



# WORKFORCE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVE STAFF PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

The study investigated workforce diversity management and effective performance of staff in public universities in Rivers State. Three research questions and three corresponding null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance. The study adopted the correlational survey design. The population of the study was 3,494 academic staff in the three public universities in Rivers State. A sample of 679 was drawn, which represents 20% of the total population consisting 420 male academic staff and 259 female academic staff respectively. Stratified random sampling techniques was used to select the sample. Data were collected through a self-designed questionnaire titled “workforce Diversity management Questionnaire (WDMQ) and Effective Staff Performance Questionnaire (EPSQ). The instrument was validated by three experts in the Department of Educational Management, Ignatius Ajuru of University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. The reliability was assessed using the test-retest method. Cronbach Alpha analysis was used to ascertain reliability indices demonstrating internal consistency from which reliability indexes of .890 and .780 were realized. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient was used to answer the research questions and also to test the hypotheses at a .05 level of significance, with the aid of SPSS version 28. The findings of the study revealed that workforce diversity training, creating supportive workforce culture, establishment of diversity recruitment programs, unconscious bias training and inclusive leadership all enhance effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State. The study concluded that institutions may need to explore alternative strategies or interventions that could have a more direct and measurable impact on enhancing staff productivity and overall institutional effectiveness. Amongst others the study recommended that government should not employ academic staff base on political or religious differences but base merit.

**Keywords:** Workforce Diversity Management, Staff Performance, Public Universities, Rivers State, Higher Education, Inclusivity, Organizational Effectiveness, Employee Motivation, Equity and Fairness, Diversity Policies.

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## INTRODUCTION

Workforce diversity management is an increasingly essential factor in enhancing organizational effectiveness, particularly in the context of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. As these institutions strive to fulfil their educational missions, the diverse composition of their workforce, encompassing differences in race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, and other characteristics, necessitates deliberate management strategies to harness this diversity for enhanced performance. The effective management of workforce diversity involves not only recognizing and valuing differences but also implementing practices that foster inclusion, equity, and respect within the institution (Nnokam & Hassan, 2020).

Workforce diversity training is an essential strategy in managing diversity effectively within organizations, including tertiary institutions. Diversity training is designed to raise awareness among employees about the importance of diversity, help them recognize and mitigate their biases, and equip them with the skills necessary to interact respectfully and effectively with people from different backgrounds. According to Amah and Ahiauzu (2013), diversity training in Nigerian universities plays a crucial role in enhancing interpersonal relationships among staff members, leading to improved collaboration and job satisfaction. This improved collaboration results directly from the training's ability to reduce misunderstandings and conflicts that often arise from cultural differences, thereby creating a more harmonious work environment conducive to higher performance levels. Okoye (2017) argued that diversity training is instrumental in breaking down cultural barriers within the workplace, fostering a greater sense of unity and shared purpose among staff members. This sense of unity is particularly important in academic settings, where teamwork and collaboration are essential for achieving institutional goals.

However, the effectiveness of diversity training programs depends largely on the institution's commitment to their implementation. Nwokolo and Uche (2018) observed that diversity training programs can sometimes be treated as mere formalities, with little genuine effort to integrate the principles of diversity and inclusion into the institution's daily operations. For diversity training to truly enhance staff performance, it must be part of a broader organizational strategy that includes continuous learning and improvement. This involves regularly assessing the impact of the training on staff behaviour and performance and making necessary adjustments to ensure its effectiveness. Additionally, diversity training should be tailored to address the specific challenges and opportunities associated with the institution's unique cultural and organizational context. In Rivers State, where the workforce is characterized by rich cultural diversity, diversity training programs should emphasize the importance of cultural competence, which is the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Nnadi & Ibekwe, 2021).

Supportive Workforce Culture is another factor that influences staff performance in tertiary institutions. A supportive workforce culture refers to an organizational environment where all employees feel valued, respected, and supported in their professional and personal development. This culture is characterized by practices that promote inclusivity, open communication, and a strong sense of community within the institution. Edeh (2019) highlighted that a supportive workforce culture is directly linked to higher levels of job satisfaction among staff members, which in turn leads to improved performance. When employees feel that their contributions are recognized and appreciated, they are more likely to be motivated and committed to their work. This sense of motivation is further enhanced by the availability of opportunities for professional development, which allows employees to grow and advance in their careers. Furthermore, a supportive workforce culture plays a crucial role in mitigating

workplace stress and preventing burnout, which are common issues in the academic sector. Ugoani (2016) emphasized that institutions that prioritize employee well-being through supportive practices, such as flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and work-life balance initiatives, see significant improvements in staff performance. This improvement is due to employees who feel supported by their institution are more likely to be engaged and productive in their work, leading to better outcomes for the institution as a whole.

A supportive workforce culture fosters a sense of belonging among employees, which is essential for creating a cohesive and collaborative work environment. According to Ogbogu (2017), leaders in tertiary institutions play a critical role in shaping the workforce culture by setting the tone from the top and modelling inclusive and supportive behaviours. This leadership is crucial for ensuring that the institution's values are reflected in everyday practices and that all employees feel empowered to contribute to the institution's success (Nnokam & Hassan, 2020).

Diversity recruitment programs is a vital component of workforce diversity management, aimed at attracting, hiring, and retaining a diverse workforce that reflects the diversity of the student population and the broader society. These programs are particularly important in tertiary institutions, where diversity is not only a matter of legal and ethical obligation but also a strategic advantage that can enhance the institution's overall performance. Adebayo (2018) argued that diversity in recruitment leads to a more dynamic and innovative workforce, as employees from diverse backgrounds bring different perspectives and approaches to problem-solving. This diversity of thought is especially valuable in academic settings, where the ability to think critically and creatively is essential for achieving academic excellence.

