



Article

Federal Character and Service Delivery in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study critically evaluates the application of the federal character principle in service delivery within Nigerian public sector organizations. Despite its significance in promoting socio-economic development, the principle faces resource allocation and recruitment challenges amidst Nigeria's demographic diversity. The study proposes a broader interpretation of the principle, encompassing geographic boundaries and addressing religious and ethnic diversity. Employing the New Public Administration Theory, the study utilizes documentary data analysis, revealing disparities in resource allocation and recruitment among regions and ethnic groups. These challenges, linked to the federal character principle, impact employee performance in Nigeria's public sector. The study seeks practical strategies to enhance service delivery and proposes solutions to foster equity in resource allocation and recruitment, contributing to improved service delivery outcomes in Nigeria.

Keywords: Federal character principle, service delivery, Nigerian public sector, resource allocation, recruitment

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, a nation emblematic of its multifarious ethnic and religious tapestry, is emblematic of a dynamic social landscape (Obi, Ewuim, & Nwosu, 2021). The mosaic of this nation encompasses the Northern territories inhabited by the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Igbira, Igalas, and other ethnic groups. At the same time, the Southern terrain hosts the Yoruba, Edos, Urhobos, Ibos, Ibibios, Ijaws, and other smaller ethnic enclaves. Within this intricate backdrop, the confluence of policy formulations and governmental interventions inflected with ethnic and religious dimensions is recurrent and conspicuous. The pursuit of equitable representation across ethnic, religious, and geographical facets constitutes a perpetual litmus test, casting a significant spotlight on governance efficacy since Nigeria's inception in 1960.

As discerned by Osaghae's "Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence" (2002), the intricate tapestry of Nigerian society epitomises the complexities facing deeply fractured societies beset by multifaceted challenges. This schism has its roots in Lord Lugard's 1914 amalgamation initiative, which resulted in the unification of the Northern Nigeria Protectorate and the Southern Nigeria Colony and Protectorate into a single entity. This historical juncture casts an enduring shadow, amplifying the interplay between ethnic and geopolitical factions, exacerbating disparities in resource distribution, and amplifying calls for equitable representation within the public service and broader governance structure.

The roots of the federal character principle find their origins in 1939, a pivotal period marked by Bernard Bourdillon's role in fostering federalism through establishing the North, West, and East regions. After the formal adoption of the federal system of governance and constitution in 1954, the embryonic practise of the federal character gained traction. Its complete institutionalisation, however, took root in 1979—a watershed moment coinciding with Nigeria's reversion to democratic governance and the embrace of a presidential model. The underlying ethos of the federal character principle is rooted in accommodating Nigeria's linguistic, ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity within the realm of public service (Ugoh & Ukpere, 2012). By amplifying the inclusion of minority groups, the principle counteracts sentiments of marginalisation, solidifying national unity and stability. This foundational framework averts the potential dominance of specific states or ethnic cohorts, fostering an echo of the nation's diversity within governmental establishments.

However, the actualization of the federal character principle complicates its admirable goal. The crux of the issue lies in harmonising demographic representation with merit-based selection, particularly in recruitment processes. Critics contend that an excessive focus on demographic diversity may erode meritocracy, undermining the selection of the most qualified candidates. Thus, the discourse grapples with the nuanced interaction between the federal character principle and service delivery within Nigeria's public sector (Ugoh & Ukpere, 2012).

Nigeria faces complex difficulties in a setting that is rife with ethnic diversity and resource allocation inequalities. Although policy endeavours have sought to ameliorate these inequities, they persist, precipitating inter-community conflicts and hindering national cohesion. The federal character principle emerged as a proactive response, aiming to embrace diversity and inclusivity while ensuring equitable

access to opportunities. Nonetheless, as its operational dynamics unfold, concerns arise concerning its influence on service delivery and efficient governance.

This study embarks on an in-depth exploration of the federal character principle and its implications for service delivery within Nigeria's public sector. Through a nuanced analysis of its historical underpinnings, objectives, and ramifications, we aim to decipher the dialectic interplay between the principle's intent and its practical embodiment in public administration. This research contributes to an enhanced comprehension of this pivotal facet of Nigerian governance while offering insights into potential avenues for enhancement and optimisation.

