



Developing a Culturally Nuanced Assessment Tool for Workforce Diversity Management in Nigerian Higher Education: A Framework for Enhancing Institutional Performance and Inclusion

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Abstract. Workforce diversity is widely acknowledged as a vital element affecting the performance and sustainability of higher education institutions. This study examines the development of a measurement instrument to assess the success of diversity management in Nigerian universities, highlighting the necessity for a standardised, culturally relevant evaluation tool. Variety in global higher education institutions is associated with enhanced innovation, academic achievement, and organisational efficiency; yet, managing this variety is a difficulty, especially within the Nigerian setting. The study identifies deficiencies in diversity management, emphasising the lack of established instruments to evaluate institutional strategies for workforce diversity. It presents a conceptual framework that incorporates essential characteristics such as leadership commitment, inclusive recruitment techniques, organisational culture, and diversity policies. The study seeks to create an instrument that functions as a practical tool for institutional evaluation and a resource for improving diversity policies and practices by integrating social identity theory, institutional theory, and the resource-based view. The results are anticipated to enhance the literature on diversity in African higher education, offering insights into how Nigerian universities can cultivate inclusive cultures that advance academic achievement and institutional performance.

Keywords: workforce diversity, higher education, diversity management, Nigerian universities, inclusion, assessment tool, institutional performance, cultural competence, leadership, organizational culture

1. Introduction

In recent years, the global higher education landscape has experienced a notable movement towards prioritising diversity as a fundamental element in institutional development and performance. Diversity in this sense includes a broad range of human distinctions, such as colour, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, social

status, physical abilities, and political viewpoints. Globally, universities increasingly recognise inclusive practices as a hallmark of quality and innovation, with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) establishing themselves as fundamental pillars in the governance, administration, and strategic planning of academic institutions (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). Higher education is today regarded not just as a centre for knowledge distribution but as a transformative environment where varied perspectives unite to promote comprehensive growth and sustained advancement (Alordiah et al., 2023).

The discussion on worker diversity in Nigeria's higher education system is gaining prominence. The higher education industry mirrors the nation's profound multiculturalism, ethnic diversity, religious variety, and intricate gender relations. Nigerian universities exemplify the nation's diversity by admitting students and hiring personnel from a multitude of ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. Notwithstanding this abundant variability, the proficient administration of workforce diversity continues to provide a significant issue. Many Nigerian institutions' current administrative and governance systems frequently lack intentional and systematic methods to leverage the advantages of this variety (Osegbue et al., 2025a). This has resulted in nuanced conflicts, the under-representation of minority groups, and discrepancies in policy execution, which subsequently affect performance and the broader institutional environment.

The issue, consequently, resides in the lack of verified tools that enable institutions to evaluate the scope and efficacy of their diversity management efforts. In the absence of such tools, identifying gaps, measuring progress, or benchmarking best practices becomes challenging. The absence of systematic evaluation methods diminishes initiatives aimed at fostering equity, inclusivity, and institutional excellence. Furthermore, inadequate diversity management techniques have been associated with decreased employee morale,

communication failures, limited collaboration, and, in certain instances, institutional discord. These challenges present considerable risks to the achievement of national objectives in higher education, encompassing quality assurance, global competitiveness, and sustainable development.

This study seeks to fill a significant gap by conceptualising and providing a comprehensive framework for creating a measurement instrument designed to assess the efficiency of diversity management in Nigerian higher education institutions. The objective is not solely to promote inclusion in theoretical terms but to furnish a practical, empirically substantiated instrument that universities may utilise to evaluate, enhance, and institutionalise diverse policies throughout academic and administrative frameworks.

This study is significant for its contribution to the expanding literature on diversity and inclusion in African contexts, especially in higher education. It provides a practical solution for policymakers, administrators, and researchers by suggesting an evaluative tool that can direct institutional reforms, improve human resource practices, and foster a more inclusive academic environment. The study specifically examines workforce diversity, including both academic and non-academic personnel, in Nigerian public and private universities, establishing a clear theoretical, conceptual, and methodological framework for enhancing diversity management in a contextually relevant manner.

2. Conceptual Clarifications and Theoretical Foundations

Understanding and managing workforce diversity in Nigerian higher education institutions necessitates a clear comprehension of fundamental concepts and a foundation in theoretical frameworks that elucidate individual and institutional behaviours.

