

# *The good, the bad and the ugly in the melting pot: the challenges of Nigerianising diversity management*

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## **Abstract**

Taking a clue from the aftermaths of colonisation and the need to manage an 'unholy marriage' created by the British colonial masters, the review paper examines the peculiar challenges of managing Nigeria's unique diversity in the public sector through the critical lens of the Federal Character Principle (FCP) with specific focus on how this invented model of diversity management ended up creating more serious problems than it was meant to solve in the Nigerian public administration.

The paper is essentially a review, and it relies on previous studies and real-world evidence on the subject. The paper systematically traces the evolution of diversity management in Nigeria's public administration through the critical lens of the Federal Character Principle (FCP) with specific focus on how problematic it is to management Nigeria's unique diversity with more serious problems being created by the FCP application in the public sector.

The paper reveals that the constitutional provisions of the 'Federal Character Principle' (FCP) ended up creating more problems than it set out to solve, reflecting in the 'melting pot' allegory. It reveals how problematic it is to manage the country's diversity, and highlights some of the problems created by the FCP. The review makes a case for an urgent need to intensify empirical research on the subject in order to fashion out a better way of managing Nigeria's diversity in the public sector.

One major limitation of this paper is rooted lack of empirical research such as survey to further explore the topic. However, some real-life examples and cases were provided were drawn on the phenomenon. Thus, a call for more systematic and empirical research is made.

The implication of the finding is that the model for managing workforce diversity especially in the Nigerian public sector (not limited to the public administration) must be 'Nigerianised' such that the unique socio-cultural realities of the Nigeria's society as well as benefits accrued to diversity can be fully explored in driving the growth of the country and survival of the 'unity-in-diversity' goal.

The paper will benefit the government, relevant stakeholders, and the Nigerian society at large. It offers some useful insights into public administration. It stimulates an interest to conduct further research on diversity management with a view to producing some useful findings that could lead to a better management of diversity in the country.

## **Introduction**

Nigerian organisations are theoretically a reflection of the society as it is in other countries of the world. Similarly, the quest for a more meaningful appreciation and deeper level of diversity (particularly based on socio-demographic variables such as gender, race, ethnic) is on the surge. While the concept of diversity has its roots in the US (Atewologun and Singh, 2010), it has been widely adopted in other developed countries such as the UK, Canada and Australia (Agocs and Burr, 1996). In addition to the fact the US premiered most issues on the subject, most research contributions to the

field of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are conducted in the US (Ely, 1995; Ely and Thomas, 2001). This probably justifies why most companies constantly benchmark with the US in their efforts at eliminating subjective discrimination in workplaces.

However, African countries (e.g. Nigeria) were a bit slow in responding to this global pendulum despite its exceptional cultural spread, ethnic structure and colonial historical profiles being generically similar to that of the US. This possibly accounts for the peculiar burgeoning challenges marking the relative nascence of the concept in the country. Another implication is the relative dearth of literature especially in the sub-Saharan Africa on the subject matter. However, with actual specific differences in socio-economic and political trajectories of the pioneering countries and Nigeria, this implies that the context within which difference is experienced or constructed should rather be country specific (Atewelogun and Singh, 2010). Nigerian dimension of diversity is so unique and more nuanced that a customised management model is highly justifiable, and desperately required. While the need to contextualise the concept to reflect the unique socio-cultural and institutional realities of the country has long been recognised, an “ideal” model is still unavailable.

A global survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management [2009] – the US/The Economist Intelligence Unit, ranked Nigeria in the top five most diverse countries in the world, and simultaneously ranked the country as the 45th out of a total of 47 countries sustaining national diversity (indices include: social inclusion, government inclusion, and legal framework (Adeleye *et al.*, 2014). The survey outcome clearly portrays a paradox between the country’s diversity potentials and actual harnessing. This is as a result of many reasons including a weak institution and government framework (notably the Federal Character Principle in the context of public service). This is essentially due to a voluntaristic approach of the country (Adeleye *et al.*, 2012).

Particularly in the public sector, Nigeria has struggled in its pursuit of a ‘real’ equitable, inclusive and diverse representation (Adeleye *et al.*, 2014; Klarsfeld *et al.*, 2012). Considering the importance of this sector, a truly representative bureaucracy is very crucial to the socio-economic growth and survival of the country. With non-negotiable goals of ‘unity in diversity’ and continued national integration, a workable and mutually

beneficial model rather than the current controversial, moribund and counterproductive Federal Character Principle (FCP) will be a 'rare jewel'. Management diversity transcends such political and emotive policies like the FCP that fail to recognise specific cultural realities of the country. Rather, diversity management is a faithful initiative aims at achieving equal, diverse and equitable representation without compromising merit.

This review paper has two aims. The first is to explore existing literature by tracing the evolutions, and highlighting the challenges emanating from the FCP, especially in Nigeria's public sector. Secondly, the paper will suggest a useful framework for researching the challenges of diversity management in the Nigerian public sector. This will stimulate academic research on the subject with a view to finding an alternative model to the moribund FCP. The remaining part of this paper is aimed at addressing these two goals by providing an evolutionary discourse on diversity management in Nigeria through the critical lens of quota system, FCP, and the country's monumental failure in achieving representative bureaucracies in public sector administration.

### **Managing diversity in Nigeria: The origin of the Federal Character Principle**

Nigeria being an artificial creation of Britain, the colonial masters merged different 'nations' with varied socio-cultural backgrounds. As far back as 1904, Christopher Alexander Sapara Williams (the first Nigerian lawyer) had launched an appeal that the peoples who were at roughly of the same political, historical and socio-cultural backgrounds be grouped together into one province. However, Sir Frederick Lugard, the Governor of the Southern and Northern Protectorates (1902-1914) and later the first Nigerian Governor-General (1914-1919), planned and supervised the amalgamation of the Nigerian nations. Sir Fredrick vehemently opposed this principle on the rather personal grounds of administrative convenience and cost (Afigbo and Falola, 2005). This partially accounted for why over 300 ethnic groups or nationalities from different socio-cultural backgrounds were forcefully 'merged' together.

