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Federalism in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and the Way Forward

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Abstract

The study investigated Federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges.To achieve this purpose, Survey research design was adopted. This design was found suitable because it involves using a self-designed questionnaire in collecting data from the respondents. The Population of the study consisted of all the respondents in Akwa Ibom State. A sample of 200 respondents was selected using purposive sampling technique. The Instrument used for obtaining data was a researcher developed instrument entitled "Practice of Federalism Questionnaire (PFQ)". The instrument was given face validation by experts. In order to establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was carried out on a sample of 30 respondents using a test-retest method. Data generated from the study were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test analysis for both research questions and t-test respectively. The results of the findings showed that there is a significant influence of Federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on resource allocation, inter-ethnic competition and inter-governmental relations. Based on the findings, it is

recommended among others that there should be a review of Revenue Allocation Formulae to emphasize the Derivation Principle and allocation of larger percentage of resources to states, there should also encourage and facilitate dialogue among ethnic leaders and civil society organizations to address grievances and promote peaceful coexistence. Finally,there should consider devolving more powers to the state and local governments, allowing them to have greater control over matters that directly affect their communities. This promotes local governance and development.

Keywords: Federalism, Resource Allocation, Nigeria, Inter-ethnic competition, Inter-governmental relations

Introduction

Nigeria is a country with an estimated 350 ethnic groups which are largely contiguous territories. This feature makes it a natural candidate for a federal system of government. Federalism is a political structure that allows states to unite under a central government to maintain a measure of independence and interdependence. This governance pattern which appears as a compromise formula allows for power sharing between national and state governments. It is generally regarded as the appropriate governmental principle for countries with huge ethno-cultural diversities. Federalism has emerged as one of the most preferred forms of government based on its integrative competence to estimate the diverse political life of multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-linguistic societies. Though, in the Nigerian state, the practice of federalism has continued a forbidding frightening because of the twisted nature of the federal system which has led to serious contestations among the integral populations, thus resulting in limitless fiddling and dissolution. The problem Nigeria has had to face is how to save an efficient and effective central government that would help preserve national harmony and allowing free choice for the diversities of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual integral parts (Lanre, 2017).

However, the call for true federalism as a way of achieving equity and development can better be seen as politicization of federalism in Nigeria. That is, the practice of interpreting federalism to be in line with ethnic or group interest. Thus for instance, while true federalism for a Southerner in Nigeria lies not in the introduction of sharia law in any part of the country, but in achieving control over oil resources in the region. To a typical Northerner (especially Northern Muslim), true federalism lies in the full enthronement of Sharia legal system in the region rather than regional control of resources, while the Westerners (Yorubas) understand it from allocation of resources and the reason it should be based on need and population and so on (Jinadu, 2004).

But as Jinadu (2004) noted, 'there is no pure or true form of federalism rather what exists is a federal spectrum along which there are variations'. But this as well is not to suggest that there are no imbalances in the country's practice of federalism. If in the least, the asymmetric structure of the federation, which creates room for marginalization and inability of the federal structure to fully redress this, is a factor to contend with. Moreover, a major challenge currently facing the Nigerian federalism is the inability of many states to pay the salaries of workers regularly. Although, these problemshave been associated with corruption and the inability of states to generate enough revenue, the fact remains that these states are not financially autonomous. These problems shall be used as variables in this study.

Among the most volatile issues in the Nigerian federalism is resource allocation. Embedded in these is the use of the derivative principle in the allocation of the country's revenues. The principle of derivation in revenue allocation has indeed, been a very explosive one, such that it has continued to threaten the stability of Nigeria. In view of the above

explanation, one can clearly and categorically see that federalism is a process of aggregation or disintegration. It is drawn as a temporary device holding together units that eventually stay together to aggregate or fall apart or disaggregate. Ethnic competition has taken the front burner in contemporary discourse on Nigeria's federalism. Since the commencement of democratic rule on May 29, 1999, ethnic competition has come to occupy the center stage. The prevalence of ethnic competition is attested to by the sheer dramatic rise in the incidences as well as the volume of destruction of lives and properties that have accompanied them and the palpable tension and animosity it has generated in the relationships between different religions and groups in the country (Egwemi 2010).

Inter-Governmental Relations is perhaps one of the biggest challenges confronting Nigeria federalism. Intergovernmental relations among the levels of government in the Fourth Republic have been in disarray due to the unhealthy rivalry that exists. The problem is not unconnected to the dissatisfaction in the distribution of functions among the levels of government and lack of adequate tax powers allocated to the states and local governments in relation to their functions, undue removal of local government chairmen by the State Governors through their audit powers, joint state- local government account, and shortening of the tenure of local government chairmen, among other factors. It is on this background, that this study was out to investigate the practices of federalism in Nigeria: issues, challenges and the way forward.

