

## **DEMOCRATIZATION OF PUBLIC BUREAUCRACY IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR CIVIL SERVICE EFFICIENCY**

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### **Abstract**

*The heterogeneous composition of the Nigerian state has since its amalgamation generated a lot of tensions among its constituent ethnic nationalities. There have been cut throat competitions and distrust among them as each struggle to get higher share of our common wealth. In an effort to end the menace and encourage national consciousness and integration, successive governments have introduced far reaching policies among which are the federal character principle and quota system. The implementation of the policies has cut across both the political and administrative spheres of the Nigerian state. The policies have therefore, been fingered for inefficiency, ineffectiveness, redtapism, rot, etc that characterize the federal civil service. This paper is therefore, a bold effort to examine the effect of federal character principle and quota system on the efficiency of the Nigerian civil service. To achieve this objective, qualitative research design was adopted as content analytical technique was applied. The study is anchored on Representative Bureaucracy theory. The study reveals among others that the abuse of federal character principle and quota system in the federal civil service is significantly responsible for inefficiency, corruption, nepotism/favouritism, indiscipline, etc in the system. We however, recommended as follows: that the application of federal character principle and quota system should be discontinued in the federal civil service but should be strictly restricted to political appointments which should reflect the heterogeneous character of the country; that there should be restructuring of the Nigerian federation to help take the steam out of the federal civil service. This is believed to reduce to the barest minimum the intense competitions to dominate the federal civil service by members of a given ethnic nationality, etc.*

**Keywords:** Democratization, Public Bureaucracy, Federal Character Principle, Implication, Efficiency.

### **Introduction**

Nigeria from inception has remained a heterogeneous state housing more than three hundred and forty ethnic nationalities (Obi, 2016). These ethnic groups have continued to engage each other in cut throat competitions to maintain dominance in public institutions and to obtain disproportionate share of our common national patrimony which oftentimes result in agitations and in extreme cases break down of law and order. There is no gain saying the fact that the inter-ethnic rivalry among the ethnic groupings in the country has continued to pose a serious threat to Nigerian unity. The situation has gone so bad in recent time that Nigerians tend to show near

absolute loyalty and allegiance to their respective ethnic nationalities to the detriment of national consciousness and integration.

However, successive governments have experimented with several mechanisms to douse the ethnic tensions, encourage healthy competitions, promote national loyalty and give every ethnic nationality a sense of belonging. In the colonial period, the colonial administrators evolved different constitutions adjudged suitable to manage the diversity of the indigenous people of Nigeria. The first was the Richards Constitution of 1946, which set the pace for the country's federal arrangement by dividing the country into three regions. We shall not forget the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 which made Nigeria a quasi federal state. The Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 however, formalized the federal system of government in the country. Obi (2016), maintained that federalism was intended to achieve limited unity in diversity and equally allow the ethnic nationalities to develop at their own pace and direction. It is believed that this system of government could launch the country on the path of irreversible growth and development. The attempts at constitutional configurations in the country did not stop with the exit of the white men. The exercise continued through post-colonial period. These measures notwithstanding, national consciousness and integration have largely remained a mirage as the statement credited to a foremost politician, Chief Obafemi Awolowo that Nigeria is not a nation but a mere geographical expression has continued to resonate. However, government continued to make effort which resulted in introduction of representative policies such as quota system and federal character principle. While quota system was introduced in 1958, the Constitution Drafting Committee in 1975 evolved the concept of federal character principle. The federal character principle was given adequate cover in the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

For all intents and purposes, federal character principle was introduced to correct the imbalance in terms of employment and appointment into government institutions among different ethnic groups, regions, states and local governments. It is argued that it has the potency to ensure equity, fair play and order among different ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria in the equitable distribution of resources in order to promote national harmony and loyalty for overall development of the country (Akpanabia, 2012). In other words, the federal character principle places premium on representation of every ethnic group in all government owned institutions and equitable sharing of our national resources among all the ethnic nationalities. The Federal Character Commission was subsequently set up as an administrative mechanism to ensure effective enforcement of the policy.

