

## **Assessing the Application of Federal Character Principles in Staffing Processes and Manpower Utilisation in a Federal University in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

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This study focuses on Federal Character Principles and Manpower Utilisation in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. It seeks to ascertain the federal character principle in the staffing process of workers and the extent to which it is applied in FUO. Also, it investigates whether the federal character principle has led to effective manpower utilisation in the university. The Bureaucracy Theory and the Theory of Distributive Justice were adopted for this study. The study was carried out among 23 academic and non-academic staff of the Federal University Otuoke through a multi-stage sampling technique. Qualitative data collection methods utilised in this study included In-depth Interview (IDI) and Key Informant Interview (KII). Results from the study indicated that FUO applies the Federal Character Principle in its recruitment process with about 50% to 60% level of implementation, the application of the federal character principle was revealed to have both positive and negative effects on manpower utilisation in the institution, and the major challenges the University faces in the implementation of the principles in the recruitment of staff are political factors, ethnic factors, religious factors, and distance. It was thus recommended that the federal character commission should ensure that the principle is applied the way the makers of the policy envisioned. Also, consideration for employment should be based on merit, even in seeking to achieve a balanced distribution and geo-political representation during recruitment.

**Keywords:** *Federal Character, Staffing, Manpower Utilisation, Appointment, Promotion, Federal University Otuoke*

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## **Background to the Study**

In the modern world, federal systems are increasingly viewed as political structures that provide a platform for all of the disparities within the political structure to attain legitimate expression. The fundamental commitment to national sovereignty is never in any way compromised by the federal ideal, which is inherently an expression of political variety and accommodation (Okolo, 2014). The concept of federal character or quota system has been integrated into the Nigerian Constitution since 1979. Its objective is to ensure that individuals selected for roles within federal civil service entities mirror the diverse aspects of the nation, encompassing language, ethnicity, religion, and geography (Ajayi et al., 2022). Therefore, Section 14, Subsection 3 of the 1979 constitution explicitly declares that the administration of its affairs should adhere to a federal structure in Nigeria and foster national unity. This mandate applies irrespective of any sectional groups that may exist within the government of the federation or any of its agencies (Ume, 2022).

Practically every facet of the political, social, cultural, and economic lives of the nation exhibits a sense of understanding of federal character. Examples include the "proverbial" North-South divide; rivalry between the three dominant ethnic or nationality groups; perceptions of oppression and dominance of the minority by the majority ethnic groups; the Muslim-Christian divide; indigenous against non-indigenous politics; and more. It is both the consciousness of this phenomenon and the attempt to deal with it that we have come to identify as the doctrine of federal character (Ajayi et al., 2022). It is on this note that Nwatu (2006) stated that:

*The doctrine enjoins public authorities, semi-governmental agencies and even institutions in the private sector to ensure and be seen to ensure fair and effective representation in states or local government areas or ethnic groups as the case may be in positions of power, authority, status and so on (p. 358).*

The federal character doctrine thus addresses a wide range of issues in the federal political system. These include issues with race, citizenship, and nationality as well as issues with underprivileged groups' lack of growth opportunities, development and discrimination based on place of birth, resource control or allocation, power sharing, quota system in employment, and admissions into institutions of higher learning. In other words, the doctrine of the employment phenomenon of federal character has acquired a very crucial role in governance and administration in Nigeria (Osifeso, 2011).

However, recruiting public officials using the principles of federal character, commonly referred to as the quota system, poses significant challenges. Striking a balance between meritocracy and the quota system often proves difficult, presenting public institutions with issues related to discipline, morale, overall efficiency, production, and service delivery. These challenges, as noted by Ume (2022), have negative implications for the existence of these organisations. The public service sector is traditionally perceived as a service-oriented system that emphasises merit-based hiring, job stability, and timely career progression as a means of appropriately recognising service and talent. This approach has historically provided the state with a cadre of loyal and dedicated permanent non-political officials who serve as the backbone of Public Administration (Demarest et al., 2020).

The principle of the federal civil service encompasses the entire workforce employed by the federal government to translate policy goals and campaign promises into tangible benefits for the public. In the recruitment of capable candidates, the Nigerian federal civil service places a strong emphasis on consistency, standardisation, and transparency (Ezeibe, 2013; Igbokwe-Ibeto et al., 2015). Despite the extensive provisions in the constitution and civil service rules and regulations regarding the recruitment and selection process, the staff composition of the majority of Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) indicates the hiring of mediocre individuals and quacks, contrary to the principles of merit and technical competence rooted in Max Weber's ideal bureaucracy (Obidimma & Okeke, 2020).