Conceptualizing Federal Character and Service Delivery

Federal Character

Before delving into the review, let's establish a foundational understanding of the federal character principle. Ezeibe (2013) asserts that this principle embodies a deliberate strategy aimed at ensuring the equitable distribution of amenities and government projects within a country. Implicit within this concept is the recognition that the federal character principle is often deployed in response to tangible disparities in culture, tradition, and disparities in both human and natural aspects. With this understanding in place, we can now proceed to examine the specific aspects of the research under review.

According to Olagunju (2014), opportunity Federal character depicts a purposeful construct designed to accommodate interests that may wield less influence but are frequently vocalised with intensity. It entails a strategic arrangement geared towards mitigating the politicisation of emerging requirements via institutional mechanisms. Therefore, this principle warrants adaptation and incremental extension, potentially encompassing the private sector. Federal Character in Nigeria must be viewed from the point of view that the diverse characteristics of the Federal Republic of Nigeria are finding expressions that are described as the characteristics of the plural nature of the federal makeup of the republic.

Ideally, the federal character principle ensures that appointments within public service entities accurately reflect the multifaceted diversity encompassing the nation, encompassing linguistic, ethnic, religious, and geographical dimensions. The delineation unequivocally stipulates that federal character serves as a mechanism to uphold impartiality in public service appointments, potentially superseding expertise considerations and achieving objectives. As defined by the Constitution drafting committee (1976), the federal character principles are:

The distinctive desire of the people 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 that may exist and which it is their desire to nourish and harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria):

The 1979 constitution amended the 1976 definition by dropping the passage in brackets and substituting a reference to "a sense of belonging to the nation as expressed in sections 14 (3) and (4) of this constitution." Section 14 (3) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979, spelled

out the modus operandi of the Federal Character Principles as follows: *The composition of the government of the federation or any of its agencies is 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 loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies.*

Following this stipulation, several additional clauses were incorporated into the constitution to ensure the effective implementation of the federal character principle. These distinct provisions mandate that the management of the activities of central, state, and local governmental entities be executed in a manner that acknowledges the multifarious composition of the populace within their respective spheres of jurisdiction. Furthermore, these provisions emphasise the imperative to cultivate a sentiment of inclusivity and allegiance among all constituent groups within the federation.

Federal character or quota system terminology was integrated into Nigeria's political lexicon through its incorporation by the Constitution Drafting Committee in 1975. The expression "federal character" was initially introduced by the late General Murtala Mohammed during his inaugural speech at the commencement of the Constitution Drafting Committee on October 18, 1975. According to the committee, the federal character principle is the Nigerian people's distinctive desire to foster the nation's integration, cultivate a sense of unity among its populace, and cultivate a sentiment of inclusivity among Nigerian citizens, irrespective of their ethnic lineage, cultural heritage, linguistic distinctions, or religious variations.

Service Delivery

"The concept of service delivery has been in a state of flux. This can be attributed to the evolving nature of public services and the changing expectations of citizens. Conceptualizing service delivery first requires a standard explanation of the term 'service,' which in itself has evolved over time." Service, as defined by Okoye (2014), pertains to a product or activity that fulfils the requirements of a user or applies to a user. For optimal functionality, services should encompass the following attributes:

- Accessibility and timeliness: Available and delivered at a specific time and location that aligns with the user's demands.
- Reliability and dependability: Furnished punctually in accordance with the stipulated user specifications.
- Usability: Presented in formats tailored to the user's preferences, ensuring comprehensive comprehension.
- Functionality: Capable of effectively addressing user requirements.
- Credibility: Instils user confidence for informed decision-making.
- Authenticity: Valid within the context of the decision-making stakeholders.
- Responsiveness and flexibility: Adapt to evolving user necessities.
- Sustainability: Economically viable and consistently applicable over time.
- Scalability: Adaptable to various types of services (Okoye, 2014).