Statement of the Problem

The federal system of government was set up for the purpose of national unity in the plural society like Nigeria and to preserve the distinct social identities valued by its constituent parts. Moreover, the implementation of the federal system in the Nigerian context and Nigeria's political system has continued to work with minimum unity and diversity. Competition basically prompted by cultural common distrust progressively deteriorates the stuff of Nigerian Authority (Ola, 1995). Essentially, Nigeria is a plural society, its constituent groups are detached from each other by substantial differences of ethnicity, language, cultures, and traditions. Nigeria formed differences in character, outlook, and attitudes, faced with the problem of federalism. Nigeria accepted federalism as a means of accomplishing its much-needed goal of national unity among people of different religions, ethnicity, and culture. In essence, the federalism so adopted is expected to lessen the massively destructive inter-ethnic competition and tension, alleviate the usually assumed fear of majority and minority domination, and bringing government closer to the people and give these diverse groups more opportunities, thereby integrating the country (Wheare, 1963).

The central argument is that the federal system of government was set up to unite people with different culture, religion, languages, educational background. The unification has resulted in unequal power sharing and resources allocation among the general population across the nation. especially between the majority and minority ethnic groups. The problem of inequality in power, ethnic competition, inter-Governmental Relations and resources allocation among the citizens has created a wide gap. This is because the ethnic majority has dominated the few minorities in all spheres of life in the country, especially in the power and resources allocation.

Research Questions

From the forgoing problem statement, the study seeks to answer the following research questions

1. What is the influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on resource allocation?

2. What is the influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-ethnic competition?

3. What is the influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-governmental relations?

Objectives of the Study

This study examined the influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges. Specifically, this study seeks to;

1. Examine the influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on resource allocation
2. Examine the influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-ethnic competition
3. Examine the influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-governmental relations

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study;

1. The practice of federalism in Nigeria tends to influence resource allocation principles in Nigeria
2. The practice of federalism in Nigeria tends to influence inter-ethnic competition in Nigeria
3. The practice of federalism in Nigeria tends to influence inter-governmental relations in Nigeria

Review of Related Literature

For major concepts, name, federalism, resource allocation, inter-ethnic competition and inter-governmental relations are relevant to the study an require in-depth explication.

Concept of Federalism

Federalism is a form of governmental and an institutional structure designed to cope with the difficult task of maintaining unity while also preserving diversity. Benz and Broschek (2013) refer to federalism as a moving target that continues to present significant difficulties on how to explore its origins and developmental patterns. Federalism, a system which Nigeria operates constitutionally for over sixty-five (65) years refers to the plan of government with more than one level or tier of government, each with diverse taxing authorities, expenses and responsibilities which in Nigeria, comprises of three levels (Federal/Central, 36 States and 774 Local Governments) of the federation (Shehu, 2017).

A study by Fatile and Adejuwon (2009), Majekodunmi (2015) sees federalism as a system of governance as practical, lively, serviceable and developing. It can only struggle on discussion, negotiation, compromise, bargaining, and agreement among the integral governments. It grows under a system of support and interdependence. Similarly, a study by Wheare (1963), noted that the discussion of modern federalism seems to have started in the work of Kenneth C. W 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 individual spheres of authority and capability, is independent and coordinate.

Concept of Resource Allocation

Revenue allocation is one component of the balance funds originating from the revenues of the State Budget allocated to regions based on certain percentage figures to fund regional needs in the context of implementing decentralization (Ahmad, 2002). Revenue transferred by the central government to the regional government consists of two types, namely the revenue sharing fund and non-tax revenue sharing (natural resources). Regions that have natural wealth and tax revenues will have regional revenues derived from the results of the management of these sources by the central government to finance their regional expenditures (Nazarullah, 2011). Revenue allocation committee inaugurated a special committee on Revenue Allocation together with the Federal House of Representatives on August 23, 2006 to revisit the 1992 Revenue Allocation Formula the nation has been using to share revenue among the tiers of government. Before then, the polity is yet to have constitutionally backed sharing indices for the Federal (FG), States and Local Government Councils (LGCs).