Administrative performance in the Nigerian public sector is often hampered by the uncomfortable implementation of the federal character principle due to the limitation of merit. A society's attempt at sustainable development is more likely to fail if the idea of federal character is applied to hiring decisions without considering competence. According to Kwanashie (2002), tension and conflict in Nigerian politics have always been accompanied by fear. Not the psychological fear of oppression, or the spiritual fear of vengeance, but the psychological fear of physical violence. He continued by saying that it is the worry of not obtaining one's just dessert or fair share.

Along with the problem of productivity ineffectiveness, the federal character practice has fueled racial and religious fervour over broader organisational or general interests. There is fierce competition over whose ethnic group was hired before the other and which religion, all to the detriment of what the staff can do best. Compared to the meritocracy that is envisaged in practice, ministries, agencies, commissions, and other aspects of the public sector are clearly characterised and recognised with ethnic and religious labels. This essentially comes down to how public sector services and tasks are carried out. The theory has made it easier for fans of racial and religious intolerance to spread throughout the nation rather than serving as a catalyst for integration. Because of this, organisational productivity has suffered significantly (Demarest et al., 2020; Igbokwe-Ibeto et al., 2013). While there are existing studies on the implementation of the federal character in Nigeria, a significant gap remains, particularly concerning recruitment in federal universities and its implications for manpower utilisation. For instance, Okolo (2014) observed that the Federal Character Principle (FCP) and Federal Character Commission (FCC) fell short of rectifying evident disparities in various aspects of the nation's affairs, as evidenced in a study on the application of the FCP in Nigeria.

In Briggs' (2007) examination of recruitment issues in the Nigerian federal civil service, the lack of independence of the service commission and the federal character principle emerged as the most pervasive problems influencing recruitment. The study employed a stratified random sampling method with 190 respondents from five federal ministries categorised into four major grade levels. Consequently, these issues hindered the effective utilisation of job descriptions and standard personnel criteria, particularly in the lowest category of grade levels during the recruitment process.

Finally, previous studies on the application of the federal character principles have largely focused on employment positions and not appointment positions in the federal civil service. Thus, the question is: Are appointments into various positions like directors and heads of units based on federal character principles? Given the above gap identified in previous studies, this study has been considered essential and relevant because it will close a gap in the body of knowledge.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study is to examine the federal character principle and its influence on manpower utilisation in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State.

The following objectives have been designed to guide the study:

1. To examine the application of the federal character principle in the staffing process of workers in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
2. To determine the extent to which the federal character principle is applied in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
3. To investigate the impact of the federal character principle on effective manpower utilisation in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.
4. To examine the relationship between promotion and appointment of staff into key positions and the application of the federal character principle in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For the purpose of this study, two main competing paradigms have been adopted namely: the Bureaucracy Theory and the Theory of Distributive Justice.

#### **Bureaucracy Theory**

The study is grounded in the Bureaucratic Theory introduced by Max Weber, although the term "bureaucracy" was coined by the Frenchman M. de Gournay. This theory is considered a crucial element in the rationalisation of the modern world, representing the most essential of all social processes. Bureaucracy is viewed as the most rational and efficient organisational form, emphasising control based on knowledge, a clearly defined sphere of competency, adherence to analysable rules, and precision, speed, consistency, availability of records, continuity, unity, rigorous coordination, as well as minimal interpersonal conflict, personnel, and material cost (Weber, cited in Sapru, 2013). Bureaucracy generally relies on a hierarchical form of authority, division of labour, specialization of duty, and impersonal detachment.

This ideal form of management underscores rules, regulations, authority, and technical qualifications as the criteria for selecting individuals into both public and private institutions. The "merit system of operation" or "merit and qualification rule" is a foundational principle of bureaucracy theory, emphasising that there should be basic requirements for all positions in any bureaucratic institution. Weber justified this component by stating that "bureaucratic administration entails primarily the exercise of control on the basis of knowledge." As a theory in public administrative management, it upholds professionalism, effectiveness, and efficiency in organisations, whether public (civil service) or private.