The "service delivery" concept lacks a universal definition, primarily due to its entanglement in a semantic dilemma. This intricacy is evident in the diverse definitions provided by numerous scholars and authors within the literature. Service delivery encompasses providing goods and services in alignment with recipients' expectations, promptly and efficiently catering to citizens. As Akhakpe

(2014) expounded, service delivery signifies the extent and embodiment of excellence within the public service domain. From the perspective of Franz (2011), it entails substantial human engagement, underscoring the significance of effective human resource management, considering that the human component frequently constitutes a pivotal factor within service industries.

A service delivery framework constitutes a compendium of fundamental tenets, benchmarks, regulations, and limitations intended to steer the formulation, establishment, implementation, operation, and eventual cessation of services dispensed by a service provider. Ukere (2014) added that service delivery is a continuous, cyclic process for developing and delivering user-focused services. It is further outlined in four stages, which are:

Stage 1: User Engagement identifying users and understanding their needs, as well as understanding the role of weather, climate, and water-related information in different sectors;

Stage 2: Service Design and Development Process between Users, Providers, , and Partners of creating, designing, and developing services, ensuring user needs are met;

Stage 3: Delivery: producing, disseminating, and communicating data, products, and information (i.e., services) that are fit for purpose and relevant to user needs; and,

Stage 4: Evaluation and Improvement Process: To collect user feedback and performance metrics to continuously evaluate and improve products and services,

According to Nweke (2013), a significant relationship exists between service delivery and performance. Effective service delivery is often a critical determinant of an organization's overall performance and success, as it directly impacts customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and the achievement of organizational goals. Nweke's work underscores the importance of optimizing service delivery processes to enhance performance outcomes in both public and private sector organizations. He added that improved performance leads to enhanced service delivery. Public service delivery is one of the significant challenges facing developing countries, including Nigeria. This should be a top priority for the government if the country is to make substantial progress in socio-economic development. Service delivery is the government's essential task. Government exists, among other reasons, because it is the only structure that can adequately guide certain critical services such as public order, safety, infrastructure, management, and maintenance of public roads, and so forth.

The requirement and concern for such provisions give legitimacy to government activities. It is laid down in constitutions and international treaties that the government is responsible for essential services in many social areas, including Education and schooling, social security and basic provisions, legal protection, and housing for the less advantaged. The government must provide citizens with guarantees on the continuity of service delivery: equal access for all, irrespective of social and cultural background, and affordable prices. This has consequences for executive organisations. Transparency, efficiency, general accessibility, and such influence the quality of the package of products that the government delivers in its services to citizens.

Theoretical Framework

The New Public Administration Theory and Its Application

The foundation of this Study rests within the framework of the New Public Administration (NPA) theory, which serves as the guiding structure for this research endeavor. The NPA theory represents a distinctive paradigm within public administration, deriving its impetus from eminent scholars such as Waldo (1980). Waldo's seminal work, "Enterprise of Public Administration," delineated three fundamental domains encapsulating the essence of the NPA theory: the orientation of bureaucracy towards clients, the embodiment of representative bureaucracy, and the advocacy for active citizen engagement. Esteemed figures such as Frank Marini, George Frederickson, Joseph Uvages, Charles Lindbloom, and Vincent Ostrom were among the early proponents of the NPA theory.

The traditional concepts of public administration have undergone a transformative evolution to address emerging geopolitical and economic challenges. The era of more significant government intervention in socio-economic transformation until the 1960s faced criticism due to fiscal crises, bureaucratic rigidity, subpar performance, a lack of accountability in public organizations, rampant corruption, shifting public expectations, and the emergence of more effective alternative service delivery models, culminating in the emergence of the NPA theory (Sarker, cited in Igbokwe-Ibeto, Agbodike, and Anazodo, 2015).

With its inception, the NPA theory offered a framework for managing public sector organizations. It was characterized by two key features: separating policy formulation from operation and integrating private-sector management strategies into public-sector management.

The NPA theory represents a transition from traditional public administration theories, aiming for practical and results-driven arrangements. It emphasises efficiency, effectiveness, corporate governance, technological innovation, and democratisation. In its relentless pursuit of cost reduction, transparency, and accountability in resource allocation and performance management, the NPA theory champions service quality (Pollit, cited in Igbokwe-Ibeto, Agbodike, and Anazodo, 2015).