Concept of Inter-Ethnic Competition

Ethnic competition can be defined as the breakdown of accommodation of ethnic minorities within the state. This definition has a number of shortcomings. First, ethnic competition can also result from failure to accommodate ethnic majorities within the state. Secondly, ethnic competition can result from insufficient accommodation within the state for different ethnic groups. Breakdown may not occur if the different groups can accommodate one another, but breakdown will definitely lead to competition. Lastly, ethnic competition may not necessarily be caused within the state but by external influence, which then triggers ethnic competition. (Adebayo 2006). Ethnicity is a phenomenon in form and conflictual in nature and content such that people from different ethnic groups sees each other as competitors in the quest for resources rather than compatriots. This can only exist within a plural political states such as Nigeria with over four (400) languages. It is the relationship between the diverse ethnic groups with the political environment that produces ethnicity. In the case of Nigeria, its conflictual nature stems from interethnic competition for power and scarce resources. It is often characterized by inter-ethnic discrimination in jobs, housing, admission into higher institutions, scholarships, distribution of welfare services, marriage etc. This is often accompanied by nepotism and corruption. Merit is quite often sacrificed on the altar of ethnicity, thus, ethnic crisis becomes the resultant effects. (Obaje, 2002).

Concept of Inter-Governmental Relations

Intergovernmental relations can be defined as the interactions that take place among the different levels of government within a state. Usually, the concept is associated with states having a federal administration system where the relationships between the Federal, Central or national Government and the major sub-national unit (province, region or state) are formally spelt out in the constitution and any re-arrangement must be through a constitutional amendment involving all the levels of government. Although, the emphasis in the analysis of inter-governmental relations (Inter-governmental Relations) is on Federal-State Relations, the full picture also includes how both levels relate to the Local Government units established within each state. The result, then, is that a full analysis of inter-governmental Relations within a Federal administration system must cover the following: Federal-State, Federal-State-Local, Federal-Local, Inter-State, State-Local and Inter-Local Relations (Ralph 2004). The concept of intergovernmental relations (IGR) can be understood by considering the three dimensions or schools of thought. The first school of thought believes that intergovernmental relations occur in a federal system, the second

school of thought believes that it can only exist in both federal and unitary systems of government while the third stresses that it can take place at the international level.

The above is an indication that intergovernmental relations exist in both the federal and unitary systems. Therefore, intergovernmental relation is not associated with any system of government. Adamolekun (1983) Olopade (1984) defined intergovernmental relations as interactions that take place among the different levels of government within a state. It is federalism in action. Okoli (2005) argues that IGR is dominated by the relationship between the central government and the major sub-national governments with the main features spelt out in the constitution. Okoli added that intergovernmental relations involve patterns of cooperative relationship between various levels of government in a federal governmental structure. IGR encourages a focus on the vertical and horizontal governmental and non-governmental policy-making structures at different levels and in different sectors of the overall intergovernmental process. It also places greater emphasis on cooperative as opposed to conflictual aspects of intergovernmental relations.

In his opinion Watts (2008) identifies formal interactions that are conducted exclusively among the governments of constituent units or states. The informal pattern occurs when the same party is dominant in both levels of government for IGR issues to be addressed within the informal structures of that party itself, rather than in more formal IGR channels. Watts (2008) cites Nigeria since 1999 as a notable example of a presidential regime with a strong executive. Nigerian federalism and IGR have gone through many changes over the past five decades. Frequent constitutional reforms or changes have taken place since independence in 1960, 1963, 1975 and 1979 (Ugwu, 1998) and most recently in 1999.

Empirical Framework

In a study, Monday and Samuel (2016) conducted a comprehensive interrogation on resource control; its meaning, agitation, innovation and politics as well as its manifestation as one of the most highly contentious issues in Nigeria's federalism. The paper adopts a historical/descriptive method of enquiry and generates data largely from books, journal articles, magazines/newspapers and the Internet. The paper argues that the central control of oil resources and the utilization of the revenue derived therefrom to fast-track the development of the nation tends to favour the major ethnic groups rather than the minority from which the oil is exploited. The conflict over the distribution of State resources and its control within communal territories exacerbated the difficulties of political accommodation in Nigeria's federation. Findings have revealed that there has been innovation in the agitation for resource control in Nigeria, which ranges from regional cleavages, States, minority/majority ethnic groups to geo-political zones. The paper makes conceptual and practical recommendations for rethinking and restructuring of the nation's federalism for mutual co-existence and management of the nation's resources.

