

Workforce Diversity Management and Employee Performance among Academic Staff of Federal Universities in North Central Nigeria

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Abstract

Workforce diversity has become an important feature of modern organizations, particularly in higher education institutions where individuals from diverse demographic and professional backgrounds interact to achieve institutional goals. This study examined the relationship between workforce diversity management and employee performance among academic staff of federal universities in North Central Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the influence of gender diversity management and ethnic diversity management on academic staff performance. A survey research design was adopted. The population of the study comprises 3981 selected academic staff of the Federal University in North Central Nigeria. To obtain a representative sample, a multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. First, a purposive sampling method was used to select federal universities within the North Central region based on their size and diversity characteristics. Next, a stratified sampling technique was applied to categorize academic staff according to faculties or departments to ensure adequate representation across disciplines. Finally, a simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents within each stratum. Through this process, data were collected from 210 academic staff using the Krejcie and Morgan random sampling technique through structured questionnaires from the 3981 population of the study from the University of Ilorin, the University of Abuja, the University of Jos, the University of Agriculture, Markudi, Federal University Lokoja, and the Federal University of Lafia. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that gender diversity management has a significant positive effect on employee performance ($\beta = 0.41, p < 0.05$), indicating that equitable gender policies and inclusive work environments enhance academic staff productivity. Similarly, ethnic diversity management was found to significantly influence employee performance ($\beta = 0.34, p < 0.05$), suggesting that universities that promote inclusiveness across ethnic groups experience improved collaboration and institutional outcomes. The study, therefore, concludes that effective workforce diversity management plays a critical role in improving employee productivity and institutional effectiveness in federal universities. The study recommends that university management should strengthen diversity management policies, promote inclusive leadership practices, ensure fairness in recruitment and promotion processes, and implement diversity training programs to foster an inclusive academic environment.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Employee performance in modern organizations is increasingly shaped by how effectively workforce diversity is managed. Federal universities in Nigeria operate within a highly diverse socio-cultural environment. Academic staff in these institutions represent various ethnic groups, genders, educational backgrounds, and professional experiences. While such diversity can contribute to innovation and intellectual development, poor diversity management may create conflicts, discrimination, and communication barriers that negatively affect employee performance

Employee performance in universities is crucial because academic staff play a key role in teaching, research, and community service. Their productivity determines the quality of education and the reputation of institutions. Therefore, creating an inclusive work environment that values diversity is essential for improving staff performance and institutional effectiveness, as studies have shown that diversity and inclusion initiatives significantly enhance employee motivation, engagement, innovation, and overall productivity ((Ma'wa & Wibowo, 2026)

Despite the potential benefits of workforce diversity, many universities still face challenges in managing diverse employees effectively (Umar. A 2023). Issues such as gender imbalance, ethnic bias, and unequal access to opportunities remain prevalent in some Nigerian higher education institutions. These challenges may undermine staff motivation and reduce overall productivity.

This study therefore examines the relationship between workforce diversity management and employee performance among academic staff of federal universities in North Central Nigeria, with particular focus on gender and ethnic diversity.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the effect of gender diversity management on employee performance among academic staff of federal universities in North Central Nigeria.
2. Determine the influence of ethnic diversity management on employee performance among academic staff of federal universities in North Central Nigeria.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does gender diversity management influence employee performance among academic staff of federal universities in North Central Nigeria?
2. What is the effect of ethnic diversity management on employee performance among academic staff of federal universities in North Central Nigeria?

To guide the study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H01: Gender diversity management has no significant effect on employee performance among academic staff of federal universities in North Central Nigeria.

H02: Ethnic diversity management has no significant effect on employee performance among academic staff of federal universities in North Central Nigeria.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study illustrates the relationship between workforce diversity management and employee performance.