Bureaucratically structured government is the prevailing form of public administration globally, including the Nigerian Civil Service. However, the application of this structure in the Nigerian civil service, as highlighted by Ume (2022), encounters negative reactions. The principle of meritocracy, central to bureaucracy, contrasts with the politicised Nigerian civil service where applicants are often selected based on political criteria. This approach fosters inefficiency, ineffective service delivery, and, critically, a lack of professionalism. Issues such as patronage politics, cronyism, manipulation of the federal character principle, ethnic sentiments, spoil systems, and the prevalence of administrative functionaries affiliated with the ruling party are some of the challenges associated with the use of political criteria in the Nigerian civil service.

### **Theory of Distributive Justice**

Wallace (1977) stated that distributive justice is justice that intends the good of each individual as a member of the community. It is related to legal justice in the sense that, the more the individual devotes his efforts to the common good, the more the community should also devote to his good. Similar to this, according to Velasquez (2002), distributive justice deals with the equitable and right distribution of public benefits and liabilities among community members. Work and the expenses associated with increasing society's productive capabilities are burdens. All the goods that people desire and that society generates are included in the advantages. Although distributive justice applies to all groups, it primarily concerns how the government divides its costs and rewards among its constituents.

Distributive justice explicitly affects a wide range of issues, including employment, income, taxation, and access to healthcare. There will always be some assumption about how resources should be distributed when there is not enough for everyone in any response to the question of how employment ought to be assigned, income and taxes calculated, and medical resources allocated. This assumption is known as the distributive justice principle. For instance, it is frequently suggested that employment should be based on merit and aptitude. Once more, it is frequently argued that major firms should receive tax cuts so they can reinvest their savings and boost productivity and employment, which would ultimately benefit society as a whole.

Nevertheless, Aquinas's (1967) submission seems to be slightly different from the above submissions, according to him distributive justice is the administration of justice to each individual member of the community by the community (state, government). Distributive justice is administered according to “the proportion of equality” so that the person of higher merit or higher state receives more than the person of lesser merit or lower state (p. 70).

In corroboration to Aquinas's assertion, Peschke (1979) further stated that “insofar as burdens, and honors must be divided fairly because individuals and groups differ in their capacities, resources, and commitment to the welfare of the community. For instance, the gradation of direct taxes according to income”. Hence, the disproportion in the distribution of burdens and partiality in the award of favours is contrary to distributive justice. In addition, Messner (1949) said, “this system of justice imposes a duty to distribute responsibilities and rewards in accordance with the proportional equality required for the common good”. Every

individual has basic rights within the community as a whole, and each of its agencies and members must recognise them. This aims at the establishment and preservation of a just order in the relationship between the community and its members.

Its role is to ensure that the goods that the community possesses are distributed in proportion to the merits and rights of each, hence the name distributive. For Ekwutosi (2006), "it is the virtue which inclines a community or organisation to promote the good of the individual. It requires a fair and proper distribution of public benefits and burdens, duties and privileges among the members of the community" (p. 125). Goods are distributed to the members based on their kind of membership and according to their strengths and capabilities. Obi (2012) contends that good governance eludes a society where there is no equitable distribution of public benefits, duties, and privileges among the populace; where people put in the positions of management of public resources to ensure equitable distribution of these resources, mismanage these resources to satisfy their selfish desires instead of the common good. Thus, where people are not free to choose who rules them, they are denied both economic and political opportunities.

#### **Application of Theories**

Based on the ideas from Bureaucratic theory, emphasis is placed on technical qualification as the basis upon which individuals should be recruited and promoted. Therefore, the "merit and qualification rule" stands as a foundational principle integral to the structure of the Bureaucracy Theory, complementing other fundamental concepts. In applying this theory to this study, it is argued that instead of recruitment of university staff based on the federal character principle, the bureaucratic principles should be followed given that the university is a centre of excellence where a crop of experts is expected to be recruited to produce ultimate results that are expedient for societal development. Thus, with regard to this study, technical competence is stressed over reliance on some federal character principle which stresses on the recruitment of people based on ethnic and regional characteristics. Additionally, the bureaucratic theory noted that organisations that employ people based on some primordial sentiments are bound to fail. Consequently, applying this theory, this study averred that if the university fails to recruit and promote people based on technical competence and qualifications, they are bound to fail in achieving the aims of the university which is learning and knowledge acquisition.

