



Impact of Students Union Politics on Academic Performance: A Comparative Analysis of Two Nigerian Public Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Background: Student union politics in tertiary institutions is widely recognized as a platform for leadership development, civic participation, and democratic engagement among undergraduates. However, active involvement in political activities often creates competing demands between political responsibilities and academic obligations, potentially affecting students' academic performance.

Objective: This study assessed the influence of student union politics on academic performance, identified strategies for mitigating its negative consequences, and compared institutional approaches to managing these challenges in Nigerian public higher education institutions.

Method: The study adopted a qualitative comparative case study design involving the University of Ibadan and the Polytechnic of Ibadan. Using purposive sampling, thirty key informants (15 from each institution)—including student union leaders, academic staff, and administrative personnel—were selected. Data were collected through semi-structured key informant interviews using the Academic Outcomes and Student Politics Interview Schedule (AOSPIS) and analysed using inductive thematic analysis.

Results: Findings revealed that participation in student politics enhances leadership skills, communication competence, and civic awareness. However, it also imposes significant time and role demands that often conflict with academic responsibilities. While most respondents reported negative academic implications, a minority acknowledged positive academic outcomes.

Conclusion: The study concludes that although student politics is valuable for leadership development, excessive involvement can undermine academic performance due to role conflict between political and academic responsibilities.

Unique Contribution: This study contributes to existing literature by offering comparative institutional insights into how Nigerian tertiary institutions manage the intersection of student political engagement and academic performance.

Key Recommendation: The study recommends the institutionalisation of structured mentorship programmes, the development of clear policies regulating student political activities, and the provision of mandatory counselling support for student leaders to promote a balance between academic and political responsibilities.

Keywords: Role conflict theory, student politics, academic performance, tertiary education, institutional policy, mentorship programmes



INTRODUCTION

Student union politics occupies an ambivalent position of both a civic formation activity and a potential source of institutional tension in tertiary education. Political participation in institutions, socialisation, and leadership development has been largely linked with student political activities (Palma et al., 2023; Rasheed et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the long-term participation in union activities can also create conflicting requirements that jeopardise academic attention and disturb university peace (Mustaqim and Wahjoedi, 2024). This tension indicates a complicated interaction of student political engagement and institutional stability, which indicates that the educational impacts of student politics as a phenomenon should be studied in the context of circumstances and regulations.

Studies have shown that peer networks tend to create student leadership frameworks that replicate both inclusionary and exclusionary practices, which strengthens the power dynamics within student unions (Brooks et al., 2015; Augusto, 2021). These dynamics have the potential to empower leadership capacity and at the same time enhance competition and conflict amongst student actors. Historically, institutional dialogue and advocacy have been through student unionism in the Nigerian context. However, it has also been linked to instances of violence, property and reputation issues in institutions. These opposite results highlight the multicultural nature of student politics as a social and institutional phenomenon instead of a positive or negative force (Brooks et al., 2015; Oluwole and Akindele, 2021; Ogunode et al., 2024). This complexity is further demonstrated through comparative views of other African contexts. Ghanaian studies have shown that student unionism is entrenched in the leadership cultures within universities campus with students using respective leadership styles which they view to be effective in addressing challenges in academia and in institutions. Student politics can produce positive institutional outcomes when supported in an appropriate manner using properly designed engagement systems, such as mentorship and leadership development programmes. These results indicate that the effects of the political involvement of students are influenced more by the institutional factors in which they take place than by the participation (Awaah et al., 2023).