Federal character principle has been observed overtime in making political appointments as every government is required by the constitution to form its cabinet with party men or technocrats who are drawn from across the thirty-six states of the federation, which should reflect the multi ethnic composition of the country. The application of the principle was not only restricted to political appointments, it has also been extended to public bureaucracy (civil service) especially at the entry point for new entrants into the service. On the other hand, quota system has mainly been

applied in the educational system in order to bridge the gap between less Educationally Less Developed states/local government areas and educationally developed states/local government areas in securing admission into federal government owned institutions of learning. Just like the federal character principle, quota system has been extended to the civil service. Nonetheless, the application of the principles in the service has generated a lot of controversies. According to Akpanabia (2012), since the introduction of the federal character principle in 1979, the desired change has not been realized. He argued that it has resulted in the public service becoming a dumping ground for incompetent and ill-motivated servants from different parts of the country. Similarly, Okpata (2011), maintained that it has become the bedrock of corruption, nepotism and inefficiency. He further argued that it has marred our national development since quality and standards have continued to remain below average and constantly depreciated. To Joy and Egwu (2006:104), in some states a grade level 09 or grade level 10 officer because of federal character principle becomes a permanent secretary in either the federal or state civil service. It is in view of the foregoing that this research becomes imperative to examine the implications of democratization of the Nigerian federal civil service through the instrumentality of the federal character principle.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

This segment of our discourse will extensively analyse the basic concepts that form the cornerstone of the study. They are – Democratization of Public Bureaucracy, Civil Service and Efficiency.

- i. **Democratization of Public Bureaucracy** – From hindsight, democracy emphasizes the principles of popular participation, popular control, freedom, equality, etc. According to Okpata (2011:72), “the application of federal character principle (or its corollary, the quota system), in the public service is seen as the democratization of our public bureaucracy through the principle of representation as contained in the 1979 Constitution of Nigeria.” The definition is apt and it is therefore adopted as a working definition for this study. The federal character principle emphasizes fair representation of ethnic nationalities in the public service so as to give every ethnic group a sense of belonging to the Nigerian project. The Constitutional Drafting Committee (1975:2), defines federal character as “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, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.” Obiya and Akindele (2002), view federal character principle as 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 bottom line of federal character principle from the above definitions is to address the daunting challenges of imbalance and discrimination in the composition of

public institutions as well as allocation of the national resources across all ethnic divides in the country. Ojo (2009), defines federal character principle as an integrative mechanism which allows for fair and effective representation of the various components of the federation in the country's position of power, status and influence. Simply put, federal character principle promotes and encourages democratic principles such as popular participation, equity and fairness in the composition of public service by individuals drawn from various ethnic nationalities in the country. It also ensures that public resources as well as goods are evenly distributed across all ethnic groups. It is believed that effective application of the principle is capable of reducing to the barest minimum the cut-throat competitions, mutual suspicion and distrust that have characterized relations among ethnic groupings in the country as well as promote national unity, loyalty and integration. Democratization of public bureaucracy is clearly different from representative bureaucracy. While the former through the adoption of federal character principle ensures adequate representation of all ethnic colourations in the country, the latter is more or less concerned with public service being perceived to reflect the population (demography) of the citizenry or simply the diversity of the population.

- ii. **Civil Service** – The importance of civil service in the life of any administration cannot be relegated to the background. The service can make or mar government in the pursuit of its mandates. This explains why adequate attention should be paid on the administrative apparatus to enable it perform its essential duties to drive socio-economic development. By way of definition, civil service is conceived as an administrative institution composed of career staff who are employed in a civil capacity to assist government in formulation and enforcement of approved public policies and programmes to meet the needs of the people. Adebayo (1986), defines civil service as comprising all servants of the state, other than those holding political appointments, who are employed in a civil capacity and whose remuneration is paid out of money voted by the legislature. Civil service is seen also as the administrative institution composed of career civil servants who are employed in a civil capacity to assist government in policy formulation and implementation (Abah and Nwokwu, 2017). Adamolekun (1983), perceives civil service as the body of permanent officials appointed to assist the political executives in formulating and implementing governmental policies. In the second usage, he sees the concept as referring to the ministries and departments within which specific government functions are carried out. It is noteworthy that civil service is very narrow in scope. It encompasses all the career staff who work in core ministries and extra-ministerial departments. Technically speaking, members of the armed forces personnel, police, judicial personnel, teachers, staff of public corporations or parastatals, statutory boards, etc are not civil servants but public servants. It is the duty of the civil servants to give sincere advice to their political executive in the course of policy formulation and equally ensure

religious enforcement of all approved public policies and programmes to realize the objectives of the government in power.

- iii. **Efficiency** – This implies the ratio of output to input utilized in performing a given task (Ekong, 1980). It has been argued that efficiency criterion is most suitable in commercial undertakings which are guided by profit motive. In such organizations, money is the main factor in measuring output and income. As civil service's core mandate is not money making but to ensure quality service delivery, it becomes problematic to apply efficiency in measuring its performance. Be that as it may, we can conceptualize efficiency here to imply the utilization of available resources at the civil service disposal to achieve appreciable, quantitative and qualitative results towards addressing the yearnings and aspirations of the people.