Independent Variables (Workforce Diversity Management):

- Gender Diversity
- Ethnic Diversity

Dependent Variable:

- Employee
- Performance

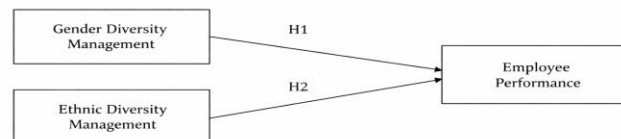


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Workforce Diversity Management and Employee Performance

The framework suggests that effective management of gender and ethnic diversity can improve employee performance through enhanced collaboration, fairness, and equal opportunities in the workplace

2.2 Gender Diversity and Employee Performance

Gender diversity refers to the representation of both men and women in the workplace and the equitable treatment of employees regardless of gender. (Thomas et al., 2024)

Gender-inclusive organizations often benefit from diverse perspectives and improved decision-making processes (Nishii & Rich, 2013)). Studies have shown that organizations that promote gender equality experience higher employee engagement and productivity. In academic institutions, gender diversity contributes to balanced leadership, improved teaching quality, and enhanced research collaboration. However, gender disparities in recruitment, promotion, and leadership opportunities remain a challenge in many universities. Effective gender diversity management is therefore essential for creating equal opportunities and improving staff performance.

2.3 Ethnic Diversity and Employee Performance

Ethnic diversity refers to the presence of employees from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds within an organization. In multicultural societies such as Nigeria, ethnic diversity is a significant aspect of workforce composition. Ethnically diverse teams can provide a variety of perspectives that improve creativity and problem-solving capabilities. However, poor management of ethnic diversity may lead to workplace conflicts and reduced employee morale (Shore et al., 2018). Empirical studies indicate that organizations that promote ethnic inclusiveness through fair policies and inclusive leadership tend to experience higher levels of employee performance and organizational effectiveness.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

The relationship between workforce diversity management and employee performance has been explained by several organizational and social psychology theories. These theories provide the conceptual basis for understanding how diversity influences employee behavior, workplace relationships, and organizational outcomes. Key theories that explain workforce diversity include Social Identity Theory, Similarity–Attraction Theory, Resource-Based View Theory, Social Categorization Theory, and Role Congruity Theory. These theoretical perspectives provide insight into how demographic differences such as gender, ethnicity, age, and cultural background influence workplace interactions and performance outcomes.

2.5 Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel (1979), later expanded by John Turner, developed Social Identity Theory to explain how individuals derive their identity from the social groups they belong to. Rooted in Social Psychology, the theory emphasizes that

people classify themselves and others into groups based on characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age, or profession. The theory is built on three key processes: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison, which often lead individuals to favor their own group (in-group) over others (out-group), sometimes resulting in bias or discrimination. In organizational contexts, the theory explains how workforce diversity can affect employee performance. While diversity may create divisions and conflict, effective management and inclusive practices can foster unity, improve collaboration, and enhance productivity. Overall, Social Identity Theory highlights that the outcomes of workforce diversity depend on how well organizations manage group differences and promote inclusiveness.

2.6 Empirical Review

Empirical literature provides substantial evidence that workforce diversity management influences employee performance across organizational contexts. For instance, Academy of Management Journal studies such as Quinetta M. Roberson (2006) and Taylor H. Cox Jr. (1991) demonstrate that well-managed diversity enhances creativity, decision-making quality, and overall organizational effectiveness. More recent empirical evidence from Journal of Applied Psychology by Katherine W. Phillips et al. (2014) shows that diverse teams outperform homogeneous ones in problem-solving due to broader cognitive perspectives. Similarly, research published in Human Resource Management (e.g., Patrick F. McKay et al., 2011) finds that racial and gender diversity are positively associated with firm performance, particularly when supported by inclusive HR practices. Olu-Ogunleye and Akanji (2025) examines the influence of workforce diversity on employee performance in XYZ Nigeria plc, illustrating the imperatives of diversity management for improving innovation, teamwork and organizational effectiveness. Using regression analysis, the result indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between workplace diversity and employee performance.

