

Federal Character and National Integration in Nigeria: The Need for Discretion and Interface

Kayode Asaju¹ & Tony Egberi²

Abstract

The unfolding events during and especially after independent in 1960 call to question the idea of a federating unite called Nigeria. This situation no doubt impedes efforts at national integration as it applies to the building of a united Nigeria out of the incongruent ethnic, geographic, social, economic and religious elements in the country. This culminates into the establishment of federal character principle, which was entrenched in the 1979 Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria as the best solution to solving this problem. But since its establishment in 1979, it seems the aim of building a virile and united nation as not being achieved. So the question is why is it that achieving national integration has been difficult? The main thrust of this paper is to understand the reasons why the struggle to ensure national integration through the instrument of Federal Character has proved abortive in Nigeria. The paper is a documentary research and data were collated from secondary sources i.e. journals, books, official publications of the government and other NGOs, internet materials among others. The data was analyzed using the content analysis. It has been argued that the principle will make for a more equal federation to which more people will owe loyalty. But unfortunately, findings reveal that the principle while stressing the imperative of ethnic balancing, invariably enthrones ethnicity and deemphasizes the nation. In the process, too, it strengthens the parochial, particularistic orientations and individual ethnic attachments of Nigerians. Thus by focusing on regional and ethnic representation, federal character exacerbates differentiation instead of enhancing mutual trust, accommodation and national development. Hence the paper advocates for a reversal of the principle of federal character.

Keywords: Federalism, Federal Character, National Integration, Nigeria, Principle

1. Introduction

Nigeria a federation of many different nations is the most populous country in Africa with about 160 million people. The country is divided into 36 states and 748 local government areas. The religious, ethnic, and cultural diversities of the federating units no doubt make it a unique one. Otite (1990) in Mustapha (2007), identifies 374 ethnicities which are broadly divided into ethnic 'majorities' and ethnic 'minorities'. The majority ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest, and the Igbos of the southeast. However, the relationship between these groups is characterized by fear and suspicion of domination of one state or ethnic group by another. Meanwhile, this suspicion and fear between groups is historical. However, it became pronounced when Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard began the process of subjecting ethnic groups with a history of mutual distrust and hatred together as one Nigeria. Remarkably, these ethnic groups are not of equal population and hence some tend to dominate others thus exploiting them. Also, political and economic imbalances exist among these various states or ethnic groups that make up Nigeria. These imbalances arose from the nature and character of the post colonial Nigerian state. In almost all the sectors, state, ethnic or regions, people feel marginalized.

¹ PhD, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences, Federal University, Wukari P.M.B 1020, Wukari- Nigeria. Tel: +2348035992503 Email: asajuk@gmail.com

² Department of Political Science, Faculty of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences, Federal University, Wukari. Nigeria.

These have brought about a choking socio-economic competition among the various ethnic groups which have resulted into ethno-regional conflict and tension that characterize Nigeria since 1960. The emergence of various militia groups in the Niger Delta, OPC in the South-West, MASSOB in the South East and of recent Boko Haram in the North, are all indications of the existence of rivalries between and among the various groups over the sharing of national cake. These ethnic, regional, and religious divides in the country have become so problematic with resultant patterns of inequalities. These inequalities are caused by a complex range of factors, including history, geography, cultural orientation, religious affiliation, natural resource endowments, current government policies, and past colonial policies. Akinola and Adesopo (2011) in Aderonke (2013) support this argument when they posit that, the problem of ethnic minority has been receiving attention of scholars and practitioners of governance and development. This is because ethnic minority is usually sidelined and ignored by the majority in decision making and resources distribution. The consequence of such politics of exclusion has been agitation and demand for social inclusion, which at times results to violent actions. Society is a system of human cooperation, the question of how society can mainstream the minority groups in decision making on welfare matters, requires adequate policy consideration.

