DYNAMICS OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY IN ETHIOPIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The main purpose of this study is to understand the dynamics of diversity in higher educational institutions in Ethiopia particularly the dynamics in terms of gender, marital status, age, religious and educational status. The study also emphasized on main diversity dimensions as: diversity climate, organizational justice, identity, values, schema and communication practices in higher educational institutions.

Theoretical Framework: This study which deals with the dynamics of diversity in higher educational institutions in Ethiopia is based on the taxonomy of workplace diversity used by Tailer (2011).

Methods: The study is conducted using descriptive research design and mixed approach. The researchers describe the gender diversities and infer something based on the empirical evidences available. The Universities were selected using convenience sampling and self-administered questionnaires were distributed to respondents.

Results and Conclusion: Diversity is one of the buzzwords of our contemporary organizational realm as lack of diversity affects their performance in different perspective. Gender, marital status, age, religion and educational status were the diversity dimensions considered to see the dynamics of diversity. The analysis indicated that Ethiopian higher educational institutions are diversified in terms of the indicated variables and especially are advised to focus on gender and religion diversities. The diversity taxonomy result indicated the following: availability of inclusive climate, fair treatment of employees and hence, they perceive as they are part and parcel of their organization. Furthermore, employees are not subject to stereotyping at work and availability of a clear communication system in Ethiopian higher educational institutions.

Finding and Implication: Diversity can manifest in many ways and it is expressed as the differences in race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, upbringing, and philosophical views are just a few ways in which people can be diverse. Hence, leaders of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in Ethiopia thus need to create an environment where people with diverse attributes work together to achieve enhanced organizational performance.

Keywords: dynamics, Ethiopia, higher education, work force diversity.

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DINÂMICA DA DIVERSIDADE DA FORÇA DE TRABALHO NAS INSTITUIÇÕES DE ENSINO SUPERIOR ETÍOPES

RESUMO

Propósito: O principal objetivo deste estudo é entender a dinâmica da diversidade em instituições de ensino superior na Etiópia, particularmente a dinâmica em termos de gênero, estado civil, idade, status religioso e educacional. O estudo também enfatizou as principais dimensões da diversidade como: clima de diversidade, justiça organizacional, identidade, valores, esquema e práticas de comunicação em instituições de ensino superior.


Métodos: O estudo é realizado usando design de pesquisa descritiva e abordagem mista. Os pesquisadores descrevem as diversidades de gênero e inferem algo a partir das evidências empíricas disponíveis. As Universidades foram selecionadas por amostragem de conveniência e questionários autoadministrados foram distribuídos aos entrevistados.

Resultados e Conclusão: Diversidade é uma das palavras de ordem do nosso mundo organizacional contemporâneo, já que a falta de diversidade afeta seu desempenho em diferentes perspectivas. Gênero, estado civil, idade, religião e estado educacional foram as dimensões da diversidade consideradas para ver a dinâmica da diversidade. A análise indicou que as instituições de ensino superior etíopes são diversificadas em termos das variáveis indicadas e, especialmente, são aconselhados a se concentrar nas diversidades de gênero e religião. O resultado da taxonomia de diversidade indicou o seguinte: disponibilidade de clima inclusivo, tratamento justo dos funcionários e, portanto, eles percebem como eles são parte integrante de sua organização. Além disso, os funcionários não estão sujeitos a estereótipos no trabalho e à disponibilidade de um sistema de comunicação claro em instituições de ensino superior etíopes.

Descoberta e Implicação: A diversidade pode se manifestar de muitas maneiras e é expressa como as diferenças em raça, gênero, orientação sexual, status socioeconômico, educação e pontos de vista filosóficos são apenas algumas maneiras em que as pessoas podem ser diversas. Portanto, os líderes das Instituições de Ensino Superior (IES) na Etiópia precisam criar um ambiente onde pessoas com atributos diversos trabalhem juntas para alcançar um desempenho organizacional aprimorado.

Palavras-chave: dinâmica, Etiópia, ensino superior, diversidade da força de trabalho.

1 INTRODUCTION

Diversity is one of the buzzwords of our contemporary world. Literatures on the subject matter used different basis for defining diversity and there are no general consensuses as to what a diversity is. Cognizant to this fact, Annija, Petrocelia, and Tsvetelina (2011) indicated that diversity is becoming the interest of business context for
the past three decades and now becoming more relevant to higher education institutions, where diversity is present both in the supplier and customer side and according to these authors, the broader concept of diversity includes differences in variables such as age, gender, sexual orientation, and religious belief.