However, student politics can extend beyond healthy involvement in leadership and manifest in the forms of unhealthy competition, coercion, or violence. The fact that political engagement by students outside the Nigerian setting can be fuelled by ambitions to be influential and gain recognition can be proved by examples of political participation in other settings, which culminates in aggressive behaviour with socio-economic dissatisfaction. These trends have been attributed to political influence, limited economic opportunities, and weak institutional regulation, with documented effects on class attendance, learning persistence, and academic achievement in polytechnics and universities in Nigeria (Ahmad, 2020; Shamaki et al., 2020; Aligwe & Nwafor 2016). This is an indication that student political involvement is working within more general structural and socio-economic limits that mediate its academic outcomes (Şeker and Tatar, 2019; Strong, 2024). The correlation existing between student politics and student performance is thus well perceived as a multidimensional relationship and not a linear one. Although political involvement might increase transferable skills, including communication, negotiation, and leadership, but intensive political involvement can also cost a student more time in studying, leading to more stress and absenteeism. Empirical research in universities in Nigeria



has demonstrated that an increase in political participation is mostly linked with poor academic performance, especially when there is a high level of university union activity. Simultaneously, student unions that are aligned with institutional goals have been observed to enhance institutional governance, student morale, and student–management relations. These results show the contingency of student politics and its reliance on institutional orientation and control (Ezeala and Dauda, 2020; Emesini, 2016; Oluwole and Akindele, 2021).

To overcome such difficulties, tertiary institutions have implemented different strategies that seek to curb the negative academic outcomes of student politics. Some of the most prevalent interventions involve leadership training, time management training, mentorship programmes, and the introduction of regulatory frameworks to put a check on disruptive practices (Zhao and Asavisanu, 2023; Munando and Chingwanangwana, 2025). Although these interventions indicate institutional recognition of the problem, their effectiveness varies across settings, and evidence of their long-term impact remains limited. In addition, the available literature concentrate on individual institutional contexts, providing minimal comparative information on the way various tertiary subsystems address the dilemma of balancing political involvement and academic accountability.

Against this background, the relationship between student union politics and academic performance in Nigerian tertiary institutions remains a sensitive yet under-researched subject. This calls for a comparative analysis between institutional types to shed more light on how the governance structure, organisational culture and policy decisions influence student political behaviour and academic consequences. This study aims to contribute to the current discussion on the topic of student governance in African institutions of higher learning, as well as to determine the institutional mechanisms that can allow political formations with academic excellence by the students participating in school politics.

Tertiary institutions have been providing institutional solutions to curb the ill academic effects of student involvement in politics. Such interventions are usually leadership development programmes, time management training, mentorship, and regulatory frameworks that are meant to tame disruptive political behaviours on campuses (Zhao and Asavisanu, 2023; Munando and Chingwanangwana, 2025; Aligwe et al., 2017). These interventions make it clear that institutions are fully aware of the challenges, yet their effectiveness varies across settings, and evidence of their long-term impact remains limited. The disruptive nature of student politics, in relation to protests, instability in institutions and weakening academic participation, has been reported by other studies. Although these studies offer significant information on the practical application of student political activities, they are also limited in the academic implication on such activities in the context of particular institutions. Besides, empirical studies are usually limited to one or two kinds of institutions or are based on a single institution, thus providing a scanty comparative insight into how various patterns of student political participation and institutional cultures can influence the correlation between student political participation and academic achievement.



It is against this backdrop that there exists a significant gap in the literature regarding the comparative institutional dynamics by which student union politics can impact academic responsibilities in the Nigerian tertiary education. Although the dual role of students as both political participants and academic learners has been recognised, little has been done to comprehend the role tension of mediation among various forms of tertiary institutions. As a result, the processes by which institutional policies, governance arrangements and organisational cultures are working on the academic implications of the student political participation on the part of the students have not been adequately investigated. To close this gap, a comparative study is necessary, which places the political involvement of students into the context of larger institutional frameworks. This research hence analyses the association between student union politics and their academic performance by comparative analysis of a university and a polytechnic in Nigeria to establish the institutional factors that determine the balance between politicking and academic responsibility.