### **Theoretical Explication**

The study is anchored on the Representative Bureaucracy theory espoused by Kingsley (1944). At inception, the theory was used to denote an administration which reflects the dominant classes in society. In other words, Kingsley's conception of representation is simply a reflection of the power structures in society (Andrews, Groeneveld, Meier and Schroter, 2016). However, since the seventies representative bureaucracy has been used to explain a bureaucracy that is representative of the population as a whole, including disadvantaged or minority groups (Groeneveld and Van de Walle, 2010). From this period onwards, studies have begun to focus attention on social demographic characteristics with special interest in gender, ethnicity and race, rather than to social economic characteristics such as class and education.

Representative theory argues that bureaucrats' social demographic background is very significant as it affects their value system which in turn influences administrative decision-making (Andrews et al, 2016). The theory as it is currently commonly used has two main underlying assumptions – First, it is believed that through the processes of socialization individuals of the same social demographic background will share certain values (Meier, 1975; Mosher, 1968). The second assumption is that bureaucrats will act in consonance with their values and seek to maximize the values that are salient to them at the time of the decision (Meier and Morton, 2015). It is argued that if bureaucracy is representative of the public which it serves, then its decisions will significantly reflect the values of that public. By being more responsive to the preferences and needs of the public, representativeness is assumed to contribute to the performance and legitimacy of a bureaucracy (Selden, Brudney and Kellough, 1998). It is important to stress that representation is essential in the civil service to ensure equal access and opportunity, and the inclusion of group interests in administrative decisions. Representative bureaucracy becomes necessary in view of the fact that passive or symbolic representation by designated groups can lead to active representation in which the representative agents may develop and implement policies for the benefit of the group. In other words, the theory argues that there is a strong linkage between passive and active representations (Adusah-Karikari and Ohemeng, 2012).

The relevance of the theory is hinged on the fact that representation of people drawn from various ethnic nationalities in the civil service will certainly go a long way to assist the administrative institution to formulate and implement administrative decisions that could reflect the interests of all ethnic groupings in the country. In other words, when there is no predominance of one ethnic group in the civil service, there is high tendency that the service will definitely reflect the values of all the ethnic groups in the country in taking critical decisions and their onward execution. It is believed that this development is capable of encouraging and sustaining national cohesion, unity and consciousness thereby reducing to the barest minimum the high rate of mutual distrust and suspicions as well as cut throat competitions that have characterised inter and intra ethnic relations in the country.

### **Democracy and Bureaucracy: A Nexus**

Before delving into the major point of discourse, it is academically worthwhile to throw more light on the two concepts – Democracy and bureaucracy with a view to determining their compatibility or otherwise.

Democracy is derived from two Greek words “demos” meaning people and “Kratos” denoting rule. This literally means rule by the people. It is in this light that Appadorai (1975), conceptualized democracy as the system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through representatives, periodically elected by themselves. In the same vein, a one time American President, Abraham Lincoln opined that democracy is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Democracy emphasizes popular participation as well as popular opinion in governance either directly or indirectly through periodic election of representatives (Abah, 2011).

The principles of democracy otherwise known as pillars of democracy according to the United States Information Agency Magazine of October, 1991 include the following –

- i. Sovereignty of the people.
- ii. Government based upon consent of the people.
- iii. Majority rule.
- iv. Minority right.
- v. Guarantee of basic human rights.
- vi. Free and fair election.
- vii. Equality before the law.
- viii. Due process of the law.
- ix. Constitutional limits on government.
- x. Social, economic and political pluralism.
- xi. Values of tolerance, pragmatism, cooperation and compromise.

On the other hand, bureaucracy is seen as the most efficient and rational organization in which there is clearly defined hierarchy of offices, each office with a clearly defined area of jurisdiction, each office filled by an individual who possesses the highest technical qualifications and the entire set of offices linked together by a

system of rules, procedures and impersonal relationships (Nwizu, 1997). In the words of Rao (1990), bureaucracy implies an organization characterized by rules, procedures, impersonal relations and an elaborate and fairly rigid hierarchy of authority-responsibility relationships. In the contemporary usage of the concept, it refers to the tasks and procedures of administrative officials (Nwizu, 2002). Max Weber maintained that bureaucratic elements are found almost universally in modern organizations, especially if they are more complex than simple face-to-face relationship.