Deborah (2013) also posited that diversity can manifest in many ways and it is expressed as the differences in race, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, upbringing, and philosophical views are just a few ways in which people can be diverse. According to Wentling and Palma-Rivas, (2000) the broader definition of diversity may include age, religion, disability, educational and economic status. Others view diversity from the perspectives of cultural factors such as race, gender, color, physical ability, ethnicity. According to Abebaw (2022) diversity can be broadly conceived of as all the ways that people are different and the difference could be based on various attributes including, among other things, ethnicity, religion, race, language, culture, ability, social status, and sexual orientation.

According to Zhou, Liu and Song (2022) positive diversity climate is the outcome of a well-managed diversity, and is reported to lead to higher job performance. Similarly, Moon and Christensen (2019) posited that diversity management reinforces employees’ performance, which in turn leads to better organizational outcome. Furthermore, diversity management is thought to help reconfigure employees in accordance with their expertise and specialization, which ultimately leads to higher employee performance. In this way, workforce diversity management maintains a favorable working environment by providing the employees merit-based job for effective utilization of skills owned by the workforce for better performance (Park and Liang, 2019).

What is also critical is not only the existence of proportional diversity but also a well-managed diversity that augments organizational performance, implying the need to put in place a diversity management strategy. To put a workable diversity management strategy in place, it is thus vital that research aiming at generation of information that would be used to design such strategies is required.

Ethiopian public higher education institutions (HEIs) can be characterized by an increasing trend in their workforce diversity. Diversity brings with it the heterogeneity that needs to be nurtured, cultivated and appreciated for enhanced performance at individual and organizational levels. The Ethiopian public HEIs are responsible for producing high quality human power, conducting quality and problem-solving research,
and also generate and disseminate improved technologies for use by the community. But these missions require the integration of all stakeholders especially internal ones. The management of diversified students in terms of sex, age, ethnicity, language, religion and other variables as well as that of staffs academic and administrative is at the heart of achieving the vision and mission of Ethiopian higher educational institutions. Regardless of these facts as far as the knowledge of the researchers is concerned few there is no comprehensive study conducted to understand the dynamics of diversity and more importantly using the taxonomy of diversity at work place. This study therefore, is designed to analyze the dynamics of diversity in selected public higher educational institutions in Ethiopia.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Workplace diversity is increasing in an organizations and employees are more heterogenous than before (Taylor, 2011). Workforce of varying demographic and socio-cultural attributes are thought to work in HEIs of Ethiopia. Hence, leaders of HEIs need to thus create an environment where people with diverse attributes work together to achieve enhanced organizational performance. To create such an environment, empirical research, the output of which could be used as input to facilitate informed decision making is vital. As it is true in other organizations, due to the presence of workforce of diverse demographic and socio-cultural characteristics, diversity management in HEIs fascinates the attention of leaders and researchers (Ouellette, Frazier, Shernoff, Cappella, Mehta, Martinez-Lora, Grace Cua and Atkins. 2018). However, exploration of extant literature on issues of diversity management in Ethiopian HEIs revealed that a limited number of studies had hitherto been reported (Adamu and Zellelew, 2007; Biru, 2019; Mekonnen, 2013). Research works reported thus far had largely focused on review of secondary information (Tariku and Latchana, 2016), non-academic corporate organizations (Amdemichael, 2018; Prasad, 2015), private HEIs (Biru, 2019), non-governmental entities (Kelali, 2018) and on limited diversity attributed of the students (Adamu, 2013). The scope of generalizability of the research works done thus far is generally limited (Biru, 2019). Therefore, researching on the dynamic of workforce diversity in Ethiopian higher educational institutions is timely and worth studying.
3 METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was obtained from the four Universities in Ethiopia mainly, Addis Ababa University, Bahrdar University, Hawasa University and Jimma University were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data was collected using self-administered questionnaire and respondents filled and returned the questionnaires. Explanatory research design was used and the data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The researchers inferred based on literatures and their understanding from the data obtained rather than mere description of the data as it is.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data in this section was collected from four universities (Addis Ababa University (AAU), Bahir Dar University (BDU), Hawassa University (HU), and Jimma University (JU) in Ethiopia with a total sample size of 386. Out of the total sample, 111 (28.75%) and 113 (29.25%) of the respondents were drawn from AAU and BDU, respectively. Hawassa and Jimma universities each constituted 81 respondents (21% share). It was hypothesized that employees working for HEIs in Ethiopia do vary in demographic variables. The following features of staff working in these universities were recorded: gender, marital status, age, religion and level of education. Summary of the data on these features is analyzed in the following section.