Lack of adequate representation by the ethnic groups constitutes a great threat to national integration. In realization of some inherent cleavages of inequalities, the federal character principle was introduced. The effectiveness of this policy measure in fostering national integration as well as promoting national development in Nigeria has been one of the most controversial and problematic issues in any political, social and economic discourse. The problem is that despite the adoption of the federal character principles since 1979, achieving national integration has been very difficult. It was in view of correcting this abnormality that the Federal Character Commission was set up and inaugurated on July 2002 as an executive agency charged with the responsibility of implementing Federal Character provisions and to uphold its principles. The essence is to ensure that government decisions on citing industries, building roads, awarding scholarships, appointment of public office holders, admission, employment and revenue allocations etc reflect federal character. But the problem is that, there is still a high rate of lopsidedness in the above mention areas of government decisions. The high rate of social segregation inherent in the political and social realms of the country, ethnic and religion divides, agitations, and crises brought to the front burner the basis for the adoption of the federal character principle in Nigeria. The question is, why has the Federal character principle failed in bringing about the desired national integration in Nigeria? The main objective of this paper is to examine the reasons why the struggle to ensure national integration through the instrument of Federal Character has proved abortive in Nigeria. The paper is a documentary research and data were collated from secondary sources i.e. journals, books, official publications of the government and other NGOs, internet materials among others. The data was analyzed using the content analysis.

2. Conceptual Issues

2.1 Federal Character

Section 14(3) of the 1999 Constitution provides: "The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few State or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies." It means that: The composition of the Government of the federation or any of its agencies, shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies (Nnoli, 1996 in Adeosun, 2011). Pursuant of the above provision, Section 135(3) states that in the appointment of Ministers, the president shall reflect the federal character of Nigeria" provided that in giving effects to the provision aforesaid, the president shall appoint at least one Minister from each state who shall be an indigene of such state (Nnoli, 1996 in Adeosun, 2011). Moreover, Section 157 provides that appointment by the President into the offices of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Head of Service of the Federation, Ambassadors, or the principal representatives abroad, Permanent Secretary or other Chief Executive in any Ministry or Department of the federal Government, or any office on the personal staff of the president shall have regard to the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity.

Section 197(2) provides that the composition of the officer corps and other ranks of the Armed Forces of the Federation shall reflect the federal character of Nigeria. Various other provisions were made in the constitution to ensure that the federal character principle was operative in the political process (Nnoli, 1996 in Adeosun, 2011).

Section 153 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution established the Federal Character Commission, as a federal executive body, empowered in Section 8(1) of the Third Schedule of the Constitution to oversee and monitor the implementation of the federal character clauses. The mandates of the Commission are as follows:

- i. work out an equitable formula subject to the approval of the National Assembly for the distribution of all cadres of posts in the public service of the Federation and of the States, the armed forces of the Federation, the Nigerian Police Force and other security agencies, government-owned companies and parastatals of the States;
- ii. Promote, monitor and enforce compliance with the principle of proportional sharing of all bureaucratic, economic, media and political posts at all levels of government;
- iii. take such legal measures, including prosecution of the head or staff of any ministry or government body or agency which fails to comply with any federal character principle or formula prescribed by the Commission, and as provided for in Section 8(3) of the Schedule,
- iv. Notwithstanding any provisions in any other law or enactment, the Commission shall ensure that every public company or corporation reflects the federal character in the appointment of its directors and senior management staff.

Afigbo (1989) in Aderonke (2013) asserts that federal character principle is anchored on 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, 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. Ezenwa (1987) and Heirmexy (2011) in Okorie and Greg (2013) also posit that federal character was introduced for equitable sharing of posts and even distribution of natural and economic resources. Federal character suggests an attempt to build a nation where equal opportunities abound and where every individual must feel that he has equal chance to participate without bias of ethnic affiliation (Talih (1987) in Ezeibe (n.d)). Federal character is both a reaction as well as a system. It is a positive reaction to correct those practices of the past, especially in the conduct of public management which tended to exploit the diversities of the nation and by so doing cause ill will. Also it is a reaction to those practices which tended to reflect selfish and parochial consideration, especially those negative forces which placed self interests above national interest. The federal character principles involve a deliberate plan to construct means of ensuring the proper distribution of amenities and government projects in the country. The principle of federal character was formulated and put into use by successive governments in Nigeria to address and hopefully mitigate the problem of diversity so as to ensure a peaceful, stable and united Nigeria. The question begging for answer is whether Federal character has been able to achieve its laudably goals of National integration.

