

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN FIRST BANK PLC ABAKALIKI, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Prejudice, nepotism, tribalism, and regional identities continue to exist in both Nigerian public and private companies. Instances of racial prejudice and other forms of discrimination can affect several facets of employer-employee interactions, including training, promotions, and other areas. The study examines workforce diversity and human resource management practices at First Bank Plc Abakaliki, Nigeria, focusing on combating issues of tribalism, regional identities, nepotism, and discrimination; Through the lens of social identity theory, the research aims to achieve two main objectives and to access the impact of inclusive hiring processes on employee engagement, and investigate the relationship between cultural competency training and employee engagement. Employing a survey research design and utilizing questionnaires, primary data was collected from a target population of eighty-one individuals. Hypotheses were tested using Spearman rank technique via SPSS 20 software. Findings indicate a significant positive relationship between workforce diversity and employee engagement. In conclusion, the study confirms that workforce diversity substantially enhances employee engagement, particularly within banking institutions like First Bank Plc. The objectives have been effectively met, underscoring the importance of diversity in bolstering employee engagement. Recommendations stemming from the findings advocate for First Bank Plc to intensify its commitment to inclusive recruitment practices. This entails regular reviews and updates to hiring policies to ensure diversity and equal opportunities. Furthermore, HR professionals should undergo training to recognize and address biases in the recruitment process, fostering a more inclusive and engaged workforce.

Keywords: *Workforce Diversity, hiring inclusive process, cultural competence, employee engagement.*

INTRODUCTION

In order to keep pace with the rapidly evolving global economy, there is a greater need than ever for increased cross-cultural communication. People are no longer

restricted to living and working in their immediate surroundings due to their participation in a global economy that competes in practically every region of the world (Patel, 2016). Businesses are aggressively pursuing diversity to enhance their competitive advantage in the market

by fostering more flexibility, creativity, and innovation. Managers must possess the ability to identify and adapt to the many personal characteristics of their employees in order to sustain a diverse workforce (Griffith & Moorhead, 2014). Companies are seeking methods to enhance the services they offer in order to attract and retain skilled employees (Gupta, 2013).

Cultural variety in the workplace refers to the coexistence of both common characteristics and differences among personnel (Griffin & Moorhead, 2014). Nwinami (2014) defines a person's "uniqueness" based on many variables, such as their thoughts, attitudes, experiences, income, marital status, religion, race/ethnicity, and job history. These attributes uphold and presuppose the essential premise of an organization. Furthermore, it signifies organizations that have a workforce that is becoming more varied in terms of age, ethnicity, and skill level (Robbins & Judge, 2013). Due to the significance of these characteristics in the development and implementation of strategic challenges and the achievement of excellence within businesses, they impact HRM practices. To reach and maintain a competitive level of employee engagement, managers should fully utilize the capabilities of their employees. Leaders in contemporary workplaces must expand their viewpoints and engage in novel endeavors to achieve success.

The success of a company heavily relies on its employees, and the level of employee engagement significantly impacts their ability to remain with the firm, generate new ideas, and be productive. First Bank PLC, a prominent Nigerian financial institution with a significant presence in

Abakaliki, recognizes that a diverse and committed staff is crucial for achieving long-term success. This need is reinforced by the constantly evolving financial industry. The objective of this study is to assist First Bank PLC in formulating strategies to cultivate a workforce that is more diverse and inclusive. This will be achieved by evaluating the intricate relationship between diversity and employee engagement.

Statement of the Problem

Historically, research on employee diversity has focused on affirmative action initiatives and the promotion of employment opportunities for women, people of color, and other defined groups. Nigeria has a population of 180 million, with more than half of its citizens being of working age. This makes Nigeria a significant and powerful country in Africa (Akinnusi et al., 2017). This cosmopolitan community is comprised of individuals from several ethnic origins. Ugwuzor (2011) observed that Nigerian public and commercial companies continue to exhibit tribalism, regional identities, nepotism, and prejudice, as previously mentioned by Mustapha (2005). Instances of racial prejudice and other forms of discrimination can occur in all facets of employer-employee relations, including training and promotions. Hence, effectively overseeing a diverse workforce and ensuring the implementation of policies and procedures without conflicts of interest is a significant challenge for management (Akinnusi et al., 2017).

