

**FACTORS AFFECTING EFFECTIVE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA:  
FOCUS ON FEDERAL CHARACTER PRINCIPLE**

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**Abstract**

*This study investigated factors affecting effective policy implementation in Nigeria with a focus on the Federal Character Principle. The Federal Character Principle was enacted and captured in Section 14 (3) and (4) to ensure equitable employment distribution in the Nigerian civil service; however, it appears that the implementation of the policy is ineffective because disparity remains prominent in employment distribution despite the enactment of the policy. Building on existing literature and the use of existing secondary data the paper identified corruption, lack of political will, personal interest and poor policy evaluation strategies as factors responsible for the ineffective implementation of the Federal Character Principle in the Nigerian public service. The paper of the study provides a valuable blueprint for policy implementers, governments and policymakers to close-in the identified factors hindering the effective implementation of the Federal Character Principle in Nigeria*

**Keywords:** Corruption; Federal Character Principle; Personal Interest; Policy Implementation; Political Will

**Introduction**

The implementation of the Federal Character Principle which was enacted to solve the issue of disparity in the Nigerian civil service employment distribution appears to be ineffective because disparity remains inherent in the employment distribution in the civil servant (FCC, 2015; Ibor, Peterside and Egolikuma, 2015; Mustapha, 2007; Majekodunmi, 2013). Invariably, the implementation of the Federal Character Principle appears to be ineffective during the conduct of employment distribution into the Nigerian civil service because disparity remains recurrent in the employment distribution despite the enactment of the Federal Character Principle in 1999. According to George, Owoyemi, & Adegboye (2014: p.49) the Federal Character Principle was enacted to “making (sic) sure that people from the various geo-political areas of the country were recruited especially on the board of directors”, thus ensuring that all geopolitical zones and states are represented equally in the civil servant employment distribution but it appears ineffective because of continuous disparity over the years.

The continuous disparity in employment distribution of civil servants in the Nigerian civil service as a result of the ineffective implementation of the Federal Character Principle has become a pressing national issue in the country (Ibor, et al 2015). The Federal Character Principle has been “widely seen to

have promoted exclusion, especially in appointments in the Nigeria's civil service, and the growing mutual distrust, ethnic loyalty, regionally based agitations for self-governments"(Idike, Ukeje, Iwuala, Onele, Ekwunife, Nwachukwu, & Udu, 2019:P.6). Lopsidedness and inherent disparity in employment distribution in the Nigeria civil service as a result of the ineffective implementation of Federal Character Principle has led to discontent among the geopolitical zones in the country giving rise to calls for secession which could lead to a conflict of great proportion if not adequately resolved (Akintoye and Utang, 2012). The increasing call for secession in Nigeria has not abated. As Anejionu & Ahiamunnah (2018:1) put it "three years after, the tensions are yet to abate, with increased calls for self-determination by different parts of the country". The asymmetrical distribution of employment among the geopolitical zones led to the renewed agitation for self-determination in Nigeria (Ojibara, 2016). This position was further supported by Farayibi, (2017) who opined that the continuous agitations about secession across the geopolitical zones from the geopolitical zones, currently dominate political discourse because of the discord and marginalization felt by other zones simply because of the ineffective implementation of the Federal Character Principle. Farayibi, (2017, p.:9) puts it thus "marginalization and discord that is awakening secessionist movements which represents their solution to their discontentment".

Arising from the foregoing, this paper attempts to examine the reasons for the ineffectiveness in the implementation of the Federal Character Principle in the Nigerian civil service. The paper is divided into five sections which is the introduction, literature review (policy implementation and Federal Character Principle) methodology, discussion (challenges in the implementation of Federal Character Principle) and Conclusion and recommendations.

## **Literature Review**

### **Federal Character Principle: Marginalization, Inequality and Ethnicity**

Yakubu (2017) in a study of the Federal Character Principle, National Development and Ethnicity in Nigeria, found that although the policy of federal character emerged in response to the quest for nation-building by the political elites to ensure equitable redistribution of not only employment but wealth and facilitates across the geopolitical zones, the policy has however, remained largely ineffective because of the challenge post by ethnicity. He found that the quest to satisfy ethnic interest remains the main impediment to national development and inclusion which the policy set to achieve. Oyedeji's (2016) study of the dynamics of the Federal Character Principle in Nigeria with a focus on the background of the policy through the Federal Character Commission of Nigeria (FCCN) indicated that the Federal Character Principle was a response mechanism of the federal government to the numerous, divisive and complex employment issues which abound in the states of the federation. He noted that the policy was initiated to address issues of marginalization, injustice, and imbalance in Nigeria's society through employment distribution amongst the various geopolitical zones of the country.