2.1 Key Concepts

Workforce diversity refers to the presence of differences among employees in a workplace, which may manifest in various forms. It is typically classified into three primary categories: demographic, experiential, and cognitive variety (Ogbo et al., 2014).

Demographic variety includes observable characteristics such as age, gender, race, religion, and disability status. Experiential diversity refers to variations in life experiences, educational backgrounds, and professional histories. Cognitive diversity includes differences in viewpoints, cognitive processes, and methodologies for problem-solving. In Nigerian higher education, worker diversity embodies the nation's varied cultural, ethnic, and gender composition, serving as a potent yet frequently underexploited catalyst for institutional growth and innovation (Khan et al., 2019).

Institutional performance in higher education encompasses a broad spectrum of indicators that reflect the health, efficiency, and competitiveness of an institution. This study prioritises elements that are particularly sensitive to workforce diversity, in contrast to traditional measures that typically emphasise student results and research production. These encompass administrative efficiency (the capacity to manage operations with minimal friction), staff morale (employees' psychological well-being and job satisfaction), innovation (the creation and execution of novel ideas), and productivity (output per unit of input, frequently manifested in service delivery, teaching, and research). Effective diversity management can improve these performance metrics by fostering inclusivity, minimising conflict, and utilising varied skills and perspectives (Makuve, 2024).

Diversity management encompasses the strategies, policies, and organisational cultures designed to embrace and leverage workforce diversity. It entails proactive measures to guarantee equitable representation, fair treatment, and inclusive participation of all employees, irrespective of their backgrounds. Effective diversity management goes beyond tokenism; it necessitates an organisational commitment to equity in recruiting, advancement, decision-making, and capacity building. It also entails fostering organisational cultures that prioritise plurality and aggressively oppose discriminatory practices. In Nigerian universities, this may necessitate interventions in policy formulation, leadership orientation, communication standards, and grievance resolution processes (Gidi et al., 2024).

An assessment tool, in this context, is an empirically based instrument intended to evaluate the scope and efficacy of diversity management initiatives. In the social sciences, assessment tools often manifest as scales, indices, questionnaires, or checklists, constructed according to psychometric principles of validity, reliability, and usability. These instruments assist institutions in assessing their status regarding diversity objectives, identifying existing deficiencies, and monitoring progress over time. An effective diversity management evaluation instrument must be contextually pertinent, culturally aware, and flexible to the evolving circumstances of Nigerian higher education. (Cho et al., 2017).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The research is based on many theoretical frameworks that elucidate the relationship between diversity and institutional behaviour.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from their membership in social groups. Within the university workforce, personnel may be categorised by ethnicity, religion, gender, or academic subject.

These group connections influence intergroup dynamics, feelings of inclusion or exclusion, and reactions to institutional measures. When diversity is inadequately handled, these identities may solidify into contentious classifications, resulting in conflict or disengagement. Effective diversity management must acknowledge these identity systems and promote a culture of mutual respect and intergroup cooperation (Gaisch et al., 2019).

Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) explains how organisational practices are influenced by societal norms, values, and expectations. In Nigerian colleges, expectations of fairness, representation, and equity frequently arise from overarching socio-political realities. Institutional theory elucidates the reasons behind the adoption or resistance of specific diversity practices and the influence of official regulations and informal norms on these processes. It also underscores legitimacy—institutions may adopt diversity policies not solely due to internal beliefs but to conform to external demands and expectations from accreditation organisations, governmental agencies, and global standards (Ohunakin et al., 2019).

The Resource-Based View (RBV) of the firm treats internal resources, including human capital, as critical to competitive advantage. In this context, worker diversity is regarded as an intangible asset that, when effectively managed, may foster creativity, resilience, and innovation. Diverse teams provide a wider array of abilities and perspectives, so enhancing problem-solving, refining decision-making, and promoting academic success. The resource-based view emphasises the strategic significance of investing in diversity as a means to achieve long-term institutional success (Carstens, 2016).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality offer deeper insights into the structural and systemic barriers that often underlie diversity challenges. Critical race theory examines the integration of race and power dynamics inside institutional policies and practices, frequently in manners that sustain inequality. Intersectionality elucidates how individuals may encounter compounded kinds of discrimination or privilege due to the convergence of race, gender, class, and other identities (Osegbue et al., 2025b; Inegbedion et al., 2019). These frameworks are particularly valuable in assessing the Nigerian university system, where historical, socio-political, and economic issues influence access to opportunities and the allocation of institutional power.

