

FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLES: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

¹Timothy Onimisi, ²Ku Hasnita Ku Samsu, ³Mohd Mahadee bin Ismail,
⁴Murni binti Wan Mohd Nor

^{1,2,3,4}Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia

Abstract: One of the major problems confronting Nigeria as a country is the high level of inequality and marginalization across Nigeria. Therefore, the Federal government of Nigeria established the Federal Character Principle as a policy measure to check the problem of inequality and marginalization that has led to the lopsidedness in the country. The objective of this paper therefore is to conceptualize the Federal Character Principles as a policy measure aimed at ending perceived marginalization and inequality in the Nigeria. Secondary source of data collection was used for this paper; specifically scholarly journals, text books, conference/seminar papers, articles, handbooks, governmental official document and dictionaries was consulted and used for this study. For the purpose of analyses the study adopt the content analysis of scholarly input with the decision making theory as it analytical framework. The research discovered that the whole essence of the establishment of the Federal Character Principles as a policy measure for equitable distribution of governmental activities in the Nigeria remains an admirable policy mechanism of the Federal Government of Nigeria but its interpretation and implementation is far from its main objectives. Hence, this paper recommends a strict adherence to policy guidelines and massive orientation is needed to draw the attention of the general public to the major objectives of the Federal Character Principles.

Keywords: Federal Character Principles, Employment Distribution, States, Policy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The country called Nigeria is multiethnic in nature divided majorly into North and South. The Northern section of the country has mainly the Hausa, Fulani, the Ebiras, Kanuri, Igalas and many others ethnic groups, while the Southern section are dominated by the Yoruba, Edo, Esan, Ibo, Urhobos, the Ibibios, Ijaws and so many other ethnic groups (Adeosun, 2011). In fact Nigeria as a heterogeneous society has over 374 ethnic groups who have been in constant interaction and continuous struggle for power, wealth, position and influence (Salawu and Hassan, 2011).

Historically, Nigeria is a creation of British government through its colonization, though there has been noticeable changes in the country in her 56 years of independence, but the pangs of birth still very much hang in Nigeria (Osifeso, 2011). The 1914 amalgamation of both the Northern and Southern geographic sections which was done for administrative and economic conveniences failed to unite its people. This is further understood with Frederick Lugard's letter to the then Secretary of state for the colonies that the continuous separation of the Northern and Southern colonies cannot guarantee them the access to the sea as the North has no access to the sea except through the South, and the annual revenue from the South and the imperial treasury has kept the North going hence for administrative and financial purpose "...it is expected that the unification of the North and South would relieve the imperial treasury of the necessity to making sure yearly contributions" (Odumosu, 1993:3).

Thus the creation of the country Nigeria by joining people of diverse origin, culture, tradition and regions into an artificial political entity was indeed a merger of convenience for the British colonial government who sought to heavily consolidate their economic and socio-political interest by the merger and ironically these were largely a marriage of inconvenience for

the various groups, indigenous people and ethnic cleavages who were not consulted before the merger (Babatunde, 2015). The policy of the British authority culminated in a sort of polarization of the nation along tribal/regional lines and the colonialist forcefully sure the integration of the people which was subsequently followed by the colonialist egregious policy agenda of divide and rule was a great disservice (Osifeso, 2011; Babatunde, 2015). The practice of divide and rule consolidated the deepening division and spilled into the social life of the people, with the south exposed to western education/Christianity, while the north was quarantined against the possible influence by the south, hence widening the division, marginalization and inequity became more glaring (Osifeso, 2011).

However with the emergence of the modern Nigeria, the government formulated policy geared towards unification and “Nigerianization”. It is imperative to note that the Nigerianization policy created to ensure equality, unification and guarantee equal opportunities for all Nigerians obviously failed. Hence, the federal government of Nigeria came up with the Federal Character Principles to put a permanent stop to the problem of inequity and perceived marginalization as expressed by most parts of the country. It is against this back drop that this paper sort conceptualize the Federal Character Principles as a policy agenda aimed at ending marginalization and inequity in Nigeria

2. DEFINITION OF FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLES

Asaju and Egberi (2015:4) defined the federal character principles as both reaction as well as a system; the principles 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).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical base of this paper on federal character principles is anchored on the decision making theory. The imperative for this theoretical framework lies in it identification of the significance of decision in institutions in area of who to recruit, 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.

One of the major assumptions of the decision making theory is that institutions are rational inn taking rational decisions in order to facilitate the effect and smooth running of institutions in their quest to achieve the institution aims and objectives (Miller, 2003). This rational decision to Simon (1976) is a style of behavior which is appropriated to a specific given goal within the limits imposed on it. Decisions are the proposed course of action aimed at realizing the purpose for which an institution is established knowing fully that decision making remains a vital aspect of institutional objectives (Iyayi, 2002; Tonwe, 1994; Gberevbie, 2010).

The substantive nationality stemming from the decisions properly placed at achieving to given goals within the limited frame with a given conditions and constraints while psychological procedural rationality is stemmed from appropriate deliberation outcome (Simon, 1976). Decision on whom to recruit, what procedural methods to apply in order to ensure equality and the appropriate design to be adopted to fit into the federal character principles to guarantee wide spread employment distribution remains a crucial decisions an institution would have to make if must achieve its objective of ending marginalization of some sections of the country.

