

**FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE AND PUBLIC SECTOR
PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF FEDERAL MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION IN NIGERIA 2015-2018**

DR. EJIMBEONWU, GERALD KENE (REV. FR.)

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, LEGACY UNIVERSITY, OKIJA
geraldkenechukwu@gmail.com(07031240668)

Abstract

This study fundamentally seeks to examine the effect of federal character principle on the productivity of the Nigerian public sector with direct focus on the Federal Ministry of Education. Federal character principle is a policy alternative initiated by Nigerian government to ensure proper management of the public service with regards to even ethnic representation. The situation results to mutual mistrust and inter community conflicts has become perennial and endemic in the nation's body politics and has militated against the political stability of the country since independence. Anchored on decision making theoretical framework, the researcher adopted an in-depth research method to carry out the study. Purposively, the researcher sampled fourteen staff from the fourteen different departments of the Federal Ministry of Education and guided by the study's research analysis elicited useful information from them. Findings from the study revealed that there is less connection between productivity and federal character. It was also discovered that federal character is disastrous to productivity in the public sector. The study also found out that the northern part of Nigeria is favoured by federal character principle while the south is favoured mostly by merit. In the end, the study recommended that government should go back to the original plan of the federal character principle which does not undermine merit. Application of federal character principle in civil service must be blended with merit in order to dissuade mediocrity.

Introduction

The perpetual problem of imbalance of the public sector which has affected productivity in our educational sector is the necessary condition which prompted the research so as to investigate on the issues relating to the correlation between federal character principle and the allocation of educationally based positions among the federating units which means that all the geo-political zones will be given equal chance for the appointment and output-efficiency as it relates to observation of federal character principle. From the foregoing, it is evident to state that, there have been discriminatory attitudes on many federal institutions in terms of employment into the Nigerian civil service as there are specific numbers of candidates to be taken from each state. There is also a problem of quota system in the area of employment into the

federal civil service, which has introduced and glorified mediocrity in the service. This gross misconduct in the area of employment due to sectional considerations and prebendalism from those in authority in the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) is a soft ground for nepotism and favoritism as the effect of such practices to the productivity, efficiency of service delivery and quality of output to the nation is overlooked. These issues have been a multifarious challenge to the Federal Character Commission.

For reasons often attributed to the faulty foundations, Nigeria has always had to contend with problems of intolerance and misunderstandings among its constituent diverse ethnic groups and interests. This situation according to Agbodike (2004) results to mutual distrust and inter-community conflicts has become perennial and endemic in the nation's body politics and has militated against the political stability of the country since independence. Expectedly, the fear of domination of one ethnic group or section of the country by another and the national question of who gets what and how the national cake should be shared constitute a major factor of this problem. As a result of mutual suspicion existing among the various social groups, whatever the issue at hand in Nigeria, the patterns of reaction to it will be determined by geo-political as well as religious considerations. This situation as a matter of fact seriously hampers efforts at national unity as it applies to the building of a united Nigeria out of the disparate ethnic, geographic, social, economic and religious elements or groups in the country (Gambari, 1994).

Notwithstanding the many positives intended, the federal character evidently came with numerous challenges. Discriminatory attitudes on many federal institutions in terms of employment into the Nigerian civil service became common as there are specific numbers of candidates to be taken from each state. There is also a problem of quota system in the area of employment into federal civil service, which has introduced mediocrity in the service. Merit was jettisoned and sacrificed on the altar of representativeness which seemingly has less real benefits for the nation. Using the Federal Ministry of Education as case study, the intent of this study is to understand the effect of federal character principle on public sector productivity in Nigeria.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the decision making theory. The imperative for this theoretical framework lies in the identification of the significance of decision in institutions in the area of who recruits, the procedure to adopt and guideline to follow

in the process of employment in order to meet the aspiration of the citizen and to ensure fairness. The decision making theory is associated with scholars like Simon (1945), Mintzberg (1973), Iyayi (2002) and Miller (2003) in their various studies of decision making in institution.

The application of the decision making theory in an institution shows that most decision taken are based on some elements of egocentrism, nepotism, tribalism rather than altruism (Iyayi, 2002). Decision that are characterized by egocentric or tribal act has a lot of political undertones with less rationality and tend to rely more on judgment and negotiation rather the altruism decisions that guarantee equality and fairness in the employment process, procedure and selection that brings about institutional development, survival and less marginalization in the country(Iyayi, 2002). The decision making theory is confronted with the major weakness of the fact that it is almost impossible to identify and evaluate all possible alternatives before decisions are taken and decisions are on subjective views of a particular problem. Time and resources may be constraints in identifying and evaluating all other policy options before decisions are taken.