This created a lot of challenges during the British colonisation and became more problematic after independence. The notion of the 'Federal Character' was created in an attempt to manage the crisis (Hair, 1967). The Federal Character Principle under the management of the Federal Character Commission was expected to help in solving the problems created by the forceful union of diverse groups through the Lugardian 1900-

1914 Amalgamation of the Southern Protectorate and the Crown Colony of Lagos with the Northern Protectorate (Ballard, 1971). The merger invariably meshed together different ethnic groups/nationalities.

For example, the Northern part of the country consisted of the Hausa and Fulani people whose major languages were Hausa and Kanuri respectively, with some other distinct minority groups such as Igala, Ibira, Okun and the minority Bassa; the South mainly comprised the Yoruba speaking people with different versions and dialects of Yoruba language; the Ibo speaking people with a common language; the Ijaws, who speak a number of languages, the Itshekiris, also minority part of the South-South have their own unique language; the Calabars, also of the South-South, speak a number of distinct languages (Crozier and Blench, 1992). Therefore, this over 300 different ethnic groups hold divergent rather than convergent cultural views. Yet the British colonial masters were not oblivious of this fact before merging the diverse ethnic groups together during the 1900-1914 Amalgamation, which brought all of them together as one nation-state (Hair, 1967).

Shortly after independence, the Nigerian civil service was dominated by the Southerners who had previously been exposed to Christianity and the Western/British type of education earlier, while most of the Northerners who were exposed to the Islamic education appeared unemployable as the workplace rules and standards were predominantly derived from the Western education (Adamolekun *et al.*, 1991). Thus, in order to foster the required unity, the constitutional provision of the Federal Character was introduced (Dia, 1993). It was observed that there were differences in culture, stages of socio-economic development, and levels of political awareness among the peoples now referred to as Nigerians (Ekeh and Osaghae, 1989). Disparities were also observed in the western educational development across different states and regions which culminated in the actual and perceived marginalisation – in terms of power sharing and wealth distribution (e.g. Nnoli, 1978).

A possible explanation for this inequity is that some states (e.g. Ogun) benefitted from their proximity to Lagos (Ukiwo, 2007). Ogun state could tap from development in Lagos state which was the first point of call for most of the colonial masters as well as the Christian missionaries. Further, there were some important changes spurred by the interactions between the two countries (the coloniser and the colony) as well the states

that later made up the colony. As an example, the introduction of the Western education which was spread later into the hinterlands of the country. Contrastingly, most parts of today's Northern Nigeria which previously conquered by the Muslim Jihadists, introduced the Islamic education. Meanwhile, this system of education was largely incongruent and notably less structured than the Western education introduced by the British colonial masters (Umar, 2006).

Further, it should be added that the British colonialists handed over a public service that was meant to expediently service Britain's administrative and economic interests without giving much attention to the ethnic disparities between the various federating units as well as the varied state and rate of development and their future needs (Inyang, 2007). Employment that was strictly based on merit, from the time of independence, have been severely criticised as favouring only people from certain states or regions tagged 'educationally privileged states' especially states in the Southern part of the country; leaving people from most parts of the north largely unemployed (Afigbo, 1989; Ekeh and Osagahe, 1989; Nnoli, 1978). The 1979 Constitution of Nigeria therefore gave birth to the 'Principle of the Federal Character' and made provisions for the creation of the Federal Character Commission (FCC). The FCC was later established through various decrees and laws, 1989, 1996 and 1999. This was as a result of the recommendations of the constitutional conference of 1995. This was later enshrined into the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The FCC is one of the fourteen independent Federal Executive Bodies established by section 14(3) of the 1979 and 1999 Constitution. The Federal Character Principle is defined by the Constitution of as follows:

*The distinctive desire of the people of Nigeria to promote unity, foster national loyalty and give citizens of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation, notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which is their desire to nourish and harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Federal Character Commission, p. 111 as cited by Marcellius and Christian, 2012).*

Furthermore, section 14(3) of the 1979 and 1999 constitution made special and specific provisions for the concept of Federal Character as follows:

*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 loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic groups in that government or in any of its Agencies.*

Finally, section 14(4) states that:

*The composition of the government of a state, a Local Government council and the conduct of the affairs of the Government shall be carried out in such a manner as to recognise the diversity within its area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all the people of the federation.*

These two constitutional provisions provided a term of reference for the establishment of the Federal Character Commission as originally contained in the 1979 Constitution, with no amendment till today. The following are vision and statements:

#### ***Vision statement of the Federal Character Commission***

*Building a strong, virile and indivisible nation, united in purpose and to which every citizen feels proud to belong, founded on the philosophy of fairness, equity and justice’ (based on the law establishing the FCC, as cited in George, 2010).*

#### ***Mission statement of the Federal Character Commission***

*The Federal Character Commission is committed to fostering a sense of belonging among all Nigerians through: Equitable sharing of posts in the Public Service without sacrificing merit; and fair distribution of socio-economic amenities to ensure even development among the federating units of Nigeria (based on the law establishing the FCC, as cited in George, 2010).*

With a combination of three basic approaches: the quota system, merit principle, and a measure of representation (Adamolekun, *et al.*, 1991), the FCP attempted to achieve and maintain a Nigerian model of representative bureaucracy or diversity management. The specific goals are to ensure fairness and equity in order to reflect the national socio-ethnic, linguistic and geographic diversity. Normatively, the long term sustainable objective is to promote unity, integration and continued mutually beneficial co-existence of the “forcefully” united peoples from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. The need to preserve diverse nationhood with threat of disintegration persistently serves as the primary goal of the FCP. Probably; this may explain why the past and present political leaderships (civilian and military) have refused to scrap the convoluted model. Specifically, the FCC has further developed a quota system by stipulating the total



public sector positions comprising of at least 2.5% of individuals from each state and a maximum of 3% (Adeleye *et al.*, 2014).