Diversity recruitment programs also contribute to a more equitable and fairer workplace, which is crucial for fostering a positive work environment. Adetunji and Adeyemi (2020) suggested that institutions that prioritize diversity in their recruitment practices are more likely to attract top talent, as candidates are drawn to organizations that value inclusivity and equal opportunities. This focus on diversity not only enhances the institution's reputation but also improves its competitiveness in the academic marketplace, leading to better performance outcomes. However, the success of diversity recruitment programs depends on the institution's commitment to creating a truly inclusive environment where all employees can thrive. Okechukwu and Adebayo (2020) emphasized that it is not enough to simply hire a diverse workforce; institutions must also provide the necessary support and resources to ensure that all employees have the opportunity to succeed and advance in their careers. This includes offering mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and creating a work environment that respects and values diversity.

Unconscious bias training is a tool for addressing the subtle, often unintentional prejudices that can affect employees' behaviour and decision-making within the workplace. Unconscious biases can manifest in various ways, such as in hiring practices, performance evaluations, and daily interactions with colleagues and students. These biases can create an environment where certain individuals or groups feel marginalized or undervalued, which can negatively impact their morale and performance. Nnadi and Ibekwe (2021) argued that unconscious bias training is essential for raising awareness of these biases and providing employees with strategies for mitigating them, thereby creating a more inclusive and equitable work environment.

The effectiveness of unconscious bias training, depends on the institution's commitment to fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Okoro and Onuoha (2022) suggested that unconscious bias training should be part of a broader diversity and inclusion strategy that includes regular assessments of the training's impact, opportunities for employees to

engage in meaningful discussions about bias and inclusion, and a supportive environment where employees feel safe to address their biases and make changes to their behaviour. Moreover, it should be tailored to address the specific biases and challenges associated with the institution's unique cultural and organizational context. In the case of tertiary institutions in Rivers State, where cultural diversity is a significant feature of the workforce, unconscious bias training should emphasize the importance of cultural competence and the need to recognize and value the diverse perspectives and experiences of all employees.

Inclusive leadership is an emerging concept that plays a crucial role in enhancing staff performance within diverse organizational settings, including tertiary institutions. Inclusive leadership refers to leadership practices that promote a sense of belonging and respect for all employees, regardless of their background or identity. Inclusive leaders actively seek out and consider diverse perspectives, foster open communication, and create an environment where all employees feel empowered to contribute their unique ideas and talents. In the context of tertiary institutions in Rivers State, inclusive leadership is particularly important given the diverse composition of the workforce and the need to manage this diversity effectively to achieve optimal performance.

Chukwuma and Eze (2019) opined that inclusive leadership in Nigerian tertiary institutions enhances staff performance by fostering a culture of trust and collaboration. When leaders demonstrate inclusivity, they create an environment where employees feel valued and respected, which in turn increases their commitment and motivation to perform at their best. This positive impact on performance is further amplified by the leader's ability to address and mitigate any potential conflicts or tensions that may arise from diversity within the workforce.

Okonkwo and Obiekwe (2021) argued that inclusive leadership contributes to innovation and creativity, as it encourages the open exchange of ideas and leverages the diverse perspectives of all staff members. This exchange of ideas is particularly important in academic settings, where the ability to think critically and creatively is essential for achieving institutional goals. Inclusive leadership also plays a vital role in succession planning and talent development within tertiary institutions. As noted by Udeh and Nwoye (2020), inclusive leaders are more likely to recognize and nurture the potential of all employees, regardless of their background or identity.

This inclusive approach to leadership development ensures that the institution can draw on a diverse pool of talent when filling leadership roles, thereby enhancing the institution's overall performance and sustainability. Moreover, inclusive leadership is essential for fostering a positive organizational culture that aligns with the institution's values and mission. Modelling inclusive behaviours and setting high expectations for diversity and inclusion, leaders can create a culture that supports the success of all employees and contributes to the institution's long-term success. Workforce diversity management is a multifaceted approach that involves various strategies aimed at promoting inclusivity, equity, and respect within the workplace. In the context of tertiary institutions in Rivers State, the effective management of workforce diversity is crucial for enhancing staff performance and ensuring the institution's overall success. This study highlighted the importance of diversity training, supportive workforce culture, diversity recruitment programs, unconscious bias training, and inclusive leadership as key components of workforce diversity management. Integrating these strategies into their organizational practices, tertiary institutions in Rivers State can create a more inclusive and supportive work environment, ultimately leading to improved staff performance and better outcomes for the institution as a whole.

## **Statement of the Problem**

In Rivers State, Nigeria, tertiary institutions are characterized by a diverse workforce that includes various ethnic, cultural, and demographic groups, presenting both opportunities and challenges for effective management. Despite the acknowledged benefits of workforce diversity management, there is a significant lack of practical evidence regarding how specific diversity management practices influence staff performance within these institutions. Workforce diversity training is designed to improve staff interactions and performance by increasing awareness and reducing biases, its actual effectiveness in the context of Nigerian tertiary institutions remains uncertain. Similarly, the creation of a supportive workforce culture, which is supposed to enhance job satisfaction and productivity, has not been sufficiently evaluated in these institutions to determine its impact on staff performance.

Diversity recruitment programs aim to attract and retain a diverse workforce but their success in improving staff performance within Rivers State's tertiary institutions needs further investigation. Unconscious bias training is intended to address subtle prejudices that can affect decision-making and behaviour, yet there is limited research on its effectiveness in reducing bias and enhancing performance in these settings. Additionally, inclusive leadership should foster a sense of belonging and maximize staff potential, has not been thoroughly explored in terms of its impact on staff performance in Nigerian higher education institutions.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by examining the extent to which diversity management practices like workforce diversity training, supportive workforce culture, and diversity recruitment programs for enhanced staff performance in public universities in Rivers State

## **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between workforce diversity management and effective performance of staff in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The specific objectives were to:

- Determine the extent workforce diversity training enhance effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.
- Ascertain the extent creating supportive workforce culture enhance effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.
- Examine the extent establishment of diversity recruitment programs enhance effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.

## **Research Questions**

In order to adequately evaluate this study, the following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- What is the extent of relationship between workforce diversity of training and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State?
- What is the extent of relationship between creating supportive workforce culture and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State?