An Overview of Federal Character Principle

Conceptually, the federal character principle entails the recognition of the plural nature of the country in recruitment, distribution of administrative and political offices and power as well as the resources of the country. The essence of federal character principle is to allow the composition and conduct of public institutions and affairs reflect the country's diversity. It is premised on the ground that when national institutions and affairs are reflective, in composition and conduct, of the pluralism of the country then, a sense of belonging is likely to be evoked from the citizenry. It is also designed to mitigate, if not obviate, the bellicose political struggle that characterized previous Nigeria's democratic systems (Obiyan&Akindele, 2001).

In the actual sense, the idea of the Federal Character Principle is not new. It has existed in the country under different nomenclatures such as zoning or quota system (Adeosun, 2011). Its informal origins date back to the pre-independence era of nationalist struggle for political participation in the colonial Nigeria, especially after Nigeria became a federation in 1954. At first, during its informal application, it was concerned with legislative representation and equalization of inter-regional opportunities in education and appointments at the Federal level. But in its modern formalized and institutionalized form, as enshrined in the 1979, 1989 and 1999

constitutions, virtually every level of Federal, State and Local Governments operation is involved and consequently politicized (Agbodike, 1989:182).

The phrase “Federal Character” was first used by the late General Murtala Ramat Muhammed in his address to the opening session of the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDCs) on Saturday the 18th of October 1975. Federal Character according to the CDCs report of 1977 refers to the distinctive desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Babura, 2013). Section 14(3) and (4) of the 1979 constitution, reflected the Federal Character Principle thus; that the composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies, shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the Federal Character of Nigeria and the need to promote national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies. Specifically the sections provides thus:

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the Federal Character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few States or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or any of its agencies.

Section 14(4) says that:

The composition of the Government of a State, a Local government council, or any of the agencies of such Government or council, and the conduct of the affairs of the Government or council or such agencies shall be carried out in such manner as to recognize the diversity of the people within its area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all the peoples of the federation.

According to Edigin (2010), the federal character principle is an attempt aimed at institutionalizing the accommodation of the diverse groups and interest in the country through process of employment distribution. This position is further captured in the

constitution drafting committee (CDC) reports that see the federal character has a provision or an Act created to ensure and promote national unity and to harness the diversities existing in the country. The Federal character remains the deliberate effort of the government designed to accommodate less privileged sections of the country (Olagunju, 1987). Similarly, Afigbo (1989) sees the federal character principle as distinctive aim of the citizen of the country initiated to promote national unity and loyalty, to give the people of the country a sense of belonging through the employment process in the public service. Bodunrin (1989) sees the federal character principle as a political settlement policy agenda that enables all the states and geo-political zones in the country to be represented in government recruitment. While Gberevbie (2010) sees the principle as going beyond just euphemizing ethnic balancing which has the ability to solve the problem and fear of marginalization but the policy has what it takes to stabilize the needed developmental quest of the country. The civil service is the body of public officials employed in the civil capacity to undertake the formulation and implementation of government policies and programmes. This can be viewed in terms of structure like ministries, departments, etc or human occupants of the public offices like permanent secretaries, ministers and higher administrative staff. Section 2 of the Pension Act of 1951 defines civil service as the service in a civil capacity under the government of the federal or in a college, university or a pensionable employment under local authority. Civil servants are mainly of two categories: lower clerical staff and higher administrative and technical staff. The higher administrative staffs are those directly responsible to the elected public officers, who are charged with the responsibility of steering the ship of state. The Nigerian civil service is patterned to the Westminster model, and composed of well trained, highly skilled body of professional officials who have taken government service as a career (Ekhatior, 2002).

Recognizing the economic and political values of civil servants, varied groups and interest in Nigeria jostle to be given positions in those government establishments. Nonetheless, Suberu and Diamond (2004) write that federal character as defined and pursued by the 1979 and 1999 constitutions cannot succeed in integrating the people because it was an ideology of the minority ruling class aimed at protecting their interest. The operation of the federal character in Nigeria has given more powers to the politically superior groups thus creating a wider power disparity between the strong and the weak. A situation in which the politically weak are subjected to a form of double jeopardy is antithetical to national integration which federal character was aimed to achieve (Bello, 2012).

According to Onyeoziri (2002) the federal character principle was introduced to foster national building; however its implementation had been fraught with different problems as it had resulted in tension among the component units of the federation. The reasons for the tensions are as follows:

The fuzziness that pervades its application in certain areas; the arbitrariness that seems to accompany its application even in areas where the application seems straight, especially during military regimes; lack of political will from the leading elite to employ sanctions when the rules are breached; and lack of definite guideline in achieving balance between equity and efficiency in the application of the principle (Onyeoziri, 2002: 17).

