
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENCE ARTS AND COMMERCE

Perceived ways of reducing the impact of ethnicity in the management of universities in Nigeria.

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Abstract

In spite of the astronomical growth of universities in Nigeria, both Federal and State Government have not been able to contend with the surging demand for university education and employment. Universities in recent times, in response to societal developments are subscribing to the pressure of ethnicity where certain issues like the appointment of Vice Chancellor (VC) which was predicated on vital requirements such as experience, qualification, scholarship, integrity among others are sacrificed under the pressure from various states agitating for the representation of their sons and daughters in these exalted positions. This study seeks to perceive ways of reducing the impact of ethnicity in the management of universities in Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population for the study was 14,347 staff in Federal and State universities in North Central Nigeria. A sample of 1,435 was drawn through stratified proportionate sampling technique. Data were collected using questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire was structured and designed on a 4-point scale. Out of 1,435 questionnaire that were distributed, 1,035 were returned. Data was analyzed using mean scores, standard deviations. The obvious implications of this are the continuous decline of the desired standards universities education and continuous ethnic conflict, marginalization and alienation of minority group of students and workers. It was recommended that Government should implement the federal character principle at both Federal and State universities. Universities in addition to achieving excellence should encourage universality out of which it derives her name, foster care, respect, and integrity, promote equity and justice as well as provide fertile ground for the Federal Character Principle and other national policies.

The Concept of Ethnicity

The phrase ethnic identity, ethnic group and ethnic conflict have become quite common terms of discussion in the media and political programs as well as in casual conversations. It then seems as though the meaning of this term has become ambiguous and vague. However, a comparable development in the social sciences during the 1980s and 1990s has witnessed an explosion in the growth of scholarly publications on ethnicity particularly in the field of Political Science,

History, Sociology and Social Anthropology. All of the approaches, in these different fields agree that ethnicity has something to do with the classification of people and group relationships.

Ethnicity has been conceptualized by various authors. Nnoli (2007) defined ethnicity as a social phenomenon associated with contact among ethnic groups that exist within the same political system (p.75). Also, Suberu (1999) described ethnicity as the mobilization and politization of ethnic group identified in a situation of competitive or conflicting ethnic pluralism. It is characterized by cultural prejudice and social discrimination. Underlying these characteristics are feelings of pride in the in-group, common consciousness and identity of member of the group, the excessiveness of membership of the group. It is a phenomenon that linked directly or indirectly to forms of affiliation and identification, built around ties of real or putative kinship. Otite (1990) defined ethnicity as categories of people characterized by cultural criteria of symbols, including language, value system and normative behavior whose members are anchored in a particular part of the country or state. This definition agrees with Elaigwu (1994) who observed that in certain circumstances, different ethnic group may act out a feeling of attachment and loyalty of its member's intersection with others, when the interest of both intersects is over the same values and scarce social goods. Similarly, Osaghae (1995) opined that ethnicity as the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation. Osaghae's definition stresses the unification of a common group for the pursuance of a common interest. In this case, there is a discrimination of a non member of the identified group.

Adadevoh (2002) asserted that some feminist stretch the meaning of ethnicism (prejudice based on ethnicity) to a wide scope of conceptualization to include a proposal for social transformation as well as a movement that strives to end the multiple oppression of women on sexual and cultural note. This definition is particular on gender discrimination based on cultural perception. It is clear that in African continent some culture does not permit women to hold some key posts or responsibilities and in some cases certain roles are associated with the male folk. Therefore, ethnicism tends to segregate the groups based on gender disparity, cultural differences, tribal affiliation, religious fanaticism among others. Ethnicity has also been defined as a family's common ancestry through which identity develops as a result of evolved shared values and customs (Mc Liddrick, Liordano, and Pearce, 1996). This definition of ethnicity or more functional term ethnic group, consists of individual and families who are members of international, national, religious, cultural and racial group that do not belong to the dominant group in a society. One thing that is common with the definition is ethnicity is the grouping of people according to their cultural lineage; it is a social group consciousness that influence social, economic and political decision. They can be differentiated from both the dominant group and other ethnic group by some combination of their values, expectations, geographical location, language, altitudes, customs, lifestyles, rituals, and celebrations. Foreigners in different countries identify themselves, recognize each other and have a sense of a common group. They are often differentiated by race, geographical location of origin, lifestyles and so on.