An exploratory study by Ibor, Egoikuma, & Isa (2015)with focus on marginalization and inequality on employment distribution in the civil service of Nigeria sees the Federal Character Principle as a decision to ensure equal representation in the country's civil service with the main aim of solving the problems of marginalization and inequality as perceived by some parts of the country. The study found that high cases of marginalization and inequality in the Nigerian civil service employment distribution using the rank order technique necessitated the Federal Character Principle and thus, represents the whole essence of the policy.

Similarly, Lambert (2011) in the study of ethnicity and the Federal Character Principle in the country using the ethnicity perspective concluded that policy is a response mechanism aimed at solving

the inter-ethnic domination and rivalry of one ethnic group over the other thus addressing predominance of one section or group of persons or states in the composition of government through appointment and employment. Thus far, previous studies carried by Lambert (2011) investigated the effects of ethnicity on the Federal Character Principle in Nigeria and found out that primordial attachment to ethnic identity has greatly hindered the core objective of the federal character principle which the Nigerian government enacted to ensure that public institutions (civil service) and other governmental agencies in-country are occupied by citizens or people who would reflect the demographic diversity of the Nigeria and thus put a stop to the cry of marginalization.

Furthermore, the studies under review, established that the policy rather than promote national integration in the country, the monster of ethnicity has de-emphasized the core objective of the Federal Character Principle. Mustapha (2007) in a study of ethnic representation and its effect on the Federal Character Commission found that even though the policy is a necessity as a result of the disparity in the country's civil service, the deficiencies as shown from the arithmetic quota, is that the major ethnic groups in the country tend to favor themselves to the detriment of the fundamental goal of the policy.

### **Conceptual Definitions**

**Federal Character Principle:** The concept Federal Character Principle according to Wahab (2009), is an important tool used to ensure equality in employment distribution in Nigeria, it also ensure that all the 36 states of the federation and the federal character territory are representation as well as all segments of the Nigerian society in employment into the federal agencies. Federal Character Principle, according to Aondoaka and Orluckuku (2015) was put in place to ensure greater and equal political balance in employment distribution especially into the ministries, agencies, and parastatals. To Aondoaka and Orluckuku (2015) Federal Character Principle, is an attempt by the government to foster spirit of equal employment distribution for all Nigerians in respective of their state of origin and ethnicity. Federal character principles to the measures put in place in form of policy by the federal government of Nigeria aimed at ensuring equality in the civil service of Nigeria.

**Federal Character Commission:** The Federal Character Commission since inception in 1996 was mandated to monitor, enforce and implement the principles of federal character as enshrined in the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria. The commission mandate was to ensure equal employment distribution and public expenditure (Demarest, Langer & Ukiwo, 2020). The constitutional provision of Federal Character Commission can be found in section 14 subsection 3 and section 14 subsection 4 of the 1999 constitution. The commission is required to ensure that no predomination of persons from a few states, geopolitical zones or ethnic group in the federal government agencies and parastatals (Demarest, et al, 2020).

**Policy Implementation:** The term policy implementation according to Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983:20) "accomplishing a basic policy decision, which is often incorporated in an Act but which takes a form of important executive decisions or actions". Policy implementation entails the process of fulfilling government directive or an act establishing an agency leading to an improvement in the specific area or target program (Schneider & Ingram, 1990). According to Hanzl, Meschik, & Sammer (2002), policy implementation is the operational stage or phase of a long cycle of policy process where the decisions of government are carried out. Policy implementation is the execution stage of the government's decision.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper adopts the top-down. The theory see policy implementation see top-down approach or bottom-up implementation approach of policy involves the methods of structuring implementation of policy to guarantee the attainment of the purpose for which the policy was established (Birkland, 2014).

Policymakers are central actors in the policy implementation process and they play a significant role in role in the implementation and at the central level of implementation process, which is one the basic tent of the top-down theory (Matland, 1995).

Top-down theoretical assumptions identify synthesized political and legal variables as a conditions needed for effective implementation of governmental policy, which accurately capture the tenet of this paper, as it stress the ineffective implementation of Federal Character Principle (Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1983). The other assumption of the theory accounting to Sabatier and Mazmanian (1983) states that policies must have a clearly stated objectives, and a clearly legal structure of the implementation process and procedure with a set of committed officials with the responsible for the implementation such policies. The strength of the theory is its consistency in the policy advice and implementation, while the criticism centers on ignoring other key actors in policy implementation process. The theory broadens the understanding of policy implementation process and place decision-makers who are responsible for policy formulation to also handle implementation. Importantly, theory is consistent and it involves actors directly implementation process.