Evidently, the above mentioned factors constitute liabilities to the judicious practice of the principle and make things hard towards the realization of sustainable development in Nigeria. Federal character principle instead of ameliorating the negative effects of ethnocentrism provokes ethno-regional division; it suffers from a fundamental contradiction as a policy for ensuring nation building or national integration. The principle does not encourage treating individuals as members of the nation-state, but views them from the lens of ethno-linguistic group within the nation state, thereby reinforcing the integrating of the units instead of the nation-state (Onyeoziri, 2002: 18).

Asaju and Egberi (2015:4) defined the federal character principles as both reaction as well as a system; the principle is a positive reaction to correct the wrongs of the past in the conduct of public service and to exploit the great diversities of the country, also it is a reaction measure to those practices which place selfish and parochial consideration over the national interest. Okolie and Greg (2013:5) defined the federal character as a policy mechanism introduced for equitable distribution of appointments, natural and economic resources for the benefit of the citizens. The federal character principle is that distinctive desire of the citizen of Nigeria to ensure and promote national loyalty, unity and national harmony and to give the people of Nigeria sense of belonging (Aderonke, 2013).

In principle, the idea of federal character connotes the existence of a federal society. However, as a federal state, Nigeria was faced with the challenge of how to imbibe the principle of federalism in practice. As a result, the quota system was introduced into the Nigerian public service in 1958 by the government “to ensure equitable

representation of the various groups in the country” (Tonwe and Oghator, 2009:235). To further consolidate on the gains of the quota system, the Federal Military Government of Generals Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo in the drafting and approval of the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria during the transition to civilian rule (1976-79) introduced into the Nigerian political and administrative landscapes the principle of federal character (Ekeh, 1989:19). Federal character principle sought to give “opportunities in education and employment, usually at the point of entry, to disadvantaged groups and areas to enable them compete and catch up with more advanced areas and sectors of the nation” (Ekeh, 1989:38).

Comparing the quota system with that of the federal character principle, Ekeh (1989:38) submits that federal character principle “demands far more” than quota system in the sense that “it switches emphasis from opportunities to privileges and benefits.” He argues that federal character principle is a legal weapon put in place to regulate appointments, promotions, security of tenure and severance in every government department. The reference to the phrase “disadvantaged groups” in the area of educational opportunities means that “special consideration should be given to candidates from the Northern provinces and other areas where educational facilities were more backward than elsewhere” (Gboyega, 1989:166). The awkward application of the federal character principle tends to pose challenges to administrative effectiveness in the Nigerian public service through the circumscription of merit. This implies that a top performing candidate can be ignored in favour of less performing candidate just for the reason of representativeness. In emphasizing the shortcomings of the application of the federal Character principle in Nigeria, Gboyega (1989: 178) writes that issues of making public institutions reflect the federal character was taken up haphazardly giving rise to arbitrariness and victimization of some unfortunate public servants. Ekeh (1989: 34) taking a similar position argues that “the most radical and damaging application of federal character has been in the bureaucracies and public services of the federation, where permanent secretaries have been kicked around, removed and sometimes dismissed”. The argument of Ekeh (1989: 34) is that federal character principle “has invaded the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy as well as other governmental bodies that normally require some protection against the vagaries of politics”. Ojo (1999), from the equitable representation point of view, sees the federal character principle as the conscious and purposeful efforts of the law makers as well other constitutional making body in the federal state of Nigeria to enhance and ensure equitable representation of all the sections and segments of the

country in all state owned institutions including the public service and possible the private sectors of the economy. It is a collective and continuous efforts of the government aimed at not only ensuring numerical equity in the country but it is a policy agenda of the government geared toward equitable representation of the generality of the citizen of Nigeria in all governmental appointments (Bello, 2012). Arguing further, Okpu (1989) sees the federal character policy as correcting mechanism of the government in favor of those sections of the country that has underwent great marginalization under the various military regimes in Nigeria. Further, according to Ezeibe (2012), the federal character is that positive policy reaction aimed at correcting those practices of the previous administration in the area of diversities of the nation. To him, the federal character principle is the deliberate plan cause of action geared towards ensuring the proper distribution of amenities, employment, and governmental projects in the country. Nnoli (1987) conceptualized it from the mediocrity point of view. For him, the federal character policy is not synonymous with mediocrity neither does it intent to replace serving employers from another section of the country with the existing ones not adequately represented in the country, rather is to ensure firm participation of all in respective of the background. Ayoade (2010) explains further when he stated that subjecting recruitment and promotion to federal character discriminates against merit and it is unfair to certain section, hence the principles itself is self discriminatory. The federal character principle to Chukwuma (2007) has become a mechanism for employment both qualified and unqualified people into the civil of the country. Longe (1987) recognized the need for employment to reflect the federal character policy but caution must be taken so that it is not done at the expense of merit without which work place efficient can be achieved.