- What is the extent of relationship between workforce diversity establishment of recruitment programs and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State?

## **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance:

- There is there is no significant relationship between workforce diversity training and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.
- There is no significant relationship between creating supportive workforce culture and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.
- There is no significant relationship between establishment of diversity recruitment programs and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory (SIT) developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979 offers a profound framework for understanding how individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, and how this categorization impacts behaviors, attitudes, and interactions within society. Tajfel and Turner posited that individuals do not merely derive their sense of self from personal attributes, but also from their membership in various social groups. This theoretical lens, as cited by Van Bezouw et al. (2018), emphasized that people strive to maintain a positive self-image, which is partly dependent on the perceived status of their groups. In essence, Social Identity Theory suggests that individuals develop both personal identity (based on their individual characteristics) and social identity (based on their group memberships), and this dual identity influences how they perceive the world and behave within it.

The process of categorization, a core concept in SIT, is the mechanism through which individuals sort themselves and others into various social groups, such as race, gender, religion, profession, or nationality. Categorization is essential because it allows people to simplify the complexities of the social world. According to the theory, once individuals are categorized into a group, they begin to identify with that group and develop an “in-group” (us) versus “out-group” (them) mentality. This differentiation between in-group and out-group often leads to bias, as people tend to favor their in-group over the out-group. The importance of this bias in everyday life and within organizations cannot be overstated, as it forms the foundation of group-based interactions, stereotyping, and even discrimination.

Applying this theory to the study of workforce diversity and the performance of staff in organizations, SIT offers valuable insights into how employees identify with various groups in the workplace, and how these identifications impact their performance. As people categorize themselves based on characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, or even their roles in the organization, they inevitably align themselves with particular in-groups. These in-groups often generate a sense of belonging and solidarity among members, which can enhance team cohesion and cooperation. However, they can also foster competition, exclusion, and conflict with perceived out-groups within the same organization. The implications for effective performance are profound. On the one hand, when employees feel a strong sense of belonging to their workgroups, they may be

more motivated to collaborate and perform effectively. On the other hand, if individuals feel marginalized or excluded from influential in-groups, their motivation, job satisfaction, and performance may suffer.

Moreover, the theory postulates that individuals seek positive distinctiveness for their in-groups, meaning that they strive for their groups to be seen as better than others. This can manifest in organizations where certain departments, teams, or demographic groups attempt to outshine others, sometimes leading to unhealthy competition. In organizations with diverse workforces, the challenges of managing social identities are heightened. If employees perceive that their group is being treated unfairly compared to other groups, they may develop negative attitudes toward the organization, leading to reduced performance. Therefore, managers must be keenly aware of the dynamics of social identities in the workplace and work actively to promote inclusivity and fairness. The promotion of diversity initiatives, such as unconscious bias training and inclusive leadership, can mitigate some of the adverse effects of in-group favoritism and out-group bias.

SIT also sheds light on the psychological mechanisms underlying discrimination and bias in organizations. Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggested that people tend to exaggerate the differences between their in-group and out-groups, leading to stereotypes and biased behavior. In organizations, this can translate into unconscious biases during recruitment, promotion, and evaluation processes. If, for example, managers unconsciously favor employees who share their social identity, they may overlook the contributions of others, resulting in unfair treatment and a loss of valuable talent. Biases rooted in social identity can also hinder the performance of employees who belong to marginalized groups. When employees feel that they are being judged based on stereotypes rather than their individual abilities, their motivation and performance may decline.

In the context of tertiary institutions in Rivers State, as investigated in this study, Social Identity Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how diversity initiatives, such as workforce diversity training, creating supportive workforce cultures, and establishing diversity recruitment programs, can impact staff performance (Ololube, 2024). When diversity is promoted in tertiary institutions, it can foster a sense of belonging among all employees, regardless of their social identity. This, in turn, can enhance job satisfaction, motivation, and ultimately performance. For instance, diversity training programs can help employees become aware of their unconscious biases and develop strategies for working more effectively with people from different backgrounds. This can reduce in-group favoritism and out-group bias, leading to a more inclusive and supportive work environment. When staff members feel that they are valued and respected for their unique contributions, they are more likely to be engaged and productive.

Furthermore, the theory suggests that leadership plays a vital role in shaping the social identity dynamics within organizations. Leaders who embrace inclusive leadership styles can help bridge the divide between in-groups and out-groups by promoting fairness, transparency, and equal opportunities for all employees. Inclusive leaders are those who actively seek input from diverse groups and ensure that all voices are heard and respected. By doing so, they can foster a sense of collective identity among employees, where everyone feels that they are part of a larger whole. This sense of collective identity can enhance team cohesion and cooperation, leading to improved performance. Additionally, when leaders demonstrate that they value diversity and inclusivity, it sets a positive example for the rest of the organization, encouraging employees to adopt similar attitudes and behaviors.

The establishment of diversity recruitment programs, as highlighted in the study, can also be understood through the lens of Social Identity Theory. When tertiary institutions actively recruit staff from diverse backgrounds, they are signaling to all employees that diversity is valued.

This can help reduce the perception that certain groups are more favored than others, promoting a more inclusive and equitable work environment. Diversity recruitment programs can also enhance the institution's ability to attract top talent, as individuals are more likely to apply to organizations where they feel they will be valued and respected. The benefits of diversity recruitment extend beyond the individual level to the organizational level, as diverse teams have been shown to be more innovative and better at problem-solving.

## CONCEPTUALIZATION

### **Workforce Diversity Training and Effective Performance of Staff**

Workforce diversity training has become a fundamental tool for enhancing staff performance in today's increasingly multicultural and interconnected world. Diversity within an organization is defined by a mixture of differences in gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic background, religion, and more. Organizations in Nigeria, like those worldwide, are realizing the value of workforce diversity training in fostering inclusivity, improving communication, and promoting employee collaboration. This training is essential in equipping employees to work effectively in diverse environments, which ultimately enhances overall organizational performance. In the Nigerian, diversity training has gained increased attention as businesses, educational institutions, and public sector organizations aim to develop a more inclusive workforce that reflects the rich diversity of the nation. The connection between workforce diversity training and effective staff performance lies in how well employees can harness their differences to create a more innovative, adaptable, and dynamic workforce.