### **Challenges in the Implementation Federal Character Principle**

#### **Vague Policy Objective**

Ambiguous policy target remains a big challenge to the implementation of the Federal Character principle. Ambiguity inherent in the policy remains a major challenge in its implementation. Ugwuanyi & Chukwuemeka (2013) views that the over-ambitious nature of public policies in Nigeria and in this case, the Federal Character Principle has an unclear objective emanating from the formulation stage which eventually leads to greater challenges at the implementation stage of the policy. Ugoh & Ukpere (2012) were specific in their study of the Federal Character Principle and the Nigerian federalism, in which they discovered that the policy tended to focus on arithmetic employment distribution in the civil service and ignoring the critical inherent cleavages in the Nigerian civil service as well as the different population sizes of the various states, the ethnic structure of those states and their level of educational attainment. Thus Ugoh & Ukpere (2012) believe that the vagueness of the Federal Character Principle has hindered the implementation since it effectively ignored the very important variables inherent in the country.

The problem with the implementation of the Federal Character Principle began during the initial stage of conception of the idea of the policy which was not well understood by all, and as such its manipulation was imminent, because the ambiguity of the law establishing the policy, subsequently prompted the implementation issues. The ambiguous policy target inherent in the Federal Character Principle serves as a big challenge in the implementation of the policy, which previous studies have demonstrated (Gberevbie & Ibieta, 2013). Similarly, Zahariadis & Exadaktylos (2016) see ambiguity as providing room for the difficulty in policy implementation, leading to multiple and misleading strategies of implementation; the ambiguity of the policy itself, it was found to be making implementation difficult thus providing an avenue for a setback in the public policy implementation.

There are similarities between the reason for the ineffectiveness in the implementation of governmental policy decision by previous scholars and those described by Rosli & Rossi (2014) who opined that implementing policies can be a difficult and challenging task for those responsible for policy implementation due to high level of ambiguity, widening gap between policy target and instrument used for implementation, which unfortunately leads to increasing mismatch between them thus creating room for ineffectiveness. This further support by the idea of Matland (1995) who opined that policy implementation is only possible according to the level of ambiguity surrounding it, and a situation of

great ambiguity in policy objective target provides reasons for many challenges in public policy implementation.

The implementation of the Federal Character Principle is made more complicated because the obvious population difference which was not taken care of by the policy objective. According to Gberevbie & Ibietan (2013) who stated that the Federal Character Principle introduced in Nigeria to ensure equal employment distribution in the civil service of the country suffers in its implementation due to the major ambiguity inherent in it, as the policy has contradictions which only helped to further deepen the crisis in a multi-ethnic state structure such as Nigeria. Similarly, Justine (2015) believed that the implementation of the Federal Character Principle is ineffective and has not helped to solve the issues associated with employment distribution in the Nigerian civil service because of the ambiguities of the policy which have affected every aspect of the service especially in the area of equal employment distribution.

### **Poor Policy Evaluation**

The existing evaluation structure cannot guarantee the implementation of Federal Character Principle. Poor policy evaluation put in place cannot help to achieve the tenets of the Federal Character Principle, especially, the absence of feedback mechanism. Poor policy evaluation remains a problem to the implementation of the Federal Character Principle. Ideally, whenever a policy is being rolled out such as the Federal Character Principle, the need to have channels for feedback remains essentially, however, this seems to be absent in this case. This paper is consistent with that of Ahmed et al (2012) who opined that poor policy evaluation in the implementation of policy remains a major reason for the ineffective implementation of policy in the country. Ahmed et al, (2012) noted that an ambiguous policy target does complicate the policy implementation leaving the policy implementers to use their discretion to evaluate whether or not the policy in question has been properly and creditably carried out.

### **Attitude towards Public Policy Implementation**

The attitude of the officials towards public policy implementation is that which does not encourage policy implementation. The attitude towards policy implementation contributes significantly to the effective implementation of a policy or otherwise. Public servants hardly take the implementation of governmental policy seriously because whether they do or not in most cases, no sanction is meted. Thus, attitude towards government policies remains one of the greatest challenges of implementation in Nigeria. This shows why the implementation of the Federal Character Principle suffer setback. The lackadaisical attitude toward public policy inherent in the service of the country causes ineffectiveness in the implementation of the Federal Character Principle. The lukewarm attitude of civil servants towards government public policy implementation in the country hinders the good objectives of any policy.