Advocates of the NPA theory recognised that, in their zeal to transform public administration into a scientific discipline, the value content of public administration had been overlooked. The prevailing emphasis on a value-neutral administration, where rules were uniformly applied, resulted in limited consideration for society's most vulnerable segments. Thus, the need arose to rethink the objectives and scope of public administration, leading to the emergence of the NPA concept. In essence, the NPA theory posits that public administration operates within a broader societal context and must be responsive to societal needs while addressing prevalent challenges and shortcomings.

The Core Tenets of NPA Theory

The NPA theory is built upon four essential pillars:

1. **Change:** Departing from the status quo activities of the state, the NPA theory advocates for a change-oriented approach responsive to socio-economic-political transformations. Operational flexibility and organisational adaptability should be embedded in administrative systems to accommodate evolving societal dynamics effectively.

2. **Relevance:** Acknowledging the unique problems inherent to each society, the NPA theory emphasises the consideration of country-specific, culture-specific, and area-specific changes that are relevant and meaningful to the populace. The rationality of both administrators and citizens should inform policy formulation.
3. **Equity, Fairness, and Justice:** The NPA theory prioritises social equity as a guiding principle for human development. Administrators should champion the rights of marginalised sections of society, ensuring distributive justice and promoting social harmony and integration.
4. **Values:** The NPA theory advocates a shift in administrative ideology and philosophy. It challenges the concept of value-neutrality and embraces a value-oriented approach that aligns administrators' commitment with the state's goals.

Relevance and Application of NPA Theory to the Study

The NPA theory's postulates correlate with the discourse presented in this Study. The Federal Character Principle, as introduced, seeks to accommodate Nigeria's diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious variations. Unlike the rigidities of the bureaucratic model inherent in traditional public administration, the principle of federal character aims to imbue administrative systems with operational adaptability and flexibility.

Furthermore, the federal character principle fosters equity, fairness, and justice in resource distribution, privileges, and employment opportunities. This commitment to distributive justice aligns harmoniously with the NPA theory's objectives. An administration that fails to address the concerns of marginalised groups risks exacerbating their marginalisation. Lastly, the NPA theory's value-oriented stance aligns with the federal character principle's core values of political stability, national integration, and representative democracy.

In essence, the NPA theory's emphasis on administrative responsiveness, equity, and value orientation aligns seamlessly with the principles of the Federal Character Principle, reinforcing the Study's focus on enhancing service delivery and governance efficacy within Nigerian public sector organisations.

Federal Character Principle and Service Delivery

Discussions on the merit principle in the recruitment and selection of personnel into the public service have always had their backing from the ideals of Max Weber's bureaucracy, which is at the heart of the traditional model of public administration. The bureaucratic system is based on rules and regulations from public law; the control system is rational and legal. Scholars who have accused the bureaucracy of being responsible for the apparent manifestations of inefficiency and lack of effectiveness in the public service still advocate adopting the same principle in the recruitment and selection processes in the Nigerian civil service. For instance, Igbokwe-Ibeto, Agbodike, and Anazodo (2015) argue that recruitment and selection over the years have been weighed down by favouritism at the expense of merit and have shifted from the qualification of individuals based on the job description and specification to a man knows man basis. This makes recruitment and selection subjective rather than objective. The objectivity advocated in the preceding assertion is akin to the principles of rationality and impersonality of the bureaucratic model. In the same vein, Eneanya (2009) argues that despite the elaborate provisions in the constitution as well as the civil service rules and regulations as regards the mode of recruitment and selection into the service, the staff composition of most Ministries,

Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) reveals that mediocre and quacks get recruited against the tenets of merit and technical competence rooted in Max Weber's ideal bureaucracy.