In addition, studies emphasize the importance of contextual mechanisms. For example, Orlando Richard et al. (2007) in Academy of Management Journal highlight the moderating role of leadership and organizational strategy, while Ramaswami et al. (2014) in Personnel Psychology show that employee engagement mediates the diversity–performance relationship. These findings suggest that diversity alone is insufficient; rather, its benefits depend on effective management practices and inclusive leadership structures.

Despite these contributions, several critical gaps remain. First, a contextual gap persists, as much of the empirical evidence originates from Western and Asian economies, with limited large-scale, theory-driven studies in sub-Saharan Africa, thereby constraining generalizability. Second, a methodological gap is evident in the dominance of cross-sectional survey designs and self-reported measures, which restrict causal inference and fail to capture the dynamic evolution of diversity management practices over time. Third, an inconsistency gap exists, as findings regarding specific diversity dimensions—particularly age diversity—remain mixed, indicating the need for more nuanced, multilevel analyses that examine both individual and interactive effects.

Furthermore, a theoretical and analytical gap is evident in the limited examination of mediating and moderating variables such as organizational culture, leadership style, and employee engagement, which are crucial in explaining how diversity influences performance. There is also a sectoral gap, as most studies focus on public institutions and large organizations, with insufficient attention given to private sector organizations, SMEs, and emerging industries. Additionally, a practical implementation gap exists, as many studies emphasize the outcomes of diversity management while neglecting the challenges associated with its implementation, such as resistance to change, cultural barriers, and limited managerial capacity.

Finally, an emerging trends gap is identified, as issues such as digital work environments, globalization, and sustainability-driven HR practices are underexplored, particularly in developing economies. Overall, while the literature strongly supports the positive relationship between workforce diversity management and employee performance, these gaps highlight the need for more context-specific, methodologically robust, and comprehensive studies to deepen understanding and enhance practical application.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a survey research design to examine the relationship between workforce diversity management and employee performance among academic staff of federal universities in North Central Nigeria. The choice of survey design was appropriate as it enabled the collection of quantitative data from a relatively large population and facilitated the analysis of relationships among the study variables.

The population comprised 3981 academic staff from selected federal universities within the North Central region of Nigeria. A total of 210 academic staff, drawn from various faculties and academic ranks, including Assistant Lecturers, Lecturer II, Lecturer I, Senior Lecturers, and Professors, constituted the study population and were used for analysis.

A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted in selecting the respondents. Initially, purposive sampling was used to select relevant federal universities within the study area based on accessibility and suitability. Thereafter, stratified sampling was employed to categorize academic staff into different strata based on their academic ranks to ensure adequate representation. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select respondents from each stratum, thereby ensuring fairness and minimizing selection bias. The total sample size for the study was 210 respondents.

The study relied on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The instrument consisted of two sections: the first section captured respondents' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, academic rank, and work experience, while the second section measured key constructs including gender diversity management, ethnic diversity management, and employee performance. The items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

To ensure the validity of the instrument, content and face validity were established through expert review in the fields of business administration and research methodology. Their input helped to refine the questionnaire and ensure that it adequately measured the intended constructs. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded coefficients of 0.84 for gender diversity management, 0.81 for ethnic diversity management, and 0.87 for employee performance, with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.86. These values exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating a high level of internal consistency.

Data collected were analyzed with SPSS using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize respondents' characteristics and study variables. Inferential statistics included correlation analysis to examine the relationships among variables, multiple regression analysis to determine the effect of gender and ethnic diversity management on employee performance, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the overall significance of the regression model. All analyses were conducted at a 0.05 level of significance.