The negative attitude towards public policy implementation contributes to the ineffectiveness in the implementation of the Federal Character Principle in Nigeria. The attitude towards public policy implementation by officials of government, whose responsibility is to carry out such policy objectives, ironically hinders the successful implementation of Federal Character Principle in Nigerian. It is pertinent to note that the reason for the ineffectiveness in the implementation of Federal Character Principle is attributable to the poor attitude of public officials towards the implementation of public policy in Nigeria. Previous research by Makinde (2005) has demonstrated that attitude is the reason that can lead to the ineffectiveness in policy implementation, as most policy implementers tend to exercise considerable amount of discretion in the implementation of governmental policies. Makinde (2005), further supports the idea of attitude towards policy implementation by stating that the implementation ineffectiveness witnessed today is a resultant effect of the attitudinal disposition of the policy implementers towards

policy goals. The paper seems to be consistent with other research carried out by Bolaji, et al (2015) found that effective public policy implementation in the country is greatly determined by the right attitude towards public policy by the implementers of such policy. Where this is not in place, the implementation of such policy suffers undue setback as has been experienced in the implementation of the Federal Character Principle.

### **Corruption**

The lack of political will and personal interest can be attributed to the reason for the ineffectiveness in the implementation of the Federal Character Principle. Corruption by policy implementers, personal interest over the implementation of the policy and lack of political will are the reasons for the ineffectiveness in the implementation of the policy. Prior studies have shown that corruption and personal interest on the part of those responsible for policy implementation can affect effective implementation (Makinde, 2005; Bolaji & Campbell-Evan, 2015; Onimisi, 2015; Ahmad et al 2012). The paper agrees with the discovery of other studies such as Makinde (2005); Bolaji & Campbell-Evan (2015); Onimisi (2015); Ahmad et al (2012) as the that continuous corruption, personal interest and lack of political will caused the ineffectiveness in the implementation of the Federal Character Principle in the Nigerian civil service employment distribution. The paper corroborates the ideas of Bolaji & Campbell-Evan (2015), who identified corruption as the core reason derailing policy implementation in Nigeria.

Systematic corruption on the part of the personnel responsible for the implementation of the policy especially in the discharge of their mandate remains a big challenge to the successful implementation of the Federal Character Principle. Corruption, just as it has affected every other sector of the country, has equally affected the implementation of the Federal Character Principle. Corruption is the reason why the Federal Character Principle is not leaving up to expectations in its implementation. Bolaji & Campbell-Evan (2015) stated that the implementation of public policy in Nigeria has continued to record ineffectiveness and disruption at the level of implementation due to corruption from those entrusted with implementation, which invariably has constituted a bottleneck that has permeated every public policy in the country. Okorie & Onwe (2015) specifically identify corruption as the bane that paralyzed public policy implementation in the country. Their study of Federal Character Principles and the implication of separation of power in public sector in Nigeria shows that corruption can negate the implementation of the policy in the Nigerian civil service and consequently ineffectiveness in the implementation of the federal character, whose overriding aim is to ensure the equal employment distribution in the service.

Okoroma (2006) who, in his study of the problem associated with the implementation of policies in Nigeria, noted that the virus of corruption has contributed in no small measure to the stagnation in the implementation of policy and the overall development of Nigeria. The monster of corruption among policy implementers in the country has brought about ineffectiveness in implementation as witnessed in the service today. Furthermore, Okoroma (2006) stated that the objectives of most policies in Nigeria are often derailed at the level of implementation due to the display of corruption and corrupt tendencies by policy implementers. Similarly, Ugwuanyi & Chukwuemeka (2013) see corruption by policy implementers as a major obstacle to effective implementation of policy in Nigeria. Their study shows that ineptitude and corruption result in setback and subsequently prevent the possibility of practical and effective implementation of government policies.

Quah (1987) also opined that corruption remains a great obstacle to policy implementation, because huge amount of resources are often wasted on bribes, forgetting the core activities that directly

relate to policy implementation, and delays happen to be common, all these measures definitely do not contribute to the prompt implementation of policies. Quah (1987) position was further supported by Effiong (2013) who equally opined that corruption remains the reason for poor and ineffective policy implementation in Nigeria. Abegunde (2015), in his work which focuses on public policy in some selected developing nations especially, Africa and Nigeria in particular, and found that corruption in the continent has led to the failure in policy implementation in those countries.