2.2. National Integration

National integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. It means that though citizens belong to different castes, religions, regions and speak different languages, they still recognize themselves as one. This kind of integration is very important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation. National integration can also be seen as the process whereby several desperate groups within a given territorial are united together or cooperate under conditions which do not appear to permit satisfaction of their system needs in any other way (Fatile & Adejuwon, 2012 in Aderonke, 2013). It implies unity in diversity. According to Elaigwu (1987) in Aderonke (2013), national integration is determined by the degree to which members and groups in a plural society adapt to the demands of national existence while co-existing harmoniously. On the practical note, national integration is a process, not an end in itself and it is usually affected by contending social forces. It is a process leading to political cohesion and sentiments of loyalty toward a central political authority and institutions by individuals belonging to different social groups or political units. It is a process whereby political actors in distinct national setting are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre, whose institution possess or demand jurisdiction over preexisting nation-state (Ogunojemite, 1987; Oyeleye, 1987 in Aderonke, 2013). Shona (2003) in Okorie and Greg (2013) also notes that, National Integration is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country. Nigeria is a country with about 250 ethnic nationalities distinctively isolated in terms of religion, languages.

National integration implies that we should de-emphasize these differences and promote such policies that could unite Nigeria. Some of the policies aimed at achieving national integration according to Alapiki (2005) in Okorie and Greg (2013) include the introduction of Unity Schools, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), state and local government creation, quota system and federal character. It seems that despite all these policy measures, achieving national integration and unity in among the various ethnic and religious groups has been a mirage. No wonder, Aderonke (2013) posits that the ability of the state to resolve or regulate the recurring crises and to create an enabling environment where the people's respect and love for their nation is enhanced would definitely affect the tempo of the national integration positively.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical base of this paper is anchored on the Elite theory. There are many writers and different explanation of the elite theory. This was summarily discussed with the view of understanding the basic premises of the elite theory.

Elites Theory

Higley (1980) posits that the origin of the Elite theory lies most clearly in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert Michels (1876-1936). Mosca emphasized the ways in which tiny minorities out-organize and outwit large majorities. He posits that "political classes" – Mosca's term for political elites – usually have "a certain material, intellectual, or even moral superiority" over those they govern (1923&1939). Pareto postulated that in societies with truly unrestricted social mobility, elites would consist of the most talented and deserving individuals. But in actual societies, elites are those most adept at using the two modes of political rule, force and persuasion, and who usually enjoy important advantages such as inherited wealth and family connections (1915/1935). Pareto sketched alternating types of governing elites, which he likened to lions and foxes. Elites ("oligarchies") according to Michels originated from organizations who were in dear need for leaders and experts that could operate them efficiently. As these individuals gain control of funds, information flows, promotions, and other aspects of organizational functioning, power becomes concentrated in their hands. In the same vein, that Elitism's core tenets are deceptively simple, due to their strategic positions and resources under their control, they affect political outcomes regularly and substantially" (Higley & Burton 2006) in Jan (2012).

Jan (2012) further explains that Elites have the power that the majority of people or non-elites lack, and they make systematic use of their power in democratic and non- democratic politics. However, while power is portrayed by elitists as concentrated in elite hands and exercised in the top-down manner, even in the modern democratic regimes, the elite perspective does not dismiss non-elites as inconsequential or powerless. This is because elites are always constrained by non-elite orientations and preferences, which they – the elite members – have to shape and cultivate to sustain their rule, even if they act in an autonomous way. Higley & Burton (2006) in Jan (2012) reminds us that power-holders must cultivate mass support and "frame their appeals to accord with the interests and political orientations of non-elites".