As far back as 1983, barely four years after its appearance in the constitution, scholars (e.g. Adamolekun *et al.*, 1991; Kirk-Greene, 1983; Gboyega, 1984) had expressed disappointment in the principle. In fact, Adamolekun *et al.* (1991) confidently expressed a sheer optimism that an end to the prolonged military rule will automatically mark the end of the principle. A hypothetical target of 2014 set as at 1991 was here and already gone, yet the FCP was very much alive till today (2016) with more problems being triggered.

Following the attainment of independence in 1960, the adoption of the 'British Voluntarist' employment relations practice to replace the existing 'Nigerian Paternalistic' employment relations practice with little or no thoughtfulness for socio-cultural realities of the country became a tough issue that increasingly requires attention (Yesufu, 1982). Meanwhile, the import of the British practice had already been noticeably problematic before the independence (as early as 1954) when the country adopted Federalism (Agbaje, 1989). In 1954, the 'quota system' was consequently introduced in order to tackle the problems created by the transfer of management practices between Britain and Nigeria during the colonisation.

This equally moribund quota system according to Mustapha, (2007) was what metamorphosed into the FCP in 1978 which was officially included in the constitution in 1979. The reason why the problem persisted and remained largely unresolved till 1975 (and even till date) was a serious political issue that must be carefully handled to forestall looming disintegration of the country (Afigbo, 1989). Nevertheless, as expected by some critical observers and commentators, this problem was not solved even after the introduction of the FCP; it rather became messier and more complicated. Consequently, members of ethnic groups who were generally less educationally and professionally qualified (mostly from the Northern part of the country) were able to get positions in the public service and rose to the top echelons within the MDAs at the detriment of better educated and more professionally qualified Southerners (Afigbo, 1989).

### **Key drivers of diversity management in Nigeria**

Essentially, managing diversity has evolved through many phases ranging from encouraging minorities, valuing egalitarian society, and eliminating discrimination. The concept is a paradigm shift from the egalitarian/equality model that argues for diversity based on rights and social justice to valuing diversity for utilitarian benefits (Kirton and Green, 2005; Noon, 2007). The concept has also come to be associated with a cosmetic attempt to appeal to some the disadvantaged groups rather than eliminating social discrimination (Liff and Wajcman, 1996). The third school of thought is an attempt to reconcile these two seemingly opposing forces (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010) which is an ideal state every country should aim. Shifts in the focus have been primarily orchestrated by the rapid change in socio-demographic forces across the globe (Syed and Ozbilgin, 2009), and further shaped factors such as multiculturalism and globalisation (George, *et al.*, 2013);

Nigeria has a rich and relatively complicated history. With a Federation comprising of thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory situated in Abuja, further clustered into six geographical zones, namely: North-West, North-Central, North-East, South-West, South-East, and South-South, and more importantly, roughly divided into two regions, the north and south. The three 'major' ethnic groups include: the Hausa-Fulani (consisting of 29% of the population), the Yoruba (21%), and the Igbo (18%), while smaller minority ethnic groups make up the remaining (Adeleye *et al.*, 2014). Nigeria is ranked among four biggest economies in Africa - others being South Africa, Algeria and Egypt (Adeleye *et al.*, 2014). As at 2011, the country had an estimated GDP of \$236 billion in agriculturally powered economy, with agriculture accounting for over 70 percent of its active working population relative to other sectors such as services and industry which constitute the remaining 30 percent (CIA World Factbook, 2012).

In terms of specifics, as at 2010, Lagos (one of the 36 states in Nigeria) state had a GDP (across all economic sectors) of N12.091 trillion equivalent to \$80.61 billion dollars which accounted for 35.6% of the national GDP figure of N33.985trillion - a whopping of 62.3% of the non-oil GDP (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). It is therefore not surprising that Lagos operates as a global entrepot, and also a sort of 'melting pot' for many nationalities - people from different parts of the country as well as from neighbouring West African countries and other parts of the globe-. The workforce of

the city reflects the metaphor of melting pot (i.e., rendezvous for a diverse range of peoples).

However, the point here is not the actual socio-demographic heterogeneity but valuing and harnessing the full potentials of this diversity. Adopting a largely voluntaristic approach (see Adeleye, *et al.*, 2012) with policies such as the FCP in the public sectors and lack of a real institutional framework for monitoring EDI in private sector has not only rendered diversity of the country useless in the private organisations, but also created more problems in FCP's primary domain, public sector. While EDI may connote a similar normative meaning in both sectors, it is understandable that the emphasis placed on managing diversity essentially differs between public and private organisations. Essentially, the fundamental distinction between the private and public administration on the 'focus and goal' criterion accounts for the emphasis paid on EDI in both institutions.

Notably, another major difference between private and public organisations is in terms of their record of compliance with global diversity initiative. In recent times, for some logical reasons (perhaps utilitarian argument), few (though rising) number of multinational corporations, have voluntarily adopted diversity initiatives. However, public organisations have only succeeded in institutionalising discrimination (e.g. Adamolaekun *et al.*, 1991; Adeleye *et al.*, 2012; Suberu, 2001). The reasons for this mediocrity in EDI performance (more cases substantiating this are later reviewed) are not far-fetched. With a mere 'anti-discriminatory clause' in the constitution which prohibits discrimination on the bases of association, ethnicity, place of origin, gender, religious affiliation, or political ideology, the evidence of prevalent inequities and discrimination in organisations is reflective of this passive approach to manage EDI.

Governments have historically and narrowly fixated on suppressing ethnic and religious inequities, the dimensions along which the country is most expressively polarised (Adeleye, *et al.*, 2014). Hence, majority of the laws and efforts geared towards achieving ethnic equality have lopsidedly and fruitlessly concentrated on the public sector, public education and political institutions, thereby granting private employers and organisations the freedom to manage workforce diversity in a way that promotes their business goals. This is why it is hard to find any serious attempt to achieve equality, diversity and inclusion in public organisations.

