

BALANCING THE IMBALANCES IN THE STRUCTURE OF NIGERIA FEDERALISM: THE CIVIC EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVE

¹Enu, Donald Bette, ²Opoh, Fredrick Awhen & ³Bassey, Pascal Eze

^{1,2&3}Department of Social Science Education
Faculty of Education, University of Calabar - Calabar

Abstract

The structure of Nigeria federalism was born out of colonial convenience rather than necessity at the instance of the colonial masters who connived with the selfish Nigerian political elites who wanted to be leaders of big wide Nigeria. Though there is an assumption that the British has good intent in the adoption of federalism, they left a porous foundation and weak principles with the system. Despite this, Nigeria federalism has been distorted from its original practice and structure by military incursion into politics through centralization of power. The scenario has created imbalances in the structure of Nigeria federalism. This paper is therefore a clarion call for the need to reappraise the structure and practice of federalism to strengthen the Nigerian nascent democracy. The paper has examined the concept, features and evolution of Nigeria federalism. The imbalances in the structure of Nigeria federalism as well as measures towards balancing the imbalances were the primary concern of the paper. The perspective of the authors was therefore anchored on Cohen Aviv 2010 theoretical model of four Conceptions of Civic Education namely; liberal, diversity, critical and republican.

Keywords: *Federalism, Federating units, Centralization, Colonialism*

Corresponding Author: Enu, Donald Bette

Background to the Study

The political and economic milieu of the entity designated today as Nigeria from about 1849 until it attained independence in 1960 and even as practiced today is largely the story of the impact of the Jiggery-pokery of the colonial masters. The colonial authorities invaded the Niger-Benue area to pursue their interests which were largely economic (Elaigwu, 2007). In the process of seeking to realize those interests, there were many unplanned by-products such as the socio-political aggregation which is known today in international law as the Federal Republic of Nigeria and its governance structures. With the background of divide and rule, the colonialists seek to promote and sustain interest in federalism and multi-level governance.

The structure of Nigerian federalism was therefore born out of colonial convenience rather than necessity at the instance of the colonial masters who connived with the selfish Nigerian elites who wanted to be leaders of "big wide Nigeria". On this note, the history of Nigeria federalism is the history of colonial intentions. If Nigeria as a country is agreed to be colonial creation and with the recent calls for restructuring, then federalism as operating in Nigeria cannot be an exception. Nevertheless, Thom-otuya (2013) rationalized the British adoption of federalism in Nigeria stating that federal system of government is a system of government that befits Nigeria's diversity and heterogeneity. However, Majekodunmi (2015) revealed that the origins of Nigeria's federalism lie not in the pluralities of economic and geographic regions or of ethnic nationalities as claimed by Thom-otuya, but in the plurality of colonial administrative traditions imposed by the British. Even though, the British has good intent in the adoption of federalism as earlier assumed by Thom-otuya (2013), they left a porous foundations and weak principles with the system. According to Oguejiofor (2015), the political aspects of this menace have been deeply asphyxiating, being that these weak political structures created by the western imperialist nations received politico-economic functions at independence, which they are not developed enough to handle. Like many others woes left with Africans on the exit of colonial masters, the structure and practice of the federal system of government radiate more tears than smiles aggravated by minority-majority crises, problem of resource control and allocation and problems associated with federal character such as compromise of standard. Rodney in the book 'How Europe under developed Africa' argued that a combination of power politics and economic exploitation of Africa by Europeans led to the poor state of African political and economic development evident in the late 20th century.

It has become clear that the political woes that characterized the Nigerian political atmosphere since independence in 1960 cannot be disassociated with the imbalances in the structure of Nigeria federalism inherited from the colonial authorities. The military incursion into governance and politics, distorted the practice of decentralization for centralization. About two decades of continued civil rule in Nigeria, politicians are yet to restructure the damage caused by military in the Nigeria federal structure. This paper is therefore a clarion call for the restructuring of Nigeria federalism from the perspective of the civic educator.

Civic Education

Education is seen as instrument for the reconstruction of the social system. Just like John Dewey argued, education is the best means of perpetuating and recovering state political power. Such education must be pragmatically civic. Civic education is concerned with the education of citizen awareness and participation in all aspects of socio-political society. Civic/citizenship education focuses on 3 main elements of teaching; Civic Knowledge, Civic Disposition (values) and Civic Skills. It is not limited to schooling and the education of children and youth but lifelong education that travails all stages of human life and human society.