The Nigerian Public Sector

The public sector consists of governments and all publicly controlled or publicly funded agencies, enterprises, and other entities that deliver public programs, goods, or services (Institute of Internal Auditors; 2011). After the achievement of independence by most African countries in the late 1950s and 1960s, the public sector was widely regarded as the pivot that would promote socio-economic development (Ayee, 2005). Primarily, the public sector, which includes several institutions functioned to make and implement decisions with regard to interests of various kinds, was to provide goods and services to citizens based on “realization and representation of public interests and its possession of unique public qualities compared to business management” (Haque, 2001). With the support of donor countries, states had become involved in virtually every aspect

of the African economy by the end of 1960 (Tanzi, 1995).

As at 2007, the Nigerian public Service was described as being oversized and poorly remunerated which resulted in poor service delivery. Public sector recruitment under military regimes had resulted in an oversized and under skilled work force in which often did not have the appropriate technical skills needed for their assignments (Okonjo-Iweala and Osafo-Kwaoko, 2007). Hallmarks of public enterprises in Nigeria include: low profitability and low efficiency, poor accounting and reporting systems (Obi, 1986), Lewis (1990) gives reasons for these as: a lack of accountability and poor management due to political and bureaucratic interference. The Development Assistance Committee of the OECD describes the Private Sector as “a basic organizing principle for economic activity where private ownership is an important factor, where markets and competition drive production and where private initiative and risk-taking set activities in motion” (DAC, 1994). In Nigeria, the private sector is said to include any self-employed person or any employer of labour who does not belong to the government or public sector (Jerome, 1999). In general terms, the public sector consists of governments and all publicly controlled or publicly funded agencies, enterprises, and other entities that deliver public programs, goods, or services. It is not; however, always clear whether any particular organization should be included under that umbrella. Therefore, it is necessary to identify specific criteria to help define the boundaries.

The concept of public sector is broader than simply that of core government and may overlap with the not-for-profit or private sectors. For the purposes of this guidance, the public sector consists of an expanding ring of organizations, with core government at the center, followed by agencies and public enterprises. Around this ring is a gray zone consisting of publicly funded contractors and publicly owned businesses, which may be, but for the most part are not, part of the public sector. Public sector organizations may exist at any of four levels:

- International (multistate entities or partnerships).
- National (an independent state).
- Regional (a province/state within a national state).
- Local (a municipal-level body such as a city or county).

Relationship between Federal Character Principle and Productivity

Findings from the responses of the interviewees revealed that there is less connection between productivity and federal character. The researcher in one of the questions sought to find out if the principle of federal character gives rise to increase in productivity with regards to the Nigerian public sector. Answers from most of the

respondents support the view that the federal character principle only gives rise to group-interest satisfaction but has less to do with productivity. Some respondents bemoaned the fact that even in allotting opportunities accruing from this principle of federal character; the really qualified are ignored for those with connection to the influential. Most times these connected individuals lack the requisite competence or passion to do the job with dexterity. Competence and passion are two elements that must be present in discussing productivity. The worker must have the necessary ability and knowledge of the job. He or she must equally love the job in order to give his or her best. A respondent tells of an individual employed to teach in a university department without proper certifications in the discipline he resumed job in. Still, the young man got the job because he was connected to a stakeholder in the institution. The resulting consequence was disastrous for the young man, the students and the whole department. In a nutshell thus, the researcher discovered here that there is little or no relationship between federal character principle and productivity in the public sector with particular reference to the federal ministry of education. This particular policy alternative is mismanaged in Nigeria and has no meaningful impact on productivity.

Negative Effect of Federal Character Principle on Productivity

The researcher discovered that consequent to the little or no relationship between federal character principle and productivity in the Nigerian public sector, the effect is disastrous. The willful jettisoning merit according to many respondents interviewed has reflected poorly on the nation's public sector. The federal character principle is considered a foundation for enthroneing mediocrity in the Nigeria educational system. A typical example is 2018 admission into federal government unity schools.

For many parents and stakeholders in the education sector, the public notice by the National Examination Council (NECO) may well be the start of another unending controversy over who eventually makes it into the final admission list, and from what region of the country. Not that the whining is an unnecessary fuss by some losers who failed in their bid to secure a slot in the unity arrangements exactly. The griping has always been that the admission policy into those federal colleges is skewed in favour of the North even though the preliminary intent of the unity colleges is to foster unity among Nigeria's over 300 ethnic nationalities. To keep the hope of getting on the admission list alive, the cut-off mark system requires candidates from states in the South-East and South-West to score significantly higher marks than their counterparts from the North, or those states dubbed educationally disadvantaged (Lawal, 2019:39).