Diversity training helps organizations foster an environment that is more inclusive, thereby allowing employees from different backgrounds to feel valued and understood. When employees perceive that their contributions are recognized, regardless of their personal or cultural differences, they tend to be more engaged in their work. This sense of belonging positively affects individual performance, as employees are more motivated and less likely to experience feelings of isolation or alienation. In the Nigerian workplace, this is particularly important, given the country's multi-ethnic composition, where diversity in the workforce mirrors the broader societal structure. Ejiofor (2018) posited that an inclusive organizational environment, employees are better able to work together harmoniously, which directly contributes to improved productivity and organizational performance. Moreover, diversity training fosters understanding and reduces potential conflicts stemming from cultural differences. In turn, reducing these conflicts leads to a more harmonious working environment, where employees can focus on their tasks and responsibilities without the distractions of interpersonal friction.

In addition to fostering inclusivity, workforce diversity training enhances communication within teams. In diverse work environments, communication styles may vary based on employees' cultural or educational backgrounds. Training can help employees navigate these differences by emphasizing the importance of clear and effective communication. Furthermore, workforce diversity training equips employees with the skills to adapt to and embrace different communication styles, thus ensuring that ideas and feedback are clearly conveyed and understood. In this regard, effective communication fosters collaboration and teamwork, as employees from different backgrounds can work together more efficiently. According to Akinyele (2021), organizations that invest in diversity training have reported improved communication between team members, leading to enhanced team performance and cohesion. This is especially crucial in the Nigerian

context, where organizations are composed of employees from various ethnic groups with distinct communication patterns.

Furthermore, diversity training enhances problem-solving and innovation within organizations, which directly impacts staff performance. Employees from diverse backgrounds bring unique perspectives to the table, which can lead to more creative solutions and approaches to challenges. A diverse workforce is better equipped to address complex problems by drawing on a wider range of experiences, knowledge, and cultural insights. This diversity of thought promotes innovation, as employees are encouraged to think outside the box and explore new ways of achieving organizational objectives. Ugochukwu (2020) observed diversity training creates an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas and viewpoints, knowing that their contributions are valued. In this setting, employees are more likely to collaborate and engage in innovative problem-solving, which ultimately enhances the performance of the organization as a whole. Where organizations are increasingly competing in the global market, fostering innovation through diversity training is essential for maintaining a competitive edge.

In addition to promoting innovation, workforce diversity training improves adaptability and flexibility within organizations. A diverse workforce is better prepared to respond to changing market conditions, customer preferences, and global trends. In an era of rapid globalization, organizations must be able to adapt quickly to new challenges and opportunities. Diversity training helps employees develop a broader understanding of global perspectives, which is particularly important in multinational organizations operating in Nigeria. According to Adebola (2019), diversity training enables employees to appreciate different viewpoints and cultural practices, which enhances their ability to work in diverse and international settings. This increased adaptability translates into better staff performance, as employees are more likely to respond effectively to changes in their work environment and contribute to the organization's success in navigating new challenges.

Moreover, workforce diversity training helps address unconscious biases, which can negatively impact staff performance. Unconscious biases are preconceived attitudes or stereotypes that individuals may hold without realizing it and these biases can influence decision-making and interpersonal interactions within the workplace. In many cases, unconscious biases can lead to discriminatory behavior or favoritism, which can create a toxic work environment and hinder employee performance. Diversity training helps employees recognize and challenge their unconscious biases, creating a more equitable and fair work environment. As Abubakar (2018) asserted addressing unconscious biases through diversity training not only improves individual performance but also enhances organizational performance by fostering a culture of fairness and equality.

Additionally, diversity training prepares leaders within organizations to lead more effectively in diverse work environments. Inclusive leadership is an essential component of workforce diversity, as leaders play a crucial role in setting the tone for inclusivity within the organization. Diversity training equips leaders with the skills to manage diverse teams, resolve conflicts, and promote a culture of inclusion. Leaders who are trained in diversity are more likely to create an environment where all employees feel valued and included, which positively impacts staff morale and performance. Furthermore, inclusive leaders are better equipped to leverage the diverse talents and perspectives of their team members to achieve organizational goals. In Nigeria, where leadership styles may vary based on cultural and regional factors, diversity training for leaders is particularly important in ensuring that organizations can harness the full potential of their diverse workforce. Oladele (2021) highlighted that organizations that invest in leadership diversity train-

ing have seen improvements in team performance, employee engagement, and overall organizational success.

The role of diversity training in enhancing staff performance also extends to employee retention. Employees are more likely to stay with an organization that values diversity and promotes an inclusive work environment. Retaining top talent is essential for organizational success, as high employee turnover can disrupt operations and negatively impact performance. Diversity training helps create a positive work culture where employees feel respected and appreciated, leading to higher job satisfaction and retention rates. According to Okoro (2020), organizations that prioritize diversity training have seen a reduction in employee turnover, as employees are more likely to remain with an employer that promotes inclusivity and values their contributions. In the Nigerian context, where competition for skilled workers is high, retaining top talent is critical for maintaining organizational performance and achieving long-term success.

Workforce diversity training plays a critical role in enhancing the effective performance of staff. It fosters inclusivity, improves communication, promotes innovation, enhances adaptability, addresses unconscious biases, and prepares leaders to lead diverse teams effectively. In Nigeria, where workforce diversity reflects the broader societal diversity, organizations that invest in diversity training are better positioned to succeed in an increasingly globalized and competitive market. Diversity training is a strategic tool for achieving effective staff performance and long-term organizational success.