In another study, Awofeso and Obah-Akpowoghaha (2017) conducted a study to examine the current challenges of federalism in Nigeria, contextual and theoretical analyses and its implications. It aims to explain philosophically the variables that have influenced and are influencing the entrenchment of federalist option in Nigeria. In achieving this broad objective, secondary data such as scholarly works from the internet, newspapers and textbooks were used. Philosophical deduction and content analyses in relation to contextual background of federalism in Nigeria serve as the bases for arriving at the challenges of federalism in Nigeria. However, most literature on federalism focused on power relations between and among levels of government vis-à-vis fiscal federalism while issues relating to contextual dilemma and the

pitfalls in the experiment have attracted few academic works. Moreover, scholarly works on the concept of federalism are premised on the method of content analysis paying no or little attention to philosophical explanations. Hence, this paper seeks to investigate the aforementioned issues above. However, issues such as military incursion, corruption, civil war, colonial master and Nigerian elites' manipulations, etc, among others have been identified in this piece as contending factors that have created a setback to Nigerian federalism.

Joy (2018) examines Federalism and National Integration in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges. Nigeria is essentially a plural society, its component groups are separated apart from each other by significant differences of language, ethnicity, and cultures, created differences in attitude, outlook and character. Faced with these problems, Nigeria adopted federalism as a means of achieving its much needed goal of national integration. The objectives of this study were to ascertain whether federalism in Nigeria has reduced inter-ethnic competition and to examine whether federalism in Nigeria minimized the usually alleged fear of domination. System theory was used for the analysis of this work. The sample size of this work was determined using the Taro Yamani formula. The questionnaire was drafted and distributed to respondents to answer the questions on it. Based on hypotheses testing, the paper observed the following: federalism in Nigeria reduces inter-ethnic competition and federalism in Nigeria alley the usually alleged fear of domination.

In the same vein, Akpanim, Joseph and Ukeme (2022) conducted a study to investigatecontending issues in management of intergovernmental Relations in Nigeria: Diagnosis Elephantine Problems and Prospects. To achieve this purpose, survey research design was used. The Population of the study consisted of all the Local Government Staff in Uyo Local Government Area. A sample of 200 staff was selected using purposive sampling technique. The instrument used for the study was researcher developed instrument entitled "Contending Issues in Inter-Government Relations Questionnaire (CIIGRQ)". The instrument for the research was given face validation by experts. In order to establish the reliability of the instruments, a pilot study was carried out on a sample of 30 local government staff using a test-retest method. The two hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation at 0.197 level of significance. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between Political Interference and revenue sharing and allocation on Inter-Governmental Relations.

Methods and Materials

The study adopted Survey research design. This design was found suitable because it involves using a self-designed questionnaire in collecting data from the respondents. The area of the study was Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The Population of the study consisted of all the respondents in Akwa Ibom State. A sample of 200 respondents was selected using purposive sampling technique. The Instrument used for obtaining needed data was a researcher developed instrument entitled "Practices of Federalism Questionnaire (PFQ)". The instrument for the research was given face validation by experts. In order to establish the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was carried out on a sample of 30 respondents using a test-retest method. Data generated from the study were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test analysis for both research questions and t-test respectively.

Results

Research Question One

What is the practice of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on resource allocation?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation ofpractices of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and

Challenges based on resource allocation

Variable	N	SD	Remark
Resource			

allocation				
High	120	23.24	3.78	
Federalism				Great difference
Low	80	18.92	6.02	

The result in Table 1 reveals that respondents with highresource allocation have the mean score of 23.24 while respondents with low resources allocation have the mean score of 33.92. the result shows that resources allocation influences federalism in Nigeria.

Research Question Two

What is the practice of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-ethnic competition?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of the practices of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-ethnic competition

Variable	inter-ethnic competition	N		SD	Remark
High		115	34.89	6.03	
Federalism					Great Influence
Low		85	23.82	6.36	

The result in Table 2 reveals that respondents with high inter-ethnic competition have the mean score of 34.89 while respondents with low inter-ethnic competition have the mean score of 23.89. The result shows that inter-ethnic competitioninfluences federalism in Nigeria.

Research Question Three

What is the practice of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-governmental relations?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of the practices of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-governmental relations

Variable	inter-governmental relations	N		SD	Remark
	High	115	34.89	6.03	
Federalism					Great Influence
	Low	85	23.82	6.36	

The result in Table 3 reveals that respondents with high inter-governmental relations have the mean score of 34.89 while respondents with low inter-governmental relations have the mean

score of 23.89. the result shows that inter-governmental relations influences federalism in Nigeria.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One

There is no significant influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on resource allocation

Table 4: Independent t-testof the influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on resource allocation

Variable	N		SD	Df	Cal-t	Crit-t	Decision at P < .05 alpha
High	120	23.24	3.78				
Federalism				384	57.13	1.96	rejected
Low	80	33.92	6.02				

*significant at p < 0.05 alpha level, n = 386

The result in Table 4 shows that the calculated t-value of 57.13 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 with degree of freedom of 384 at 0.05 alpha level. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate is upheld which means that there is a significant influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on resource allocation

