



'Federal Government'. Employment quota System and it's negativity on productivity

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Abstract

Nigeria has always battled with the issues of marginalization, equitable distribution of national resources and the optimal utilization of these resources. The federal character principle, seen as a measure to address some of these pestering issues, was enshrined in the 1979 constitution to ensure that appointments into public service institutions (including the military and para-military) fairly reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity of the country. The principle however allows unqualified people to occupy sensitive positions in the civil service, which may be a factor in the failed governance Nigeria has today. The heterogeneous configuration of the Nigerian state has since inception generated series of issues that have continued to engage the government in tinkering ways of preserving the existence of the system. These issues have divided the country along ethnic, religious, majority-minority, advantaged-disadvantaged lines. The introduction of quota system and federal character principle in employment process became pivotal in extinguishing the already looming class conflict, as they were aimed at fostering national integration, sense of belonging and a wholesome development of the entire parts of the state..

1 The Nigerian Quota System

According to Chafe, the primary requirement for debating a thing is to first understand the actual thing being talked about. More often than not, the quota system has been confused to be the same as the federal character principle. (Chafe, 1994 and Duruji, 2014)

This is an error that is easily committed due to the fact that both policies were responses to the challenges arising from a multi-ethnic and multicultural entity like Nigeria. Quota system was purposed at facilitating equal representation of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria's public service. (Tonwe, 2009 and Anyanwu, 2010). But confusion has been made by a number of scholars who stated that the federal character principle was known by different nomenclatures such as zoning or quota system. (Ekundayo, 2009. Adeosun, 2011). Others submit that the quota system is the corollary of the federal character. (Okpata, 2011) Nevertheless, certain scholars have attempted to distinguish the two concepts. Ekeh (1989), argues that the federal character principle demands far more than the quota system in the sense that it switches emphasis from opportunities to privileges and benefits. In other words, for him, while the quota system creates opportunities for disadvantaged states, the federal character principle in addition creates soft landing for them. Ekeh (1989), in the same vein, special consideration should be given to candidates from the Northern provinces and other areas where educational facilities were more backward than elsewhere. Gboyega (1989), to this extent, though the quota system and federal character seem alike; the latter however covers wider scope than the former. (Duruji, 2014)

2 The Nigerian Recruitment and Selection Process

The Personnel Department plays a key role in recruitment and selection of employees. This is because, it knows the personnel needs of organizations as suggested by Makinde (1992). The personnel department prepares a concise job description and specification stating clearly the title of the job and responsibility required. (Fatiregun

(1992). If vacancies has to be filled from outside the organization, an advertisement is made through the print and electronic media. The advertisement carries the job description, specification, age of applicants, qualification, experience, and deadline for submission of applications. At the expiration of the deadline for submission of applications, the personnel officers of the ministry sort out the applications to find out those

eligible through screening or shortlisting. Successfully shortlisted applicants are then communicated on the date for interview. The Nigerian civil service places a lot of premium on the interview method for selection.

Decree 43 of 1988 states that “all eligible candidates for appointment shall be interviewed by the appropriate personnel management board or committee. Whatever the case, the principles of merit, that of quota system and federal character are always enforced to determine who to recruit and whom to select. This to a large extent and in the view of Nze (1988) downplays the inevitability of bureaucracies to efficiently and effectively ‘deliver the good’ and as advocated for by Weber. Competence and job specialization cannot thrive where sentiments are brought to play. In any case, successful candidates are notified through letters of appointment duly signed by an officer designated to do so by the ministry concerned or by the civil service commission.

3 Challenges of quota system and administrative effectiveness in the Nigerian public service

The quota System principle which made its debut into the Nigerian political and public administrative landscape through the drafting and adoption of the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria appeared to be a normative expression of the historical belief of Nigerians in equal access to and participation in the political and administrative affairs of the country in the area of policy formulation and implementation.

quota System was summarized by Mustapha (2007) to include: working out formula for sharing posts and services; compliance monitoring; enforcement of compliance through legal actions; demanding and reviewing data on staffing; and institutional investigations.