In other words, Iyabo (2019) noted that a pupil from the South seeking admission into any of the unity schools must score at least 140 points out of a possible 300 to stand a chance of securing admission. But a candidate from the North doesn't need to stress himself as such in order to be considered for admission. The cut-off mark for a male pupil from Yobe State in the 2018/2019 session is two. It is four points for the male candidate from Zamfara while the male candidate from Taraba State only needs three points out of 300 to be a proud student of any of the federal government colleges he so chooses. But the minimum score is 139 for any male or female pupil from Anambra State nursing the hope of getting place in a unity college.

The full list of cut-off marks for the 36 states and FCT in the 2018 academic session will perplex any optimist in the unity arrangement actually. Abia 130; Adamawa 62; Akwa-Ibom 123; Anambra 139; Bauchi 35; Bayelsa 72; Benue 111; Borno 45; Cross River 97; Delta 131; Ebonyi 112; Edo 127; Ekiti 119; Enugu 134; Gombe 58; Imo 138; Jigawa 44; Kaduna 91; Kano 67; Katsina 60; Kebbi 9 (male) 20 (female); Kogi 119; Kwara 123; Lagos 133; Nasarawa 58; Niger 93; Ogun 131; Ondo 126; Osun 127; Oyo 127; Plateau 97; Rivers 118; Sokoto 9 (male) 13 (female); Taraba 3 (male) 11 (female); Yobe 2 (male) 27 (female); Zamfara 4 (male) 2 (female) and FCT Abuja 90. From the records, registrations for the 2018 Common Entrance Examinations indicate that a total of 71, 294 young minds sat for the examination, a little less than the 81,930 that sat for the same entrance examination in 2017. Lagos State came top of the registration list with 24,465 candidates, same as in 2017, while the Federal Capital Territory came next with 7, 699 candidates and Rivers State with 4,810 candidates. Zamfara State, however, had 28 candidates; Kebbi registered 50 pupils, while Taraba had 95 candidates (Lawal, 2019:44).

After 50 years of Independence, the government of the so called disadvantaged regions ought to have done something to address the situation. You cannot continue to spoon-feed a child and expect that same child to grow, mature and be independent. A student from Abia scores 130 in the Federal Common Entrance exam, yet it's almost impossible to gain admission in the school of his choice, yet another child from Zamfara will score less than 5 and gains same admission seamlessly. How do you encourage such a child that hard work and merit pays? Yet, in the spirit of diversity than unity, there are only 12 Unity Schools in the entire South-East, 18 in the South-West and 16 in the South-South where more than 65 percent of candidates are said to have come from. North-East has 15 schools; North Central has 24 while North-West has a total of 18 federal government colleges. No matter how much they try to explain

the necessity of this wide disparity in cut-off marks and catchment areas, the rationale has always come out hollow and trite to a crowd of Nigerians.

Prof. Abdul Rashid Garba, the Registrar, National Examination Council (NECO) during the National Common Entrance Examination (NCEE) in Abuja in 2015 said the score alone does not determine whether or not a child is admitted. The NECO boss told newsmen that in every state, ranking is done. The release of another discriminatory admission cut-off mark by the Ministry of Education for the 2018/2019 admission into the unity schools forced the apex Igbo socio-cultural organisation, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, to pillory the Federal Ministry of Education for continuing in its discriminatory cut-off point in federal government colleges in Nigeria. In a statement in April 2018, the group moaned that under the guise of educationally disadvantaged areas, some states are unduly favoured with very low cut-off marks while others have unacceptably high cut-off points. The statement read: “For instance, whereas Abia State has 65 points for male and female, some states in the North have as low as seven points for female and 10 points for male. This cannot continue. And funny enough, when products of this unjust system graduate, the same so-called educationally disadvantaged specie will get jobs and preferential treatment before his ‘advantaged’ colleague (Iyabo, 2019)

In July 2018, Randolph Iwo Oruene Brown, representing Degema/Bonny Federal Constituency in the House of Representatives, challenged the House Committee on Basic Education and Services to investigate the varied cut-off marks for admission into unity schools in northern states, consequent upon the decision of the NCEEB Board to peg 65 percent cut-off mark for students from South-East, while it reduced that of Zamfara State in the North-West to 14 percent and 12 percent for male and female respectively. Iyabo (2019:61) while citing the words of Hon. Oruene Brown stated, “I am worried that some students have to meet a cut-off mark of 65 percent from Abia State and in Zamfara, the males have cut-off mark of 14 percent while their female counterparts have 12 percent cut-off marks. This portends danger and discrimination as one expects them to end up in the same university and to study the same course”. One wonders what will be the productive effect of these students when they are sent into labour markets. Hence, their productivity cannot be compared with their counterparts from the south. It becomes unquestionable why there are high beams of productivity in the southern than in the northern section of the country.