One major drawback of the bureaucratic principle in its structure and processes is its failure to consider the vast cultural differences in society (Dibie, 2014). According to Weber, as cited in Lunenburg (2017) one size fits all bureaucracies, but in the real world, there are significant differences in organisational design due to culture. Thus, applying the bureaucratic principles of merit, rationality, and impersonality in recruitment and selection processes in the Nigerian civil service without consideration for our historical and cultural diversities will likely present a situation where a particular section of the country will dominate the service to the detriment of others. It is a known fact that the South is ahead in Education. This is further confirmed in the cut-off marks allocated to states for admission into unity schools and in the performances in UTME, WAEC, and NECO, where candidates from southern parts of the country lead the pack. This researcher believes that a call for a strict application of the federal character principle in the recruitment processes in the Nigerian civil service is indirectly a call for the domination of the service by a particular section of the country.

At the risk of being grossly misunderstood, let us expatiate what we meant by the strict application of federal character in the processes based on merit that seek to attract the best and most qualified for the positions advertised. Usually, there are minimum qualifications that the potential job holder is expected to possess. Through a detailed process of job analysis, the knowledge, skills, and attitude of the potential job holder are determined and attached to the positions being advertised. Applying the simple economic laws of demand and supply will present a scenario where, if there are more than enough qualified applicants for a particular position, the organisation goes for the BEST among the most qualified. Thus, if a B.Sc. degree in the relevant field is the minimum requirement, a master's degree holder or applicants with professional qualifications have an added advantage. This does not negate the fact that others are equally qualified. It just means that some are more qualified than others.

Thus, in the strict application of the federal character principle, the best among the best are recruited without consideration for tribe, religion, or location. This will neither cater to our religious, ethnic, and cultural diversities nor accommodate the minorities or weaker sections of our society. Application of the federal character principle ensures that all segments of Nigerian society are catered for in the employment and distribution of national assets. In Nigeria, as in other developing countries, governments carry the bulk of the burden of economic development. The state, being the biggest labour employer due to the lack of a well-developed private sector, has thus become a huge instrument for stemming unemployment and other socio-economic miseries. Developing countries depend on big governments for their development because of their peculiar circumstances (Garba & Jirgi, 2014). Hence, enlisting individuals into the federal civil service transcends mere personnel protocol; rather, it constitutes a social stratagem directed towards fostering economic empowerment, facilitating job generation, and ameliorating the scourge of poverty. These privileges are to be enjoyed equally by all, not for the exclusive preservation of a particular ethnic group.

The big question to address at this juncture is; does the federal character principle enthrone mediocrity over merit? The answer was deduced from the citation and interpretation of Section 1 (1-3) of the Federal Character Commission (Establishment) Act of 1996, which states as follows:

1. *Every State within the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory shall be fairly represented across all national institutions, public enterprises, and organisations.*
2. *Selections for positions designated for individuals from a particular State of the Federation or the Federal Capital Territory shall prioritise individuals of exceptional competence and skill.*
3. *Upon meeting the essential prerequisites for a specific role, a candidate becomes eligible to occupy a pertinent vacancy allocated for State or Federal Capital Territory residents.*

One may not need to have a law degree or be a legal luminary to understand and appreciate the provisions of this Act. While the first subsection emphasises equal representation, the second emphasises competence and quality. In other words, the best should be recruited among the various states. Those demonising the federal character principle often disregard this law section. Since all job positions have minimum essential requirements, the law in subsection three states, among other things, that once a candidate has attained the necessary minimum requirement for appointment to a position, he shall qualify to fill a relevant vacancy reserved for indigenes of his State or the Federal Capital Territory. The fact that some candidates have higher qualifications does not make those with the minimum requirements any less qualified or incapable of occupying the positions allocated to them.

To further counter the notion that the federal character principle enthrones mediocrity over merit, subsection five states as follows:

When the local inhabitants of a particular State or the Federal Capital Territory cannot occupy all the available positions designated for them, individuals from the native population of any other State(s) within the same geographic zone will be accorded precedence in allocating these positions. Notably, if the designated zone does not seize the opportunity to fill these vacancies, inhabitants from any other geographical zone will subsequently be considered for such appointments.