This research is based on Role Conflict Theory (Kahn et al., 1964), which offers a critical approach to the research question by explaining how student leaders manage the two-fold pressure of politics and academic commitments. According to the theory, role conflict is a friction that occurs when one is confronted with conflicting demands as a result of the roles he or she holds. In this case, leaders of student unions are both academic students and political leaders, and this conflict usually places one of these aspects ahead of the other (Kahn et al., 1964). The theory puts into context the political activity as a role that needs to be assisted in the quantification of the level at which the students are entrenched in the union activities at the expense of the academic work. It coincides directly with the main idea of the theory, which is that when a person gets excessively involved in politics (protests, meetings), they may start getting role overloaded, thus spending less time on studying, consequently becoming stressed, and getting worse academic achievements. The approach of the theory in focusing on role ambiguity (unclear expectations) is also the reason why not all student leaders can juggle the roles, particularly in cases where the institutional guidelines are unclear. Another strength of the theory is the mitigation strategies. Kahn et al. (1964) maintain that structural support can help curb role conflict. The study was to determine the best institutional strategies that reduce conflict by comparing the University of Ibadan and the Polytechnic of Ibadan as postulated by the theory.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the extent of political involvement among student leaders in tertiary institutions?
2. To what extent does school politics influence academic performance of students in tertiary institutions?
3. How can the negative impact of school politics on the academic performance of student leaders be mitigated?
4. Compare the institutional strategies employed by the University of Ibadan and the Polytechnic Ibadan to mitigate the negative impact of school politics on student academic performance.



METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research design was employed in this study to investigate the effects of student politics on the academic performance in the University of Ibadan and the Polytechnic, Ibadan. These institutions were selected for their active student political culture. A purposive sampling was employed to select 30 representatives with 15 participants per institution. These include 5 in each category of student leaders, academic staff, and core administrative staff at the students affairs divisions who were directly involved in campus politics, to ensure expert perspectives. The students' leaders were selected among Student Union Representatives and faculty leaders. Data collection involved a validated KII guide with open-ended questions on: (1) institutional political dynamics, (2) academic impacts, and (3) mitigation strategies. Validity of the instruments was established by expert reviews and four-participant pilot test, whereas the reliability was obtained through interview consistency and cross-validation based on themes. A content analysis was used and the responses that have been coded were categorised into themes that covered the objectives of the research.

Although the research had a qualitative design, the proportionate significance of themes according to answers of the participants was demonstrated by the means of descriptive frequencies and percentages. Such numerical representations do not make any statistical generalisation, but they help to make the analysis more understandable by showing the prevailing patterns in the qualitative data. This sort of quasi-quantification only serves as a descriptive tool and as a secondary part of thematic interpretation.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data analysis was done in the systematic thematic content analysis process. Secondly, the interview transcripts were read multiple times to familiarise oneself, and the codes were inductively generated based on the information. Thereafter, the codes were classified into larger themes in line with the aims of the study. Themes were cross-verified in different groups of participants and institutions to find the areas of convergence and divergence to strengthen credibility. The reliability of the results was maintained by applying the coding framework uniformly across the transcripts.

RESULTS

Table 1: Academic Staff Demographic Data

Age Group	Role	Faculty/Department/Unit	Institution	Years of Experience
36-45	Adviser	Department	Polytechnic	7+ years
46-50	Level Coordinator	Environmental Studies/Architecture	Polytechnic	7+ years
46-50	Adviser	Mathematics & Statistics	Polytechnic	4-6 years
36-45	Level Coordinator	Mathematics & Statistics	Polytechnic	4-6 years
36-45	Adviser	Science	Polytechnic	7+ years
36-45	Level Coordinator	Education	University	4-6 years
46-50	Adviser	Education	University	4-6 years
36-45	Level Coordinator	History	University	1-3 years
51+	Adviser	Technology	University	1-3 years
51+	Sub Dean	Education	University	4-6 years



Table 1 reflects the academic staff working as Advisers, Level Coordinators and Sub-Deans within university and polytechnic settings. The age distribution of the respondents stands between 36 and 51 years and above, meaning that the leadership positions are held by experienced individuals. The majority of them possess 4 to 7+ years of experience, which ensures a degree of stability in academic administration and student mentoring.