The second theory which is a contrast to the first argues that equality should be stressed over competence. According to the statement, as not all people and organisations possess the same skills, resources, or commitment to promoting the welfare of society, aids, burdens, and honours must be allocated fairly. Therefore, public advantages and liabilities should be distributed among a community's members in a fair and appropriate manner. Work and the expenses associated with increasing society's productive capabilities are burdens. In applying the distributive justice theory to this study, it is argued that opportunities in the university should be equally distributed.

Thus, it is noted that if people are to be employed strictly on competence, some regions will be left behind since they lack the requisite qualifications to engage in university employment. Consequently, the northern region will be left behind in university employment since, it has been noted that the north is less educated when compared to the southern region. It is on this note that the concept of distributive justice is in sync with the federal character principle which stresses equality of employment in all federal government parastatals of which the university is part of.

## **Methods**

### **Study Area and Design**

This study was conducted in Federal University Otuoke (FUO), Bayelsa State, Nigeria. FUO is one of the Federal Universities established by the Nigerian Federal Government in February 2011. Its primary purpose is to address the educational disparities between advantaged and disadvantaged regions of the country, particularly in areas where the presence of universities was lacking. The university is located at Otuoke Community, Ogbia LGA, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The choice of Federal University Otuoke is because it is one of the new federal universities in the South-South established after the federal character principle was formally recognised. University of Port Harcourt, which is also a Federal University, had started before the federal character principle was recognised. Thus, it becomes expedient to select the Federal University Otuoke as the research locale for this study, as it will give a vivid description of the current state of the application of the federal character principle as practised in Federal Universities in Nigeria.

The study adopted a descriptive case study design which focused on a small number of people, groups, or both that are central to the narrative of the study. This research design is adopted to describe the application of the federal character principles and how it affects manpower development using the experiences of the staff and administrators of the Federal University Otuoke. The descriptive case study is designed to get an in-depth description of how the university applies the principle of federal character and how it affects its manpower development of the university.

### **Study Population**

The study population for this study includes academic and non-academic staff of Federal University Otuoke. The Nigerian University System Statistical Digest (NUSSD) of 2019 puts the total number of staff of the Federal University Otuoke at 1,226 made up of 428 academic staff and 798 non-academic staff (National Universities Commission, 2019). The Federal University Otuoke Establishment Office, however, puts the total number of employees at Otuoke at 1,892 with 328 academic staff, and 1,564 non-academic staff (See Table 3.1). Nevertheless, for the inclusion criteria for this study, only 10 academic and 10 non-academic staff that have worked for at least five years in the university were recruited for this study. This is because, they are in a better position to provide information about the federal character principle and its applications, and how it affects manpower development.

### **Sampling Techniques**

For this study, a multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. This involved using different sampling techniques at different points of data collection and sampling of respondents. First and foremost, the purposive sampling technique was used to select Federal University Otuoke out of the federal universities in Nigeria. This is because it is one of the new federal universities in the South-South established after the federal character principle was formally recognized. Secondly, the purposive sampling technique was used to select only staff of the universities that have spent at least five years in the university.

Additionally, the stratified sampling technique was used to divide the staff into academic and non-academic staff. This is to ensure a divergent view from both divides of the staff of the institution. However, the accidental sampling technique was used to recruit academic and non-academic staff of the university who were available for the study at the time of data collection. Stratified sampling was also used to divide the faculties into six, while simple random sampling technique was applied in selecting two departments in the Faculty of Education, two departments in the Faculty of Engineering, two departments in the Faculty of Management Sciences, two departments in the Faculty of Science, and one each from the Faculties of Social Sciences and Humanities. Two faculties were selected each from the Faculties of Education, Science, Engineering, and Management Sciences because they have more departments than those in the social and management sciences. Finally, the purposive sampling technique was used to select the administrators of the university who can adequately provide information on the employment status of the university based on state of origin. Summarising comments from different researchers on the ideal sample size for a qualitative study, Boddy (2016) concluded that while the appropriate sample size for grounded theory studies should be in the range of 20-30, those of case studies should be in the range of 15 to 30. However, for the purpose of this study, the sample size was made up of an average of 15-30 which is approximately 23.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for this study was done, using two instruments of qualitative data collection namely: In-depth Interview (IDI) and Key Informant Interview (KII). These were designed to elicit responses based on the objectives of the study from participants. While the IDI was used to elicit information from the academic and non-academic staff of the university, the KII was used to collect data from the school administrators. The interviews were conducted in English in the offices of the participants. The questions were designed to permit an in-depth probing of emerging themes. The instrument was to particularly explore how participants felt about how the federal character principle is applied to the staffing process, if the federal character principle has led to effective manpower utilisation in the university, if promotion and appointment of key officers are based on the federal character principle, and the major challenges in implementing the federal character principle in the university. Before participating in the study, however, the objectives and eligibility criteria were read to each participant. Those who agreed to participate in the study were given a consent form to sign before the interview.