This goes to show that in the pursuit of equality, inclusiveness, and representative democracy, as the federal character principle is often called, the question of merit and competence has not been relegated to the background, as the law makes ample provision for alternatives if a state or any part of the country is unable to meet up with the minimum essential requirements for recruitment into the civil service of the federation.

In closing, this segment of our discourse bears significance to underscore that the concept of equality, inclusivity, and representation—commonly recognised as the federal character principle in the Nigerian context—finds resonance in practises across the globe. This principle is manifested worldwide, even beyond administrative frameworks. For instance, diverse sports organisations employ quotas or allocations for all continents during international tournaments. Whether in football, basketball, or table tennis, this principle prevails. To illustrate, the continent of Africa has been allocated five slots in global cup competitions. Consequently, the over fifty member nations constituting the Confederation of African Football (CAF) engage in a series of qualifying fixtures through which the five most proficient and capable nations emerge to represent not only their countries but also the entirety of the continent on the international stage.

Drawing parallels, those who embrace this model globally may find themselves exercising inconsistency if they disapprove of its application within the Nigerian civil service. The analogy between international sports tournaments and the federal character principle underscores a broader

acceptance of inclusive representation to foster unity and diversity. This principle transcends geographical boundaries and administrative contexts.

Appraisal of the Federal Character Principle in Nigeria

The Federal Character Principle/Federal Character Commission has been the subject of many attacks in Nigeria. Subaru (2013) labelled it 'geographical apartheid,' asserting that the federal character principle is inherently discriminatory and counter-productive. Critics, often those whose prior advantages were affected by affirmative action, highlight its shortcomings. While valid criticisms exist about its implementation in Nigeria, these critiques primarily focus on the policy, neglecting to propose alternative strategies to address inherent ethno-regional disparities. This oversight disregards a pivotal source of political instability. Additionally, the FCC's reliance on arithmetic quotas poses an issue. Despite their simplicity, quotas prioritise group and geographical representation over candidates' relative qualifications.

Federal character as a policy was designed to promote equity in distributing public offices, government resources, and socio-economic opportunities like infrastructure and health among the various regions or ethnic groups. Nevertheless, it is serving the ruling class's interests, thus further dis-empowering the underprivileged in society.

An additional drawback encountered during the execution of this policy is the unspoken practise of replacement through substitution, a phenomenon that paradoxically undermines its intended objectives. For the sake of impartiality, one must question the rationale behind releasing or displacing an individual unnecessarily from a public service role under the pretext of adhering to the federal character principle solely due to the intent of installing a family member into that position. In a smart analysis of this policy, Ayoade (2015) pointed out that as long as the principle is used to keep discriminating against one group while favouring another, it is unlikely that a sense of unity can be reached through such an effort.

Criticism has been directed towards the policy, highlighting its pursuit of distributive justice, which entails two distinct manifestations: arithmetical and proportional equality. Arithmetic equality presumes that all states are equal, but this presumption is false given the obvious differences between states in terms of size, population, and the pool of qualified candidates available for appointments. In contrast, proportional equality emerges as a more equitable and less prejudiced approach than arithmetical equality, as it inherently acknowledges the nuances of varying state characteristics and thus offers a fairer distribution of resources.

Nevertheless, more appropriately, the appointment must reflect the number of eligible candidates per state so that excellence is rewarded. Competent people who are disqualified based on their state of origin and other spurious criteria cannot be willing to contribute to the unity of the country. They must feel compelled to volunteer for national sacrifice (Ayoade, 2015).

In practical implementation, efforts to enhance candidate qualification assessment across states and equitably balance equity and merit should be considered. The FCC quota formula, however, does not guarantee the selection of the most qualified candidate from each state. Focusing on relative qualifications would shift from a "quota model" to a "trumping model," prioritising qualified candidates

over highly qualified ones. This model requires considering only the best candidates across states and zones while monitoring preferences.

Criticism of the FCC extends to its disregard for ethnic and religious factors. Although it centres on states and zones by law, it perpetuates the dominance of majority ethnic groups and neglects ethnic minorities. The absence of religious consideration also sparks controversy. Factors like state population, ethnic group count, and educational attainment are ignored, hampering proportionality. Moving beyond the confines of the arithmetic quota presents a formidable challenge for the FCC.