Meanwhile, Weber's ideal principles of bureaucracy include the following –

- i. A clear division of labour.
- ii. Hierarchy of authority.
- iii. Rules and procedure, impersonal relations.
- iv. Technical competence.
- v. Separation of ownership.
- vi. Rights and property position.
- vii. Written record/documentation.

In bureaucracy, authority and power rest in the institution or office. Thus, a person that holds an office and the power he exercises is legitimized in the office he holds because he is chosen based on technical competence. Bureaucracy therefore, brings some kind of order into an anarchic society and it therefore rationalizes human relationships that could have otherwise been irrational and accidental.

We could observe from the foregoing analysis that bureaucracy contradicts democracy by its emphasis on technical competence/qualification (merit) as the main criterion for gaining and holding position in a given organization. Abah (2011), argued that the two concepts are parallel and have no meeting point, both in meaning and practice adding that democracy seemingly borrows from bureaucracy. He went further to say that technical competence which bureaucracy emphasizes does not permit democracy because it (democracy) promotes majoritarian opinion although it emphasizes experience in the western world.

We align with Okoli (1980), who safely argued that bringing democracy into bureaucracy is to destroy the underlying principles of ideal bureaucracy as propounded by Max Weber.

### **Federal Character Principle: A Historical Background**

As we pointed out earlier on, Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country consisting of over three hundred (300) ethnic nationalities. To give room for unity in diversity, the federal system of government was adopted beginning from the colonial period. To Wheare (1943:10), who is credited to be the father of federalism, federal government is seen as “a method of dividing powers so that general and regional governments are each, within a sphere, co-ordinate and independent.” He went further to outline the basic principles of federalism to include –

- i. The division of powers among levels of government.
- ii. Written constitution showing this division; and

- iii. Co-ordinate supremacy of the two levels of government with regards to their respective functions.

Wheare's concept of federalism has received several criticisms from renowned scholars who argued that his notion about the concept was too legalistic, inflexible and a mere description of American federalism. The definition presented by Ramphal cited in Obi (2016:3) will be adopted as the working definition of federalism in this study. To Ramphal, federalism is

A pragmatic method of organizing government so that sovereignty and political power are combined within a single nation of several territorial units but are also distributed between national and unit government that each within its own sphere is substantially independent of the others.

However, the federal character principle is one of the veritable tools evolved by Nigeria to manage her ethnic problems. To Afigbo (1989:1), "federal character principle is one of the inventions of the Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC) inaugurated by the Late General Murtala Mohammed on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1975." The committee found it expedient to evolve the principle principally because there had been inter-ethnic rivalry to secure domination of government and its institutions by one ethnic group or a combination of ethnic groups to the exclusion of others (Akpanabia, 2012). According to the Constitutional Drafting Committee (1975:2), federal character

"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, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria."

The term was later provided for in section 14(3) of the 1979 Constitution. The section stated inter alia:

The composition of the federal government or any of its agencies and the conduct of their affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to recognise the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and to command national loyalty. Accordingly, the predominance in that government or its agencies of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups shall be avoided.

The principle was further extended to the states and local government councils via section 14(4) of the same grundnorm which stated as follows:

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 a manner as to recognise the diversity of the peoples within its area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all the peoples of the federation.

To Ekeh (1989:21),

Federal character purports to deal with the distribution of privileges and benefits among the primordial components of any state organization. This is to say that federal character as a doctrine of the 1979 Constitution sought to give semblance of order to the modes of this distribution by preventing any ethnic group from having dominance and exclusive access to those opportunities and benefits inherent in the exercise of state powers and thus ensuring that every primordial grouping has equal access to the bounties of state.

In an attempt to ensure effective enforcement of the federal character principle, the Federal Character Commission (FEC) was established by Decree 34 of 1996 and the powers of the commission was summarized by Mustapha (2007) to include – working out formula for sharing posts and services; compliance monitoring; enforcement of compliance through legal actions; demanding and reviewing data on staffing; and institutional investigations. The FCC is a commission under the presidency; its members are appointed by the president subject to confirmation by the senate. The commission is expected to ensure that no government institution or agency is dominated by people from a particular state or ethnic group and that allocation of public resources are evenly spread across the ethnic nationalities in the country in order to encourage national integration and to command national loyalty.

