healthcare, which have had a lasting impact on the state's development (Olawoyin, 2019).

In sum, while godfatherism may have its flaws, it is clear that it can foster mentorship, provide crucial resources, ensure political stability, facilitate alliances, transfer valuable experience, and ensure continuity in developmental projects. These positive contributions can significantly enhance leadership in both politics and educational institutions.

Positive Contributions of Godfatherism in Choosing Leaders in Educational Institutions

"Agba ki waloja ki ori omotuntun wo" is a Yoruba proverb that translates to *"The experienced elder is the guide to the new born."* This proverb emphasizes the importance of experience, wisdom, and gradual growth in attaining leadership positions. It suggests that leadership is not achieved in a hasty or impulsive manner but requires a process of learning, maturation, and accumulating knowledge over time. The proverb highlights the value of respecting and learning from experienced elders who have acquired wisdom through their life journeys. It encourages individuals to be patient, diligent, and open to learning from those who have already gained valuable insights and expertise in their respective fields.

Godfatherism in the context of educational leadership or choosing educational leaders is a topic that elicits strong opinions and debates. While some argue that it can bring certain benefits, a critical examination is necessary to fully understand its potential positive contributions. On one hand, godfatherism may provide access to resources, expedite decision-making processes, and facilitate better communication between policymakers and educational practitioners (Ekiyor, 2015). In this section, this article critically evaluates the positive contributions of godfatherism to effective educational leadership, taking into account both its potential benefits and the broader implications for the education system.

One potential positive contribution of godfatherism to effective educational leadership is the access to resources and opportunities it can provide. In some cases, godfathers may use their influence to secure funding, infrastructure, or other necessary resources for educational institutions (Falleti & Posadas, 2010). This can help improve the quality of education by providing students and teachers with better facilities, materials, and equipment. Additionally, godfathers may leverage their connections to create networking opportunities, partnerships, and collaborations with other educational institutions, leading to knowledge exchange and enhanced educational practices (Heidenheimer, 2002).

Furthermore, godfatherism can facilitate decision-making processes in educational leadership. In a system where godfathers hold significant sway, they may be able to expedite administrative procedures on hiring and promotions, leading to more efficient management (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2008). This can be particularly advantageous in contexts where bureaucracy and red tape hinder progress. By streamlining decision-making, godfatherism may enable educational leaders to implement reforms and initiatives more swiftly, benefiting students and the overall education system (Grzymala-Busse, 2007).

Additional Contributions of Godfatherism in Educational Leadership

Godfatherism can play a crucial role in ensuring that experienced and knowledgeable individuals assume leadership positions in the university system. By leveraging the influence of well-respected figures, competent leaders with a proven track record of success can be identified and appointed, thereby promoting stability and effective decision-making within educational institutions (Tella, 2017). Additionally, godfatherism fosters networking and collaboration among professionals, creating opportunities for knowledge-sharing and cooperative efforts. These networks can lead to fruitful partnerships between different educational institutions, facilitating exchange programs, joint research projects, and the sharing of resources that contribute to academic growth and

institutional development (Falleti & Posadas, 2010).

Another positive aspect of godfatherism is its ability to influence resource allocation within the education sector. The backing of influential figures can help secure crucial resources such as funding, research grants, and infrastructure, ensuring that universities have the necessary support to enhance teaching, learning, and research activities (Olawoyin, 2019). Furthermore, godfatherism provides valuable mentorship opportunities, where experienced leaders guide and support emerging educational administrators. This mentorship fosters leadership development, equipping new leaders with the skills and knowledge required to navigate the complexities of educational governance (Heidenheimer, 2002).

Moreover, godfatherism can strengthen alumni engagement by leveraging networks to secure financial contributions and mentorship opportunities. Influential figures can play a pivotal role in reconnecting successful alumni with their alma maters, leading to increased support for institutional initiatives, scholarship programs, and career development opportunities for students (Ekiyor, 2015).

While the positive contributions of godfatherism in educational leadership are evident, it is essential to acknowledge the concerns associated with this practice. Addressing its potential drawbacks and working towards minimizing negative implications will ensure that godfatherism serves as a constructive force in enhancing the quality of leadership and governance in educational institutions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, godfatherism in choosing leaders in educational institutions can bring certain positive contributions to effective educational leadership. Access to resources, expedited decision-making processes, networking opportunities, and mentorship are among the potential benefits of godfatherism. It can ensure that experienced and knowledgeable individuals assume leadership positions, foster collaboration and knowledge exchange between institutions, allocate necessary resources, provide mentorship and support to emerging leaders, and encourage stronger alumni

engagement. However, it is essential to address the concerns and negative implications associated with godfatherism, such as favoritism, nepotism, and the propensity for corruption. Balancing the potential benefits with ethical considerations and ensuring transparency, accountability, and merit-based selection processes are crucial steps towards optimizing the positive contributions of godfatherism while safeguarding the integrity of educational institutions. Ultimately, a comprehensive evaluation of the pros and cons of godfatherism in educational leadership is necessary to inform policy decisions and ensure the best possible outcomes for students, faculty, and the education system as a whole.

Suggestions

To ensure that godfatherism is utilized in a responsible and beneficial manner, it is essential to establish systems of transparency and accountability. Educational institutions should create clear guidelines and policies for selecting leaders, focusing on merit, qualifications, and proven experience. By doing so, these institutions can prevent nepotism and ensure that those appointed as leaders are truly deserving of their roles, ultimately fostering a more effective and just leadership structure.

Furthermore, institutions should leverage the potential networking and collaboration advantages of godfatherism. Encouraging partnerships and exchange programs with other educational bodies can enhance this process. Organizing conferences, seminars, and workshops where leaders from various institutions can share knowledge, experiences, and best practices would help broaden perspectives and contribute to the growth of both leaders and institutions. Such collaborative efforts could significantly enrich the educational landscape and advance the development of leadership across institutions.

Additionally, implementing mentorship programs would be an effective way to foster the growth of emerging leaders. Pairing experienced mentors with new leaders allows for the transfer of knowledge, expertise, and insights. In this context, godfathers can play a pivotal role by guiding and supporting the next generation of

leaders. These mentorship programs would not only promote professional development but also equip new leaders with the skills and knowledge they need to excel in their roles, ensuring their long-term success.

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