The model for the study specified employee performance as a function of gender diversity management and ethnic diversity management, expressed as:

$$EP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 GDM + \beta_2 EDM + \mu,$$

where EP represents employee performance, GDM denotes gender diversity management, EDM represents ethnic diversity management, β_0 is the constant term, β_1 and β_2 are the regression coefficients, and μ is the error term.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	128	61.0
	Female	82	39.0
Age	25–34 years	46	21.9
	35–44 years	88	41.9
	45–54 years	54	25.7
	55 years and above	22	10.5
Academic Rank	Assistant Lecturer	34	16.2
	Lecturer II	68	32.4
	Lecturer I	56	26.7
	Senior Lecturer	32	15.2
	Professor	20	9.5
Work Experience	1–5 years	52	24.8
	6–10 years	86	41.0
	11–15 years	44	21.0
	16 years and above	28	13.3

The demographic results indicate that the majority of respondents were male academic staff. Most participants were within the 35–44 age group, and a significant proportion held the rank of Lecturer II. This distribution reflects the typical structure of academic staff in Nigerian universities. Factor analysis was conducted to confirm that the questionnaire items properly measured the study constructs.

Table 3: Measurement Model (Factor Loadings)

Construct	Items	Factor Loading
Gender Diversity Management	GDM1	0.78
	GDM2	0.82
	GDM3	0.76
	GDM4	0.80
	GDM5	0.74
Ethnic Diversity Management	EDM1	0.77
	EDM2	0.81
	EDM3	0.79
	EDM4	0.73
	EDM5	0.76
Employee Performance	EP1	0.83
	EP2	0.85
	EP3	0.80
	EP4	0.78
	EP5	0.82
	EP6	0.79

All factor loadings are above 0.70, indicating that the measurement items adequately represent their respective constructs.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender Diversity Management	210	3.72	0.68
Ethnic Diversity Management	210	3.65	0.71
Employee Performance	210	3.88	0.64

The results indicate relatively high perceptions of diversity management practices and employee performance among academic staff.

Table 5 Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2	3
Gender Diversity Management	1		
Ethnic Diversity Management	0.48	1	
Employee Performance	0.56	0.51	1

Note: $p < 0.01$

The correlation results show positive relationships between diversity management variables and employee performance.

4.2 Regression Analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	0.63	0.397	0.389	0.52

The model explains 39.7% of the variation in employee performance.

ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	38.42	2	19.21	24.36	0.000
Residual	58.77	207	0.284		
Total	97.19	209			

The regression model is statistically significant.

Regression Coefficients

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig
Constant	1.214	0.352	—	3.45	0.001
Gender Diversity Management	0.372	0.081	0.41	4.58	0.000
Ethnic Diversity Management	0.298	0.075	0.34	3.97	0.000

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The study found that workforce diversity management significantly influences employee performance among academic staff of federal universities in North Central Nigeria. Specifically, gender diversity management exhibited the strongest positive effect on performance, indicating that equitable policies and inclusive gender practices enhance motivation, commitment, and productivity. Ethnic diversity management also showed a significant positive relationship with employee performance, suggesting that inclusive environments that value ethnic differences promote collaboration and improved work outcomes.

These findings are consistent with Social Exchange Theory and Equity Theory, which emphasize that fairness and inclusiveness drive positive employee behavior, as well as the Resource-Based View, which considers diversity a strategic asset for organizational effectiveness. The results align with prior empirical studies that report positive associations between diversity management and employee performance. Overall, the study concludes that effective management of workforce diversity is a critical determinant of improved performance in academic institutions.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are derived from the findings of the study:

- University management should implement gender-inclusive policies that ensure equal opportunities for both male and female academic staff in recruitment, promotion, leadership roles, and professional development.

- ii. Federal universities should strengthen ethnic diversity management policies by promoting fairness, inclusiveness, and respect for cultural differences among staff to enhance collaboration and reduce workplace conflicts.
- iii. University administrators should introduce diversity training and awareness programs to educate academic staff on the importance of inclusiveness, mutual respect, and teamwork in diverse academic environments. Institutional leadership should adopt inclusive leadership practices that encourage participation of staff from diverse backgrounds in decision-making processes.

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