The proponents of the principle believe that it is capable of reducing imbalance in the socio-economic gap among the various ethnic groups. On the contrary, the antagonists argued that by giving ethnic groups a permanent place in our political life, we are indirectly encouraging ethnic affiliations and by extension inflaming ethnic tensions (Obi, 2016). Yusuf (1977) cited in Obi (2016), maintained that the federal character principle has grossly contradicted the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution regarding residency rights and completely undermine the development of a national citizenry, a basic requirement for national cohesion. The same 1979 Constitution which provided for federal character equally provided in Section 15(2) that “accordingly, national integration shall be actively encouraged, whilst discrimination on the ground of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited.” It does not occur to the inventors of the principle that the federal character, which promotes discrimination on the grounds of place of origin infringes on the constitution.

**Democratization of Public Bureaucracy in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis**

The Nigeria has experimented with several measures to foster and maintain ethnic balancing in the composition of public institutions located across the length and breadth of the country. The bottom line of such measures is to promote and sustain national unity, cohesion and consciousness. It is also geared towards reducing to a significant level the rate of inter ethnic rivalries that have become the hallmark of Nigeria which have continued to ridicule the country in the comity of nations. Overtime, as highlighted earlier on, the successive Nigerian government have adopted quota system and federal character principle to douse ethnic tensions in the country. Our discussions in this segment of this study will specifically centre on these two measures employed to achieve representative bureaucracy in the country.

The structure of the Nigerian colonial state brought about imbalance in the representation of the numerous ethnic groups in federal institutions since it was observed that colonialism favoured particular groups over the others. This development resulted in agitations for a system that could encourage equity and justice among the various entities (Segun, Loromeke and Olanrewaju, 2014). In 1958, a quota system was introduced to quell the agitation for access into public service (Gberevbie and Ibieta, 2013). Quota system means the process of facilitating equal representation of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria’s public service (Anyanwu, 2010). Thus, a quota of 50% was given to the North while 25% each was allotted to the East and West (Mustapha, 2006). In spite of the huge gap between the North and the South in areas of education in the 50s the quota system was not adopted for admission into University College Ibadan. This is because the International University Council (IUC) insisted on merit as a critical factor for academic excellence and admission into the institution. The stance on merit over quota was equally maintained by the Alhaji Tafawa Balewa in admission into public institutions of higher learning. In the 1970s the Northern leaders became apprehensive over the extent to which the north has been left behind in the area of western education. Thus, they intensify clamour for inclusion of quota system in education. While the south resisted the idea with strong argument that it negated international standards, the north insisted that non-inclusion of the system will create barrier to the western educationally weak northerners to be educated and become competitive as the southerners (Yoloye, 1989). The quota system was however introduced into the educational system in 1972 following the desire of General Yakubu Gowon to dismantle academic barriers to Northern Nigeria.

**Table 1:** Admission formula into federal tertiary institutions introduced by the General Murtala/Obasanjo Military Administration.

Criteria	Admission Formula
Merit	40%
States/Quota	30%
Catchment zone	20%
Discretion	10%

Source: Nwagwu, 1997

The above table 1 shows that only 40% of admission quota is allotted to merit whereas 60% is left for other factors.

The idea of quota system emanated from apparent multi-ethnic posture of the Nigerian polity and imbalance in educational development of the various ethnic nationalities. Today, admission into Unity school is no longer based on merit but on quota system and federal character for purpose of bringing about equalization of opportunity of the various states in education. It is important to emphasize that admission into unity schools is done through national merit, state of origin merit, catchment area and educationally disadvantaged states modes. Put differently, a given quota is allotted to each state of the federation. However, there are years in which some states with low cut-off marks could not fill their quota, this situation usually creates opportunity for any indigenes of such a state to be given admission automatically (Olugbile, 2013). This policy has been extended to higher institutions in the country. The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) now Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) which is in charge of admission into the universities in the country first applied the quota system in 1983. Thus, admission into universities that year followed this order – Merit (40%), Locality (30%), Educationally Less Developed (ELD) (20%) and Discretion (10%) by the six oldest universities (i.e. The University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile Ife, University of Lagos, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, University of Benin and University of Nigeria Nsukka). In 2000, the government cancelled the discretion criterion given to the Vice Chancellors of Universities on account of its abuse and the fact that it has led to violent cult activities in public universities.

**Table 2: New Admission Quota Formula**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Admission Formula</b>
Merit	45%
Locality	35%
Educationally Less Developed	20%

**Source:** Salim, 2003.

The above table shows that only 45% is based on merit and the remaining 55% is based on some other factors.