It is in view of this that the author is in agreement with Agbodike (2003) in Okolo (2014) that federal character has been manipulated and channeled to serve the overall interest of the petty bourgeoisies ruling class. Elitism represents the interests of the few minorities Guaba, (2004), Agarwal, (2006) and Chaturvedi, (2006) in Okolo (2014). Implicit in the above explanations is that those who champion the principle and policies are indirect benefactor hence it is another form of expanding their solid-political and economic empire. Nigeria today wallow in the blind alley of development, it is obvious that the elite's roles in national development is numbed, trapped, and caged by ethnicity. Ethnic movements is created and use by the elites in furtherance of their own special interests which are time and again constitutive interests of the emerging social classes. This elite's class depend on the state devices to increase their benefits from the society. Part of the ethnic scheme is Federal Character, quota system etc which are the mechanism through which the political elite maintain power and exercises influences. The basic idea and discussions of this paper are tailored alone the above assumptions.

4. 1 Federal Character and National Integration

The assertion that Nigeria is a creation of British colonialism is no longer irrefutable. Driven by economic considerations, the colonialists annulled the sovereignty and independence of the hitherto disparate autonomous socio-political entities which had inhabited Nigeria. The consequence of this resort is that the various nationalities inhabiting Nigeria have not been welded into a nation in which all of them would have a stake rather it provided a favorable environment for mutual suspicion and distrust among the disparate groups in Nigeria (Bello, 2012 in Adetiba, 2013). This situation no doubt impedes efforts at national integration in terms of building a united Nigeria out of the incongruent ethnic, geographic, social, economic and religious differences in the country. Equally, are the characters of Leaders in Nigeria? As most of them are Nationalists in the day and ethnicists by night, as they only advocate Federalism in name, but actually worked towards the accrual of advantage to their ethnic units. Pye cited in Sharma (2012) had earlier observed that in societies or countries where there is high rate of social dissension, loyalty to family, language, religion, caste, or ethnic groups diminish individual commitment to national political system with great potential for political unrest and instability. Nigerians have come to agree that the greatest danger facing the development of this great country is not necessarily only corruption, but also lack of national identity and sense of belonging among majority of its citizens. Most Nigerians owe their loyalty to either the north or south or their ethnic nationalities. Politicians, who want to get undue advantage usually, fan the embers of North/South dichotomy or ethnic or religion differentiations to achieve their selfish aim or desire. Instead of achieving unity through balancing of interest, the country is further divided and polarized. The danger inherent is that consolidating nationalism disguise of federal character principle threatens the appropriateness of the federal system in Nigeria.

The federal character principle has been manipulated and channeled to serve the overall interest of the petty bourgeois ruling class. The members of this class formulate and operate the principle to achieve their selfish desires under the guise of the federal character principle. They get themselves entrenched in power and exercise control over the machinery of state through the application of this principle. They strive to reconcile their class differences through the operation of acceptable formula for the allocation, distribution and sharing of national resources and benefits among themselves. While they do this, they capitalize on and fan the ethnic differences among the various Nigerian peoples to win the support of the masses in their areas. And in the course of this elite game, members of this class climb to positions, amass wealth and enrich themselves illegally. Thus, the federal character principle is merely an elite ploy, which would not materially improve the lot of the downtrodden in whose name it is raised (Awa 1972, Agbaje 1989, Gboyega, 1989 in Aderonke, 2013). The federal character principles satisfied the quest for representativeness and appointment among various groups. However in the application of the formula as noted by Bodunrin (1989) in *Students' Diary* (2013) choices are often made on the basis of other criteria other than merit. For example, the federal character as applied in educational sector leads to lowering of standard against national interest. In the army, it leads to the production of sub grade soldiers and officers. In the civil and public services of the federation, standards and professionalism are compromise by eschewing meritocracy without recourse to standards. The federal character becomes morally reprehensible and an act of injustice. Viewed from this perspective, the quota factor in the federal character principle becomes counterproductive to peaceful and orderly progress, and the development of Nigeria.