Human resource managers face cultural diversity-related challenges in areas such as training, recruitment, and career

development. The primary objective of this research is to analyze data from a field study conducted at First Bank PLC, Abakaliki, Nigeria, in order to draw conclusions about the influence of cultural diversity on HRM practices. Based on the research objective, the following research questions are raised: i. To what extent does inclusive hiring processes significantly relate to employee recruitment in First Bank PLC, Abakaliki, Nigeria? ii. What is the extent of the relationship between cultural competency training and employee training in First Bank PLC, Abakaliki, Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Prior to proceeding, it is imperative that we establish a shared understanding of the concept of diversity. Evans and Henry (2007) describe workplace diversity as the presence of individuals from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds collaborating. One perspective on the differences between social groups is to examine the characteristics that are common among their members, which can provide insights into their distinct aims and ideals (Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). According to Scott and Sims (2016), diverse workforces refer to a strategic approach that encourages and facilitates the integration of a wide range of human variety at all levels. This approach is guided by specific policies and practices focused on diversity and inclusion in the work environment.

These numerous theories serve to emphasize that the core of diversity is in the aspects that both unite and distinguish us from each other. An organization's

workforce consists of individuals from diverse demographic groups, such as age, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender. The culture of a nation may be described as the collective history, values, and practices of its people, which foster a feeling of national pride (Sayers, 2012). Cultural variety is comprised of distinct linguistic, religious, ethnic, and cultural variations.

In recent years, corporations have been actively engaging in the recruitment of a more diverse staff with the aim of enhancing morale and productivity in the workplace. Minimal levels of cultural diversity have a negligible impact on the team's financial success, including metrics such as profit, sales, and market share. According to Gupta (2013), when a team consists of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, their performance is enhanced. There has been a recent increase in the number of work groups aiming to enhance participation to improve overall organizational and employee performance in response to growing diversity.

Schools are increasingly recognizing the need to have a staff that is varied in terms of age, gender, culture, and level of education (Watzon, Johnson, & Zgourides, 2002). The prevalence of many cultural traditions in contemporary society has led to the widespread influence of multiculturalism in several domains, including companies, families, classrooms, and places of worship. In their study, Watzon, Johnson, and Zgourides (2002) discovered that teams composed of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds and with varying viewpoints exhibited enhanced collaboration in problem-solving and achieved superior outcomes because team members may

discover opportunities to use their distinctive abilities.

According to Harrison and Klein (2007), having a diverse workforce that includes individuals of different ages, genders, races/ethnicities, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds may have negative consequences for firms. Individuals from underrepresented demographics are more likely to have greater levels of work unhappiness, poorer levels of commitment to their organization, identity crises, and discrimination, according to a study by Milliken and Martins in 1996. However, it is observed that the majority of problems tend to diminish as the size of the minority group increases. Research conducted by Timmermans, Ostergaard, and Kristinsson (2011) suggests that cultural diversity might stimulate team members to think innovatively and contribute more creatively. The study conducted by Timmermans, Ostergaard, and Kristinsson (2011) found that minor cultural diversity enhances creative output and innovation. Conversely, high cultural variety can result in the formation of exclusive social groups among employees, workplace conflicts, and a lack of cohesion among teams (Dahlin, Weingart, & Hinds, 2005).

General overview of HRM

Effective utilization of human resources may provide a corporation with a sustained competitive advantage. The primary emphasis of a research-based approach to HR is the ability to effectively utilize human resources in various situations and challenges. In order to maintain a lasting competitive advantage, organizations utilize unique, indispensable, and irreplicable resources (Amrutha & Geetha,

2020). Private enterprises have the ability to rapidly embrace novel competitive models and strategies, but government institutions tend to rely on simple imitations, as stated by Anwar and Balcioglu (2016). Additionally, they highlight the significance of employees' abilities in achieving organizational success. The organization's objectives are better comprehended via the exploration of concepts, comparable to the organizing paradigm in strategic management. This process allows for more informed decision-making regarding the areas of concentration. If this hypothesis is accurate, the factors that define a company's long-term sustainability will be prioritized over short-term competitiveness and external market influences. The notion is not only tangible, but it also spans the individual, organizational, and financial domains. Insufficient staff performance hampers firms from maximizing their investment in productivity (Sadikova, 2020). Consequently, this enables organizations to recruit and retain highly educated, trained, experienced, and capable individuals (Yong, 2020).

Various industries have consistently considered human resources to be the primary role. Despite the transformative impact of global HRM on the firm's appearance, it also shown foresight in restructuring internal operations. Retaining and training employees is a beneficial practice that companies implement to improve efficiency. This practice is particularly important for managers and production workers. The HR department plays a crucial role in the growth of organizations by focusing on this aspect (Othman & Abdullah, 2016). Furthermore, HR should have played a more proactive

role in influencing and advancing the company's culture, as well as in determining the regulations and protocols of the organization and specific divisions. Lombardi (2020) has determined if there is a correlation between information management competency and the influence of human resource management activities on organizational innovation.