Apart from educational institutions, quota system has been extended to recruitment into the civil service. In this case, a given quota is allotted to each state of the federation to fill. It is therefore expected that the states should be able to fill their own allocated vacancies. In situations where such states do not have required number of qualified candidates to take up the appointment, any persons however qualified from the affected states could be allowed to fill up their own chances. The implication of the foregoing is that there is usually the temptation of putting a square peg in a round hole, which invariably introduces inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the public service particularly in the civil service. As if that is not enough, politicians of nowadays have been in the habit of obtaining employment slots from different

public institutions for people to whom they represent. It is now a common knowledge to observe Nigerian politicians during electioneering campaigns reel out the number of employment opportunities that they have been able to use their influence to secure for their constituents. This development may have been responsible for appointment of candidates with the poorest certificates into the public service especially in the civil service. This situation has remained recurrent in every recruitment exercise so far conducted in the country. Merit system has been thrown to the wind while other factors have been given pride of place in offering appointment to people in the service. This partly explains why most applicants now find it expedient to make duplicates of their credentials and submit same to top politicians from their localities as the medium has proven to be the quickest means of securing important employment opportunities.

On the other hand, the federal character principle which came into existence via drafting and adoption of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria seemed to be a normative belief of Nigerians in equal access to and participation in the political and administrative affairs of the country in the area of policy formulation and implementation. In emphasizing the shortcomings in the enforcement of the principle, Gboyega (1989:178) argued that "... the issues of making public institutions reflect the federal character was taken up haphazardly giving rise to arbitrariness and victimization of some unfortunate public servants." On his own part, Ekeh (1989:34) maintained that "its most radical and damaging application has been in the bureaucracies and public services of the federation... permanent secretaries have been kicked around, removed and sometimes dismissed." He went further to argue that the application of the federal character principle has invaded the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy and other governmental bodies that normally require safeguards from the ravages of politics. To Tonwe and Oghator (2009:237), "federal character allows ethno-regional patrons and their clients to exploit and mismanage state resources without contributing to any meaningful development." As pointed out by Ojo (2009:167), "there is no greater inequality than the equal treatment of unequals." The federal character principle that is practised in Nigeria is elitist and class biased which leads to a blurring of the boundary between the pursuits of meritocracy and ethnic balancing thereby creating inadvertently a multiple system of citizenship in the polity. The principle has brought about the unintended effect of creating situations of 'elimination by substitution' which makes it counter-productive. This it does through discrimination in appointment and promotion. The principle attempts to achieve equality of all states, whereas states are not equal in population, and size of the pool of candidates for appointment (Ojo, 2009).

From the foregoing analysis, it could be observed that the idea of democratization of public bureaucracy has been largely responsible for the rot, inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the service that characterize the Nigerian public service. Nonetheless, the current parlous condition of our public institutions seemed to be suitable for both our political and administrative leaders who have kept on manipulating and abusing the two policies to achieve their inordinate ambitions at the expense of effective service delivery.

### **Application of the Federal Character Principle in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service**

There is no doubt that the application of federal character principle in the federal civil service is strictly restricted to the entry point. This implies that once a prospective candidate is successfully appointed in keeping with the principle, the concerned staff can now work out his/her career progression through the promotional ladder.

It is worthy of note that appointments into the federal civil service are done through the following means – recruitment, transfer and secondment. However, recruitment has no doubt remained the main source of appointment of fresh blood into the civil service. It is very paramount to the administrative system as it determines the tone and calibre of the civil service (Nwizu, 2002). According to Sharma and Sadana (1989), recruitment means attracting the proper and suitable type of candidate for the post to be filled. It can also mean the process of getting potential employees willing to apply for a job or jobs into an organization. Jacob cited in Nwizu (2002), conceptualized recruitment as the process by which a large number of prospective candidates are attracted by various methods to apply for the positions available. In the civil service, recruitment implies “the filling of vacancies by appointment of persons not already in the service” (FRN, 2000).

The Federal Civil Service Commission is statutorily charged with personnel administration of the Nigerian federal civil service. The commission reserves the right to exclusively undertake appointments of prospective candidates into the entry points of posts graded Grade Level 07-10. Appointments to posts graded Grade Level 12-17 are done by the commission after consultations with appropriate authorities. Appointments to posts graded Grade Level 01-06 are delegated to various ministries and extra-ministerial departments by the commission to perform on its behalf.

However, appointments into the federal civil service are influenced by three main factors –

- i. Availability of vacancies;
- ii. Qualifications;
- iii. Federal Character.

Among the above factors, the federal character happens to be a constitutional matter. As earlier on emphasized, it is the intention of the 1979 Constitution Section 14(3) that:

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 few states or from few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.