Again, look at all the appointments the president has made so far, over 90% from the north with the emphasis that they were based on merit. The question is how comes, when it comes to appointment, they are hiding under merit to appoint only their own, but when it comes to exams and admission into Federal institutions, they bring in Federal character. The government should be an advocate of merit, hard work, transparency, objectivity and empirical selection process. That way you encourage everybody to work hard for whatever he/she wants.

Further, in 2016, the appointments were made in the federal ministry of education for the following offices: the National Universities Commission (NUC), Prof. Abubakar Adamu Rasheed; Nigerian Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), Prof. Lilian Salami; Universal Basic Education Board (UBEB), Dr. Hameed Bobboyi; National Library of Nigeria (NLN), Prof. Lanre Aina; and National Examinations Council (NECO), Prof. Charles Uwakwe. Others were: National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NCMLA&NE), Prof. Abba Haladu; Nomadic Education Commission (NEC), Prof. Bashir Usman; National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB), Prof. Ifeoma Isiugo-Abanihe; Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), Prof. Sunday Ajiboye; Computer Registration Council of Nigeria (CRCN), Afolabi Aderinto; National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Prof. Bappah Aliyu; and Tertiary Education Tax Fund (TETFund), Dr. Abdullahi BichiBaffa. The rest were: National Teachers Institute (NTI), Prof. Garba Dahuwa Azare; Librarian Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), Prof. Michael Afolabi; National Mathematical Centre, Sheda (NMC), Prof. Steven Ejugwu Onah; Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), Prof. Ishaq Olarenwaju Oloyode; and National Institute of Nigerian Languages (NINLAN), Prof. Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche. The following four Chief Executive Officers retained their positions. They are : Prof Samaila Junaidu of Nigeria Educational Research & Development Council (NERDC); Prof. Raauf Adebisi, Nigerian French Language Village Badagry, (NFLV); Dr. Mas'ud A. Kazaure, National Board For Technical Education (NBTE); and Prof Muhammad Mu'az of National Arabic Language Village, Maiduguri, Borno State (NALV). From investigation carried out, many of these came from a particular section of the country particularly northeast and northwest.

This mediocrity is witnessed in the engagement of individuals lacking the requisite knowledge and passion of a particular field who in turn produce outputs lacking in quality and standard. The Nigerian university is another proven instance of the bad

effect of federal character. Today the nation produces unemployable graduates who sit and complain about how difficult life is without having the requisite skills to survive. Consequently, the effect of federal character on the Nigeria public sector can simply be adjudged as bad and discouraging. While the principle may have been borne out of good intention, the researcher discovered that it bears little or no positive impact to the society. Socio-economic changes revolve only around those who are connected to the political class leaving the greater population stranded and in need. In this regard, the application of the federal character principle has failed to offer credible solutions to administrative ineffectiveness in the Nigerian public service and has actually become a drag on sustainable development. The implication of the foregoing is that unethical behaviour among public officials and low productivity in the Nigerian public service can be explained by the appointment of incompetent personnel through the application the federal character principle that makes it possible for people from the different segments of the Nigerian society to be represented in government without due consideration for merit and quality training to enhance productivity.

North versus South Politics

The researcher discovered in the course of the research that there are north versus south politics associated with the issue of retaining or rejection principle of federal character. The north seemingly favours the federal character principle while the south favours the principle of merit. The researcher learnt subsequently that the reason for these different standpoint boils down to consistent quest for regional/ethnic influence. While the north has more states in number and appears disadvantaged compared to the south in merit, the south has less states but has an upper hand over the north in merit. Thus, each region/tribe advances their narratives in favour of their respective advantages.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The federal character principle was to solve problem of representational equity in Nigeria which arose as a result of the plurality nature of the Nigerian State. Bello (2012) blamed this problem of representational equity on the unequal relationship between the two major halves of the country- North and South. Bello (2012) further accounted that creation of states in Nigeria was a bid to solve this nagging problem of North-South imbalance; yet the problem remained unsolved till date. The federal character principle as witnessed in the course of this study was also an attempt to solve this nagging problem of inequality. Still the problem North-South imbalance remains and reflects in all the policies and decisions made in the country. The habit of

pathological mutual suspicion among the regions and ethnic groups resident in the country continues to constitute a clog in the wheel of national development and growth. The two regions of the nation continue to manifest attitudes capable of causing national disintegration and see eventually to the end of the country.