Diversity Management and HR Practices

"Diversity begets diversity"—in other words, it is crucial to recruit and retain a wide range of staff in order to effectively serve a diversified clientele. Many organizations today adhere to the guiding notion that staff should mirror the company's consumer. Managing diversity within the workforce is necessary to effectively satisfy the needs of clients who come from varied backgrounds. Furthermore, contemporary and forward-thinking companies actively look for individuals who possess distinctive viewpoints and varied life experiences (Kundu, 2004) to create a work atmosphere that promotes the success of diverse teams (Meena & Vanka, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary for HR strategy to include diversity management.

Diversity and Recruitment Programmes

Businesses may gain a competitive advantage by effectively managing diversity in their workforce, which involves attracting and keeping employees from a variety of backgrounds (Meena & Vanka, 2013). In order to address the increasing diversity, several prestigious organizations have effectively recruited individuals from marginalized demographics, such as women, those with disabilities, and those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds

(Shen et al., 2009). For instance, Genpact has made significant progress in acknowledging the importance of gender diversity. Currently, the female gender constitutes the larger portion of the global population. Notable corporations such as IBM, Wipro, Xerox, Burger King, PepsiCo, and Infosys have actively worked to promote diversity by reaching out to underrepresented groups such as immigrants, individuals with disabilities, and those facing economic and social hardships. These efforts have been documented by Bateman & Snell (2008), Shen (2009), and Meena & Vanka (2013). Human resource diversity management tactics encompass several strategies, including advertising in local newspapers and using recruiting methods to enhance diversity inside the organization (D'Netto & Sohal, 1999; Wambui et al., 2013). Implementing online recruitment activities, such as those mentioned by Meena and Vanka (2013), increases the likelihood of achieving a diverse workforce by reaching a larger and more varied audience. Diversity-Enhancing Selection Programs In order for diversity management to be effective, decisions about employment should be made using criteria that are sensitive to diversity, as stated by Babalola and Marques (2013).

Hypothesis 1:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between inclusive hiring processes and employee engagement in First Bank Plc Abakaliki, Nigeria

Diversity and Training Programmes

Babalola and Marques (2013) define diversity training as an instructional approach aimed at educating employees about the many racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and religious differences present in the workforce. There are two primary categories: those that prioritize growing awareness (such as enhancing staff education or sensitivity to diversity problems) and those that prioritize skill development (such as modifying employees' behavior). Day and Glick (2000) and Bateman and Snell (2008) are referenced. Several leading multinational firms have developed extensive diversity training programs for their workforce. These programs encompass various activities such as workshops, seminars, experiential exercises, and other similar events (Bateman & Snell, 2008; Gomez-Mejia, 2010).

Hypothesis 2:

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between cultural competency training and employee engagement in First Bank Plc Abakaliki, Nigeria.

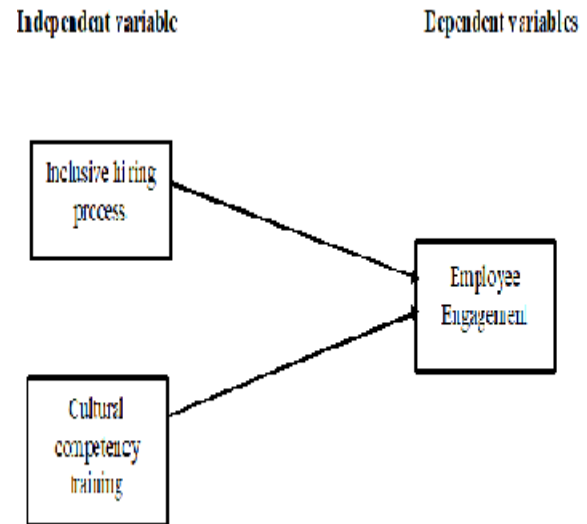


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

Source; adapted and modify Abidi eta al (2017).

The model above shows the relationship between the independent variables i.e cultural diversity and the dependent variable of Human Resources Practices (HRM) measured in recruitment, Training, Reward, Rewards, Career development as can be seen in the model.

Theoretical Framework

The subject of workforce diversity is extensive and, one may contend, has been too simplified in several fields. This study employs the following the theory of social identity.