Table 2: Administrative Staff Demographic Data

Age Group	Role	Faculty/Department/Unit	Institution	Years of Experience
46-50	Executive (Executive Officer)	Procurement & Supply (FBCS)	Polytechnic	< 1 year
46-50	Administrator (Administrative Staff)	Admin	Polytechnic	1-3 years
36-45	Assistant Warden	Faculty	Polytechnic	7+ years
36-45	Executive Officer	Student Affairs	Polytechnic	7+ years
36-45	Clerical Officer	Student Affairs	Polytechnic	7+ years
46-50	Administrative Staff	Student Affairs Division	University	7+ years
46-50	Administrative Staff	Student Affairs	University	7+ years
51+	Administrative Staff	Student Affairs	University	4-6 years
36-45	Administrative Staff	Student Affairs	University	7+ years
51+	Assistant Warden	Student Affairs	University	7+ years

Table 2 shows the administrative staff in charge of faculty administration, bursary, procurement, and student affairs across universities and polytechnics. The majority of these staff members are aged 46 and above and possess considerable experience (4-7+ years), which ensures institutional stability.



Research Question 1: What is the extent of political involvement among student leaders in higher institution?

Table 3: Content Analysis of Student Leaders' Political Engagement

Variable	Category	University (n=14)	Polytechnic (n=15)
Level of Political Engagement	High / Very Active	35.7%	26.7%
	Moderate / Average	42.9%	40.0%
	Low / Below Par	7.1%	20.0%
	Other / Unclear	14.3%	13.3%
Thematic Types of Engagement	Elections & Campaigns	78.6%	80.0%
	Meetings & Discussions	64.3%	66.7%
	Protests & Demonstrations	50.0%	40.0%
	Student Governance (SRC/Union)	35.7%	33.3%
	Advocacy & Petitions	28.6%	26.7%
	Dialogue with Management	21.4%	20.0%

Table 3 above shows that there is a striking similarity in the level of political engagement between the two institutions. The fact that the percentages are almost the same in fundamental activities such as elections: University (78.6%); Polytechnic (80.0%), and meetings University (64.3%); Polytechnic (66.7%), indicates that the nature of the institution is not that relevant as compared to the national or generational factors when it comes to the influence of student political behaviour. The difference in the supposition of university students being significantly more politically active is not hard to prove here. The marginally greater protest culture in universities (50.0%) and the marginally greater emphasis on formal governance positions may reflect deeper institutional culture or more formalised student representation. On the other hand, the rate of low engagement (40.0%) would be higher in the polytechnic due to other priorities among students or institutional limitations. Finally, the information dispels frugal stereotypes and points to some common, even average, political culture centred on formal procedures and not radical activism in the entire landscape of higher education.



Research Question 2: To what extent does school politics influence the academic performance of students in tertiary institutions?

Table 4: Content Analysis of Influence of School Politics on Academic Performance

Variable	Category	University (n=14)	Polytechnic (n=15)
Level of Influence	Positive	21.4%	40.0%
Level of Influence	Negative	42.9%	26.7%
Level of Influence	Mixed/Neutral	35.7%	33.3%
Thematic Types of Influence	Positive Influence (e.g., improved skills, confidence)	21.4% (3)	40.0% (6)
Thematic Types of Influence	Negative Influence (e.g., lower grades, poor performance)	42.9% (6)	26.7% (4)
Thematic Types of Influence	Time-related Challenges	21.4% (3)	13.3% (2)
Thematic Types of Influence	Absenteeism	14.3% (2)	20.0% (3)
Thematic Types of Influence	No Impact	14.3% (2)	6.7% (1)
Thematic Types of Influence	Mixed Influence	7.1% (1)	6.7% (1)

As indicated in Table 4 above, there is an evident difference in experience between these institutions.