Most if not all societies according to Crittenden (2013) recognize a need to educate youth to be “civic-minded”; that is, to think and care about the welfare of the community and not simply about their own individual well-being. The source reiterated that, civic education is also intended to make all citizens, or at least prospective leaders, effective as citizens or to reduce disparities in political power by giving everyone the knowledge, confidence, and skills they need to participate.

The Concept of Federalism

The philosophical foundation that underpinned federalism is share of governmental powers among components federating units. Federalism can therefore be defined as a system of government whereby governmental powers and economic structures of a country are shared between central government and component federating units. To Akpoto (1995), it is defined as the system of government in which governmental powers are shared between the central government, i.e. the federal government and its components (state and local government). This relationship results in horizontal or vertical competitiveness. Horizontal when among federating units and vertical when is between the central and a unit of the system.

The practice of an ideal federalism lies on certain fundamental principles. The basic tenets or principles of federalism according to K.C Where as outlined by Odion (2011:1) include:

1. There must be at least two levels of governments and there must be constitutional division of powers among the levels of governments.
2. Each levels of government must be co-ordinate and independent.
3. Each levels of government must be financially independent. He argued that this will afford each levels of government the opportunity of performing their functions without depending or appealing to the others for financial assistance.
4. There must be Supreme Court of the independent judiciary. He argued that in terms of power sharing, there is likely to be conflict hence, there must be independent judiciary to resolve the case.
5. In terms of the amendment of the constitution, no levels of government should have undue power over the amendment process.

The source maintained that, once a country is able to satisfy these conditions, such country is said to practice federalism. Nevertheless, the practice of federalism in Nigeria is far from these principles in the actual sense, occasioned by its founding fathers. The British deliberately imposed the federal system on Nigeria in order to maintain a neo-colonial control of the country after independence. Since federalism is more or less an evidence of some form of disunity, political weakness and uneven economic development, the British deliberately wanted to keep the federating units as apart as possible so as to meddle in the internal affairs of Nigeria to their own economic and political advantage after they would have granted her independence (Babalola, 2014).

However, Odion (2011) argued that in line with this historical evolution of Nigerian federalism, it should be noted that, the choice of federalism as the preferred system of government for Nigeria was not accidental. Given the heterogeneity of Nigerian polity, the founding fathers of Nigeria adopted the federal system as the most viable option of protecting the core interest of the federating units. This may not be true in all cases especially with the multiplicity of federating units in Nigeria. Similarly, the federal system has not yielded any positive result 56 years after British exit of Nigerian territory.

The Evolution of Nigeria Federalism

Before looking at the historical foundation of Nigeria federalism, it will be worthwhile to state that the idea of federation appears to be as ancient as the ideas of monarchy and democracy and as old as authority and liberty themselves. However, Majekodunmi (2015) quoted *Kenneth C.* where thus; the modern idea of what federal government is has been determined by the United States of America, which he has picked as a model. Therefore modern federalism is linked to the United State of America.

Though not in its true sense, the idea behind Nigeria federalism can be traced to 1914 when the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria were amalgamated. With the unitary form of government, Odion (2011) revealed that governmental powers started to be shared between the central government headed by the Governor-General and the governments of Northern and Southern protectorates were headed by the lieutenant Governors. This idea of sharing power really underpinned the principle of federalism. The source reiterated that with the existence and recognition of the two autonomous parts of Northern and Southern provinces, the administrative system of Nigeria wore an outlook of a federation.

Following a similar trend, in 1946 Richardson's constitution made provision for the creation of three regions (Northern region, Southern region and the Eastern region) that brought better understanding of Nigeria federalism. Still in the spirit of sharing power, The Macpherson constitution of 1951 reinforced federalism in Nigeria by appointing lieutenant Governors to head earlier created three regions and granted legislative power to the legislative and executive councils that were established. All these were still under the disguise of unity government.

According to Odion, (2011), it was the Lyttleton constitution of 1954 that removed the final shade of a unitary government from Nigeria by establishing a true federal state in the sense that it shared powers between the central and the regional governments. This constitution

provided for the clear division of powers between two levels of governments, namely: Federal and Regional governments. The promulgation of this constitution marks the actual take-off of “true federalism” in Nigeria even as practice today characterized by crises and structural imbalances.

From the foregoing, since 1914 to date, the structure of Nigerian federalism has dramatically metamorphosed from the level of provinces and regions to the current structure of 36 States and 774 Local Government Areas as well as the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. These changes are occasioned by failure of the system to yield a positive result.

