

# The Federal Character Principles in Nigerian Public Service Exercise Towards An Output Efficiency At The National Planning Commission (NPC)

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**Abstract-** *The main purpose of this research work was to examine the federal character principles in Nigerian public services exercise towards an output efficiency at the national planning commission (NPC) its relationship with the recruitment exercise in the public service. This was prompted by the fact that there is growing disenchantment in some quarters about the implementation of the federal character principle, which they believe leads to the violation of the merit principle and lowering of standards in the recruitment of personnel into the public service which will serve as a way of recruiting and promoting less competent staff into the service resulting inevitably to poor performance. Therefore, the objectives of the study stressed the following; To examine the extent to which the federal character is jeopardizing merit in the recruitment and of personnel in the public service; To identify probable problems in the application of the federal character principle on the recruitment of personnel into the public service; To examine the overall implications of federal character principle on the recruitment exercise in the public service. In conclusion we can agree that recruitment exercise in NPC Abuja is based on federal character principle, the application of federal character principle system jeopardize the merit in the recruitment exercise at NPC Abuja. The work attempted to uncover the critical issue involved in the federal character principle system through the review of related literature on the functions of the federal character commission, composition and powers of the commission, general principle and formulae for recruitment process, federalism and the federal structure of Nigeria. Etc. From the finding of the research work the researcher discovered that the federal character principle system has some deficiencies. The actual application of the federal character principle negates the merit system of civil/public service in which the NPC is not an exception since appointments and promotion are not always based on merit. The research recommended that the application of merit system or meritocracy should become the Linchpin in the recruitment of personnel into the Nigerian public service in order not to endanger standards and professionalism. It was also recommended that there is the need to strike a balance between the applications of federal character principle in public services.*

**Keywords-** Federalism, Federal character, National planning commission, Public services.

## I. INTRODUCTION

This world today is increasingly seen as political arrangements that afford an opportunity for the myriad diversities within a political system to find legitimate expression. Elazar (1993) has rightly opined that the federal principle is intrinsically an expression of political diversity and accommodation without in any way undermining the basic commitment to the sovereignty of the nation. Shastri, (2001:1).The federal character principle which was enshrined in the 1979 Constitution of Nigeria seeks to ensure appropriate linguistic, ethnic, religious and geographic diversity of the country. The introduction of federal character policies in Nigerian state is to foster unity, peace, equal ability to equal access to state resources and promote the integration of the less advantage states for better improvement and good conditions of living in the country (Bamidele and Ikulege, 2004).

Nigeria is a federal society comprising 36 states structure with a population of more than 180 million people and has more than 250 ethnic groups, which necessitate an arrangement that could accommodate people from the different segments of the country in the public bureaucracy (Gberevbie, 2012:187-210). The notion of federal character presupposes the existence of a federal society. However, as a federal state, Nigeria is faced with the challenge of how to imbibe the principle of federalism in practice. As a result, the 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). The federal character system as enshrined in the constitution of Nigeria is to ensure equitable distributions of bureaucratic and political roles in the public service at federal, states and local government levels. The objectives of the policy are to foster national unity and give every Nigerian a sense of belonging in the country. In support of this view Usman(2004;117) said that it was an effort to readdress the unbalanced structure and ethnic domination in government so that national integration could be achieved. The federal character principle which is implemented under the federal character commission is therefore designed and initiated to correct adverse impact resulting from opportunities and

resources provided by the federal government to the citizens of the country that appears neutral but have a discriminatory effect on a protected group. The federal character principle is therefore structured to ensure strong and indivisible nation based on justice and fairness, while also ensuring that a sense of belonging of all Nigerians is still maintained. As laudable as the above policy maybe, and the empowerment of the concept in the nation's constitution, its application has remain a debatable topic to which some critics have claimed that the policy comprise the merit system which will create an enabling environment for those that are only qualified to be employed into the Nigerian civil service, thereby fostering quality service rendering for the development of the country.

Bodunrin (2003) also in assessing the Federal Character from the merit perspective asserts that the federal character principle is counter- productive. Therefore it is important to note that, efficient manpower utilization is determined through effective credible recruitment. But Idumange(2008) specifically lists two areas where the Federal government has been most successful in implementing the federal character principle; The National Youth Service Corps(NYSC) and recruitment into the Armed Forces. Thus this ensures Nigerians get their own share of the 'national cake' rather than agitations which has prevented another civil war in the country.

To further consolidate on the gains of the 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).

Also the annual reports from the publications of the federal character commission shows that a lot of complaints arose as a result of breach of federal character principles by some establishments for example in the federal character monitor, a quarterly publication of the commission (2008:5) accused and summoned the Nigeria communication commission over breach of federal character principles. More so, the inefficiency of the policy in recruiting manpower potentials into the organization and the selection of employees which is not based on merit but the federal character principles are some of the problems that affect the efficient performance of the Nigerian public service (which means that all the geo-political zones will be given equal chance for the appointment and output-efficiency). In recent development, there have been discriminatory attitudes in many federal institutions in terms of students enrolment, appointment of public offices etc. Consequently, there has been gross misconduct in the area of employment due to sectional identity and nepotism by those in authority in the Ministries and parastatals. Federal institutions seem to recruit on the basis of nepotism and favouritism without minding the effect of such practices to the efficiency of service delivery and quality of output to the nation. Even when the federal character principle is observed, the institution will not consider efficiency of the candidate as long as they are relatives, and will not follow the due process thereby cutting corners in the recruitment exercise.