In recent times, one of the major and most problematic outcomes of the federal character principle is the complexity of the interest and agitations by some states and local government as well as some ethnic and religious groups in the country. For example, the recent agitation for more states and the proposal for the creation of additional twelve states by the Committee on National Conference are indications of the unending agitations for more representation by the various ethnic groups in the country with great implication for national stability if implemented. Also, the establishment of federal educational institutions in every state was to enhance greater representativeness and distribution of government facilities and other opportunities. However, this has led to the multiplication of governmental and administrative units and facilities which has become very expensive and another drain pipe to the nation. Also, the recent Privatization of Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) has put the wealth of this country in the hands of a few Nigerians at the expense of majority of the people. The masses need to be given equal opportunities for employment, equitable share in the distribution of resources and benefits of the state in terms of provision of social amenities such as education, access to good roads, portable water, housing; etc, which will bring about improvement in their standard of living. To this end, the political system, should arrest the exploitation of the less privileged in the society and redress their feeling of insecurity. It is only when this welfare issue is address that the great majority of the people can "develop a sense of national identify transcending parochial loyalties of ethnicity, religion, language and region" (Agbodike, 1998 in Adeosun, 2011).

To this end, it is obvious that the federal character principle has deepened the problem it was devised to tackle. It is against this background that this paper examines the principle and practice of federal character in Nigeria as it affects national integration. Chris (2014) observes that the implementation of the Federal character principle especially in Nigeria public service tends to encourage unethical behaviour among public official and circumscribe merit in the area of employments, promotions and appointments. He Chris (2014), further questions the effective application of Federal Character principles by citing some concrete examples of lopsidedness in representativeness in Nigeria., when he posits that, as it stands now: 70% of Nigeria Foot-soldiers are from Hausa-Fulani; 80% of all Permanent Secretaries in Federal Ministries are from Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba combine; 80% of those given Oil Wells presently in the Oil from Niger Delta Region are from Hausa-Fulani; 60% of Generals in the Nigerian Military are from Hausa-Fulani; 60% of the Heads of Parastatals are from Hausa-Fulani; 70% of the Top Posts in P.D.P are from Hausa-Fulani; 60% of the Top Ranks in Nigerian Police Force are from Hausa-Fulani; 70% of Nigerian State Security Services (SSS) men are from Hausa-Fulani; 60% Top Posts in each of: Nigerian Prison Services; Nigeria Immigration and Nigerian Ports Authority are from Hausa-Fulani; About 90% of JAMB employees are from both Hausa –Fulani and Yoruba tribes; 80% of all the employees in Federal Secretariat are from both Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba tribes combined; 95% of the professors and workers in National University Commission are from Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba tribes combine; 80% of employees in ICPC and EFCC are Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba combine; 90% of all the Registrars and Bursars of Federal Universities, Federal Colleges of Education, Federal Polytechnics are from both Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba tribes combined; Nigerian in Foreign Missions both African Union, ECOWAS and United Nations; 98% of them are from both Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba tribes combined, 70% of all the Ambassadors and High Commissioners are from Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba tribes combined, 95% of all the employees (staff) of Nigerian High Commissions and Ambassadorial abroad are from Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba tribes combined.

This was also the same trend in the Nigerian Railway Corporation. Out of a total of 431 names on the current staff list of the Corporation, 270 are Igbos and 161 belong to other tribes. The main reason adduced for the above is that the Chairman was simply an Igbo man and not because the employment is done on merit (Agbaje (1989) in Mustapha (2007). Also, related to the above is the situation in Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Out of the 16 directorates in the Commission, the North occupies 11 offices, leaving only five for the entire South. Also, all the National Commissioners heading INEC's key committees come from the North, while out of the nine-man Strategic Planning Committee members, only two come from the South (Daily Independence, 2014). The above statistics is a clear evidence of high rate of segregation as a result of nepotism and tribalism and other sentiments inherent in the system. These behaviors or actions are against the letters of the law establishing Federal Character principle with greater implication for National integration.