The Imbalances in the Structure of Nigeria Federalism

In recent times, outside insecurity, the problem of governance has become the greatest challenge staring at Nigeria. Chinua Achebe puts it thus; *“the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else”*. Like many other problems confronting Nigeria socio-political milieu, this is not unconnected with Nigeria contact with the European and acculturation. Some of the imbalances in the structure of the inherited federalism as well as leadership are presented thus;

Over Control and Weakening of Lower Units

Nigeria has remained a country of many paradoxes and known for always taking undue advantage of its self. At its initial practice of federalism in Nigeria, the regions were autonomous in governance, finance and duties. The continuous partitioning of Nigeria into small units by the military has brought untold control of these units by the central through hegemony, domination and centralization of power.

Bayo (2016) reported that if one consider that Local government is the closest to the people, should also consider that one of the reason for failure of our federal system is strategic and continuous weakening of local government tier by State government and state governments by the central. To this source, this is the greatest challenge, corruption and the elephant in the room. The source further advocated for the reshaping of Nigeria federal structure on this note.

A true federalism is a distribution of powers between the Central and the federating units, with each level having some independence of action in exercising its powers. The federating units own and manage their resources unlike the case in Nigeria where the military tricked Nigerian by centralizing power and throwing Nigerians into political and economic quagmire.

High Cost of Governance

The structure of the Nigeria federalism has made cost of governance exorbitant. It makes provision for 36 states, Federal Capital Territory with the near status of a state and 774 local governments. This multiplicity and wasteful spending is also seen in the national assembly of 360 House of Rep members and 109 senators totaling 469 members doing the

job a 10 man committee can conveniently handle. Such a squander is replicated at the state and local government level. Records show that as high as about 25% of Nigerian annual budget is spent on these prodigal elements. In a lecture at the University of Benin, the then governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) alleged that 'the situation whereby 25% of the country's revenue spending yearly goes to the national assembly is unhealthy for the country and its economy (Ajani, 2010).

Indeed, the 2016 budget is not different from this tradition, where the National Assembly's N115 billion budget is almost the same as the capital expenditure allocations for Agriculture (N47 billion), Education (N37 billion), and Health (N35 billion) put together. This avoidable spending of national resources calls for a need to restructure the pattern and form of the nation governance. Basically, much needed development and progress in Nigeria is the opportunity cost for the avoidable and extraneous spending of the government (Ogunyemi, 2016).

Resource Control

Resource control is the process of allocating a system's resources in a controlled fashion. In an ideal federalism, one fundamental requirement as postulated by K.C Wheare, is "financial autonomy" in which each levels of government must be financially independent. In Nigeria, resource control and revenue allocation among federating units experience a lot of political interferences from central government which cannot guarantee the operation of the state as an autonomous entity. It is provocative that states where resources are found in abundant are the least developed in Nigeria federalism. Ebegbulem (2011) reported that the quasi model of Nigeria federalism has not been able to address the socio-economic and developmental needs of the people [Niger Deltans] in spite of their unquantifiable contribution towards the development of the entire nation. The wealth of the nation is therefore assumed by many to been generated from a given region but used in the development of another. This situation has generated strife among federating units hence, impeding the growth of democracy and ideal federalism in Nigeria.

Unhealthy Competition

Federalism is a system of government with the feature of integrating the people in a society who are diverse ethnically, culturally, geographically and even religiously. It is not an avenue for competition as experienced in Nigeria. Majekodunmi (2015) lamented that in Nigeria, there are instances where governments have openly violated this principle of federalism creating strife among federating units. In any true federalism, rather than horizontal and vertical competition, powers are shared among and between the federating units and the central government respectively in such a way that each government has its own apparatus for the conduct of its own affairs.

This unhealthy competition can also manifest itself in the operationalization of federal character. Inappropriate application of federal character as exercised in Nigeria creates mediocrity, inequality, corruption, and lack of transparency and/or unhealthy competition. The able hands are often compromised for mediocre.

Multilevel Tiers of Government

As observed by some scholars, the creation of more states and local governments was a deliberate tactic by the military to create dependency on the federal government (Ebegbulem, 2011). Today, Nigeria operates a federal structure of 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory with an assumed status of a state and 774 local governments characterized by central control. This is far from the principle of federalism that advocated for two levels of government with mutual cooperation. This form of government can be best described as centralism rather than federalism.