### **Scope of the FCP Application**

The FCP has a very limited scope as it (in a very strict sense) only applies to public administration. Although the makers might have wished it is also applicable to the private businesses, its practical implementation and monitoring raises some insurmountable challenges (see Adeleye *et al.*, 2014). Section 14, subsections 3 and 4 of the 1999 constitution (as previously quoted) clearly spells out the operational scope of the FCP. It is therefore imperative to mention that FCP has its operational scope essentially limited to the public services; with special focus on the government of the Federation, the component units including the 36 states and 774 local government councils.

For emphasis sake, this principle applies to personnel and various offices in all MDAs controlled by the central government and each of the component units. In terms of sectorial descriptions, the FCP application covers all sectors of the economy notably including education (primary, secondary and tertiary) and strategic and sensitive sector like the military. The scope covers a broad range of issues including admission, recruitment and appointment.

### **The dark side of the FCP: Evidence from literature**

Although the concept of ‘federal character’ first appeared in Nigeria's Constitution in 1979, the principle had been in operation as far back as 1954. As variously stressed throughout this paper, the notion was primarily borne out of the need to enshrine the principles of equity and fairness in the recruitment and appointment of personnel in the Nigerian public service – comprising MDAs. Without being unnecessarily too critical, the task of managing diversity is generally not an easy ride and so it is always tainted with some troubles and paradoxes especially at the initial phase.

With its primary roots in politics, it is unavoidably described as being politically charged (Noon, 2007; Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010). The FCP being the Nigerian model of achieving equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the public administration, based on justifications provided by its proponents, is analogous to the diversity agenda practised in the private business administration. Hypothetically, workplace diversity in terms of ethno-cultural, linguistic, and geographic dispersion reflects heterogeneity of the larger Nigerian society. Nigeria as a plural society is made of widely different peoples with widely disparate socio-cultural values.

The FCP has very limited yet non-sustainable benefits. Perhaps, the supporters can argue that it is probably contributing to why the country is still existing as one indivisible entity till today. Truth is that it is a wall with many cracks, and a time bomb waiting to explode, especially if drastic actions are not taken. Numerous anecdotes and public comments coupled with few systematic research have disparaged the proponents and the operational outcomes of the Federal Character Principle (e.g. Adamolekun *et al.*, 1991; Adeleye *et al.*, 2014; Kirk-Greene, 1983; Easterly and Levine, 1997; Gboyega, 1984; Mamman and Bayodun, 2009; Sowell, 2004).

In the context of the public administration which constitutes the primary context for its implementation, the FC principle which is better described as ‘dead on arrival’ has been variously labelled as a failed attempt to achieve ‘representative bureaucracies’ (Gboyega, 1984), ‘tribal character’ (Oyovbaire, 1983), ‘federal discrimination at best’ or ‘geographical apartheid’ (Suberu, 2001: 111), ‘confused balancing of the merit principles and the quota system’ (Adamolekun, *et al.*, 1991: 75). More conceptually, the principle has also been pronounced as a ‘confused balancing of the merit principle and the quota system’ heinously found in the ideology of ‘statism’ - the decision to employ or appoint to the MDAs on criteria of the people’s states of origin rather than merit.

It is important to mention that history played its role in blocking this moribund policy from becoming a part of such a vital document as constitution. It is clearly on records that some misgivings characterised by a series of the events that culminated to the drafting process of the 1979 Constitution which eventually gave birth to the Federal Character provisions (Adamolekun *et al.*, 1991). One of the major concerns raised before the final adoption of the inclusion of the clause was in relations to the impending menace of accepting people’s ethnic or linguistic affiliation as the primary and major criterion of assessing quality or competence to perform a formal task while pushing merit to the back burners.

Regrettably however, few ‘voiceless’ antagonists were reported to have strongly pre-empted and warned that an important document like Constitution should rather reflect more enduring and noble ideas and values than a policy which reveres ethnicity or state of origin of a would-be jobholder in evaluating an individual for a job (Adamolekun *et al.*, 1991). Another important source of concerns where doubts were expressed,

regarding the non-sustainability of the Federal Character provision was with respect to extolling the status of value-laden criterion such as 'state of origin' or 'regional affiliation' in the administration of MDAs as well as the conduct of the affairs of the state, in the name of instilling fairness and equitability in the recruitment of workers, appointment and election of public office holders.

By and large, the ultimate codification of the FCP in 1979 and the subsequent retention in further constitutional amendments (e.g. 1989, 1999, and 2007) till date implies that its original birth has not been by accident. Relying on the logic underlying continued retention of the principle in the constitution, can we conclude that a valid (perhaps from the perspective of past political leaders), case has been made for the principle's sustained relevance? An attempt to come up with a sincere answer to this question is always viewed by some as an attempt to throw the national conscience and love for continuous oneness of the Federal Republic of Nigerian into the garbage can.

Holistically, this principle has ended up creating more problems than it set out to solve. The implementation has drastically impacted the public institutions and the public service system in generally (see Adeleye *et al.*, 2014; Adamolekun *et al.*, 1991). Apart from the country's mediocre rating on the diversity indices previously alluded to in this paper, adverse consequences of this principle in the light of public administration abound. As it is also experienced in the private business sector, the task of managing diversity is generally thought-provoking. It particularly poses some unique challenges in the public sector especially with the FCP model in operation.

The consequences include: demotivation of people, rampant cases of indiscipline, operational ineffectiveness and inefficiency (Adamolekun *et al.*, 1991), orchestrating some of the episodes of public policies summersault (Adeleye *et al.*, 2014), mutual mistrust and suspicion (Afigbo, 1987; Ezigbo, 2007), socio-ethnic tensions/conflicts (Adamolekun *et al.*, 1991; Adeleye *et al.*, 2014; Suberu, 2001), economic and educational disparities (Adamu, 2003; George *et al.*, 2014; Hamalai 1994), ethnocentrism (Okorie and Egbo, 2014), creation of elites class (Afigbo 1987; Agarwal, 2006; Chaturvedi,), the triumph of mediocrity over meritocracy (Adeleye *et al.*, 2012; Okorie and Egbo, 2014; George *et al.*, 2014, Suberu, 2001), tribalism, nepotism, social injustice and perceived inequity (Okorie and Egbo, 2014), operational inefficiency,

inherently discriminatory and counterproductive (Abba 2003; Ugoh and Ukpere, 2012), national identity and image management challenge (Adeleye *et al.*, 2014).