Ethnicity as a social phenomenon has a large group of attribute and identification that characterize intervention with the people. It is usually associated with specific social formations and intervention strategy among members of particular tradition, origin, religion or gender. Ethnicity manifests in a contextual discrimination of one group against another on the basis of the differentiated systems of social and cultural symbols. In Nigeria at the national level, the ethnic conflicts in Nigeria are largely among the three dominant groups. The Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. At the local level, the conflicts are among ethnic neighbours and these vary from one state to another. At each of the locations, groups compete for the available economic, material and political resources and institutions and these are often done in a manner that threatens national peace and stability.

Origin of Ethnicity

There are several conceptions of ethnicity that seek to explain the origin of ethnicity. Nnoli (2007) and Suleiman (2009) contend that ethnicity in Africa can be traceable to the colonialists. It was believed that as part of the colonialists' justification of the colonial enterprise, the colonialists too sought to create an acceptable ideological basis for African participation in colonial activities. They did this by denying the Africans a past they should be proud of, and the colonial racism provides a myth whose primary objective was the complete alienation of the African from her past, enabling a better and more complete control of her (Nnoli, 2007).

Egwu (2007) and Nnoli (2007) noted that the colonialists, who by nature were racist, portrayed the African of a pre-colonial past as a primitive sewage. Instead of ethnicity the colonialist coined the word tribalism to disunite relation among African ethnic groups. The pre colonial African had no system of ethics or principles of civilized behaviors thereby categorizing Africans into linguistic groups as tribes and to attribute to them differences in culture and ways of life was the beginning of ethnicity in Africa. A few thousand Icelanders were regarded as a nation where several million Hausas, Baganda, Zulu, Yorubas were referred to as tribes, this is the racist view of the Africans which gave birth to what has come to be a phenomenon of social identity and bigotry.

Another school of thought is the primordialism. These are of the opinion that ethnicity originated from primordial and biogenetic understanding of social life. According to the primordial view, from primeval times, the various nomadic, agricultural and other people around the world were identified by name, language, customs, beliefs and territorial origins. These identifiers, it is argued, express primordial, affective and deeply rooted sentiments of human being. The identification of the individual with the group expresses some basic, innate human need similar to that of the life in the family. It also marks the boundaries of ethnic identity. Ethnic groups are primordial groups. They arise from primal bonding of individuals to specific communities therefore, ethnicity is a primordial phenomenon. This primordial's position is taken to extremes under the influence of socio-biology. The later promote the belief that ethnicity is based on genetics. Nigeria is a country replete of ethnic pluralism. The country has more than 400 ethnic

groups and two major religions (Islam and Christianity). It is unfortunate that the country's ethnic diversity is politicized and exploited by the elite in such a way that retards the nation's growth and progress. A number of other terms, such as minority, people of color, and racial groups are related to the term ethnic group. Some minorities are differentiated on the basis of power and resources, so that to be a member of a minority group is to share a status relationship dissimilar to the dominant group. For instance, there is gender discrimination with regard to appointments into offices, zoning of offices to different geo-political zones and rotation of offices as well as admission to read certain courses in the university. Universities in recent times are evolving rapidly in response to societal developments such as the surge for university education, recruitment, production of human resources, pine for paper qualifications, innovations, equity and access to university education among others. In response to these developments certain issues like the appointment of Vice Chancellor (VC) which was predicated on vital requirements such as experience, qualification, scholarship, integrity among others are sacrificed under the pressure from various states agitating for the representation of their sons and daughters in these exalted positions. Some of the characteristics associated with ethnicity include: economic or class status, geographic origin, political position, migratory statuses, race, language and dialect, religious faith or faiths, ties of that transcend kinship, neighborhood and community boundaries, shared traditions, values and symbols among others.

The impact of ethnicity in the country affects all aspects of Nigeria's national life, most especially resource allocation and management of public institutions. The problem has produced several bloody crises across the country in addition to the 1967-1970 "Nigeria civil war". The national crisis negatively affects higher education in terms of how ethnic group compete for the location and management of universities hence, the university system is most contested. The aggressive competition between the diverse groups in Nigeria for the control of universities derives from the assumption that these institutions have significant roles to play in elite formation and recruitment in addition to the fact that, the institutions generate local employment and economic regeneration. Within this frame work, ethnic and sub-ethnic groups in the country are sensitive to the location of universities, appointment of their vice chancellors, staff recruitment as well as admission of students. In most cases, the people of the states and communities where the federal or state universities are located see the institutions as their personal properties and would want the management as such. Ifedili (2006) indicated that there was obvious discrimination in the employment, promotion and appointment to positions between indigene and non-indigene in the state government employment. He further recommended that a study should be done to find out whether the indigenes or the non-indigenes are more law abiding. Ifedili in his recommendations stated that there is a need to integrate the non-indigenes in the state employment, equal opportunity should be to non-indigenes in all states of the federation that this will bring about a sense of belonging and respect to humanity. Ifedili further suggested that government should try to instill love, peace and unity in her representatives at various establishments so that there will be no more perpetuation of wickedness against the non-indigenes. According to Ifedili, this will bring about the desired unity and that non-indigene