The implication of quota System shows that the principle and the structure put in place to enforce its implementation is not totally effective as envisaged by the government.

In emphasizing the shortcomings of the application of the quota System principle in Nigeria Gboyega (1989:178) points out that “...the issues of making public institutions reflect the quota System was taken up haphazardly giving rise to arbitrariness and victimization of some unfortunate public servants.” In the same vein, Ekeh (1989:34) contends that “its most radical and damaging application has been in the bureaucracies and public services of the federation... permanent secretaries have been kicked around, removed and sometimes dismissed.” He argues further that the application of the quota System principle “has invaded the integrity and standards of public bureaucracy and... other governmental bodies that normally require safeguards from the ravages of politics.” Furthermore, the negative effects of quota System on the public sector performance in Nigeria can be gleaned from the work of Forrest (1993:76), where he argues that the implementation of the principle of quota System in the public service “not only led to poor appointments but also enhanced mediocrity rather than merit.” To promote administrative effectiveness for performance in the Nigerian public service, Utomi (2002:48) argues that “we need to engage on the issues of competence, commitment, corruption and conflict of interest and career certainty. From there come both threats to the effectiveness of the civil service and opportunities for the service to be the anchor of a Nigerian renaissance.”

The contributions of a foremost scholar and practitioner in Nigerian public administration, Adamolekun (2008:17) to this discourse were more probing thus: “Has the quota System principle promoted or retarded national loyalty and stability? Or has the area or ethnic region of a person become the key factor in determining his quality as an individual?” He argues further that “only a critical assessment of ...years of implementing the quota System principle... would help determine the desirable way forward.” It is quite relieving that he answered the above questions in a related discussion thus:

The “quota System” principle that was introduced as Nigeria’s path to achieving “representative bureaucracy” was morphed into the bad practice of politicization. Capacity development programmes for public servants that were a major concern during the immediate pre and post-independence years was progressively neglected notwithstanding the strong case made for it in the Udoji report 1974 (Adamolekun, 2007:17).

It is very clear from the above submission why administrative effectiveness in the Nigerian public service for sustainable development may continue to be a mirage. Contributing to the debate on public sector ineffectiveness, Suleiman (2009:33) contends that “poor capacity of the majority of civil servants, sometimes to the point of illiteracy” arising from the application of the quota System is one of the reasons for poor performance of the Nigerian public service.

(2009) and Adamolekun (2009) goes to support the argument that the neglect of capacity development programmes for public servants and the implementation of the quota System offer a credible explanation on the ineffectiveness of the Nigerian public bureaucracy for sustainable development in Nigeria.

Also, Tonwe and Oghator (2009:237) submit that “quota System allows ethno-regional patrons and their clients to exploit and mismanage state resources without contributing to any meaningful development.” As noted by Ojo (2009:167), “there is no greater inequality than the equal treatment of unequals.” The quota System policy as practiced in Nigeria is elitist and class biased, additionally, it leads to a blurring of the boundary between the pursuits of meritocracy and ethnic balancing, thereby creating inadvertently a multiple system of citizenship in the polity. In addition, the principle and its application have brought about the unintended effect of creating situations of ‘elimination by substitution’ which makes it counter-productive. This it does through discrimination in appointment and promotion. The principle attempts to achieve equality of all states, whereas states are not equal in population, and size of the pool of candidates for appointment (Ojo, 2009; Tonwe and Oghator, 2009).

4 Performance and problems of nigeriapublic enterprises

In the words of Ademolekan, L., and Gboyega, A., (1979), profit is the commonest measure of efficiency in productive organizations, but is usually regarded as non-profit; and as is to be expected, an evaluation of their performance is usually required. A resolution of this dilemma has been a major concern among scholars; the solution, however, has remained elusive.