### ***The Federal Character Principle and the Nigerian educational system***

The FCP through the Commission has successfully introduced some ‘talents killing’ and ‘morale sapping’ policies. Generally, the principle has institutionalised mediocrity rather than meritocracy. For example, in the public education sector, students from some of the Northern states of Nigeria are usually offered admission into the Federal government owned and financed schools: primary, secondary and tertiary (notably lowly priced in tuition fees compared to the private school) with lower qualifications compared to their counterparts from the South. This phenomenon does not really reward hard work.

For example, a candidate from Jigawa State in the Northern part of Nigeria with a composite score of 54% (aggregate score sums up to 100 based on 50-50 or 60-40 distributed between Joint Admission Matriculation Board score and the internally administered Post-JAMB exam score respectively, organised by respective universities) is most likely be offered admission into Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria (a Federal government owned university in the North-West) while another candidate from Ogun State in the South-West with about 64% might not be admitted into the same university, in the name of ‘catchment areas’ – an educationally invented Federal Character policy . The whole idea translated into ‘holding’ some states in the South down so that the states in the North could ‘catch up’.

Perhaps it should also be mentioned that the Federation ‘arrogates’ a relatively large portion of the budget on education to the Northern states than it does to the Southern states (see Aguolu, 1979) this continues till today (2016). The implication of the above hypothetical scenario is that admission prospects face different layers of discrimination as the applicant (notably from the South) in the example even faces subjective discrimination within his/her tribes, while there are more hurdles to be scaled if he/she chooses to study in a university based in the Northern part of the country. In a case where a student scales through this aforementioned layer of discrimination, other barriers like the state quota (30%), environment (30%), exigency (10%) stand on the road to success, courtesy of the Federal Character Principle! This is analogous to what some diversity scholars (e.g. Bell and Nkomo, 2005; Fearfull and Kamenou, 2006) have

tagged the “double minority” status, though specially constructed to describe conditions of the ethnic minority women. The most recent case is the 2015/2016 admission process of the University of Lagos – one of the public universities owned by the Federal Government (as shown in Figure 1.) exposes this further. All these discriminating factors are not just discouraging excellence but killing talents and creativity. It must also be stressed that admissions into the public primary and post primary - (presumably of higher quality and cheaper than the state government and privately owned institutions) are strictly based on the ‘Federal Character’ while merit is overlooked.

Figure 1: The University of Lagos 2015-2016 Admission Cut off Points

**INSERT Figure 1**

**INSERT Figure 2**

A real illustration of this counterproductive and counter-intuitive federal character is reflected in the process of admitting into the various programmes of study in the University. See the appendix (Figure 2) on the illustration on how the composite percentage score is computed. For example, courses like Business Administration, requires a student to score 58.13% (on merit) whereas a candidate from Ekiti state only needs to score 50.50 %, Lagos state (55 %), Ogun (56.25 %), Ondo (54.75 %), Osun (50 %), and Oyo (55.38 %). The implication of this is that an admission seeker born, bred and tutored in Lagos state, but whose parents are from the Igbo tribe (i.e. Imo, Ebonyi, Anambra,) must score a ‘merit point’ of 58.13%, otherwise he or she does not get admission into the University. However, his or her counterpart from Ekiti state, for example, born, bred and schooled in Ado Ekiti and has never been to Lagos only needs to score 50.50% to gain admission to study Business Administration.

Unfortunately, all of them admitted with high and low scores are usually taught the same courses by the same lecturers. They are therefore put in the ‘melting pot’. The University, like every other public institution, now becomes a ‘melting pot’ that houses the ‘good’ (the very brilliant students), the ‘bad’ (the average students) and probably the ‘ugly’ (the below average students) drawn from different parts of the country, courtesy of the Federal Character Principle. The resultant effect is average (neither



excellent nor too poor) academic and research outcomes and the triumph of mediocrity over meritocracy.

Without much ado about the case of any ‘unfortunate’ fairly brilliant applicant who does not get admitted, some might even get frustrated along the line, the fate of such applicants could be a possible research area for sociologists and social workers. While the ‘lucky’ (no thanks to FCP) ones will eventually graduate from schools and voyage in the workplaces – public and private. Of course, the same policy will be applied in recruitments into the public organisations. In addition, it is equally important to mention that the same principle is used in recruiting the academic and non-academic staff of the universities.

Also in the primary and post primary education, the cases of confusing subtle subjective discrimination are also clearly evident in the admission into the Federal Government unity schools. In common cases, many prospective students are granted unnecessary advantage by virtue of the fact that they are indigenes of the ‘educationally disadvantaged’ (ED) states where very few students apply for admission, whereas numerous fairly bright admission prospects are sometimes denied chance mainly because there are army of applicants from their states. For example, as shown in Table 1 (see appendix), any applicants from states such as Yobe and Zamfara, few of the ED states with a very low literacy rate (see Adeleye *et al.*, 2014) is virtually guaranteed a place in the admission list with as low as 3 (on average for both genders). This ugly phenomenon of using quotas in allocating places in such an important sector like education sector has generated some recurring controversies and undermine the fair access and right to public education (Adeleye *et al.*, 2014; Odinlaku, 2008). This has been a reverberating debating theme in the media and literature.