The application of the decision making theory in an institution shows that most decision taken are based on some elements of egocentrism rather than altruism (Iyayi, 2002). And decision that are characterized by egocentric act has a lot of political undertone 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 alternative before decision are taken and decision are on subjective views of a particular problem, time and resources maybe a constraint in identifying and evaluating all other policy options before decisions are taken.

Despite the weaknesses, it is imperative to note that the decision making theory was adopted in this paper because it states the important of decision in an institution as a catalyst in the desire to realize goals, especially in the case of the federal character principle of Nigeria whose main objective is to ensure equitable and fairness distribution of employment in the country in order to end perceptible marginalization. Due to the uniqueness of the theory an understanding of it could help the institutional quest for equity and fairness, thus it is right to posit that the success and failure of any institution lies on the decisions take by it.

4. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE POLICY OF FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLES

Nigeria and most other African countries are faced with the issue of how to achieve adequate and equal distribution of employment across all the spheres of the nation as one mechanism of ensuring and putting an end to marginalization. The most important strategy so far adopted by Nigeria is the federal character, a phrase which clearly came out of the constitutional drafting committee (CDC) in the 1970's where two groups emerged, the realist and ostrich (Okolo, 2014). To the realist in order to guarantee adequate representation and to avoid predominance of some state over the other in employment distribution there is the need for provision to ensure this is taking care of, while the group with the ostrich postures accepts that even though marginalization exist but a provision is not needed rather a states and the existing constitution is adequate (Okolo, 2014).

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 nation national unity and to harness the diversities of existing in the country. The Federal character remains the deliberate effort of the government designed to accommodate less privilege sections of the country (Olagunju, 1987). Similarly, Afigbo (1989) see the federal character principle as distinctive aim of the citizen of the country initialed 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.

Akinwale (2014) was concern about the representation of the citizen in the national appointment, the role of the federal character cannot be overemphasized especially of ensuring distribution of employment across the civil of Nigeria, as only this can guarantee adequate representation in the national appointment, hence he see the federal character principle as a significant but less discuss area in Nigeria. To Wahab (2009) the federal character principle is valuable as it ensure the representation of the sections of the country, but he sees as policy measure that negates standard principle of merit in the overall employment process which can lead to poor work quality as a result of seeking balance in the political system of the country.

Similar to Akinwale and Wahab, 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 Gberebie (2010) see the principle as going beyond just euphemizing ethnic balancing which has the able to solve the problem and fear of marginalization but the policy has what it takes stabilize the needed developmental quest of the country.

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 the it from the mediocrity point of view, to 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) explain 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.

While using the report of the public service review commission Chukwuma (2007) concludes that the federal character principle looks prospective and discriminatory and it does not actually give the impression of a conscious and deliberate effort to secure the best hands in the country since the objective methods of accessing the performance of people in the service of Nigeria is not guarantee with the presence of the federal character principle

Suberu (2001) has an observation on the federal character principle using varying degrees of assessment of the principle from the two the major sections of the country. He observed that the Northerners sees the policy has a tool that ensures equal representation of the people in the bureaucracy of the government, while the Southern section of the country see it as discriminatory tool of the government in the employment process of the federal republic of Nigeria. Supporting the assertion of Suberu, Majekodunmi (2013) was of the belief that the establishment of the principle by the successive governments in country was to address and mitigate the problem of marginalization in order to ensure a peaceful, stable and united Nigeria. He belief that the federal character principle is an integrative mechanism aimed at ensuring fairness and equal representation of the various units and sections of the country who have been marginalized in the position of employment, power and position.

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).

Gboyega (1989) sees the federal character principle as a policy measure of the government in Nigeria aimed at correcting the ill of employment distribution under the country long years of military rule in the country. To him, the character principle is that policy established to correct the arbitrary appointment, employment, promotion and removal of public servant in Nigeria by the military government at various times in the history of the nation, hence this is the only sincere measure aimed at putting the citizen in the proper places in the public service of Nigeria. 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 been underwent great marginalization under the various military regimes in Nigeria

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The paper conceptualized the federal character principle in its quest to distribute employment adequately in Nigeria in order to put a stop to the perceived marginalization of some sections of the country against the other. It is imperative to point out that federal character principles is one of the notable policy mechanisms put in place by the government of Nigeria to manage the marginalization in a heterogeneous like Nigeria. However, findings reveal that there seems to be strong and general acceptance amongst scholars that the whole essence of the establishment of the federal character principles as a policy measure for equitable distribution of governmental activities and employments in the country Nigeria remains an admirable policy mechanism of the federal government which can curb the perceived inequality and marginalization across the country Nigeria, but the practical implementation and interpretation of this policy is far from it main objectives, hence this paper recommends the following:

- A strict adherence to policy guideline and implementation plans as spelled out in the Act establishing the federal character principles must be clearly followed in order to end inequality and marginalization
- Massive orientation and awareness is needed by the government to draw the intention of the general public to the major objectives of the federal character principles by this the citizens of Nigeria can awaken to what expect from the agency
- An enforcement unit of the federal character principles should be strengthen in order to carryout it duty of ensuring equitable distribution of employment and fairness and sanction should be carryout on those institution that fails policy agenda

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