The data show a distinct contrast between types of institution. University students perceived the impact of campus politics as predominantly negative (42.9%), which suggests an intense or all-consuming political environment. In contrast, polytechnic respondents report a more positive influence (40.0%). This may indicate that their political engagement is more in tandem with skill development and practical learning. Notably, a significant proportion of respondents from both groups (35.7%; 33.3%), university and polytechnic students reported a mixed or neutral impact, establishing the complexity of this issue. It demonstrates that it is not that the impact is either evidently good or bad, but a complicated mix to many. This confusion usually occurs where the true narrative emerges. Students may be self-confident at the expense of time to study, which forms their own mindset on student unionism. This table stipulates that the effect of school politics' influence on the academic performance of students is not universal and it is profoundly influenced by the particular environment in which a particular institution is situated.



Research Question 3: How would the negative impacts of school politics on students' academic performance be mitigated?

Table 5: Content Analysis on recommendations for mitigating the negative impact of school politics on students' academic performance

Recommendation Category	Specific Themes	University (n=15)	Polytechnic (n=15)
Academic & Time Management	Time management skills / Prioritisation	40.0%	46.7%
	Regular class attendance	26.7%	33.3%
	Academic performance monitoring	26.7%	26.7%
	Study schedules / Planning ahead	20.0%	13.3%
Institutional Support Systems	Orientation / Sensitization programmes	53.3%	60.0%
	Mentorship programmes	20.0%	33.3%
	Flexible academic arrangements	26.7%	20.0%
	Extra classes / Tutorials	13.3%	26.7%
	Counseling / Advisory services	13.3%	13.3%
Policy & Governance Interventions	CGPA requirements for eligibility	33.3%	26.7%
	Clear rules / Guidelines	33.3%	20.0%
	Reduced workload for leaders	13.3%	13.3%
	Academic credit for leadership	6.7%	13.3%
Structural & Operational Changes	Schedule meetings outside class hours	26.7%	20.0%
	Dialogue between leaders and administration	20.0%	26.7%
	Limit political activities	20.0%	20.0%
	Monitoring / Supervision	26.7%	20.0%

Table 5 above shows that there is a general tendency towards practical short-term solutions as compared to structural change. The two institutions are also quite supportive of student-level solutions such as time management training: University (40.0%); Polytechnic (46.7%), as well as orientation programmes: University (53.3%); Polytechnic (60.0%). This implies that there is a



tendency of shifting the burden of accommodation towards the individual student instead of overhauling the very concept of how political leadership is incorporated into the academic life. This high focus on regulations, such as CGPA demands, speaks volumes. It seems to be a transparent, enforceable policy, but it looks like a filter rather than support. Though it does not allow bad performers to head, at the same time, it also does not assist dedicated leaders to succeed as a student and a unionist. The institution management could be creative to improve the system to allow students to perform these dual roles in a sustainable way.

Research Question 4: Compare the institutional strategies employed by tertiary institutions to mitigate the negative impact of school politics on student academic performance

Table 6: Comparative Analysis of Recommendations of Polytechnic and University

Recommendations	Polytechnic Frequency (Percentage)	University Frequency (Percentage)
Orientation programme	7 (36.8%)	9 (45%)
Time management training/workshop	3 (15.8%)	4 (20%)
Mentorship programmes	3 (15.8%)	3 (15%)
Clear guidelines/rules for political activities	3 (15.8%)	2 (10%)
Academic support (tutoring/extra classes)	2 (10.5%)	1 (5%)
Limiting political activities	1 (5.3%)	1 (5%)
Counselling services	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Review of academic policies	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Note: The percentages presented have been rounded to the nearest tenth and are based on the total number of recommendations from each type of institution. There are 19 total recommendations for polytechnics and 20 for universities.

The above data in Table 6 reveal that orientation programme is a key strategy employed by both universities and polytechnics to mitigate the adverse effects of school politics on academic performance. However, university appear to place a marginally greater emphasis on orientation (45%) compared to polytechnic (36.8%). Both types of institutions, university and polytechnic respectively regard time management (36.8%; 45%) and mentorship (15.8%; 15%) programmes as important, with comparable frequencies.