It is therefore required of the federal civil service commission to religiously enforce the federal character principle in the appointment of prospective candidates into the civil service. The commission is expected to ensure adequate combination of merit and even spread of appointments (representation) across all states, or ethnic nationalities or all sectional groups that make up Nigeria. This is to give a sense of belonging to all ethnic groups in the country so as to eliminate or reduce to the barest minimum inter-ethnic rivalry and promote national unity and consciousness.

The observable pitfall in the application of federal character principle in the service is that there is no provision as to the proportion of representation from each state or ethnic nationality. This lacuna has given enough room for unscrupulous elements to abuse the application of the principle with reckless abandon in appointment as they hide under the guise of the principle to give lopsided appointments to people from their ethnic nationality while allocating few chances to individuals from other sectional groups. This obvious gap may have explained the seemingly inability of the Federal Character Commission to effectively ensure even spread of appointments across all states or ethnic groups of the federation. The lopsided appointments have equally been observed in most government ministries and extra-ministerial departments, hence the unprecedented agitations, protests or inter-ethnic rivalries that have become the order of the day in the country.

It has equally been observed that the application of the federal character principle has gone beyond appointment at entry point to now govern promotion, training/development, transfer, etc in the service, which has introduced all sorts of anomalies in the civil service with attendant adverse consequences on productivity and quality service delivery in the system.

### **Implications of Democratization of Public Bureaucracy (Federal Civil Service) in Nigeria**

The democratization of the federal civil service has had far reaching implications on the overall performance of the system. Okoli (1980), argued that the democratization of public bureaucracy results in the subordination of the concept of merit in favour of representation, which violates the Weberian ideal type bureaucracy in all its essentials and thus, throws public bureaucracy in the country into the crisis of legitimacy. Ojofeitimi (1992), observed that the impact of federal character in the recruitment, promotion and development of personnel in the federal civil service has undermined efficiency, effectiveness and productivity of human resources in quality service delivery. In the words of Yahaya (1992), the complaint of the principle of federal character revolves around the manner of its application as well as its adverse effect on the morale and productivity of the federal civil servants.

The following are therefore some specific effect of democratizing the federal civil service via the instrumentality of the federal character principle –

- i. **Wrong Recruitment and Development Policies** – The abuse of federal character principle and quota system has adversely affected both recruitment and development policies/processes in the federal civil service. It has resulted to initiation of recruitment policies that prevent the best candidates with

requisite skills and qualifications from being absorbed in the civil service especially when the government makes it mandatory for positions to be evenly or fairly distributed across all the ethnic nationalities in the federation. Abah (2000), argued that federal character and quota system have been largely responsible for entrenchment of the culture of mediocrity as less competent candidates may be given undue preference in recruitment in order to satisfy the requirement of representation. Staff training/development programmes have equally been determined on the basis of ethnic origin of prospective beneficiaries rather than staff's skill deficiencies. The results are always out there for all to see – inefficiency, ineffectiveness, waste, etc in the civil service.

- ii. **Corruption** – Some high ranking officials in the federal civil service usually hide under the cover of federal character principle and quota system implementation to engage in all manner of acts of corruption. For instance, the unscrupulous high ranking officers often engage in the abnormal practice of employing all sorts of persons from their own particular ethnic group to fill vacant positions in units or departments that they superintend even without due regard to merit. Moreso, some civil servants who were appointed through such irregular means tend to engage in acts of corruption such as embezzlement, misappropriation of fund, overpricing of invoices, bribery etc with impunity in their respective workplaces. There is no gain saying the fact that Nigerian developmental strides have been undermined by all forms of corruption involving civil servants who connive with their political heads to milk the country dry. The economic recession that we are vigorously battling to exit has been blamed on acts of looting of public treasury by public officials.
- iii. **Statism/Ethnic Consciousness** – The idea of state of origin in the process of recruitment into the Nigerian federal civil service has invariably generated a lot of concerns as it has caused loss of talents, opportunities and created a lot of hardship to many citizens of Nigeria. Some civil servants who have risen to the rank of directors or permanent secretaries oftentimes hide under the cloak of federal character principle and quota system to give preferential treatment to the people from their state of origin or ethnic nationality in areas of appointment, promotion, and training/development thereby encouraging ethnic consciousness and statism in their areas of primary assignments. It has succeeded in encouraging people to identify more with their ethnic nationalities instead of showing national allegiance. In Nigeria, the major ethnic platforms that people usually tend to fall back on include – Arewa Consultative Forum, Ohanaeze Ndigbo World Wide, Oduduwa People's Congress, Afenifere, Pan Niger Delta Forum, etc. to get government attention and intervention in their sectional groups' yearnings and aspirations. Okoli (2004), observed that appointments and promotions within the civil service have proceeded on ethnic lines as qualifications or technical competence has given way to place of birth. Therefore, the abuse of federal character has exacerbated ethnic consciousness to the detriment of national consciousness.