The issue in discourse here is productivity of the public sector especially the federal ministry of education and the impact of federal character to this regard. While the outcome of the study maintains that there is nothing wrong with the Federal Character principle, its application towards attaining maximum level of productivity in the nation remains a problem. Some persons are in the error of misconstruing federal character principle to mean the absence of merit and appropriate qualification. Applying federal character does not mean that coming from a given region or ethnic group becomes an automatic qualification. A person must merit an opportunity or position before it is allotted.

Federal character had become a divisive instrument instead of an integrative one. People who are favoured end up having greater affinity to their ethnic group given that it is the platform to their elevation, while those who are marginalized see it as an instrument to suppress them in spite of their sterling qualities, thereby bonding with those of their group who share the same fate. As such, federal character has become a divisive rather than integrative mechanism in the country.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were considered germane in the light of this study:

- Government authorities should go back to the drawing board and study the federal character principle and subsequently apply the policies the way the framers of the policy envisaged.
- The federal character principle must be seen to give succour to the weak and marginalized, and limit the power of the strong, and to further empower the already superfluously powerful. The policy must not be ran in such a manner to constitute reverse development trend by deliberately putting on hold the progress of the nation through encouragement of mediocrity over merit.
- There should be a blend of merit in the implementation of the federal character principle especially in the appointment of officers into the civil service system as the best personnel are required to achieve the development which the nation needs.

- In order to ensure administrative efficiency in the civil service, only competent and qualified manpower should be engaged and where there are qualified people by merit, then federal character can apply to ensure that no section or state is marginalized.
- The federal government should ensure those critical infrastructures are provided in all states of the federation to remove the appellation disadvantaged state.

References

Newspaper

- Adamolekun, L. (2008, March 26). *The vanguard Newspaper* Let us Debate Federalism.p.17.
- Nzeshi, O. (2012, March 11) “The Quest to Amend Federal Character Commission Act”. *This Day Newspaper* (Lagos). pp. 97-98.

Books

- Afigbo, A. (1989). ‘Federal Character: Its Meaning and History’ in P. Ekeh and E. Osaghae. (eds) *Political Restructuring in Nigeria* Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Agbodiike, C.C. (2004), ‘Federal Character Principle and National Integration||’. In Amuwo, K; Agbaje, A; Suberu, R and Herault, G. (eds) *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spetrum Books Ltd.
- Ekeh, P. P. (1989). ‘The Structure and Meaning of federal Character in the Nigerian Political System’. In Ekeh, P. P. &Osaghae, E. E. (eds). *Federal Character and Federalism in Nigeria*. (pp 19 – 44). Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Ekhatior, V. E. (2002). *Rudiments of Public Administration*. Lagos: Joyce Graphic Printer and Publisher.
- Gboyega, A. (1989) “The Public Service and Federal Character.” In P.P. Ekeh & Osaghae, E.E. (eds) *Federal Character and Federalism in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books. pp. 164-185.
- Jerome, A. (1999). *Unleashing the Private Sector in Nigeria*. Lagos: Afribank Economic and Financial Review.
- Okpata FO. Politics of staff recruitment and development in Nigerian public service. In: OnweSO, Okpata FO, Duru GJC. (eds.)Readings in Modern Public Administration. Enugu, Nigeria: Jones Communications Publishers; 2011.
- Okonjo-Iweala, N and Osafo-Kwaako, P (2007). “*Nigeria’s Economic Reforms Progress and Challenges*”. The Brookings Institution, Washington DC.
- Olagboye, A., &Fadipe, J. (Eds.). (1998). *Management of Nigerian education: Law, structures and responsibilities*. Ondo: NIEPA.
- Onyeoziri, F. (2002) *Alternative Policy Options for Managing the National Question in Nigeria*. Ibadan: John Archers Publishers.
- Orbach, E. (2003). *The capacity of the Nigerian government to deliver basic education services*. Unpublished report, World Bank, Abuja.
- Suberu, R. I. & Diamond, L. (2004). *Institutional Design, Ethnic Conflict, Management and democracy in Nigeria*. Retrieved online:

DOI:10.1093/0199246467.003.0015

- Tanzi, V. (1995). *"Fiscal Federalism and Decentralization : A review of some efficiency and macroeconomic aspects"*. Paper prepared for the World Bank's Annual Bank Conference on Development Economics, Washington, D.C.: World Bank,
- Tonwe, D.A & Oghator, E. O. (2009) "The Federal Character Principle and Democratic Stability in Nigeria." In Ola, R.F. & Tonwe, D.A. (eds) *Nigerian Public Administration*. Lagos: Amfitop Books. pp. 230-256
- Yoloye, E.A. (1989) Federal character and institutions of higher learning. In: Ekeh PP, Osaghae EE. (eds.) *Federal Character and Federalism in Nigeria*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Heinemann.