4.1 GENDER DIVERSITY

Literature indicated that men and women have different knowledge, skills, experiences, expectations, values and beliefs, behaviors and preference. For instance, Eagly (2009), indicated that men and women behave according to different stereotypes, values, and beliefs. His argument is in line with the social role theory. Wood & Eagly (2009) out weight the contribution of women to the organization indicating that they are relationally oriented, participative, and democratic than their men counterparts.

According Ferrary (2018) men and women differ in their professional preferences, that influences their career expectations and contributions. Post & Byron (2015) also posited that Male and female exhibit distinct cognitive frames due to differences in their experiences and knowledge related to education, roles outside work, and non-work interests. Furthermore, Singh, Terjesen & Vinnicombe (2008) indicated that organizations benefit from different in professional experiences of diversified gender.
There are also differences in the risk-taking behavior among men and women though inconclusive agreements are there with regard to whether women are more risk averter than men and the vice versa.

The following table indicated the gender diversity of the four Universities in Ethiopia considered for this particular study.

![Figure 1. Gender diversity of four Universities in Ethiopia](image)

Source: Survey Questionnaire

Pooled over the four universities, 250 of the respondents (64.8%) were male, while 136 (35.2%) are female. As far as the diversity of male and female is concerned, majority of the respondents are male and this is the replica of the male dominant nature of the academic staffs of Ethiopian Universities. Women were not given equal educational opportunities as males because of the cultural impact that restrict female to home responsibilities than outside responsibilities. Addis Ababa University is better in maintaining balanced number of male and female as the 48 % of the respondents are female. A mix of cognitive abilities of men and women may increase the organization’s overall creativity and innovation. Gender heterogeneous teams were reported to produce high quality decisions over a homogenous team (Kulik, Pepper, Roberson & Parker...
Empirical research supports the argument that gender diversity is positively associated with organization’s performance. Evidences indicate that because of gender discrimination, women do not get same opportunities as men get for education and promotion (Bhushan, 2016). According to Green, López, Wysocki, Kepner, Farnsworth and Clark (2015) providing equal employment opportunities for men and women is important to improve team performance in an organization. According to a study by Abbas, Hameed and Waheed (2011), gender discrimination in recruitment and promotion highly affects the performance of employee. According to a study by Rizwan, Khan, Nadeem and Abbas (2016), there is positive relationship between gender diversity and employee performance. Therefore, it is time to Ethiopian higher educational institutions to re-think about the proportion of their staff and invest on female to join Universities and also capacitate them get employment opportunities by scoring the minimum points required to be university lecturers.

4.2 MARITAL DIVERSITY

Marital status is an important aspect of diversity as it is linked with maintaining employees which, in turn is linked with organizational performance. The following figure indicated the marital status of sample employees in the four Universities in Ethiopia.
Regarding the marital status of the respondents, 282 (73.1%) of the respondents were married and 104 (26.9%) were unmarried. Analyzing the marital status of the respondents of the four Universities, there are more (36 &) of unmarried respondents which, could be the replica of the entire University. The reason for the large number of single staffs is the expensive leaving standard in Addis Ababa compared to country side.

4.3 AGE DIVERSITY

Age diversity has its impact on firm performance. In academic institutions age can have both positive and negative effect. On one hand, increased age results in experience and students will benefit from the experience of their teacher. One the other hand resistance to change, incompatibility with students and productivity will decline with increased age and hence it is good for higher educational institutions to have balanced number of both young and old age professionals. The age diversity of the four Universities in Ethiopia is indicated in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>20-30 years</th>
<th>31-40 years</th>
<th>41-50 years</th>
<th>51-60 years</th>
<th>Over 60 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BDU</td>
<td>1 (90%)</td>
<td>30 (26.5%)</td>
<td>48 (42.5%)</td>
<td>24 (21.2%)</td>
<td>10 (8.8%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAU</td>
<td>4 (3.6%)</td>
<td>51 (45.9%)</td>
<td>56 (50.5%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JU</td>
<td>2 (2.5%)</td>
<td>39 (48.1%)</td>
<td>40 (49.4%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HU</td>
<td>3 (3.7%)</td>
<td>38 (46.9%)</td>
<td>40 (49.4%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10 (2.6%)</td>
<td>158 (40.9%)</td>
<td>184 (47.7%)</td>
<td>24 (6.2%)</td>
<td>10 (2.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Questionnaire