- iv. **Favouritism and Nepotism** – These vices have continued to exert adverse effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the federal civil service. Favouritism and nepotism are oftentimes observed in the process of recruitment, promotion, training/development as well as taking disciplinary measures against staff. Some political executives oftentimes influence the civil service commission to abuse the application of federal character principle and quota system by ensuring that their candidates (blood relations, kinsmen, cronies, etc) are favoured to the exclusion of the most qualified candidates. Some civil servants that are highly connected are shielded from any disciplinary actions no matter the weight of the offence committed.
- v. **Inefficiency** – According to Omeje and Ndukwe (2009), inefficiency is the absence of competence or the ability to do anything well or to achieve a desired result without wasted energy. It is no longer in dispute that the main factor that could introduce inefficiency in the service is the abuse of the principle of federal character and quota system by the powers that be. It is common to see appointment of unqualified candidates into certain sensitive positions on the basis other than merit. When this class of people are engaged in the service, there is high tendency that they could be mere stooges or rubber stamps, who are ever ready to accept any unwholesome directives from their political heads which invariably undermines efficiency and effectiveness in the civil service.
- vi. **Indiscipline** – Whenever due procedure is not followed in the process of appointments, the candidates so selected may not show total respect to laid down rules and regulations governing the civil service. This is because the staff appointed with the use of criteria (federal character, quota, favouritism, nepotism, ethnicism, etc.) other than merit will visibly show their unwavering loyalty and respect towards whoever that assisted them to secure the appointments while at the same flout with impunity all laid down rules of the service. According to Onwe, Abah and Nwokwu (2015), those staff are highly connected and no amount of acts of indiscipline such as lateness to work, truancy, abscondment, laxity, outright absenteeism etc can attract any punitive measures against them.  
Other effects include overstaffing, mediocrity, etc in the federal civil service.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It was observed that the federal character principle was adopted to douse tensions and inter-ethnic rivalry in Nigeria as the country has remained a multi-ethnic state consisting of over three hundred ethnic nationalities. However, it was observed that due to the excessive abuse of the representative mechanisms (federal character principle/quota system) especially in the course of implementation in the federal civil service, it has unfortunately exacerbated ethnic rivalry as well as ethnic consciousness thereby failing to achieve its intended purpose - national integration and consciousness. The democratization of bureaucracy has undoubtedly undermined meritocracy and efficiency in public bureaucracy (civil service) in Nigeria, hence the seemingly poor performance of the service in public service delivery.

On the basis of the foregoing, we recommend as follows –

1. Since the principle of bureaucracy contradicts democracy which emphasizes representation, there is urgent need for the federal character principle to be discontinued in the federal civil service through constitutional amendment as the principle has been largely responsible for mediocrity and inefficiency in the system.
2. Recruitment and promotion in the Nigerian civil service should be purely based on qualification, expertise, experience and merit. This will however, enthrone professionalism and excellence in the conduct of government businesses in the core ministries and extra-ministerial departments.
3. Training and development programmes should equally be based on staff skill deficiencies and not based on ethnic consideration.
4. Government through relevant agencies such as the National Orientation Agency and media outfits should advocate and promote national consciousness and integration through implementation of programmes that border on our cherished national values, national identity, national unity and consciousness.
5. Restructuring of the Nigerian federal system of government will greatly help to take the steam out of the federal level of government. It will definitely reduce to the barest minimum the unhealthy competitions to dominate the federal civil service by people from different ethnic nationalities in the country as the federal service may be made less attractive or juicy in comparison to individual states' civil services.
6. The federal character principle should only be strictly restricted to political appointments to reflect the heterogeneous compositions of the country. The Federal Character Commission should be given enough powers to check arbitrariness of the political heads to ensure effective implementation of the principle.
7. Stringent sanctions should be meted against any public official no matter how highly placed who engages in acts of nepotism, favouritism, ethnocentrism, etc in the process of recruitment, promotion, transfer, secondment, training/development etc. of staff. This is to serve as deterrent to those who might wish to indulge in similar acts.
8. The idea of quota system, though deeply entrenched in the psyche of Nigerians, should be abandoned in the interest of merit and effective service delivery.

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