DISCUSSION

The results show that the leadership of student unions in the Polytechnic of Ibadan and the University of Ibadan is dominated by persons between the age group of 18-25 years, and their tenure is not more than three years. This population density shows the dynamic and youthful nature of student political involvement in the Nigerian universities (Oyebade & Oni, 2012). The short leadership cycle implies that there is vulnerability of an institution to discontinuity, thus explaining why structured orientation and governance support systems are necessary. Mukasa et al., (2023) acknowledged that to achieve meaningful student engagement in higher education governance, it is necessary to have institutional structures that can direct youthful activism into meaningful leadership practice. This trend is probably indicative of the transitional character of the student leadership and the brief duration of holding the campus political offices, hence the impact of leadership turnover on continuity and institutional memory of student union in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

The study discovered that political activities among students are centred around elections, debates, and advocacy, and are relatively moderate when it comes to participation in protests. This trend is similar to Mustaqim and Wahjoedi (2024), who found that participation in campuses today takes more formal and procedural manifestations, instead of being confrontational mobilisation. Likewise, Awaah et al. (2023) found that the student leadership bodies in the African universities are mostly entrenched in established institutional systems. These results reveal that the student union politics in the two institutions are mostly institutionalised and not radicalised, which implies that there exists a structured political culture. Nevertheless, its participation is intermittent but intensive. The student leaders respondents also reported spending up to 72 hours a single week at the height of political periods to engage in political activities. This time investment is analytically important when it is considered in the context of the Role Conflict Theory (Kahn, 1964). According to the theory, individuals who hold several roles encounter strain because role expectation is not compatible or too demanding in comparison to the resources available. In this regard, the role conflict arises between a student and a political leader due to the duality of the roles of the two. This pattern can also be associated with the growing institutionalisation of student representation as part of institutional governance mechanisms, which would indicate that the student politics of Nigerian tertiary institutions is shifting towards procedure-oriented instead of mainly confrontational types of activism.

The effects of overload are manifested in the levels of absenteeism, less time spent studying, and a lack of academic focus. These behavioural expressions are in line with Ezeala and Dauda (2020), who reported a negative correlation between campus political participation and academic success. In the context of Role Conflict Theory, the result of such outcomes is role overload and role strain. Role overload arises when cumulative demands are beyond the temporal and cognitive capabilities of an individual, whereas role strain arises when the execution of a certain role compromises the efficacy in another role (Kahn, 1964). The 72 hours per week engagement in political activities as reported, is equal to a full-time occupational commitment, which structurally limits investment in academic activities and increases performance susceptibility. This could be attributed to the fact that schedules regarding the political activities within most



institutions are not clearly regulated and this proves how much role pressure students with political office positions can create as a result of extensive leadership responsibilities.

However, the results also show that a minority of the participants succeeded in the positive developmental outcomes, such as enhanced communication abilities, leadership capabilities, and publicity. This two-sidedness corresponds to the profits and losses of student unionism as explained by Oluwole and Akindele (2021). Role Conflict Theory offers a valuable explanatory transitional point in this regard: incompatible demands are a source of strain, whereas, with the support of organisational structures, complementary role accumulation can make a difference in personal development. The fact that the academic performance and leadership development coexist indicates that the influence of political engagement may be contingent on regulatory balance instead of participation itself as argued by Seker and Tatar (2019). The mediating role of conflict thus involves institutional responses. The results indicate that the two institutions focus on the orientation programmes and time management training, but the university is more focused on the developmental interventions, whilst the polytechnic depends more on the regulatory guidelines. Such dispersion is indicative of opposing governance ideologies. Based on their argument, Ogunode et al. (2024) established that there is a great influence of institutional culture on the management of tertiary education in Nigeria when it comes to administrative reactions to political activity. This study is a proof that the developmental strategies are used to increase the ability of students to deal with competing demands, and the regulatory strategies are intended to limit disruptive behaviour.