The effectiveness of the Federal Character Commission (FCC) has been undermined due to operational deficiencies. Situations involving ethnic bias during the tenures of former Presidents Obasanjo, Yar'Adua, Jonathan, and Buhari have highlighted instances of ethnic favoritism. These allegations of bias have contributed to divisions and conflicts. The FCC faces the challenge of rectifying these issues and regaining its reputation. It has been contended that the FCC's regulations fail to address disparities in the influence and prominence of specific positions, leading to the dominance of particular groups in critical roles while relegating others to less significant portfolios. In 2005, a prominent Igbo figure, criticized the Federal Character Commission's operations, urging it to expand the application of the federal character principle to include the allocation of federal projects. This principle should also extend to projects; for example, if a substantial contract is granted for a dam project valued at 50 billion nairas in a specific zone, other regions should receive comparable projects of similar value. This approach advocates for fairness in resource allocation. Iwuanyanwu's involvement addresses a sensitive issue: the subjective and, some argue, biased distribution of federal resources, projects, and grants, which deviates from the established federal/state revenue-sharing process. This practice has been a defining feature of fiscal federalism in Nigeria, particularly since military dictatorships in the 1980s (Ugoh & Ukpere, 2012).

Conclusion

This study has yielded a significant finding, shedding light on the apparent misapplication of the federal character principle and its impact on Nigeria's public sector. The following summarizes the findings in response to the research questions:

1. **Impact on Employee Performance:** The research revealed that while the federal character principle theoretically holds the potential to foster a harmonious work environment conducive to effective performance in Nigerian public sector organizations, its misapplication has often resulted in the recruitment of individuals ill-suited for their job roles and responsibilities.
2. **Appraisal of the Federal Character Principle:** The study's appraisal of the federal character principle as a social policy unveiled a limited capacity to address the persisting issues of ethnic rivalry and mutual suspicion that continue to permeate Nigerian society.

These findings underscore Nigeria's federal system's unique and complex nature, which presents both advantages and challenges. To maintain the unity of Nigeria as a cohesive political entity, it becomes evident that modifications and reinforcement of the federal character principle are necessary. While valid criticisms have arisen due to its misapplication and abuse, the complete dismissal of the principle, especially within Nigeria's public sector, proves impractical and unnecessary in the current context. Addressing these concerns requires a shift in perspective, recognizing that the federal character principle functions as a socio-political instrument rather than solely as a human resources doctrine. When applied with a professional human resources paradigm, the assessments reveal a

misunderstanding of the policy's essence and intent. As a social instrument, the federal character principle remains unparalleled in its comprehensive capacity to cater to the diverse segments of Nigerian society, including historically marginalized groups. Therefore, we propose the following recommendations to mitigate the likelihood of its abuse and maximize its effectiveness in promoting equity and unity within the country.

Recommendations

1. The federal character policy should undergo an amendment to achieve greater comprehensiveness, encompassing representations based on states, regions, and geopolitical zones, ensuring equitable ethnic and religious balancing. Presently, the emphasis of the federal character policy predominantly leans towards states and geopolitical zones, leading to a disproportionate benefit for majority ethnic groups cutting across states. Consequently, it erroneously fosters assumptions such as categorizing everyone from Northern regions as exclusively Hausa or Fulani.
2. Establishing a Federal Character Tribunal at both federal and state levels is imperative. The tribunal, resembling specialized courts like the National Industrial Court and the Code of Conduct Tribunal, should be endowed with the authority to nullify recruitment exercises found to contravene the genuine ideals and principles of the federal character. Furthermore, this court should have jurisdiction to address government actions conflicting with the federal character principle. Such a tribunal would allow individuals aggrieved by employment opportunities, infrastructure allocation, or resource sharing to seek redress, promoting transparency and accountability.
3. Continual public awareness campaigns and educational programs should be instituted to dispel misunderstandings and misconceptions about the federal character principle. By fostering a more informed populace, the misalignment between perceptions and the principle's intent can be reduced, promoting its effective implementation while curbing its misapplication.

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