Tajfel (1978) initially used this concept to explain occupational marginalization. According to this hypothesis, individuals have a propensity to establish social groups based on demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and other individually meaningful factors. Consequently, individuals are more inclined to provide assistance and backing to colleagues who belong to the same social group as them,

rather than those who belong to a different social group.

Empirical Review

Employees demonstrate more commitment to their job when their company places a high value on diversity in human resources practices (Luu, 2019). According to Shaw-Taylor (2021), self-evaluations and diversity training are crucial methods for effectively managing diversity in the workplace. However, workforce diversity presents several opportunities and challenges that might impact employee performance (Kumar, 2018). According to Ely (2018), adopting an integration-and-learning mindset is the most beneficial approach for managing diversity in the workplace. Therefore, the implementation of cultural competency training and inclusive hiring techniques can lead to a rise in worker diversity, resulting in a positive impact on employee engagement. Darwin and Palanisamy (2015) conducted a study to examine the correlation between a heterogeneous workforce and production. A total of 274 groups from various Indian firms were sampled and a positive correlation was found. Additionally, it was shown that employee performance was not significantly influenced by factors such as gender, ethnicity, and age. The findings indicated that employees exhibited apathy towards diversity within the work environment. Workers have ambivalent attitudes on worker diversity, perceiving it as neither advantageous nor something to be evaded.

The study conducted by Abidi et al. (2017) aimed to investigate the influence of Diversity Management on Human

Resource Management (HRM) practices within a Kuwaiti context. Several Kuwaiti firms in the service sector completed questionnaires to contribute to the dataset. The method of convenient sampling is employed. Out of the entire set of questionnaires that were distributed, 354 were considered pertinent, which corresponds to a total of 87 separate companies. In order to thoroughly understand HRM and DM, we employ an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using varimax rotation. In order to more precisely measure the effect of diversity management on HRM, a regression analysis is utilized. The study's key findings are as follows: At first, there is a positive and significant connection between Diversity Management policy and Human Resource Management practices.

According to Dahm (2003), there are individuals who have a pessimistic perspective on cultural diversity and its ability to enhance the performance of both companies and employees, resulting in various unfavorable attitudes. On the other hand, some view it as a harmful phenomenon that requires rejection or avoidance. Past research has primarily focused on specific aspects of workforce diversity, such as multigenerational workforces, gender diversity in the workplace and its impact on organizational performance, ethnic diversity in the workforce and its effect on group performance, and generational differences in student and teacher performance. Hence, the primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of a heterogeneous workforce on employee engagement.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researchers employed a sample survey methodology, wherein participants were requested to complete questionnaires to gather primary data. The research population consists of the 81 employees of the First Bank Nigeria Plc Abakaliki branch in Ebonyi state. The researcher employed a census survey, which is a form of purposive sampling, to assess the whole population. The questionnaire functioned as the method for collecting data. The survey was constructed with a five-point Likert scale. The study instrument's validity was established through the solicitation of expert advice.

Reliability of Research Instrument

Table 1. Reliability Test result

Construct		crouchback alpha	no. of item
Inclusive hiring process		.78	5
Cultural competency training		.82	5
Employee emgagement		.80	5

Source: Authors' computation (SPSS 25)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analyzed data was used to have a deeper understanding of the relationship between cultural diversity and HRM. All 81 surveys that were distributed were received, resulting in a response rate of 100%. Tables

are utilized to present data, while the correlation is employed to assess the intensity of the relationship between two variables and offer contextual information for the data.

Test of hypotheses

The hypotheses are evaluated by the utilization of the Pearson product moment correlation. The reason for this is that when examining the associations between variables, the Pearson product moment correlation is valuable in uncovering both the magnitude and direction of the link.

Hypothesis 1:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between inclusive hiring processes and employee engagement in First Bank Plc Abakaliki, Nigeria

Table 1. Correlations

			Inclusive hiring processes	employee engagement
Inclusive hiring processes	Pearson Correlation		1	.981**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000
	N		81	81
employee engagement	Pearson Correlation		.981**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	
	N		81	81

***. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The analysis revealed a compelling relationship between inclusive hiring processes and employee engagement in First Bank Plc, Abakaliki, Nigeria. The strong positive correlation ($r = .981$, $p < .05$) signifies that as inclusive hiring processes increase, there is a corresponding increase in employee engagement within the organization. This finding, supporting the rejection of the null hypothesis,

underscores the potential impact of prioritizing diversity and inclusivity in hiring practices.

Hypothesis 2:

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between cultural competency training and employee engagement in First Bank Plc Abakaliki, Nigeria.