### ***Institutionalisation of mediocrity: Culture as a catalyst***

It must also be stated that the practice of the British Voluntarist employment relations, solely based on merit and no other considerations (Marchington and Goodman, 2004) seems to be ‘non-alignment’ with the Federal Character Principle. Meanwhile, in the former Nigerian paternalistic employment relations system, recruitment, selection, and promotion were not necessarily based on merit but on the discretion of the family head (Ubeku, 1993). The Federal Character Principle therefore leans more on the Nigerian paternalistic employment relations system than the British Voluntarist employment

relations system transferred to Nigeria by the British colonial masters (Iwuji, 1968, George, 2011, George, 2012). Therefore, culture plays a very vital role in domesticating the management of diversity in Nigeria.

It is therefore considered imperative as one of the aims of this paper to come up with a theoretical framework for conducting a systematic and comprehensive research on diversity management and the Federal Character Principle in Nigerian public service in Nigeria. From the foregoing review, it is depicted that the Nigerian diversity is unique and peculiar in terms of its antecedents, nature, consequences and policy measures designed to manage encourage include equality and inclusion. This is summarised in Figure 3.

### **INSERT Figure 3**

Antecedents of diversity are broadly grouped into two: internal and external influences. While the internal factors include: demography and culture, the external factors include colonisation and globalisation (George *et al.*, 2013; Ospina, 2001). Furthermore, diversity could be both functional and dysfunctional (Ashikali and Groeneveld, 2015; Cox, 1993; Ospina, 2001). Practical measures for achieving Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Nigerian context include meritocracy, supportive political climate, and ethical and transformational leadership, among others.

### **Policy Implications**

This paper explores the concepts and the links between diversity management and federalism in the context of the Nigerian Federal Character Principle. We attempted a review of the trajectories of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in its efforts at installing representative bureaucracies in its public sector. How do employees with distinct and widely varied socio-cultural, linguistic and geographical identities find their ways into the Nigerian public workforce? The paper reveals that while the reality of diversity portends many potential benefits to these varied public institutions, the country has struggled and experienced a number of hitches peculiar to the management of its diversity.

It is essentially revealed that the best of these public institutions and its workers generally can only be maximised if the recruitment and appointment are based on a more-merit based criterion rather than the failed FCP that regrettably has

institutionalised mediocrity. This has negative implications for stakeholders in the country, particularly, it undermines the possibility of harnessing the potentials of the country such as achieving sustainable growth and development. This aligns with the claims in several studies which are referenced as evidence in this paper. However, the FCP is clearly counter-intuitive and has proved counterproductive in realising and enjoying the full benefits of diversity as various studies (e.g. Hong and Page, 2004; Lee and Nathan, 2010) that culturally diverse workgroups tend to outperform homogenous or poorly managed population of diverse communities in all indices of performance and sustainable growth.

This paper narrates the story of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with its moribund Federal Character Principle (FCP) as a diversity management model for achieving representative bureaucracy. The FCP has been historically employed as a major policy for managing the workforce diversity in the country's organisations with the sacred goal of ensuring national integration, as well as correcting the anomaly created by the British colonial masters, who 'forcefully' merged over 300 ethnic nationalities with various different socio-demographic identities to become one nation-state. Unfortunately, this has so far created more problems than it was set up to solve or managed. The situation whereby merit is made to give way for 'state of origin' is unfair, unacceptable and against all well-known management theories of diversity, motivation, employees commitment and work engagement.

In addition, it is revealed that the Federal Character Principle with the Federal Character Commission as the watchdog has tended to encourage mediocrity. This is because the so-called educationally less privileged states will rather not aspire to develop their indigenes since their quotas in the Federal Civil Service are assured and guaranteed no matter their educational qualifications and job experience. For example, the senior positions in the Federal Civil Service like that of Directors, Assistant Directors and the Permanent Secretary are 'shared' between the states and the issue of merit is pushed aside as the quotas must be filled.

Finally, efforts geared towards managing workforce diversity in the Nigerian public sector institutions have attracted and 'meshed' together the extremely qualified, the moderately qualified, and the unqualified personnel from different socio-cultural backgrounds that make up the country and its organisations. Therefore, a 'melting pot'

is moulded, mirroring a culture of mediocrity in the national system as the quality of institutional and individual outcomes have been neutralised or negatively moderated by the efforts and contributions of the different mix of people with differential worth. It is not therefore surprising that the few ‘overqualified’ personnel who are supposed to be growing in quality are weakened by the system, and the army of mediocre possibly remains the same or get worse.

The current presidential/quasi-federal system of government was modelled after the American system after the failure of the Parliamentary system of government inherited from the colonial masters. Yet, the current system was not fully and thoroughly practised especially with limited autonomy exercised by the federating units. The call for a true federalism is resonating. This will eliminate the existing framework that is clearly unfair and unjust to most states. This will create a situation whereby economic, educational, political and social development spreads across the country.

At the federal level, recruitment, selection and promotion should be strictly on merit and not based on the FCP. This will imbue strong work ethics in all citizens in contrast to the present situation. The current situation is a disincentive to positive values like dedication and hard work among citizens. The current economic crisis in the developed economies and globalisation is creating an army of expatriates in the country. The so-called expatriates are typically brought in on contract to carry out assignments where the quota especially in Northern states. The Northern states will rather prefer expatriates in executing such assignments to candidates from the Southern states. The Southern counterparts cannot be trusted to train or hand over the tasks to the Northern candidates whenever they are qualified to handle the assignments.

It is theoretically expected that equitable social representations in bureaucracies in ethnically diverse nations should promote ‘unity in diversity’. However, the problem in achieving this significantly rests on the ways by the social policies are being implemented not just the problem of bad policies alone. There are numerous cases of ‘very good policies’ with ‘bad implementation’. In the case of the Federal Character, it is an exceptionally bad case of a poorly conceived policy meeting with an infective implementation. In other words, the policy is an allegory of ‘dead on arrival’. The case even transcends beyond what a renowned late historian Professor Gabriel Olusanaya, described as the ‘poverty of imagination and creativity’ (see Suberu, 1988).