### **Creating Supportive Workforce Culture and Effective Performance of Staff**

A supportive workforce culture is essential for enhancing staff performance, as it fosters an environment where employees feel valued, respected, and motivated to perform at their best. In organizational settings, culture refers to the collective values, beliefs, and behaviors that shape how people interact and work together. A supportive culture encourages inclusivity, collaboration, and respect, allowing employees to contribute to their full potential without facing unnecessary barriers or negative work environments. This type of culture directly impacts employee performance by promoting job satisfaction, enhancing commitment, and fostering innovation, which are critical to the overall success of the organization (Akinwale & Oyenuga, 2020).

One of the most important aspects of creating a supportive workforce culture is ensuring that employees feel psychologically safe within the workplace. Psychological safety refers to the belief that one can take interpersonal risks without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career. Employees who feel safe are more likely to speak up, share ideas, and contribute to problem-solving efforts. Eze and Ogundipe (2021) emphasized that psychological safety is particularly important in diverse workplaces, where employees come from varied cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds. A supportive culture that embraces diversity allows staff to express their perspectives freely, leading to more innovative solutions and improved team performance. Furthermore, when employees know that they are part of an inclusive culture that recognizes and respects their contributions, they are more likely to take ownership of their work and remain committed to organizational goals.

Supportive workforce culture also promotes collaboration, which is a key driver of effective staff performance. Collaboration allows employees to leverage each other's strengths, share knowledge, and work together towards common goals. A culture that encourages teamwork fosters a sense of community and mutual respect among employees, which is critical for achieving high levels of productivity. Akinola (2022) argued that in Nigerian organizations, creating spaces where employees can collaborate effectively is essential for improving overall performance.

When staff are encouraged to work together, they can pool their expertise and resources, leading to more efficient problem-solving and better decision-making processes. Additionally, collaborative cultures help reduce feelings of isolation, which can negatively affect job satisfaction and lead to disengagement. A supportive culture, therefore, ensures that employees are not only working towards individual success but are also committed to collective organizational success, which improves overall staff performance.

Moreover, the presence of a supportive workforce culture contributes to increased employee engagement. Engagement refers to the level of commitment and involvement an employee has towards their work and the organization. A culture that supports employees by providing them with the resources, feedback, and opportunities they need to succeed fosters higher engagement levels. Employees who feel engaged are more likely to be productive, stay with the organization for longer periods, and perform tasks to the best of their abilities. According to Nwachukwu and Adigun (2020), Nigerian organizations that invest in creating a supportive culture see a direct correlation between engagement and performance. In their study of Nigerian banks, they found that employees who perceived the organizational culture as supportive were more engaged in their roles and exhibited higher levels of performance compared to those who worked in unsupportive environments. This underscores the idea that organizations must prioritize creating a culture that nurtures employee well-being, growth, and recognition to drive effective performance.

In addition to fostering engagement, a supportive workforce culture contributes to employee retention, which is critical for maintaining long-term organizational success. High turnover rates can be costly and disruptive to the functioning of an organization, as it takes time and resources to recruit and train new employees. A culture that values and supports its employees creates a sense of loyalty and belonging, reducing the likelihood of staff leaving for better opportunities elsewhere. Olowookere and Abimbola (2021) highlighted that organizations with strong, supportive cultures tend to retain their top talent, as employees feel that their contributions are valued, and their career development is supported. Organizations can significantly enhance staff performance while reducing turnover rates. Retaining experienced and skilled employees allows for continuity and stability within the workforce, which ultimately leads to improved organizational outcomes.

Furthermore, a supportive workforce culture positively impacts employee mental health and well-being, which are essential components of effective performance. Stress, burnout, and mental health challenges can significantly affect an employee's ability to perform their job efficiently. Nigerian organizations that prioritize creating a supportive culture that promotes work-life balance, provides access to mental health resources, and addresses the well-being of staff have seen improvements in employee productivity and performance (Okeke & Ofoegbu, 2020). A supportive culture reduces the strain on employees by providing them with the necessary tools and resources to manage their workload and address any challenges they may face. Additionally, creating an environment that prioritizes well-being sends a strong message to employees that their health and happiness are valued, leading to increased morale and motivation to perform well.

Creating a supportive workforce culture contributes to building trust between employees and management, which is vital for effective performance. Trust is the foundation of any successful working relationship, and a culture that fosters transparency, open communication, and mutual respect helps to build that trust. Employees who trust their leaders are more likely to be committed to the organization and take initiative in their roles. According to a study by Onyekwere and Adeyemi (2022), Nigerian organizations that actively work on building trust between management and staff report higher levels of employee satisfaction and performance. Trust also enables employees to feel more secure in their positions, reducing feelings of uncertainty or fear, which

can hinder performance. A supportive culture, therefore, encourages open dialogue, where employees feel confident sharing their concerns or ideas, knowing that their input will be respected and considered.

Creating a supportive workforce culture is integral to achieving effective staff performance. By fostering psychological safety, promoting collaboration, increasing employee engagement, reducing turnover, and prioritizing employee well-being, organizations can significantly enhance the performance of their staff. Additionally, a supportive culture builds trust between employees and management, creating an environment where staff are motivated to contribute to the success of the organization. Nigerian organizations like their counterparts worldwide, must prioritize the development of a supportive workforce culture to ensure that their employees can thrive and perform at their best (Afolabi, 2021). The long-term benefits of investing in such a culture are clear, as it leads to improved organizational outcomes, a more motivated workforce, and overall higher levels of staff performance.

### **Diversity Recruitment Programs and Effective Performance of Staff**

Diversity recruitment programs have gained prominence as essential strategies for fostering inclusive work environments and enhancing organizational performance. These programs involve actively seeking to hire individuals from various backgrounds, including different races, ethnicities, genders, socioeconomic statuses, and abilities. In Nigeria, where the workforce is characterized by cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, implementing diversity recruitment programs can significantly contribute to the effectiveness of staff by promoting innovation, collaboration, and equitable representation across all levels of the organization (Ajayi & Olaniyan, 2021).