## II. LITERATURE

Federalism according to Tekena (2011) is that form of government where the component units of a political organization participate in sharing powers and functions in a cooperative manner through the combined forces of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity, among others, which tends to pull their people apart. To Suberu (2009) 'Federalism' involves constitutional and irrevocable division of governmental powers and functions on a territorial basis within a single country. It entails the division of power between central and constituent authorities. Although the arrangement of functions and responsibilities within a federal state is usually based on some constitutional or legal framework, the constitution may be a poor guide in determining whether a political system is federal or otherwise. To this school of thought, federalism should be understood not just from the narrow perspective or confines of legal formulation but from the general and systemic interaction of socio-cultural and political factors.

Nigeria is a federation with 36 States and 774 local governments existing in a coordinate and autonomous relationship. Power are shared among the federating unit that makes up the federation i.e. federal, state and local government and each unit has its own autonomous power within its area of jurisdiction usually the federal government have a greater bound of unity with power in the center. However the sharing of power between the center and the component units is in accordance with the constitutional provisions. The federal constitution of Nigeria defined closely the allocation of legislative and executive power between the levels of government; given references to section 4 of the 1999 federal constitution of Nigeria, The constitution provides three lists, the exclusive list, the concurrent list and the residual list. The exclusive list consisted of forty-five provisions on which the federal government only could legislate. The concurrent list contained twenty-nine provisions on which both the federal and states government could legislate, but with the provision that, in the event of any inconsistency in the legislation of the government, federal law will remain supreme. Thus, all subjects or matters not mentioned in the two lists fell to the state government to legislate.

According to Okoli (2004: 109-110) representation is seen in absolute numbers not just between states in the Federation but also between the North and South as collectives. In fact the issue of representation, based on the Federal Character Principle, has unwittingly degenerated into verbal and sometimes acrimonious exchange between the North and South of the country. To those from the northern parts of the country, federal character is synonymous with, therefore a proportional absorption into Federal Institutions

and Establishment. To those from the Southern parts of the country. It means an attempt by the “North” to infiltrate into areas, which they hitherto regarded as “theirs” by right.

According to Gboyega (1989) federal character principle is merely an elite ploy which would not in real sense improve the lot of the common men in whose name it is designed. He cautioned that the application of the principle was likely to create many problems, as grave as that it was supposed to solve. For example, the southerners who are already advanced in terms of education may feel as if the policy was intending to deprive them of jobs for the benefit of the northerners since merit is not the only yardstick. He further opined that even promotion is also tied to ethnic consideration and it affects the esprit de corps of the service. Afigbo (1986) describes the federal character principle as “unsophisticated every day usage” in Nigeria’s multi-ethnic character.

He further said that in this case, to reflect federal character means simply to ensure “Nigerian affairs are not dominated by persons” from a few states or ethnic groups. Ideally, the federal character is basically designed to meet up with ethnic-balancing, but a close look at its operation would reveal a derail from this end. Besides since its adoption, it has not been able to address the problem of under-representation and over-representation with only few instances of working within the spectrum of the federal character formula. To add, to this, is that the federal character may only succeed in reducing the domination of government affairs by some states or ethnic groups but for several reasons such as education imbalance and financial strength of some states or ethnic groups would make them to continuously dominate the helm of the affairs in the country.

Oni (1989) viewed federal character as a means of attaining equality of opportunity for educationally disadvantaged students. He opined that the theory and practice of federal character principles as spelt out in Nigeria constitution with respect to education is meant to eliminate discrimination and build room for equal representation. He later observed that the interpretation of this philosophy may indeed call for a change in the criteria for admissions into institutions of learning in the country. It will be axiomatic to analyze the above idea particularly the concept of equality which cannot be ascertained within the context of Nigeria because even the federal states of United States; Canada and Switzerland which are deemed as classical federal systems could not arrive at equality in all ramifications. Moreover even when for a long term the system operates in the educational setting, it has not brought about equality in education among the regions, states and ethnic groups.

### III. CONCLUSION

The paper observes that the practice of the FC principle in Nigeria suffers from a major contradiction, because it brings about division amongst Nigerians rather than foster unity as was originally intended by its proponents as a policy option for managing the challenge of equal representation of people from different segments of the society in a multi-ethnic state like Nigeria. It submitted that where appropriate recruitment strategies involving the screening of potential employees based on relevant skills, experience and educational qualifications are adopted and the proper staff training and development of the workforce, organizational productivity could be enhanced even where incompetent employees would have been employed through (in some instances), the poor application of federal character principle in Nigerian public service. There are probable problems in the application of federal character principle system on recruitment process in NPC Abuja, The application of the federal character principle system is having implications on the recruitment exercise in NPC Abuja, The application of federal character principle system on the recruitment exercise at NPC Abuja improves workers performance, The Federal Character Commission does not properly supervise the application of the federal character principle and system in the recruitment process at NPC Abuja, that the application of federal character principle system on the recruitment exercise in the public service has not solved the problem of unequal representation across the country, and that there should be the continuous use of the federal character principle system on the recruitment exercise in the public service.

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