should be promoted as at when due and should receive the same benefits that other employees get from the government. In North Central States, Akpaku (2013) noted that each ethnic group struggles to be represented in the appointment of members of governing councils of higher institutions, in recruitment of staff, promotion, trade union activities and students' admission processes in universities. Similarly, Ahmed (2011) noted that most of the universities in Nigeria marginalize the minorities of either tribe, religion or gender which are major characteristics of ethnicity. Indigenes have built an elaborate maze of manipulation, control, infiltration and economic incentive to systematically deceive stakeholders into thinking that sharing seats among the indigenous tribes is prerogative of each university hence the campaign for quota system and catchment area policies. Supporting this assertion, Ogbonnaya (2009) succinctly stated that in most of the Nigerian universities, appointment of the governing council and vice chancellor, staff employment, appointment and promotions are usually done on the basis of ethnic considerations. He further pointed out that this trend makes it difficult for the appointees to achieve their statutory responsibilities in universities governance. It is therefore important to note that University management has been greatly abused as a result of ethnic infestation at the management cadre of universities in Nigeria. This perhaps explain why in North Central States, Akpaku (2013) stated that each ethnic group struggles to be represented in the appointment of governing council members of higher institutions, staff employment, appointment, trade union, activities, and students' admissions in the universities.

In attempt to avert the above situation in the 80s, federal government had attempted to neutralize or diffuse this sentiment associated with appointment of Vice Chancellors by posting such selected chief executives to states other than their states of origin. Whawo (2003) citing examples of a few, mentioned Professor Tekena Tamuno, an Okrika from Rivers State served as VC, University of Ibadan, Oyo State; Prof. E. A. Anyandele, a Yoruba, VC, University of Calabar, Cross River State. Similarly, Prof. E. U. Essien was appointed VC, University of Maiduguri, Bornu State while Prof. Donald E. U. Ekong served as VC University of Port Harcourt, River State. In addition, the federal government has adopted the "federal character Principle" as a panacea for solving the problem of majority domination, which was considered a recipe for national integration and cohesion.

The Federal Character Principle which has been enshrined in the Nigeria's constitution since 1979 according to Adamolekun, Erero and Oshionebo (1991) seeks to ensure that appointment to public service institutions fairly reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religion, and geographical diversities of the country. The Federal character principle was particularly adopted for reducing ethnic tension, curbing suppression of minorities and ensures equalization of opportunities in appointments, distribution of amenities and working out a credible distribution for leadership. Ene (2007) interprets the Federal Character Policy to mean how fair and equal representation could be given to various components of the units and communal groups in the country's educational institutions, agencies and positions of power, status and influence. The Federal Character Commission (1996) stated that, the federal character policy involves lowering the

entry and promotional qualifications of states considered disadvantaged in educational opportunities, hence the adoption of quota system and catchment area policies. Describing the consequences of the Federal Character in the administration of institutions of higher learning, Ahmed (2011) asserted that the Federal Character Principle has been sacrificed for ethnicity in universities particularly at the management level because ethnicity as a factor in university management has induced some unethical practices in university governance.

Based on the results, it can be concluded that ethnicity can be reduced through provision of valid information and avenue for expression of views, a more participatory and supportive style of management behaviour, representation of staff and student interest groups in committees, cooperation between states and universities, decision makers and their advisers within the different groups are being better informed on how universities operate, non-violent campaign against ethnicity through the media services, workshops and seminars for various groups and a collection of the groups, penalty for the violation of the federal character principle be enforced in universities, establishment of code of conduct bureau centre is in all universities in north central States to checkmate any vindictive treatment of anybody are among ways of reducing the impact of ethnicity. Other ways of reducing the impact of ethnicity in universities in North Central States include, regular seminars organized for royal fathers, clergies, elite groups, trade unions among others on the dangers of ethnicity, importance of quota system and catchment area, transparent procedure for nomination, promotion, employment and appointment, regular interactive session within the university where issues of common interests can be discussed, a passionate appeal to the conscience of all staff from the management team reduce the impact of ethnicity in university management.

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