Table 3. Correlations

		Cultural competenc y training	Emplee Engagem ent
Cultural competency training	Pearson Correlation	1	.707**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	81	81
Employee Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.707**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	81	81

**, Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis unveiled a significant and positive correlation between cultural competency training and employee engagement in First Bank Plc, Abakaliki, Nigeria. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = .707$, $p < .05$, two-tailed) indicated that as cultural competency training increases, there is a corresponding elevation in employee engagement. This finding, supported by the rejection of the null hypothesis (Ho2), underscores the potential impact of investing in cultural competency training on fostering a more engaged workforce. Employees seem to benefit from such training by gaining a deeper understanding of diverse cultural

backgrounds, enhancing communication skills, and fostering collaboration.

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis 1: Inclusive Hiring Processes and Employee Engagement

The results strongly support a significant positive relationship between inclusive hiring processes and employee engagement in First Bank Plc. The high correlation coefficient ($r = .981$, $p < .05$, two-tailed) suggests that as the organization embraces inclusive hiring practices, there is a corresponding increase in employee engagement. This underscores the critical role of inclusivity in the recruitment process, indicating that when employees perceive fairness and equal opportunities during hiring, it positively impacts their engagement levels. The practical implication for First Bank Plc lies in the strategic integration of inclusive hiring practices to foster a more engaged and committed workforce. This support Abidi, Zaim, Yousef, Habibniya and Batan (2017) who found a positive significant relationship between Diversity Management policies and Human Resources Management practices.

Hypothesis 2: Cultural Competency Training and Employee Engagement

Similarly, the analysis supports a significant positive correlation between cultural competency training and employee engagement in First Bank Plc. The correlation coefficient of $.707$ ($p < .05$, two-tailed) signifies that as employees undergo cultural competency training, there is a concurrent elevation in their engagement levels. This finding emphasizes the value of

providing employees with the knowledge and skills to navigate diverse cultural contexts. For First Bank Plc, incorporating and sustaining cultural competency training programs could be a strategic initiative for not only promoting inclusivity but also enhancing overall employee engagement. The practical implication here is the potential for organizations to leverage cultural competency training as a tool for fostering a more engaged and cohesive work environment. This finding is in support of This is further supported by the argument that diversity training and self-assessments are crucial for workforce diversity management (Shaw-Taylor, 2021).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Research indicates that a workforce composed of individuals from various backgrounds has a beneficial and statistically significant impact on the level of employee involvement, particularly within the banking industry. The conducted analyses have successfully addressed the research challenges and achieved the objectives of the study. The study's findings demonstrate a robust association between a diverse workforce and engaged workers, as indicated by the positive responses to the questions. Based on the research findings, the study recommends the following:

i. Given the significant correlation between inclusive hiring processes and employee engagement, First Bank Plc should continue and strengthen its commitment to inclusive recruitment strategies. This may involve regularly reviewing and updating hiring policies to ensure they prioritize

diversity and equal opportunities for all candidates. HR professionals should be trained to recognize and mitigate biases throughout the recruitment process, contributing to a more inclusive and engaged workforce.

ii. The positive correlation between cultural competency training and employee engagement highlights the importance of ongoing efforts in this area. First Bank Plc should consider expanding cultural competency training programs to reach all employees at various levels. The training should encompass a broad understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds, effective communication across cultures, and strategies for creating an inclusive work environment. Regular assessments and updates to these programs will ensure they remain relevant and impactful.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It is important to note that the study's findings are entirely reliant on the subjective evaluations of the firms. Therefore, it would be unwise to presume that it would be effective for every firm. The time constraint is an inherent restriction of the investigation. The conclusions were exclusively taken from data obtained from respondents and secondary sources. The study has substantial inadequacies as a result of the researchers' failure to properly consider dependent variables. However, there may be additional characteristics that indicate differences in HR policies and practices. The following areas could be considered for future research:

- i) Employing qualitative research approaches, such as focus groups or interviews, in addition to quantitative data. This study has the ability to shed light on the impact of diversity initiatives on employee engagement, as perceived and expressed by employees based on their subjective experiences and perspectives.
- ii) Examining the impact of leadership styles, organizational culture, and work-life balance initiatives on employee engagement. This information may provide a clearer understanding of the elements that impact employee engagement in diverse settings.
- iii) Examining the relationship between several indices of workforce diversity, levels of employee engagement, and organizational performance metrics such as innovation, financial performance, and productivity. This information may provide a clearer understanding of the broader impact of diversity programs on corporate performance.

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