In Nigeria, the failure or inability of most of the public enterprises to achieve the objectives for which they were created is no longer in doubt. In an address to the working party appointed in 1966 in Nigerian statutory cooperation and state-owned companies, the then head of state said:

The present state of the statutory corporations, state-owned companies and allied organizations has given the Federal military Government some cause of anxiety. Sufficient time has elapsed to enable an objective fragment to be passed on whether or not these various organizations have creditably satisfied their objectives. The spate of public opinion in the last five years and more provides available evidence that these organizations have failed to fulfill their expectation (Report of the Nigerian Railways corporation, 1966:13).

According to Ademolekan, and Gboyega, (1979), in an effort to reverse the above ugly tide, Nigerian government in the early 1980s made effort to use performance contract to measure the performance of public enterprises in Nigeria. This plan constitutes a pact between a government and the management of the public enterprise by stating the objectives to be achieved within a given specific of turn and conditions for attaining the objectives. Normally the agreement includes a formal commitment of the government to provide the necessary resources for the enterprise. The outcome of this exercise produced poor results. This is because the government did not fulfill their part of the bargain and showed no interest in monitoring the impact of the contracts. Another manifestation of the concern about poor performance of public enterprise is the introduction of some reform measures by the new democratic government in 1979. This new reform was half-hearted, and some useful reform measures recommended by review bodies such as the Onasode (1981) were never faithfully implemented. A notable example is a 1979 two years management service agreement with Rail India Technical Services and the Dutch Royal Airline to assist in improving the performance of the Nigerian Railways Corporation and the Nigerian Airways, respectively. The pacts were signed in 1979, but the temporary improvement in service could not be sustained. Obviously, attaining improved performance in public enterprises requires more far-reaching reform in and greater commitment on the part of the government and her leadership and the management of the public enterprises (Ademolekan, and Gboyega,1979). In fact most public corporations in Nigeria cannot compete effectively with private companies engage in the same line of business. A number of factors are responsible for this among which is political instability, political interference, poor management, control by government poor attitude to work by staff, and financial mismanagement.

Political Instability: Instability in the political system occurs when the government of a state changes too frequently and unexpectedly. Every new government wants to appoint its own representatives to the boards of government corporations. These constant changes in the policy-making body of the corporation lead to inconsistent policies. Constant changes can also lead to delays in the completion of projects or unnecessary changes in projects already embarked upon. Some projects in which huge amounts of money have been spent are abandoned because the new board of directors does not approve of them.

Political Interference: Public corporations are government companies and sometimes the government and important government officials make them do things that may not be in the overall interests of the corporation. For political reasons they can force the corporation to employ persons that are not qualified for the job or embark on projects that are of no real value to the corporation. Sometimes, the government corporations are forced to **Poor Management:** This problem is closely related to the two problems mentioned above. Members of the board who make policies for the corporation are political appointees who may not have any exposure in the corporation's area of operations. Again, the government can make its corporations employ management staff that is not properly qualified. These two factors can result in poor management.

Government Controls: It is necessary for the government to exercise some control over its corporations but sometimes these controls are so oppressive that the corporations is rendered inactive. In order to compete effectively with private companies engaged in the same business, a government corporation should be allowed to operate under similar conditions. For instance, if the government, for political reasons, imposes price controls on its corporations and cannot control the prices of other companies engaged in the same business, then the government company cannot return as much profit as the private companies. donate money to the ruling party for elections and other purposes. Such interference in the affairs of the corporation by the government and politicians will necessarily affect the efficiency of the organization.

Over-Protection by Government: Some government corporations are like over-indulged children who cannot do anything for themselves. Most of them depend on the government for everything including the payment of staff salaries and the maintenance or replacement of equipment even though they were established to provide services to the public and to make profits. In private companies, the workers know that they have to make profits or the company will close down and they will become unemployed. For this reason, the workers work hard to improve on their goods and services. In public corporations the workers do not seem to care especially as they have secure tenure of office, regardless of the financial positions of the corporation. In fact the services of some public corporations are so bad that the public would have nothing to do with them if it had any choice. Thus the practice whereby government gives grants to its companies on a regular basis makes the workers careless about the quality of work they offer to the corporation.