Every question allowed participants to express themselves freely. A follow-up question was posed to allow participants elaborate on their points. This was to ensure that participants' experiences were explored to the fullest. Each interview session lasted between 30 to 40 minutes. Each interview session was audio-taped and transcribed verbatim into English after grammatical errors were corrected. To ensure the validity of the instrument, the instrument was initially tested with four staff of the university (two academic and two non-academic staff) who were not part of the main study, after which necessary adjustments were made by the researcher after inputs from the supervisor and other lecturers from the Department of Sociology, Niger Delta University. To also ensure consistency, the same IDI and KII guide was used to interview all participants.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

Data analysis for this study was done using thematic content analysis. In doing this, the six steps and processes (familiarization; coding; generating themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and writing up) of doing thematic content analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) were adhered to. Atlas.ti software was used to manage acquired data for thematic content analysis. The decision to apply thematic content analysis allowed the researcher to closely study the acquired data to uncover common themes, i.e., subjects, ideas, and patterns of meaning that emerge repeatedly from the interview. The researcher went through the interview transcripts several times to establish thorough meanings of the participants' narrations. Individual transcripts were assigned codes (e.g. FUU-IDI 1, FUU-IDI 2 ... FUU-IDI 20; FUU-KII 1, FUU-KII 2, FUU-KII 3). Codes were grouped to form sub-themes, and sub-themes were re-grouped to make major themes. Before analysis and presentation, each sub-theme and primary theme created for the study were thoroughly addressed with the research supervisor.

## **Results**

### **Participants Background Information**

This study recruited a total of 23 participants, they included 10 academic staff, 10 non-academic staff, and 3 administrators all from the Federal University, Otuoke. 56.5% of the study's participants were male and only 43.5% were female. The average age of all participants was 43.5 years, all participants (100%) were married, and they had all worked in the university for an average of 8.3 years. Most participants recruited for this study were from the Department of Education (21.7%) and the least participants were from Sociology (13.0%) and Engineering Departments (13.0%). Generally, on highest level of education, the majority of the study's participants had acquired their PhD (34.8%), 21.7% were BSc. holders, 17.4% were B.Ed holders, 13.0% had acquired their Master's degree, 8.7% had acquired their HND and only 4.3% worked with an MPA degree. Additionally, participants of this study had various ranks in the university, most of them were ARs (26.1%), 17.4% were Senior Lecturers, Lecturer 2 (13.0%), Lecturer 1 (13.0%), Assistant Lecturers (8.7%), Professors (8.7%), SARs (4.3%), PEOs (4.3%) and AOs (4.3%) made up the remaining percentage of the sample population. Lastly, most participants were Bayelsans (43.5%), Deltans made up 21.7% of the participants, 13.0% were from Edo State, 8.7% were from Imo State, 8.7% were from Rivers State and the least percentage of participants (4.3%) were from Ekiti state.

### **Federal Character Principle Applied to the Staffing Process of Workers in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.**

Findings from the study indicate that, a greater percentage of the staff in Federal University Otuoke in Bayelsa State were aware of the federal character principle applied to the staffing process of workers in the institution. While some noted that they got to know about it through informal conversations/discussions, others stated that they learned about the Federal character principle through personal studies and the media.

For instance, a non-academic staff of the university noted thus:

*“Yes, I am aware of the federal character principle in the recruitment of staff in federal parastatals, agencies, and ministries. I got to know about it through discussions with my colleagues. Also, I think Federal University Otuoke applies the federal character principle in the recruitment of its staff, because most of the states are represented here in FUU. That is, the staff of this institution are made up of persons from almost all the states in Nigeria. For example, about 70% of academic staffs in FUU are not from Bayelsa State.”*

Another participant, an academic staff stated,

*“Yes, I am well aware of the federal character principle in the recruitment of staff in federal parastatals, agencies, and ministries. I got to know about the federal character principle through personal studies. Federal University Otuoke applies the federal character principle in the recruitment of its staff. I know this because most of the staff including myself are from different parts of the country.”*

According to responses from the participants, Federal University Otuoke applies the federal character principle in the recruitment of its staff, as most of the university's staff, including some of the participants are from different regions and states of the country. Some participants also noted that, about 70% of the institution's staff were not Bayelsans.