In the same vein Adeoti & Olaniyan (2014) observe that rather than strengthen the national unity, the principle of federal character unfortunately "... enthrones ethnicity." The formula failed "...to address the problems of minority especially in a country or states made up of different and unequal ethnic groups." The noble idea behind the federal character principle has been abused by its operators through sheer manipulation of its objectives "... by converting plumbers into engineers, book keepers into accountants, and effecting the appointments of professors through committee of friends, all in the name of quota/federal character." Even the catchment area formula that was created to favour the educationally disadvantaged states goes against ethical standards. The scheme has encouraged mediocrity. Every year gifted students from educationally advantaged states are denied access to tertiary education as a result of disparity that exists in admission requirements of both educationally advantaged and disadvantaged states. The crux of the matter is that "people who are discriminated against either in admission into public schools or employment into government establishments are the same group of people who do not have access to political or economic powers of the country" Therefore, they are "...discriminated against in more than just one way.

Furthermore, *Udoh (2014)* in dissecting the decadence in the country today concludes that the basis and wrong application of Federal Character Principle by the Federal Government threatens to drag Nigeria backwards. This in effect breeds corruption, low productivity and nepotism instead of meritocracy and hard work which Nigerians have now being identified with globally in diverse fields of endeavors from medicine, engineering, computer science, mathematics, literature, arts, etc. We have witnessed cases where highly incompetent hands are sourced at all cost to fill positions made unnecessarily available due to Federal Character Principle.

This creates room for deep-seated corruption in the system because candidates who have nothing at stake, such as their painstaking years of service are willing to risk their integrity in stealing public funds. The application of this vexed principle has led to the emergence of quota Professors in the University system, not necessarily because of their academic dexterity ahead of their peers but because each region, tribe and religion had to be fairly represented. This creates room for unbalance competitions between our scholars and others globally. No wonder we hardly have Nobel laureates coming out of our institutions because our best hands are politically restricted from progressing through the system in order to accommodate Federal Character Principle. There is no doubt that these constitutional provisions are safeguards against discrimination in any form in the country. It considers Nigerians as citizens with equal rights, irrespective of state, ethnic, race, sex, religion and status. The framers of this Constitution just like the ones before it had the intention of using the provisions of federal character in promoting national integration objectives, and to build a united, free and egalitarian society for all Nigerian citizens. In design, the principle is expected to enhance national unity and integration, but in execution, there are a lot of problems, which borders on wrong application of the principle itself. This to say that, federal character principle itself has created problems for Nigerian citizens as we have seen in this study. The import of this is that there seems to be a lot of contradictions between the provisions in the constitution on federal character and the practical application of these rights altogether. When applying these principles, equity, merit and standard is unfortunately substituted with mediocrity, favouritism, nepotism etc particularly when it comes to the issues of appointment. These tendencies are capable of undermining the very essence of Nigerian national integration policy. It is unfortunate that today, the question of federal character has been stretched to a ridiculous limit. Ordinarily, nothing ought to be wrong with it, if Nigeria was to be a country where merit and qualification are the only consideration for occupying public positions as it is in the private sector or other developed Nations. However, it seems there is a contradiction between the two. Thus, the need for discretion and interface

4.2 The Need for Discretion and Interface

It is obvious from the discussions above that the aim of using the Federal character principle as a mechanism for enhancing national integration is still a mirage. Its advantages as outline by Ammani (2009) in Edigin (2010) include providing an equitable formula for the distribution of socio-economic services, amenities and infrastructural facilities; providing the modalities and schemes for redressing imbalances, real or imagined; and ensuring equitable admission into federal universities. Politically, the federal character principle ensures that no one section of the society unduly dominates the elective or appointive offices. It provides equal access of Nigerian citizens from the different background for recruitment into the Armed Forces, the Police, and other paramilitary services. The federal character principle also ensures even spread among civil servants as it serves as criteria for recruitment and even promotion. It is also applied in the deployment of tertiary institution graduates for the National Youth Service Corp. It is employed in resource allocation through the instrumentality of the Federal Accounts Allocation Committee (FACC). It also ensures the corporate existence of Nigeria and has helped to douse the centripetal agitations. It also protects the interest of the minority ethnic groups.