### **Towards harnessing the full potentials of diversity in Nigeria**

The need for value reorientation and attitudinal change should be considered imperative by both leaders and followers. To have a balanced diversity management system, all stakeholders must rise above ethnic interest and view Nigeria as the property of everybody regardless of the ethnic or social affiliation (Okorie and Egbo, 2014). This could be achieved by sincerity on the part of the leaders as well as the followers. Of course, leaders should lead by examples and not just spend money on campaigning for 'unity in the diversity' but also work their talk in attitudes and practice. This will significantly contribute in promoting, preserving and sustaining the nationhood and possibly lead to full harnessing potentials of the country's rich heritage in diversity.

The call for the replacement of the FCP with a more balanced and merit based policy of recruitment and appointment in the public sectors administration is welcomed. It is also recommended that the country should make conscious efforts at replacing the pseudo federal system of government with a true federalism model. This calls for the need to overhaul the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Indeed, this lends a voice to the resonating calls for the real constitutional review as against the cosmetic fine tuning of some sections with a view to protecting the interests of the few privileged ones.

### **Conclusion**

It is concluded that the FCP as the Nigerian diversity management model has resulted in the creation of a melting pot wherein the good, the bad, and the ugly are being meshed together with a mediocrity being the frequent outcome. Therefore Nigeria and the Nigerian governments have got more problems to tackle than they initially sought or envisaged in their quest to eliminate subjective discrimination and perceived social injustice in the public sector by implementing diversity management initiatives such as the FCP. Therefore, government and other stakeholders should intensify their efforts at domesticating diversity management in the Nigerian organisations with a more pragmatic measure for solving all the menaces of the FCP.

Any public policy addressing diversity should be aimed at installing and encouraging equality, diversity and inclusiveness via a strictly merit-based recruitment and appointment. This will perpetuate sustainable peaceful co-existence, healthy competition, and equitable distribution of national wealth among different segments of

the country. In a very strong term, this diversity management model will never promote unity. It will rather further engender a strong loyalty to the states of origin and reduce the 'Nigerianess' in Nigerians.

### **Limitations and directions for future studies**

One major limitation of this paper is rooted in the lack of empirical evidence to substantiate the anecdotal accounts. This stresses the need for future research using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Studies investigating issues like diversity typically generate a form of bias and prejudice from both the researchers and the participants. Research must therefore be carefully designed to minimise any bias.

### **Conflict of interest**

The authors have not received any funding or benefits from any individual, organisation, industry, or government. Therefore, all the statements and opinions expressed in the paper are devoid of any intentionally imposed or externally influenced bias or prejudice. The authors did everything ethically and professionally possible to dispense any form of this prejudice.

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**Figure 1: The University of Lagos 2015-2016 Admission Cut off Points**

			CATCHMENT					
FACULTY	DEPARTMENT	MERIT	EKITI	LAGOS	OGUN	ONDO	OSUN	OYO
ARTS	EUROPEAN LANGUAGES( FRENCH)	47.38	-	-	-	-	-	-
	EUROPEAN LANGUAGES(RUSSIAN)	46.88	-	-	-	-	-	-
	LINGUISTICS(YORUBA)	48.38	-	46.63	48.13	-	46.63	-
	LINGUISTICS(IGBO)	45.63	-	-	-	-	-	-
	CHINESE	49.88	-	-	47.63	-	-	-
	ENGLISH	57.13	53.38	52.88	54.13	53.63	54.38	51.50
	PHILOSOPHY	53.38	49.25	49.38	50.25	48.88	47.00	46.88
	CREATIVE ARTS	56.50	51.75	53.50	54.63	52.75	52.88	50.88
	HISTORY & STRATEGIC STUDIES	54.50	-	51.13	52.25	50.63	47.50	49.75
BUS ADMIN	ACCOUNTING	64.50	60.00	62.75	62.13	61.00	62.25	61.00
	ACT.SCIENCE	52.75	51.75	47.63	49.00	46.63	48.50	45.05
	BUS. ADMIN	58.13	50.50	55.00	56.25	54.75	52.88	55.38
	INSURANCE	55.13	48.25	48.63	53.00	49.00	51.75	51.00
	IRPM	56.25	51.25	52.50	54.13	48.25	52.63	52.13
	FINANCE	56.88	51.13	54.88	55.25	53.75	53.50	48.13
EDUCATION	ADULT	46.75	-	-	-	-	-	-
	BIOLOGY	46.50	-	-	-	-	-	-
	BUSINESS EDUCATION	49.75	-	48.63	49.00	47.63	45.63	48.75
	CRS	46.75	-	-	-	-	-	-
	CHEMISTRY	46.50	-	-	-	-	-	-
	EARLY CHILDHOOD	48.38	-	-	46.63	46.63	47.75	-

Source: Retrieved from the University of Lagos Website on 14/09/15, 5:07pm

Note: *All the figures are stated in percentage* (based on composite score, see Figure 2)

**Figure 2: Model Example of how a composite score is computed during University Admission Process**

**Hypothetical case of how a composite score is computed for admission prospects into the University of Lagos**

Given the UTME<sup>1</sup> total obtainable marks of 400, and the Post-UTME total mark is 40.

The UTME accounts for 60% of the composite score while POST-UTME accounts for the remaining 40%.

For example, an applicant who scored 280 out of 400 and 25 out of the 40 in the UTME and Post-UTME respectively.

The aggregate could be computed thus:

Step 1: Divide the applicant's UTME score by 8 (to convert the score to 60 percent)

Such that:  $280/8 = 35$  (out of 60)

Step 2: Multiply the POST-UTME score by 1.25 (to convert the score to 40 percent).