### **The Extent to which the Federal Character Principle is Applied in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.**

Results imply that, FUU applies the federal character principle to its recruitment process and the level of implementation of the federal character principle in the recruitment of Staff in FUU is about 50% to 60%. However, responses indicated that, the western and northern states/regions have not been adequately represented in FUU and the university gives more consideration to the host state and region in terms of employment, as most of the members of staff in the university are from the southern and eastern regions of the country. The stand of participants is captured in the responses below:

*“Although I have no idea about the estimated percentage of employees recruited from different regions, I do know that the level of implementation of federal character principle in the recruitment of Staff in FUU is very high, up to 50% at least. However, I still think the western and northern states have not been adequately represented in the recruitment process and all states across the geo-political zones ought to be employed in federal government agencies”*

*according to the federal character principle, but FUU gives more consideration to the host region and state in terms of employment.” (Non-Academic Staff FUU)*

*“While the level of implementation of the federal character principle in the recruitment of Staff in FUU is very high, about 60% if I must say, I still think FUU staff are more from the South-South and eastern states, and the northern and western states are not duly represented in the institution, and I think all the states of the federation have an equal right to be employed in any federal institution in Nigeria.” (Academic Staff FUU)*

*“According to the federal character principle, all regions are considered for employment in federal institutions and though I have no idea about the estimated percentage of employees recruited from different regions, the level of implementation of the federal character principle in FUU is up to 50%, but I think we have more of staff from the South-South states and the northern region is not fully represented in the institution.” (Academic Staff FUU)*

#### **Federal Character Principle and Effective Manpower Utilisation in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.**

The application or non-application of the federal character principle according to participants, affects the manpower utilisation of the school. They stated that the application of the federal character principle will positively affect the capacity of academic and non-academic staff as well as the achievement of the overall objectives of the university, especially if the recruitment is solely based on merit because qualified persons are all given equal opportunities to be employed despite their state of origin. Also, the application of the federal character principle gives a sense of belonging and unity of purpose, and to a large extent, its implementation affects performance positively. However, a few opined that the application of the federal character principle in the recruitment process may also have negative effects if qualified persons are not employed just because they want to apply the federal character principles while recruiting, and this will affect manpower utilisation in terms of achieving the overall objectives of the university.

For instance, a non-academic staff of the university noted thus:

*“I think the application of the federal character principle will affect the manpower utilisation of the school because the quality of employees affects organisational output, and if qualified persons are not employed just because they want to follow the federal character principle, it will affect manpower utilisation in terms of achieving the overall objectives of the university.”*

Another participant declared that,

*“The application of the federal character principle in the recruitment process gives us a sense of belonging and unity of purpose, to a large extent, implementation of the federal character principle affects performance positively.”*

An administrator of the university asserted that,

*“So far, the application of the federal character principle has greatly helped in improving our manpower and achieving the university's goals, as qualified individuals are all given a chance to be employed despite their state of origin. The recruitment process in FUU is solely based on merit, hence, only the most qualified are considered for employment, and with the application of the federal character principle, everyone is given equal opportunity despite the region they are from.”*

### **Promotion and Appointments of Staff into Key Positions Based on the Federal Character Principle in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.**

Results show that appointments in FUU are based on the federal character principle and in a few cases elections, but promotion within the university is by merit, experience and service. However, participants noted that, the host state (Bayelsa state) and other South-South states are mostly considered first for these appointments. The stand of the participants is captured in the comments below:

*“The federal character principle does not take care of promotions, only appointments. Promotions are earned by merit and services to the university. However, I think when giving appointments in FUU, more consideration is given to the host state and South-South states.” (Academic Staff FUU)*

*“It is fair in terms of appointments and promotions and although people from Bayelsa are usually considered in terms of appointments, the procedures for promotions are fair and are based on merit which includes qualification and years of substantial service.” (Non-Academic Staff FUU)*

*“Promotion is an internal arrangement and it's usually based on qualification and merit in FUU. However, appointments in FUU follow the federal character principle and are based on elections sometimes.” (Administrator FUU)*

The responses above show that, although promotion in Federal University Otuoke is solely based on merit, the federal character principle is strictly followed when giving appointments in the university. Still, certain considerations are given to staff from the host state and people mainly from the southern region.