Theoretically, Role Conflict Theory lays much emphasis on structural support in ambiguity and overload reduction (Kahn, 1964). The indefiniteness of institutional expectations enhances role ambiguity, whereas the lack of support systems contributes to overload. The scarcity of counselling services that can be detected in this research is a structural gap in the treatment of psychological aspects of role strain. A study by Itasanmi et al., (2023) revealed that the mechanisms of institutional support have a significant impact on academic motivation during stressful situations. This lack of institutional counselling or mentoring thus undermines institutional ability to cushion discord between scholarly and political demands. Besides, the fact that the university pays more attention to systematic time-management training is also associated with research that institutional engagement and employee devotion have positive effects on student learning (Itasanmi et al., 2022). These developmental measures deal directly with the role overload through the provision of student leaders with prioritisation skills and monitoring systems. On the contrary, a pure dependence on regulatory rules can only suppress the overt interference but not necessarily internalised role strain. This is possibly due to the experiential learning that is inherent in political participation meaning that student unionism can be an avenue of leadership training and at the same time a challenge to academic dedication.



Collectively, the results confirm that student union politics in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria exist in a predicament between developing into a leader and being strained academically. It is academically harmful to engage in politics when it is overly demanding in terms of time and mental capacity. Nevertheless, in cases where institutional arrangements offer mentoring, academic surveillance, and psychological assistance, role conflict may be regulated and changed into productive role build-up. The comparative analysis thus builds up on the current body of scholarship in Nigeria by showing that the academic effects of student politics are not necessarily injurious but structurally mediated. The key factor that matters is the unanimity of the institutional response in the trade-off between political engagement and academic responsibility. These differences presumably are affected by differences between governance tradition and administrative priorities within different types of institutions, which offer a comparative understanding of how universities and polytechnics may have different options in regards to how they control student political activity.

This enhanced theoretical amalgamation notes that the role of student unionism cannot be theorised and framed as a form of outside interference with the academic existence, but rather as a parallel institutional activity that needs to be organised into coherence. Tertiary education governance, then, needs to move beyond the reactive regulation to the integrated systems that mitigate the ambiguity, are able to manage the overload and coordinate the dual roles in the academic milieu. This observation can be seen to be the result of low levels of integration of psychosocial support services with the student leadership structures, raising the issue of focusing more on institutional structures which focus on the academic and psychological needs of student political involvement.

CONCLUSION

Arising from the results, the study concludes that student union politics in Nigerian higher institutions have two-sided effects where the student leaders develop leadership skills but face a major challenge of poor academic performance. Although political activity strengthens leadership and communication abilities, overindulgence in political engagements is known to create conflict of role, stress, absenteeism, and deteriorating academic performance. The results are based on Role Conflict Theory, and it highlights the importance of having systematic interventions to reconcile these two conflicting roles. Institutional policies to counter the negative effects should be flexible academic policies, like mentorship programmes, in which they are attached to faculty advisors. Time-management training would assist students in focusing more on academics and at the same time remain interested in politics. The political activities should be well-guided and should not disrupt lectures or examinations. Also, there should be counselling services to help deal with the psychological pressure of being a leader and an academic. Large-scale political engagement, like controlled debates can also be encouraged to reduce disruptions in academics.



With such measures, tertiary institutions will be able to maintain the developmental gains of student politics and protect academic integrity. Harmoniously and productively, a proactive and balanced orientation will enable student leaders to succeed both politically and academically, in order to integrate a more harmonious and productive campus environment.

Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

The study was conceived by Mr. Matthew Taiwo Oni, while the design was handled by Dr Manthekeleng Agnes Linake. Data collection was done by Mr. Matthew Taiwo Oni. Dr Chima Jonas Egbujuo collated the data, and also handled the analysis and interpretation, while Mr Matthew Taiwo Oni wrote the initial manuscript. All authors have critically reviewed and approved the final draft, and are responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Data availability statement

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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