Diversity recruitment programs not only enhance organizational performance by increasing the variety of perspectives within the workforce but also lead to improved problem-solving and decision-making capabilities. A diverse workforce brings together individuals with unique ways of thinking, which can challenge conventional norms and encourage creative solutions. Okechukwu and Adebayo (2020) argued that organizations that implement robust diversity recruitment initiatives are better positioned to foster innovation, as employees from different backgrounds approach problems from various angles. This diversity of thought and experience leads to more comprehensive discussions, which, in turn, facilitates more effective decision-making. Furthermore, organizations that successfully recruit and retain diverse employees are more adaptable to changing market conditions, as they can draw on the experiences of their workforce to respond to challenges and seize opportunities. Moreover, where organizations often face rapid changes in economic, social, and technological landscapes, having a diverse team that reflects the complexity of the environment can drive better performance.

Additionally, diversity recruitment programs contribute to staff performance by fostering a sense of inclusivity and belonging within the organization. Employees who feel that they belong to an inclusive workplace are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and committed to achieving organizational goals. This is particularly important in Nigeria, where there are significant variations in language, culture, and religious practices among the population. According to Adebola and Nwankwo (2019), organizations that prioritize diversity in recruitment tend to have higher levels of employee engagement because staff feel their backgrounds and perspectives are respected and valued. This sense of inclusion enhances job satisfaction and reduces turnover rates, allowing organizations to retain skilled employees who can consistently contribute to achieving strategic objectives. Creating a supportive and inclusive environment, diversity recruitment programs

help employees feel more comfortable in their roles, which translates to improved productivity and collaboration.

Furthermore, diversity recruitment programs can have a positive impact on organizational reputation, which in turn contributes to staff performance. Organizations that are known for promoting diversity and inclusivity often attract top talent, as individuals prefer to work in environments where they feel accepted and respected. A positive reputation for diversity can also enhance customer and stakeholder relationships, as clients and partners are more likely to support organizations that reflect their own values of equity and inclusion. In Nigeria, where the business environment is becoming increasingly competitive, organizations that implement diversity recruitment programs stand out as employers of choice. Okeke and Abiodun (2020) found that companies with diverse workforces reported higher levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty, as their diverse teams were better able to understand and meet the needs of their clients. This improved reputation not only attracts more skilled employees but also encourages them to perform at their best, knowing that they are part of an organization that is respected for its commitment to inclusivity.

Moreover, diversity recruitment programs play a key role in addressing systemic inequalities within the workforce, which can further enhance staff performance. Historically marginalized groups, such as women, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities, have often been excluded from certain sectors or positions due to discriminatory practices or biases. Okoroafor and Emeka (2021) emphasized that organizations that actively promote diversity in recruitment contribute to reducing workplace inequality, which fosters a more equitable and just work environment. This not only benefits marginalized groups by providing them with opportunities to excel but also creates a workforce that is more reflective of the broader society. When employees feel that they have been given a fair chance to succeed, they are more likely to take ownership of their work and strive for excellence, ultimately leading to better staff performance.

In addition, diversity recruitment programs can contribute to the development of a learning-oriented organizational culture, which is essential for improving staff performance. A diverse workforce requires organizations to adapt their training and development programs to meet the needs of employees from various backgrounds. This creates opportunities for cross-cultural learning and collaboration, where employees can learn from one another's experiences and perspectives. Diversity recruitment programs encourage organizations to create learning environments that promote intercultural understanding and collaboration, leading to better communication and teamwork (Nwachukwu, 2022). As employees from different backgrounds work together, they develop a deeper understanding of each other's strengths and challenges, which enhances the overall effectiveness of the team. This collaborative learning environment helps employees improve their skills and knowledge, which translates to higher performance and productivity.

Additionally, organizations that prioritize diversity recruitment programs are more likely to create flexible and adaptable work environments that promote staff performance. A diverse workforce often requires organizations to rethink traditional work structures and implement flexible policies that accommodate different needs. For instance, organizations may need to offer flexible working hours or remote work options to accommodate employees with different family or cultural obligations. According to Akintunde and Yusuf (2020), any organizations that have embraced diversity recruitment programs are more likely to implement flexible work arrangements that enhance employee well-being and performance. Accommodating the diverse needs of their staff, these organizations can create a more inclusive and supportive work environment, which leads to higher levels of employee satisfaction and performance. Flexibility in the workplace also

encourages creativity and innovation, as employees are given the freedom to work in ways that best suit their strengths and circumstances.

Diversity recruitment programs play a critical role in enhancing the effective performance of staff by fostering inclusivity, promoting innovation, improving organizational reputation, and addressing systemic inequalities. Diversity is a fundamental aspect of the social fabric, organizations that implement these programs are better positioned to attract and retain top talent, create supportive work environments, and achieve higher levels of productivity. Diversity recruitment programs should, therefore, be seen as a strategic priority for organizations seeking to enhance their staff performance and achieve long-term success.

## **METHODS**

The study employed a correlational research design, which was deemed appropriate because it enables the collection of data directly from a target population at a specific point in time. This design is typically used to determine, describe, and identify the degree of relationship between two or more variables without manipulating them.

The population for this study comprised 3,494 academic staff drawn from three public universities in Rivers State: 1,416 from the University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT), 1,585 from Rivers State University (RSU), and 393 from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education (IAUE), Rumuolumeni. A sample size of 679 academic staff, representing 20% of the total population, was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure fair representation across the three universities.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled 'Workforce Diversity Management Questionnaire (WDMQ) and Effective Staff Performance Questionnaire (EPSQ)'. The questionnaire comprised three sections: Section 'A' captured demographic information Section 'B' contained 25 items addressing the research questions, and Section C elicited responses related to staff performance. Respondents rated their views using a four-point scale: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE), weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

The instrument underwent face and content validation by three experts in the Department of Educational Management, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Their inputs regarding clarity, relevance, usability, and appropriateness were incorporated to strengthen the instrument.

Reliability of the instrument was established using the test-retest method with 20 respondents from the population who were not part of the main sample. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability coefficients; it yielded values of .890 and .780, which indicate satisfactory internal consistency.