### **Major Challenges in Implementing the Federal Character Principle in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria**

Findings from the study's last objective indicate that political factors, ethnic factors, religious factors, and distance are the major challenges in the implementation of the federal character principle in the recruitment and appointment of staff in Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

For instance, a participant noted thus:

*“Personally, I think distance and religious disparities are the major challenges in the implementation of the federal character principle in the recruitment and appointment of staff in the Federal University of Otuoke.”*

Another participant claimed that,

*“Political factors, ethnic factors, and religious factors are the challenges facing the full implementation of the federal character principle in the recruitment and appointment of staff in the Federal University of Otuoke. The above-mentioned factors are the major challenges facing the full implementation of the federal character principles in FUU. Although the federal character principle limits favouritism to an extent, these factors listed above still play a huge role in determining who is recruited and who is not.”*

An administrator in FUU said,

*“The major challenge we face in the application of the federal character principle is political influence on our decision-making. Most times, the recruitment process is heavily influenced by politicians for their own personal gain and political agenda. Hence, all regions may not get equal employment opportunities due to political factors.”*

Participants noted that, although the university recruitment team is compelled to strictly adhere to the federal character principle of recruitment in Federal MDAs, there are often some constraints and challenges encountered due to political influence on the recruitment process, undue fixation on ethnic and religious differences and in most cases the distance of applicants.

### **Discussions of Findings**

Findings from this study's first objective show that, the majority of staff in FUU are aware of the federal character principle and its aim, which is to promote the representation of staff from all 36 states of the country. Most of them got to know about it through informal conversations and discussions, others mentioned that they got to know about it from the media and personal studies. Results also show that FUU applies the federal character principle in its recruitment process and employment is distributed amongst all regions as most of the staff in the university are not from the host state, Bayelsa. Heirmexy (2011) observed that the introduction of the federal character principle was done to ensure the fair distribution of jobs and natural and financial resources. The federal character concept ensures an equitable distribution of civil service employees during the recruitment process for both the federal civil service and federal MDAs. Additionally, Akinwale (2014) asserts that the federal character principle offers an equal formula for distributing socioeconomic services and infrastructural facilities. It serves as a means to address inequality, facilitates fair admission into federal universities, prevents any particular segment of society from unduly dominating elective or appointed positions, safeguards the corporate existence of Nigeria, guarantees equal access to the armed forces and the police, protects the interests of minority ethnic groups, and ensures a balanced distribution in the recruitment of personnel into the federal civil service.

The level of implementation of the federal character principle in the recruitment of Staff in FUU as revealed by the study's findings, is about 50% to 60%. However, the northern and western regions were noted to be inadequately represented in the institution. According to the results, this was mainly because more considerations for employment are given to applicants from the host state, hence, most of the members of the staff in the university are from the southern and eastern regions of the country. This finding correlates with the findings of Suleiman (2017) where he asserted that the distribution is not evenly distributed; often, some states receive more than others. The third objective of the study which sought to investigate the effect of the federal character principle on manpower utilisation in the university discovered that the application of the federal character principle has positive effects such as giving the staff a sense of belonging and unity of purpose, as well as providing qualified persons from other regions the opportunity to get employed. Similarly, Cinjel & Akende (2015) asserted that the federal character principle encourages a feeling of community and a "we" mentality rather than a "they" mentality.

However, our results also show that since the federal character principal recruitment is not solely based on merit, unqualified persons are also recruited and this negatively affects the manpower utilisation, as well as the achievement of the institution's overall objectives. Likewise, Suleiman, as referenced in Mafos (2015), expressed the viewpoint that the implementation of the federal character principle in recruitment contributes to the subpar performance of public sectors in Nigeria. This is attributed to the presence of numerous incompetent individuals and, to some extent, staff lacking adequate literacy in the sector. The application of the federal character principle in the recruitment of staff within the Nigerian Civil Service has led to the hiring of incompetent or inadequately qualified personnel, including individuals with little or no experience necessary to accomplish organisational goals. Gbervbie (2014), nevertheless struck a balance between the advantageous and disadvantageous sides of the Federal Character principle. He maintained that the application of the federal character principle should be restricted to the recruitment and selection exercises within grade levels 03-06; while recruitment into the senior officer's cadre grade levels 07-17 and appointments should be strictly based on merit. Of course, the position stands reconciliatory such that the meritorious components of bureaucracy would not be eroded, while the federal character principle would stick to its values for balanced representation at the low cadres of the Nigerian Civil Service.