Poor attitude to Work: Many workers in the public sector see their work as government work. Government work, they unfortunately believe, require neither seriousness nor commitment. The result is that workers do not do their work at all or do it poorly and the corporation consequently cannot effectively discharge their duties for which they were set up.

Financial Mismanagement: Some government corporations are notorious for their mismanagement of funds. Money is sometimes embezzled outright. Officials also connive with contractors who are paid in full for work that is either not done or is improperly carried out. There have been cases where old and obsolete equipment and machinery have been bought at the price of new ones. This money could have been used for necessary development projects by the company or the government.

5 Poor performance of officials in the Nigerian public service

One of the manifestations of the implementation of the quota System principle is the poor employee procurement practice, which results in unethical behaviour among public sector workers in Nigeria. Below are some of the instances:

The audit investigation ordered by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Petroleum Resources towards the end of 2011, with the involvement of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), and was carried out by an internationally recognized audit firm – KPMG, revealed that the cost of subsidy payment on petroleum products not consumed by end users due to losses from theft and even those not supplied for use in Nigeria between 2007 and 2009 amounted to NGN11.8 billion or USD76.13 million (Agbo, 2012:56-58).

In the month of March 2012, the Nigerian Senate set up an Adhoc Committee to investigate unethical behaviour amongst public officials in the Nigerian Police Pension Fund Administration. While testifying on the pension fund management to the Senate Adhoc Committee, the former Head of Service of the Nigerian Civil Service and Chairman of the Nigerian Public Service Reform Committee of 2012, Stephen Oronsaye revealed that “top government officials were known to have falsified documents in order to siphon money from the pension fund” (Onwukwe, 2012:19). He disclosed that during his tenure as Head of the Nigerian Civil Service, it was discovered that the fraud was perpetrated from the office of the Accountant-General of the Nigerian Federation. According to him, “The Federal Government of Nigeria spent NGN5 billion or USD32.26 million monthly as pension when in the actual sense, pension expenses ought to be NGN1 billion or USD6.5 million only (Onwukwe, 2012:19). Furthermore, the Director, Pension Administration in the Office of the Head of Service of the Nigerian Federation, Dr. Sani Shuaibu and 31 other top officials were arrested by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) for theft of NGN4.5 billion or USD29.03 million belonging to the Nigerian Police Pension Fund (Abuh, & Musari, 2012:1-2; Adewole, 2012:1&4).

The Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) is a governmental agency established to oversee all port matters in Nigeria as it relates to international trade. However, appointment of public officials based on quota System principle/political patronage led to the appointment of Chief Bode George, a former National Vice-Chairman (West) of the ruling party in Nigeria People’s Democratic Party (PDP) as Chairman, board of the Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) in 2009. Chief Bode George and four other board members were charged by the EFCC before a Lagos High Court and were eventually jailed for contract inflation and mismanagement of NGN100 billion or USD645.16 million belonging to the NPA. (Fanoro, 2012:3). This is a case of unethical behaviour amongst public officials to rob the nation of the benefits of international trade and development. It is unfortunate that the funds that would have gone into developmental drive of the government are being mismanaged by incompetent workforce arising from the application of quota System principle in Nigeria.

6 Conclusion

Governments by nature are particularly charged with a variety of functions and responsibilities. From the traditional role of maintaining law and order, governments are charged with the more profound responsibility for the production and equitable distribution of a wide-range of goods and services. Similarly, government has responsibility for policy design and implementation in support of variety of defined social political and economic objectives as stated by La Palombbara, (1971). In carrying out these responsibilities, Weber’s option of ‘best result’ should inform the decision of policy makers so that the negative effects of tribalism, nepotism, quota system and Federal character besetting the Nigerian political and administrative landscape can be put aside.

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