The researcher, with the assistance of two trained research assistants, administered the questionnaires directly to the selected respondents. Clear guidance was provided to ensure proper completion, and the instruments were retrieved immediately to enhance the return rate. Of the 679 questionnaires distributed, 677 were returned, representing a 98% retrieval rate.

Data analysis was conducted using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to address the research questions and test the hypotheses at the .05 level of significance, aided by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.

## RESULTS

**Research Question One:** What is the extent of relationship between workforce diversity of training and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Summary of Pearson correlation on the extent of relationship between workforce diversity of training and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State

Variables	Mean	SD.	N	r	Remark
Workforce Diversity Training	2.97	.46	677	.136	Weak
Effective Staff Performance	3.22	.66			

Table 1 above shows that the average score ( $\bar{x}$ ) for the extent of relationship between workforce diversity of training was found to be 2.97, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.46. On the other hand, the average score for effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State was 3.22, with a standard deviation of 0.66. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) between workforce diversity of training and effective staff performance was computed to be .136. The correlation coefficient of 0.136 indicates a weak positive correlation relationship between workforce diversity of training and effective staff performance. This implies that the relationship between workforce diversity of training does not relate to effective staff performance. However, the strength of this relationship is considered weak based on the interpretation of correlation coefficients. In conclusion, the findings from the analysis indicate a weak positive correlation between workforce diversity of training and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers state.

**Research Question Two:** What is the extent of relationship between creating supportive workforce culture and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Summary of Pearson Correlation on the extent of relationship between creating supportive workforce culture and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State

Variables	Mean	SD.	N	r	Remark
Creating Supportive Workforce	3.22	.66	677	.079	Weak
Effective Staff Performance	3.22	.54			

Table 2 above shows the average score ( $\bar{x}$ ) for creating supportive workforce culture was determined to be 3.22, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.66. Concurrently, the average score for effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State was also 3.22, with a standard deviation of 0.54. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) between creating supportive workforce culture and effective staff performance was computed to be .079. The correlation coefficient of .079 signifies a weak positive correlation between creating supportive workforce culture and effective staff performance. This suggests that there is a slight tendency for effective staff performance. The correlation strength is categorized as weak based on established conventions for interpreting correlation coefficients. The findings from this analysis indicate a weak positive correlation between creating supportive workforce culture and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers state.

**Research Question Three:** What is the extent of relationship between workforce diversity establishment of recruitment programs and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Summary of Pearson correlation on the extent of relationship between workforce diversity establishment of recruitment programs and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State

Variables	Mean	SD	N	R	Remark
<b>Workforce Diversity Establishment of Recruitment Programs</b>	2.65	.44	677	.074	Weak
<b>Effective Staff Performance</b>	3.22	.66			

The third research question sought to investigate the relationship between workforce diversity establishment of recruitment programs and the effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State. The analysis utilized Pearson correlation to quantify the extent of the relationship, and the results are summarized in table 3 above shows that the average score ( $\bar{x}$ ) for workforce diversity establishment of recruitment programs was found to be 2.65, with a standard deviation (SD) of .44. In comparison, the average score for effective staff performance was 3.22, with a standard deviation of .66. The Pearson correlation coefficient (r) between workforce diversity establishment of recruitment programs and effective staff performance was computed to be .074. The correlation coefficient of .074 suggests a weak positive correlation between workforce diversity establishment of recruitment programs and effective staff performance. This indicates a slight relationship between workforce diversity establishment of recruitment programs and effective staff performance. The result from this analysis imply that, there is a weak positive correlation between workforce diversity establishment of recruitment programs and effective staff performance in public universities in rivers state.

**Test of Hypotheses:**

**H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between workforce diversity training and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: Correlation between workforce diversity training and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State

		Workforce Diversity Training	Effective Staff Performance
<b>Workforce Diversity Training</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.136
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.051
	N	677	677
<b>Effective Staff Performance</b>	Pearson Correlation	.136	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.051	
	N	677	677

The correlation analysis, as presented in Table 4, provides insights into the association between these two variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient between workforce diversity training and effective staff performance is .136. The corresponding p-value (Sig. or significance level) is

reported as .051 for both variables. In statistical terms, the p-value is used to assess the evidence against the null hypothesis. Given the p-value of .051, which is slightly above the commonly used significance threshold of .05, we would typically fail to reject the null hypothesis. This means that, based on the data at hand, there is insufficient evidence to claim a significant relationship between workforce diversity training and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers state.

**H0<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between creating supportive workforce culture and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 5: Correlation between creating supportive workforce culture and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State

		Creating Supportive Workforce Culture	Effective Staff Performance
<b>Creating Supportive Workforce Culture</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.079
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.263
	N	677	677
<b>Effective Staff Performance</b>	Pearson Correlation	.079	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.263	
	N	677	677

The correlation analysis, presented in Table 5, offers insights into the association between these two variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient between creating supportive workforce culture and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State is reported as .079. The corresponding p-value (Sig. or significance level) is .263 for both variables. In statistical terms, the p-value is utilized to assess the evidence against the null hypothesis. With a p-value of .263, which is notably above the commonly used significance threshold of .05, we would typically fail to reject the null hypothesis. This implies that, based on the data analyzed, there is insufficient evidence to claim a significant relationship between creating supportive workforce culture and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.

**H0<sub>3</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between establishment of diversity recruitment programs and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.