It has been discussed and agreed at many fora that the discussion of contemporary federalism seems to have started with Kenneth C. Wheare who saw federalism as a constitutional arrangement which divides the lawmaking powers and functions between two levels of government in such a way that each within its respective spheres of jurisdiction and competence, is independent and coordinate (Majekodunmi, 2015:108). From the foregoing, it is surprising that Nigeria only operates federal system on paper. The federal structures has never existed in Nigeria society, hence, a call for a balancing of the imbalances.

Ethnic, Religious and Regional Conflicts

Though federalism as a political philosophy seeks to create harmony among heterogeneous socio-political and ethnic divides, nevertheless, the Nigerian case is characterized by politics of contest among federating regions for positions, power and resource control. According to Eresia-Eke and Eberiyé (2010), to have such a situation of masters and servants, or a situation of graduated citizenship is a negation of true federalism because federalism does not mean rivalry or competition rather grows under a system of mutuality and interdependence. Can democracy thrive in an atmosphere of suspicion and fear of hegemony and domination of minority groups by majority groups? Never, these so-called federating units are mere entities that have never fused and cannot merge into one federation but have remained an amalgam of distinct and antagonistic entities.

Towards Balancing the Imbalances in the Structure of Nigeria Federalism

The preceding section focused on the imbalances that characterized the Nigerian federalism. This section on the other hand is aimed at building a paradigm to balance the identified problems from the stand point of the Civic Educators. The perspective of the authors is therefore anchored on Cohen Aviv (2010) theoretical model of four Conceptions of Civic Education namely; liberal, diversity, critical and republican conceptions of Civic Education.

The contents of these four main conceptions of civic education that emerged from Cohen Aviv theoretical model of Civic Education may be seen as ideal paradigm for addressing Socio-political issues. To the proponent of this model, it may be seen as an analytical heuristic device in order to assist teachers, public servants, politicians, practitioners, scholars and researchers in understanding the complex process of civic ideals. However,

the erroneous impression must be corrected here that Civic Education does not denote education in the classroom alone but transcend civic knowledge, civic competence/skills and civic disposition across all facets of social milieu. These Civic Education conceptions are adopted by these authors as paradigm for balancing the imbalances in the structure of Nigeria federalism are:

Liberal Civic Education: This conception is the inculcation and demonstration of individualistic skills needed in order to take part in the political process of the society. The position of this conception of civic education is that society is composed of individuals, and thus civic education should cultivate the role that the individual takes in the public sphere (Cohen, 2010). This can therefore be done through *enrichment of civic education curriculum* to make the individual a better participant in the political sphere.

The curriculum is the mirror of the society. The future of any modern society depends on the standard of its school while the standard of a school system is judge from the enrichment of the curriculum operating in such a system. The curriculum therefore, is a compendium through which social and political reform can and could take place in the society. Politically, nations depend on a well-informed and civic-minded citizenry to sustain their democratic ethos or traditions. Civic Education curriculum has the greatest mandate to empower the citizenry with Civic Knowledge, Civic Disposition (values) and Civic Skills.

Liberal civic education entails learning how to apply civic ideals as part of citizen action as an essential potent to exercise democratic freedoms and pursuit of the common good of the society. An understanding of civic ideals and practices is critical to full participation in society and is an essential component of education for citizenship (NCSS, 2010). Liberal Conception of Civic Education therefore helps participants develop social understanding and civic efficacy. It is therefore ideal to enrich civic education curriculum to reflect value education, voter education, peace education, moral education, and education for sustainability. Other needed areas of concern in civic education include; leadership education, security education, population education, Unity in diversities, welfarism and community development. Certainly, each falls along a continuum of educational activities in support of civic and democratic life and is mutually reinforcing. Supporters of this conception are of the view that it is only when an individual hold the required knowledge regarding her/his functions in society and shows competent to act in this public sphere that can contribute meaningfully to the development of the society.

Diversity Civic Education: The assumption of this conception of civic education is the salience of the social constructs on the citizen's life. This is targeted at the need to raise awareness regarding the social reality and in particular to the oppression of different social groups by the stronger forces of society (Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2007). The purpose of this shift is to reevaluate the ability of different social groups to overcome different circumstances, and to supply a greater understanding of the social forces that are put to work in order to maintain the given reality and transmit them appropriately. This transmission of knowledge can be ensured by Revamping ethics and morality in governance.