But in reality and actual practice the principle has rather become a problem when it supposed to be a solution. It has failed in its objective of redressing the imbalanced in structure and ethnic domination in government and other public institutions so that national integration could be achieved. So far, the application of the principle shows that it is not capable of resolving the problem of national suspicion among the ethnic groups. It has so far failed to prevent inter-ethnic conflicts such as the Jos-Plateau Crisis, Boko-Haram Crisis, Tiv-Jukun Crisis, Agileri-Umuleri Crisis among others. Also, the long list of requests for the creation of more states and local government areas during the recent constitutional conference is a case in point. It has no limitation on the powers of the executive in the allocation of resources in an attempt to satisfy the various segments of the society. In operation, the majority ethnic groups are sometimes put at an advantage over others, since a less qualified person may have an unfair advantage over a more qualified one. From the point of merit, Federal character principle seems counterproductive. The principle rather promotes mediocrity instead of meritocracy. *The interface here is to draw a border line between mediocrity and meritocracy.* The percentage for employment into government establishment, admission or allocation of government resources on merit is less than other criteria when combined. People who lack technical know-how are made to mane sensitive positions to the detriment of those with capability. Nigerians are now being discriminated against in the country on account of ethnicity. This cannot make for loyalty to the Nigerian State and therefore bring about the much sought integration. According to Shuaib (2009) in Edigin (2010) federal character principle in Nigeria promotes mediocrity and incompetence in the public service.

It is also perceived as a confused balancing of the merit principle and the quota system. It has no limitation on the powers of the executive in the allocation of resources in an attempt to satisfy the various segments of the society, in operation, the majority ethnic groups are sometimes put at a disadvantage since a less qualified person may have an unfair advantage. All these have diverse consequences in terms of discipline, morals and overall effectiveness and efficiency in the public service as it breeds corruption and promotes ethnicity rather than nationalism, *The discretion here is that the implementation and application of the Federal character principle should be based on equity, fairness and justice.* Merit should be strictly adhered to and applied especially in strategically important sectors of the economy. Nigerians will not be interested where the president, governor, minister or a worker comes from if the economy is growing and absorbing able-bodied men and women as they come out from schools. Nigerians will be gladdened to see any president no matter where ever he comes from or whatever his religious background, who will guarantee 24 hours of power supply, access roads, security of life and property, freedom of movement of goods and services. The fear of one section of the country dominating every position available should be discouraged. The argument that if merit is used one section of the country would dominate the others cannot be said to be true, because there is no state without qualified manpower to mount strategic positions. Therefore, meritocracy should be the guiding principle.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

There seems to be a general acceptance of the federal character principle as a normative expression of the equal right of all Nigerians to participate in the political, administrative and economic affairs of the country. Gone are the days when a chairman or chairperson of a public institution can surround himself or herself with co-ethnics with reckless impunity. Of a truth, if Nigeria is to remain a federating country, the utmost need to balance our diverse interests will continue to surface, therefore, the need for federal character to be employed to take care of this diverse and sometimes conflicting interest. And by all intends, the formula has come to stay. Therefore, it is necessary to seek for ways and means to make it less rancorous and problematic and to channel it in such a way as to ensure the overall progress of the country. It is a known fact that the principle has gone a long way to reduce various factors of mutual mistrust and rivalries among the different ethnic groups that make up the geographical entity called Nigeria. The implementation and application of the principle of federal character must be revised from its present status quo. Its application should be in such a way as to give succor to the weak and marginalized, and limit the power of the strong. The principle should be applied such that 70% of appointments should be on merit, 20% on the equality of State, and 10% on ecological grounds.

For stability and the achievement of national integration, it is imperative for Nigerians to see themselves as belonging to one indivisible country, where thou tribes and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand. The reign of justice, equity, fairness and respect for the rule of law and the rights of all citizens will go a long way in guaranteeing true national integration in Nigeria. Finally, It is unfortunate that today, the question of federal character has been stretched to a ridiculous limit. Ordinarily, nothing ought to be wrong with this, if Nigeria was to be a country where merit and qualification are the only consideration for occupying public positions as it is in the private sector or other developed Nations. Definitely, it is our hope that the day will come when Nigerians will become so united that it will no longer matter who is holding what job. That will certainly be the golden era we all seek for. But for now, there is the need for discretion and interface

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