Table 6: Correlation between establishment of diversity recruitment programs and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State

		Establishment of Diversity Recruitment Programs	Effective Staff Performance
<b>Establishment Of Diversity Recruitment Programs</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.074
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.289
	N	677	677
<b>Effective Staff Performance</b>	Pearson Correlation	.074	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.289	
	N	677	677

The correlation analysis, presented in Table 6, provides information on the association between these two variables. The Pearson correlation coefficient between establishment of diversity

recruitment programs and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State is reported as .074. The corresponding p-value (Sig. or significance level) is .289 for both variables. In statistical terms, the p-value is used to evaluate the evidence against the null hypothesis. With a p-value of .289, which is notably above the common significance threshold of .05, the typical interpretation would be to fail to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that, based on the data available, there is insufficient evidence to claim a significant relationship between establishment of diversity recruitment programs and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **Workforce Diversity Training and Effective Staff Performance**

Research question one investigated the relationship between workforce diversity training and effective staff performance. This Findings showed a weak correlation ( $r = 0.136$ ) was found between workforce diversity training and effective staff performance. Findings from the corresponding hypothesis showed that the analysis did not provide strong statistical evidence to reject the null hypotheses; this is suggesting that there was no significant relationship between workforce diversity training and effective staff performance. Some relevant literature that echoed with the present findings is the work of Ejiofor (2018) and Akinyele (2021) who asserted that workforce diversity training has become a fundamental tool for enhancing staff performance in today's increasingly multicultural and interconnected world. Diversity within an organization is defined by a mixture of differences in gender, ethnicity, age, socio-economic background, religion, and more. Organizations in Nigeria, like those worldwide, are realizing the value of workforce diversity training in fostering inclusivity, improving communication, and promoting employee collaboration. This training is essential in equipping employees to work effectively in diverse environments, which ultimately enhances overall organizational performance. In the Nigerian, diversity training has gained increased attention as businesses, educational institutions, and public sector organizations aim to develop a more inclusive workforce that reflects the rich diversity of the nation. The connection between workforce diversity training and effective staff performance lies in how well employees can harness their differences to create a more innovative, adaptable, and dynamic workforce.

Diversity training helps organizations foster an environment that is more inclusive, thereby allowing employees from different backgrounds to feel valued and understood. When employees perceive that their contributions are recognized, regardless of their personal or cultural differences, they tend to be more engaged in their work. This sense of belonging positively affects individual performance, as employees are more motivated and less likely to experience feelings of isolation or alienation. In the Nigerian workplace, this is particularly important, given the country's multi-ethnic composition, where diversity in the workforce mirrors the broader societal structure.

### **Creating Supportive Workforce Culture and Effective Performance of Staff**

Research question two investigated the relationship between creating supportive workforce culture and effective performance of staff. This Findings showed a weak correlation ( $r = .3.22$ ) was found between creating supportive workforce culture and effective performance of staff. Findings from the corresponding hypothesis showed that the analysis did not provide strong

statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis, this suggesting that there was no significant relationship between workforce diversity training and effective staff performance. Some relevant literature that resonates with the present findings is the work of Akinwale and Oyenuga (2020), Eze and Ogundipe (2021) and Akinola (2022) who asserted that a supportive workforce culture is essential for enhancing staff performance, as it fosters an environment where employees feel valued, respected, and motivated to perform at their best. In organizational settings, culture refers to the collective values, beliefs, and behaviors that shape how people interact and work together. A supportive culture encourages inclusivity, collaboration, and respect, allowing employees to contribute to their full potential without facing unnecessary barriers or negative work environments. This type of culture directly impacts employee performance by promoting job satisfaction, enhancing commitment, and fostering innovation, which are critical to the overall success of the organization.

Supportive workforce culture also promotes collaboration, which is a key driver of effective staff performance. Collaboration allows employees to leverage each other's strengths, share knowledge, and work together towards common goals. A culture that encourages teamwork fosters a sense of community and mutual respect among employees, which is critical for achieving high levels of productivity.

### **Diversity Recruitment Programs and Effective Performance of Staff**

Research question three examined the relationship between diversity recruitment programs and effective performance of staff. This Findings showed a weak correlation ( $r = .074$ ) was found between creating supportive workforce culture and effective performance of staff. Findings from the corresponding hypothesis showed that the analysis did not provide strong statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis, this suggesting that there was no significant relationship between diversity recruitment programs and effective performance of staff and effective staff performance. Some relevant literature that resonates with the present findings is the work of Okechukwu and Adebayo (2020), Ajayi and Olaniyan (2021) who asserted that diversity recruitment programs have gained prominence as essential strategies for fostering inclusive work environments and enhancing organizational performance. These programs involve actively seeking to hire individuals from various backgrounds, including different races, ethnicities, genders, socio-economic statuses, and abilities. In Nigeria, where the workforce is characterized by cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, implementing diversity recruitment programs can significantly contribute to the effectiveness of staff by promoting innovation, collaboration, and equitable representation across all levels of the organization.

Diversity recruitment programs do not only enhance organizational performance by increasing the variety of perspectives within the workforce but also lead to improved problem-solving and decision-making capabilities. A diverse workforce brings together individuals with unique ways of thinking, which can challenge conventional norms and encourage creative solutions.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study examined workforce diversity management and effective staff performance in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria, with a focus on understanding how the management of diverse human resources influences institutional productivity and employee outcomes. The findings revealed that effective management of workforce diversity through equitable recruitment,

fair promotion practices, inclusive decision-making, and respect for individual differences positively affects staff motivation, collaboration, and overall performance. Public universities in Rivers State comprise individuals from different ethnic, gender, cultural, and professional backgrounds, and when these differences are properly managed, they serve as a source of innovation, creativity, and institutional growth rather than conflict.

The study further concluded that poor diversity management practices, such as favoritism, discrimination, and communication barriers, can hinder job satisfaction and weaken institutional harmony. Conversely, leaders who embrace inclusivity and equity create an enabling environment where all staff feel valued and committed to achieving organizational goals. Therefore, effective diversity management remains a strategic tool for enhancing staff engagement, job satisfaction, and performance in higher education institutions.

To achieve sustainable improvement, university administrators should institutionalize diversity-friendly policies, conduct regular sensitization programs on inclusivity, and ensure that leadership practices reflect fairness and transparency. Thus, public universities in Rivers State should be able to strengthen institutional effectiveness, promote social cohesion, and contribute to the overall advancement of Nigeria's higher education system.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are made on account of the findings of the study:

- Government should not employ academic staff base on political or religious differences but base merit.
- Management of universities should demonstrate good or democratic leadership style in managing staff.
- There should be training and retraining programme for academic staff to improve their performance.

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