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-ethnic competition

Table 5: Independent t-testof the influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-ethnic competition

Variable	N		SD	Df	Cal-t	Crit-t	Decision at P < .05 alpha
High	115	34.89	6.03				
Federalism				384	2.11	1.96	rejected
Low	85	32.82	6.36				

* Not significant at p < 0.05 alpha level, n = 386

The result in Table 5 shows that the calculated t-value of 2.11 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 with degree of freedom of 384 at 0.05 alpha level. The null hypothesis is rejectedand the alternate accepted which means that there is a significant influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-ethnic competition.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-governmental relations

Table 6: Independent t-testof the influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-governmental relations

Variable	N		SD	Df	Cal-t	Crit-t	Decision at P < .05 alpha
High	115	34.89	6.03				
Federalism				384	2.11	1.96	rejected
Low	85	32.82	6.36				

* Not significant at p < 0.05 alpha level, n = 386

The result in Table 6 shows that the calculated t-value of 2.11 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 with degree of freedom of 384 at 0.05 alpha levels. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate accepted which means that there is a significant influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-governmental relations

Discussion of Findings

The result of hypothesis one showedthat there was a significant influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on resource allocation. This finding agrees with the finding of Monday and Samuel (2016) who conducted a comprehensive interrogation on resource control; its meaning, agitation, innovation and politics as well as its manifestation as one of the most highly contentious issues in Nigeria's federalism. Findings have revealed that there has been innovation in the agitation for resource control in Nigeria, which ranges from regional cleavages, States, minority/majority ethnic groups to geo-political zones. The result of hypothesis two indicated that there was asignificant influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-ethnic competition.This finding supports Joy (2018) who examines Federalism and National Integration in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges. Based on hypotheses testing, the paper observed the following: federalism in Nigeria reduces inter-ethnic competition and federalism in Nigeria alley the usually alleged fear of domination.

The result of hypothesis three indicated that there was a significant influence of federalism in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges based on inter-governmental relations. This finding supports Akpanim, Joseph and Ukeme (2022) who investigated contending issues in management of intergovernmental Relations in Nigeria: Diagnosis Elephantine Problems and Prospects. To achieve this purpose, survey research design was used. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between Political Interference and revenue sharing and allocation on Inter-Governmental Relations

Conclusion

The study examined federalism in Nigeria, issues, challenges and the way out. The paper conclude with an observation that the federal system of governance in Nigeria presents a complex landscape marked by both promises and pitfalls. While federalism holds the potential to foster unity among diverse ethnic and cultural groups, its implementation has been marred by a plethora of challenges. Chief among these challenges are issues of resource allocation, political power imbalances, ethnic tensions, and systemic corruption. The over-centralization of power at the federal level has led to a neglect of regional development, exacerbating socio-economic disparities and fostering a sense of marginalization among certain regions and ethnic groups. Moreover, the frequent clashes between the federal and state governments over jurisdictional authority have hindered effective governance and service delivery, impeding progress on critical

issues such as security, infrastructure development, and social welfare. However, the result from the study indicated that resources allocation, inter-ethnic competition and inter-governmental relations contributed immensely to the problem of Nigerian federalism, because the above factors were found to have significantly influences on Nigeria federalism.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were provided:

1. There should be a review of Revenue Allocation Formulae to emphasize the Derivation Principle and allocation of larger percentage of resources to states. In other word, the mechanisms for revenue sharing and resource management must be reformed to ensure greater equity and transparency. This includes revisiting the contentious issue of resource control and revenue allocation to ensure that oil-producing regions receive a fair share of the proceeds from their natural resources.

2. There should also encourage and facilitate dialogue among opinion leaders and civil society organizations to address grievances and promote peaceful coexistence

3. They should consider devolving more powers to the state and local governments, allowing them to have greater control over matters that directly affect their communities. This promotes local governance and development. Put differently, there is a need for a concerted effort to devolve more power and resources to the state and local levels, empowering them to address the specific needs and aspirations of their constituents.

4. There is a pressing need for enhanced intergovernmental cooperation and dialogue to foster consensus-building and address grievances in a peaceful and constructive manner. Strengthening institutions responsible for conflict resolution and promoting inclusive governance structures can help mitigate ethnic tensions and foster a sense of national unity.

5. The successful implementation of federalism in Nigeria hinges on political will, transparency, and a commitment to inclusive governance. By addressing these issues and embracing meaningful reforms, Nigeria can harness the potential of federalism to promote socio-economic development, strengthen democracy, and build a more prosperous and unified nation.

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