Such that:  $25 \times 1.25 = 31.25$

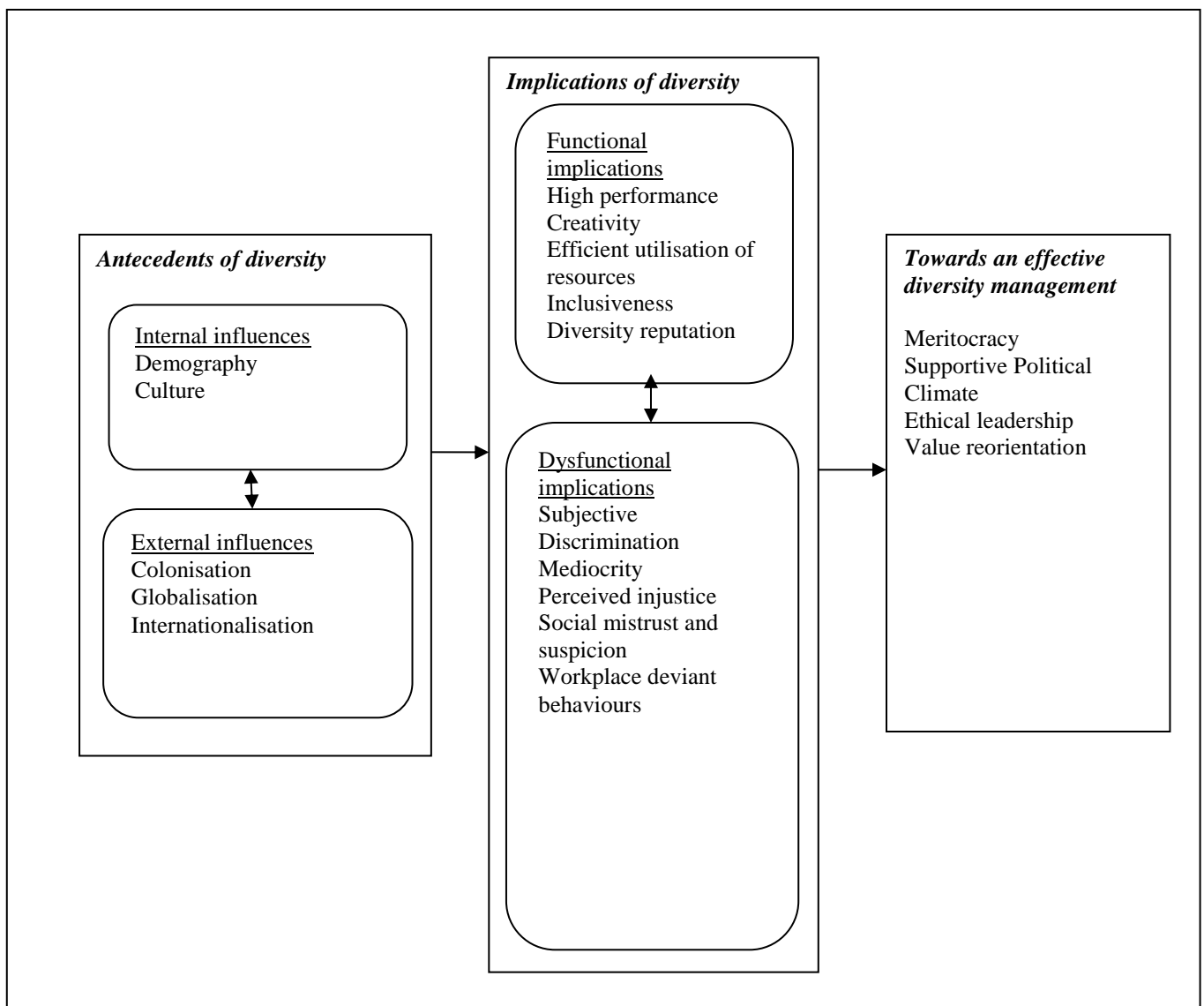
Step 3: Sum the two scores ( )

The composite (i.e. aggregate) score of the applicant is thus:

$35 + 31.25 = 66.25\%$

<sup>1</sup>. UTME: Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination.

**Figure 3: Researching Diversity Management in the Nigerian context**



**Table 1: Cut-off Marks of all 36 States of the Federation including the FCT for Admission into Federal Government Secondary Schools**

State of Origin	Geopolitical Zone	Cut-off Marks
Abia	South East	Male (130) Female (130)
Adamawa	North East	Male (62) Female (62)
Akwa-Ibom	South South	Male (123) Female (123)
Anambra	South East	Male (139) Female (139)
Bauchi	North East	Male (35) Female (35)
Bayelsa	South South	Male (72) Female (72)
Benue	North Central	Male (111) Female (111)
Borno	North East	Male (45) Female (45)
Cross River	South South	Male (97) Female (97)
Delta	South South	Male (131) Female (131)
Ebonyi	South East	Male (112) Female (112)
Edo	South South	Male (127) Female (127)
Ekiti	South West	Male (119) Female (119)
Enugu	South East	Male (134) Female (134)
Gombe	North East	Male (58) Female (58)
Imo	South East	Male (138) Female (138)
Jigawa	North West	Male (44) Female (44)
Kaduna	North West	Male (91) Female (91)
Kano	North West	Male (67) Female (67)
Kastina	North West	Male (60) Female (60)
Kebbi	North West	Male (9) Female (20)
Kogi	North Central	Male (119) Female (119)
Kwara	North Central	Male (123) Female (123)
Lagos	South West	Male (133) Female (133)
Nassarawa	North Central	Male (58) Female (58)
Niger	North Central	Male (93) Female (93)
Ogun	South West	Male (131) Female (131)
Ondo	South West	Male (126) Female (126)
Osun	South West	Male (127) Female (127)
Oyo	South West	Male (127) Female (127)
Plateau	North Central	Male (97) Female (97)
Rivers	South South	Male (118) Female (118)
Sokoto	North West	Male (9) Female (13)
Taraba	North East	Male (3) Female (11)
Yobe	North East	Male (2) Female (27)
Zamfara	North West	Male (4) Female (2)
FCT Abuja	Federal Capital Territory	Male (90) Female (90)

**Source: Formatted based on the 2013 Cut off Marks released by the Ministry of Education** <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/139694-reps-probe-cut-off-marks-in-unity-schools.html> Accessed on 10/13/2016 @ 5:37pm