Results from the fourth objective indicate that promotions in Federal University Otuoke is solely based on merit, which includes a staff's services and contributions to the institution, as well as the number of years of service. On the other hand, the federal character principle guides the process of giving appointments in the university to ensure equality among the diverse regions, still, certain considerations are given to staff from the host state and people mainly from the southern region. Likewise, Gbuile (2014) averred those placement/appointments into cadre, such as principal and management staff, is rigorously done based on federal character and not administrative procedures like seniority and experience in institutions of learning like the unity schools. However, this finding is in contrast with the ideas of Hodgkin (2017) who opined that promotion in the ministry frequently

depends on principles rather than merit. These disparities in the result may be due to the differences in the research area these studies were carried out. While this study focused on Federal University Otuoke, Hodgkin's study focused on the ministry as a whole.

In conclusion, the outcomes reveal that Federal University of Otuoke in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, encounters major challenges in implementing the federal character principles during the recruitment and appointment of staff. These challenges include political factors, ethnic considerations, religious influences, and geographical distance. Similarly, Ume (2022) contends that this principle contradicts the politicized nature of the Nigerian civil service, where selection is often based on political criteria. This approach fosters inefficiency, hampers service delivery, and, most importantly, undermines professionalism. Issues such as patronage politics, cronyism, manipulation of the federal character principle, ethnic sentiments, spoil systems, and the fact that key administrative figures often align with the ruling party or those in power are identified as problems in employing this criterion.

Aligning with these findings, Olaopa (2012) and Ikime (2002), argue that while the federal character principle has been considered an effective nation-building strategy for managing Nigeria's diverse population, it has significantly diminished the professional and competency capacity of the public service. Some critics argue that, in its pursuit of equality, the federal character principle has become discriminatory. Viewing federal character solely through the lenses of state and ethnicity is deemed inadequate, as other social divisions in Nigeria include class, religion, and ideological differences. The operations of federal character tend to empower politically dominant groups further, widening the power disparity between stronger and weaker segments.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the data collected during this research, we can conclude that the majority of the staff in FUU are aware of the federal character principle and its aim, and that FUU applies the Federal Character Principle in its recruitment process and employment is distributed amongst all regions as most of the staff in the university are not from the host state, Bayelsa. Also, the level of implementation of the federal character principle in the recruitment of Staff in FUU is about 50% to 60%, yet, the northern and western states are not fully represented. Additionally, the application of the federal character principle has positive effects such as giving the staff a sense of belonging and unity of purpose as well as providing qualified persons from other regions the opportunity to get employed but, since the federal character principle, recruitment is not solely based on merit, unqualified persons are also recruited and this negatively affects the manpower utilisation, as well as the achievement of the institution's overall objectives.

Furthermore, promotions in the Federal University Otuoke are entirely based on merit, this encompasses a staff's service, contributions to the institution, as well as the number of years of service. On the other hand, the federal character principle guides the process of giving appointments in the university to ensure equality among the diverse regions. Lastly, the major challenges the Federal University of Otuoke faces in the implementation of the federal character principle in the recruitment and appointment of staff are political factors, ethnic factors, religious factors, and distance.

With regard to the conclusion reached in this study, it is necessary to make relevant contributions to the major actors involved:

1. The Federal Character Commission should ensure that the principle is applied the way the makers and pioneers of the policy envisioned. Which is to give aid to the weak and marginalised regions in the country, limit the power of the strong, and not deliberately encourage mediocrity over merit in the federal recruitment processes.
2. The initiatives of the federal government should emphasise human capacity and institutional development without any ethnic or religious sentiment, or unethical behaviour in federal government institutions.
3. Consideration for employment or appointment should be based on merit, even in seeking to achieve a balanced distribution and geo-political representation during recruitment and promotion exercises in Federal MDAs.
4. The federal government should bring up other structures to promote equality while removing the emphasis on federal character which has become a political tool.

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