Journals

- Adeosun, A.B. (2011), —Federal Character Principle and National Integration: A Critical Appraisal|| . *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance Volume 2, No.2.4 Quarter IV*.
- Aderonke, M. (2013) Federal Character Principle as a Recipe for National Integration in Nigeria: An Overview *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Science* 2 (6) 65-84
- Akpanabia, N.H. (2012) Federal Character Principle as a Pitfall for National Development in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective, *Elixir Human Resource Management*, 47A: 9155-9158.
- Asaju, K & Egberi, T. (2015) Federal Character and National Integration in Nigeria: The need for Discretion and Interface *Review of History and Political Science* Vol. 3 No. 1 Pp 126- 134
- Bamisaie, O.A. (2014) Political parties and national integration in Nigeria 1960-1983. In: Eleazu UO.(ed.) *Nigeria: The First 25 Years*. Lagos: Infodata Limited 2003. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies (IJIMS)*, Vol 2, No.2, 1-10. 10
- Bello, M.L. (2012) Federal Character as a Recipe for National Integration: The Nigerian Paradox, *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 3(3): 1-17.
- Development Assistance Committee. (1994). *Orientations for Development Cooperation in Support of Private Sector Development*. Paris: OECD/DAC.
- Duruji, M.M., Segun, J., Olanrewaju, I.P. et al. (2014) *Ethnicization of University Education and National Development: The Nigerian Experience*. 8th International Journal of Technology, Education and Development Conference

- (INTED 2014), Valencia, Spain;
- Duze, C.O. (2012) Educational Policies/Programmes' Effect on Attrition Rates in Primary Schools in Nigeria. *International Journal of Education Administration and Policy Studies*, 4(2): 38-44. doi: 10.5897/IJEAPS10.040.
- Edigin, L. U (2010) Federal Character and National Stability in Nigeria 1979-2000 *Journal of Research in Nation Development* 8 (2) 23-34
- Ekundayo, H.T. and Adedokun M.O. (2009) The Unresolved Issue of University Autonomy and Academic Freedom in Nigeria University, Humanity and Social Science Journal, 4(1): 61-67.
- Folarin S, Olanrewaju IP, Ajayi LY. (2014) Cultural Plurality, National Integration and the Security Dilemma in Nigeria, *Covenant University Journal of Politics and International Affairs*, 2(1): 81-92.
- Gambari, I.A (1994), "Nigeria Today and to the Year 2000|| . ECPER Journal Volume II No.1 PP 1-16. Cited in Bello, M.L. (2012), —Federal Character as a Recipe for National Integration.The Nigerian Paradox|| . *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance Volume 3, No.3.3 Quarter III*.
- Gberevbie, E. D. (2010) Strategies for Employee Recruitment, Retention and Performance: Dimension of the Fedral Civil Service of Nigeria *African Journal of Business Management* Vol. 4(8), pp. 1447-1456
- Haque, M.S. (2001). "The Diminishing Publicness of Public Service under the Current Mode of Governance", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1
- Lewis P. M., (1990), "State, Economy and Privatization in Nigeria", in: Ezra Suleiman and John Waterbury (Eds), *The Political Economy of Public Sector Reform and Privatization*. Boulder (Col.): Westview Press, pp. 210-233.
- Nwogwugwu, N, Sosanya, O. (2015) 'Effect of federal character on appointment into the civil service system: A study of Federal Ministry of Education'; *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (Nigerian Chapter)* Vol. 3, No. 11,
- Obi, A.W. (1986), "Industrial Public Enterprises as an Instrument of Development Policy: The Nigerian Experiment", *Cahiers Africainsd'administrationpublique*, No.26, pp. 5-22.
- Obiyan, S. T. and Akindele, S. T. (2002). 'The Federal Character Principle and Gender Representation in Nigeria'. *Journal of Social sciences*. 6 (4), 241 – 246.
- Ojo, E. (2009) 'Federalism and the Search for National Integration in Nigeria', *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 3(9): 384-395.

- Okorie, C. O. & Greg, E. (2013) 'Federal Character Principles, Nation Building and National Integration in Nigeria: Issues and Options'. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 4(16), 33-40
- Osemeke, M. (2011), "Problems and Prospects of Private Sector Organizations in Nigeria". *International Journal of Business and Management*. Vol. 6, No
- Salawu, B. and Hassan, A. O. (2011) 'Ethnic Politics and Its Implications for Survival of democracy in Nigeria'. *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research* Vol. 3(2) pp. 28-33
- Yoloye, E. A. (1989) Federal character and institutions of higher learning. In: Ekeh PP, saghae EE. (eds.) *Federal Character and Federalism in Nigeria*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Heineman.