What demarcates a strong state from a weak state is the nature of the [moral and ethical imperatives that operate within the corridor of governance](#). A strong state is that governs by leaders with conscience who operate within the limit of ethical and moral imperatives. The weak state in the other hand is that whose leaders govern within the orbit of self. In a modern state, ethics and morality in governance are attracting attention of people who talk about good governance, even catch phrases such as politic with ethic is today a common slogan used by politician to entice their supporters. In ideal and well-governed states, people feel obligated to act according to certain minimum ethical standards, the situation is different in a badly governed states.

This decay in ethical and moral imperative has weakened the Nigerian state, hence the need for restoration. Leaders today think more of themselves rather than the general wellbeing of the people who elected them into such positions. Leadership has become an avenue of Nigerian leaders to cut their share of the national cake, thereby bastardizing the structure and principle of federalism and democracy. If those in governance keep to the standards of right and wrong that prescribe what leaders ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues, then there wouldn't be compromise of the principle of true federalism and democratic ethos. This can therefore be enforced by revamping ethical and moral imperatives in governance through civic instructions.

Critical Civic Education: This conception of civic education is rooted in the assumption that the world may be portrayed as a battle ground between social forces (in this case, the central and the federating units) where the dominant hegemonic powers work in both exposed and hidden ways in order to oppress the weaker players. Critical civic education can be achieved through instilling in individuals the spirit of mutualism and decentralization of power. The military misrepresentation and overconcentration of political and economic power at the central government is perhaps the most widely lamented sabotage done to the Nigerian federalism that called for urgent attention and redress. In a regrettable manner, Olowu reported thus;

“this extreme centralization has led to the virtual abrogation of truly federalist institutions and values, the destructive competition for the control of the central governmental machinery (especially the federal presidency), the loss of financial coherence and discipline at the federal level, the extreme dependence of the states and localities on federal developmental patronage and financial largesse and, consequently, the persistent communal pressures for new, federally-funded units of state and local government” (Suberu, 1996:2).

The above scenario in Nigeria context has made any one who assumes the position of the federal presidency an object of fear and intimidation. In recent times, there has been a public outcry of Nigerians especially of the southern extraction of the control of power and resource by the Buhari's administration. For instance, the first 30 appointments for key government officials made by President Buhari, 22 appointees were from the North while only 8 were from the South (Ezeibe, Abada & Okeke, 2016). An ideal reflection of these

unpleasant appointments had demonstrated that Nigeria is a failed nation practicing centralism in disguise under the pretence of federalism. In the same vein, the federal government has in recent times hurts viable developmental project of state governments especially of the opposition states which is out rightly against the principle of true federalism.

It is therefore the message of this paper that for a better structure and practice of true federalism in Nigeria, federating units should be autonomous in power and control of resources within their territory. In a clearer tone, there central government should be weakened and stay away from the activities and resources of the states. The critical civic education at all facets of the society is therefore a veritable tool for the actualization of this goal.

Republican Civic Education: The focus of this conception is to instill certain value and promote in individuals the willingness to give up some elements of their personal freedom as part of their life to the betterment of a larger society. In the adoption of this model, these authors are of the view of instilling in citizenry the value of renegotiation and return of the Nigerian state system of federalism to regionalism

It is elsewhere stated in this paper that Nigeria operates a federal structure of 36 states, the Federal Capital Territory with an assumed status of a state and 774 local governments in its federal structure. This multiplicity of the tiers of government has bred more tensions and hatred among these levels of government rather than mutuality as a principle of federalism. It has also enlarged the cost of governance and wasteful spending in the area of administration to the detriment of scientific, technological, educational and infrastructure advancement needed to drive the country to global competitiveness. This paper is calling for the return to regionalism where the six geo-political zones of North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South and South West become more viable federating units and a central government. This development will weaken centralism as practiced today in Nigeria and strengthen the federating units, thereby balancing the structure of the failed Nigerian federalism.

Summary

Attaining true federalism in Nigeria lies on balancing the imbalances that characterized the socio-political pedigree of the nation. These imbalances had not only impedes Nigeria pedestrian journey to nationhood and democracy but all facets of national life as a result of poor governance. The authors had on their part as Civic educators pointed out these imbalances existing in the structure of Nigeria federalism and how these affect democratic ethos and the principles of true or just federalism.

The authors in their contributions towards balancing these imbalances adopted Cohen Aviv theoretical model of Civic Education. The position of this model does not contravene the role of education as a means of promoting social justice and democracy by empowering the citizenry, inculcating and instilling in them the right value and intellect for responsive citizenry. It is the expectation of the authors that the implementation of these paradigms would help in reinventing the Nigerian dangling federalism and nascent democracy.

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