As it can be observed from table 1, 2.6% of the respondents (n=10) fell within the ages of 20-30 years, 158(40.9%) within the age range of 31-40 years, 184(47.7%) fell in the range of 41-50, and 24(6.2%) fell within the age of 51-50 years, and those with above 60 years of age were 20 (2.6%). Age diversity is the difference in age among staff according to Kunze, Boehm and Bruch (2009) have many implications. Normally, organizations are unable to properly use the talent and the skills of old workers, due to a false assumption that they face a lot of health issues and unable to adopt changes and new technologies (Joseph and Selvaraj, 2015). Different studies indicated that age diversity has both advantages and disadvantages. According to Mwatumwa (2016), age diversity causes communication problems and conflict among employees. The author further posited that inefficiency of managers to manage age diversity gives rise to conflict that reduces productivity of employees.
According to Bohem and Kunze (2015), workforce of heterogeneous age can produce huge number of multiple skills and intellectual styles, among others, that may result in increased productivity. A study reported by Zhuwao (2017) shows the positive relationship between age diversity and employee performance. Therefore, the Ethiopian higher educational institutions are diversified in age and the two extreme age groups are small in number indicating that majority are within the productive age as teaching and learning, research and community service requires require some experience and should also be young enough to take risks and adapt new technologies.

4.4. RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Religion is one of the important diversity variables that could determine the academic performance of public universities in Ethiopia. If there is homogeneity in religion, there could be a tendency of biases among the teachers towards and researchers and hence, it is important to have heteroecious group of religion among the University teachers and leaders.

With regard to religious diversity in the four Universities in Ethiopia, 335 (86.8%) of the respondents reported to be Christian, while 51 (13.2%) of them are Muslims. Religious diversity enables organizations to be confident to attract and retain a workforce
that reflects the society one operates in. Religious diversity gives the opportunity to address religious bias in the workplace and brings diversity of thought.

The current study indicated that the proportion is skewed to one religion. And this can be associated with social, historical and contextual factors. Leaders of HEIs in Ethiopia are expected to work towards creating staff of diverse religious background to realize its benefits.

4.5 EDUCATION DIVERSITY

One of the very important diversity variables in higher education is the educational diversity. According to Maalouf et al., (2023) The search for people capable of facing different situations and not getting stuck will be essential since nowadays changes are constant and it will be necessary to be qualified to get off the beaten track. Universities in Ethiopia are composed of junior staff members as well as senior professors. As per Amir, Faisal, Muhammad, Maaz & Abdul (2019), organizations do not hire employees whose training, experience and education are inadequate for specific job or position in their institution. The same authors have indicated that education is more important for employees because without sufficient educational background employees are unable to get a job and perform well. As employees get access to educational opportunities, their ability to innovate new things will be enhanced. According to Yusuf et al., (2023) Innovative Work Behavior is considered a powerful tool that leads to gaining a competitive advantage in the era of knowledge-based economy as there is no organization that can survive without continuous innovation.

Organizational leaders implement education diversity to motivate employee to perform work effectively to achieve organizational goals. An employee education background is the best indicator of the knowledge, skills and capability (Maingi, 2015). According to Maingi (2015) the educational background reflects the cognitive strength and personality of employee.

Academic performance of university instructors is affected by their educational level. It is assumed that their level of education posts their research and academic capacities. Cognizant to this fact study by Cohen and Bailey (1997) shows that the education background diversity has positive effect on team performance, because it fosters broader range of cognitive skills. Furthermore, Zhuwao (2017) and Elsaid, (2012)
also shows that there is positive relationship between education diversity and employee performance.

The following figure indicate the educational diversity of the four Universities included in this study.

Figure 4. Educational Diversity of the Sample Universities in Ethiopia

![Educational Diversity Chart]

Source: Survey Questionnaire

The proportion of PhD and MSc holders was observed to be 45.6% and 41.7%, respectively. The proportion of staff with BA and BSc was found to be around 12.7%. The finding revealed that the proportion of academic staffs with educational level of bachelor and masters is more than those with PhD. The sample Universities are those categorized as research University as per the recent categorization (Differentiation) of Universities in Ethiopia. These Universities are expected to have more proportion of staffs with PhD than that of masters and bachelor.