Another important reason for the ineffective implementation of the Federal Character Principle in the Nigerian civil service employment distribution is personal interest of the policy implementers. Championing of personal interest over and above policy objectives is one of the reasons for the ineffective policy implementation in Nigeria. The implementation of the Federal Character Principle in the Nigerian civil service remains ineffective because many of those responsible for the implementation of the place their interest above the tenets of policy. Most often, policy implementers rather than openly embrace the implementation of the Federal Character Principle in the Nigerian civil service would prefer satisfying their interest thus jeopardizing the collective objectives of the policy. It is imperative to note that personal interest over and above the implementation of the policy remains a critical challenge to public policy implementation. This corroborates the idea of Makinde (2005) who opined that personal and selfish interest of implementers of government policies remain the reason for the setback in the implementation of policy in the country.

Similarly, Ugwuanyi & Chuckwuemeka (2013), confirmed that the reason for the ineffective implementation of the policy is because of the challenge of putting away personal interest on the part of public policy implementers, in this case, those implementers responsible for the implementation of Federal Character Principle. The implementation of the policy is made difficult and unrealizable when personal interest, primordial interest, and values are put over and above the tenets of the policy, thus dissipating implementation, delaying and distorting the policy and consequently resulting to ineffectiveness in the implementation of the policy objectives

### **Lack of Political Will**

The lack of political will on the part of government officials towards the implementation of the Federal Character Principle. This indicates that policies are sometimes made for selfish and egoistic reasons by policymakers to attract public support and attention with less regard for implementation and importantly lack political will for the desired practical implementation. The lack of political will remains a leading cause of the ineffective implementation of the Federal Character Principle in the Nigerian. The absence of political will from top government officers has affected the effective implementation of the policy. These the paper further support the idea of Okoroma (2006) who opined that Nigeria leaders would formulate good policies in this case, the Federal Character Principle established to ensure equal distribution of employment in the Nigerian but the political will to implement this policy remains lacking, this has resulted in the ineffectiveness in the implementation of the policy.

In the same vein Bolaji, et al (2015) opined that the best policies, techniques, and templates will not attain its purpose and will surely fail without political will from the executive and those responsible for the implementation of such policies. According to Post, Raile & Raile (2010), political will is an idea riddled with imprecision and ambiguity, which makes the analysis difficult, political will is just too important to be abandoned in the realm of political rhetoric in understanding policy implementation. According to Chemutai (2016), policy implementation is dependent on the political will of the political class and that effective and efficient policy implementation is centered on the political will of the institution, bureaucrats and of course politician. The lack of political will provides clarification for the

problematic nature of policy implementation and the ineffective implementation of governmental policy decisions which are often exhibited by political office holders and officials in government administrative positions whose responsibility is to carry out the implementation of policies in the country.

The implementation of the Federal Character Principle who rather want a half-hazard implementation or an ineffective implementation because of their gain and interest. It is encouraging to compare this with Makinde (2005) in the scholar's study of the problem of policy implementation citing Nigeria's experiences who opined that aside corruptions and lack of continuity in government, one prominent setback to policy implementation in developing nations and especially Nigeria is sabotage. Makinde's (2005) studies show that the policy implementation problem happens when the desired or goal of the targeted beneficiaries is not met as a result of deniable which the current has found. This finding further matches those observed in earlier studies of Ajulor (2018) who opined policy implementation may be ineffective when the intended beneficiaries are denied the policy goals because of sabotage. The current found the problem ineffective implementation of the Federal Character Principle in the Nigerian civil service would be attributed to a deliberate act or refuse of those responsible for the implementation of the policy because of any gains.

### **Conclusion**

The paper investigated the factors affecting the effective implementation of the Federal Character Principle. The paper notes that effective implementation of the Federal Character Principle remains mirage mainly due to the inherent and persistent corruption by policy implementers as well as the personal interest of those scheduled with the responsibilities of implementing the policy. The paper added that the Federal Character Principle suffers from poor policy evaluation and attitude towards public policy implementation by policy implementers. The lackadaisical attitude hampers effective implementation of the policy. The paper underscores the need for prioritization of enforcement, increase monitoring of the implementation process and an important sanction should be shown to the defaulters of the policy which has greatly necessitated the ineffective implementation of the Federal Character Principle. It is against this backdrop that the study recommends:

- That adequate funding for implementation coupled with a workable strategy would help in the implementation of the Federal Character Principle in the Nigerian.
- For effective implementation of the Federal Character Principle in the Nigerian sanction should be melted on defaulters of the policy
- The national assemble should periodically check the records of the Federal Character Commission during her oversight function to ensure implementation of the policy
- Personnel of the Federal Character Commission should be place on periodic training for enhance efficacy implementation of the policy

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