4.6 TAXONOMY OF WORKPLACE DIVERSITY

The following dimensions of diversity taxonomy was used to the extent to which diversity is practiced and properly managed in higher educational institutions in Ethiopia.
Table 2: Diversity of workplace diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Climate</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Justice</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schemas</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Researcher’s Survey

Figure 1. Percentage of Diversity perceptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity Type</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schemas</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>78.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity Climate</td>
<td>76.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Justice</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Researcher’s Survey

4.7 DIVERSITY CLIMATE

The study's findings indicate that the perceived diversity climate in the studied institutions was rated above average (3.8), implying that respondents' perception of the diversity climate is approximately 77%. The finding revealed that there is a strong commitment from senior management team members in higher institutions to enhance teaching staff diversity. Encouraging initiatives have been implemented to increase the diversity of teaching staff, with university policies supporting these efforts in alignment with the institution's mission and vision.

In the context of higher education, other literature emphasizes the importance of creating an inclusive climate through various initiatives. To effectively manage diversity, it is recommended to focus on fostering a positive and supportive diversity climate. Such an inclusive climate is crucial for promoting academic performance and retention of individuals from diverse backgrounds.
4.8 ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE

The organizational justice average score is 3.73, indicating that respondents perceive organizational justice practices at about 75%. This implies that institutions treat people fairly regardless of their background, implement consistent policies for all, and strive to create a comfortable working environment for everyone and there is no significant exclusion of certain individuals based on their identity within this university. Diversity can lead to conflicts, but effective management can turn these conflicts into potential benefits, depending on the type of conflict that arises.

4.9 IDENTITY

Regarding the identity dimension of workplace diversity management, respondents scored 3.93, and the perception of belonging to the institution with a strong identity is 79%. This shows that Staff members in the case universities consider themselves integral parts of their work teams. A sense of identity and belongingness refers to being accepted, valued, involved, and supported by others within the academic environment, feeling like an important part of the institution. This sense of belonging has a significant impact on staff engagement and academic performance in the institution. It fulfills a fundamental human need as everyone desires recognition and engagement.

4.10 VALUES

The research findings revealed that respondents strongly value diversity in universities, with an average score of 4.12. About 82% of the respondents expressed a strong belief that diversity is crucial to the success of the university, and they are enthusiastic about collaborating with individuals from diverse backgrounds. It is important to note that diversity goes beyond just students and faculty members; it encompasses various aspects such as teaching methods, institutional policies, and more. Each faculty member should embrace the value of promoting social coherence and enhancing academic performance through diversity. When university leaders prioritize diversity, they provide students with a broader range of worldviews, encouraging innovation and facilitating learning from peers with diverse perspectives shaped by a variety of experiences. Such an inclusive approach enriches the educational environment and fosters a culture of openness and growth within the university community.
4.11 SCHEMAS

Schemas are fundamental mental frameworks that shape how individuals think and understand things in their daily activities and routines. These schemas are formed based on past experiences. In the workplace, schemas influence how staff approach their tasks and can have both positive and negative impacts on their work. The result shows that respondents' perception of schemas is at 79%, with a mean score of 3.93. This indicated that they are not subject to stereotyping at work. Employees' mental frameworks are not influenced by preconceived notions or biases, promoting a fair and unbiased work environment.

4.12 COMMUNICATION

Communication in a culturally diverse workplace involves accepting and respecting the differences of others while recognizing and valuing everyone's uniqueness. The selected universities have staff members from diverse backgrounds. The perception of respondents regarding communication is about 75%, with a mean score of 3.76. It appears that this diversity poses little challenge in understanding differences and effectively communicating in the workplace indicating that discussing tasks with co-workers, despite differences, is not difficult, and effective communication occurs across identity differences.

5 CONCLUSION

The extent to which managers recognize diversity and its potential advantages defines an organization’s approach to managing workforce diversity. No organization would survive without workforce diversity. It is the duty of the organizational management staff to critically evaluate the benefits of workforce diversity in their organization. On the other hand, the leaders of HEIs in Ethiopia should put in place conditions which would enhance the workforce diversity in their organizations, more especially in their strategies formulation on the diversity of the workforce. With the diversity of the workforce, these institutions would be internally and externally competitive. In today’s fast-paced work environment a successful HEI is the one where diversity is the norm and not the exception. Gender and religious diversity must be particularly focused in the case of the Ethiopian HEIs. The taxonomy of diversity
dimension also revealed that there is no as such significant problem in the diversity management perspectives.
REFERENCES