3. Literature Review

A thorough comprehension of workforce diversity and its impact on institutional performance in higher education requires a critical examination of both global and local literature.

3.1 Workforce Diversity in Higher Education

The global higher education sector has increasingly prioritised worker diversity as part of wider initiatives to enhance fairness, inclusivity, and institutional innovation. The acknowledgement of diversity as an essential element of academic performance has prompted numerous universities, particularly in the Global North, to proactively recruit and retain faculty and staff from diverse ethnicities, genders, abilities, socio-economic statuses, and national origins. Diverse academic personnel provide a variety of viewpoints that enrich courses, facilitate problem-solving, and improve decision-making in intricate institutional settings (Guillaume et al., 2013).

Empirical data highlights the advantages and difficulties of worker diversity. Numerous research studies indicate that variety stimulates creativity, promotes inclusive teaching practices, improves student achievements, and bolsters institutional adaptability in a progressively globalised environment (Sharma, 2016). Nonetheless, overseeing diversity presents challenges. Miscommunication, interpersonal disputes, and the enduring presence of systemic bias can obstruct the potential advantages of a diverse workforce. Institutions without effective diversity management frameworks may unintentionally promote marginalisation, diminished morale, and internal opposition among minority employees (Khan, 2023).

Thus, diversity must be intentionally managed through strategic policies and inclusive practices.

3.2 Diversity in Nigerian Universities

In Nigeria, workforce diversity in universities is fundamentally intertwined with the country's historical, cultural, and political backdrop. The postsecondary education system, shaped by colonial legacies and post-independence national development plans, mirrors the country's ethnic, religious, and regional diversity. Historically, institutions were frequently founded with geopolitical factors in mind, resulting in disparities in staff makeup throughout regions. Nigerian colleges currently employ personnel from diverse ethnicities, religious affiliations, and socio-cultural backgrounds (Roberson, 2018).

Nonetheless, diversity at Nigerian colleges frequently coexists with exclusionary practices and systemic imbalances. Gender imbalance continues to be a pervasive problem, with women markedly under-represented in leadership and high academic positions. Ethnic representation often reflects the politics of federal character, occasionally compromising meritocracy or inclusivity. Religious divisions and generational disparities manifest subtly, influencing staff interactions and institutional culture. These dynamics highlight the necessity for proactive diversity management strategies that recognise Nigeria's intricate

heterogeneity and aim to reconcile differences for institutional advancement (Guillaume et al., 2013).

3.3 Diversity Management Practices

Effective diversity management in higher education necessitates a synthesis of targeted recruitment, retention strategies, and inclusive institutional cultures. Research indicates that colleges emphasising inclusive recruitment strategies—such as focused outreach, blind selection methods, and affirmative action—are more likely to attain representative staffing. Retention initiatives, including mentorship programmes, career progression ladders, and employee resource groups, are essential in ensuring that diverse hires feel appreciated and supported (Aye, 2017).

Leadership is crucial in influencing institutional responses to diversity. Inclusive leadership is defined by transparency, cultural awareness, and a dedication to social equity. These leaders advocate for diversity initiatives, allocate resources for training, and exemplify inclusive behaviours. Cultural competence training has become an essential instrument for cultivating mutual respect, mitigating bias, and enhancing efficient intergroup communication. Although several Nigerian colleges have initiated the adoption of these techniques, a considerable proportion still lack established diversity management frameworks, indicating the necessity for systemic reforms (Alshaabani et al., 2021).

3.4 Institutional Performance Metrics

The success of institutions in higher education is complex and affected by the level of staff involvement and the integration of diversity. Studies indicate that inclusive cultures raise employee engagement, increase job satisfaction, and improve interdepartmental collaboration (Ashikali, 2015). These results exhibit a favourable correlation with organisational productivity, particularly in service delivery, academic performance, and administrative efficiency.

Furthermore, workforce diversity has been associated with enhanced innovation, especially in interdisciplinary research, curriculum development, and student-focused pedagogical methods. A diversified academic faculty presents a wider range of knowledge systems and teaching methodologies, hence enhancing the educational experience. Institutions employing effective diversity strategies typically exhibit superior teaching quality and administrative proficiency, as their policies embody an inclusive culture that fosters equity and fairness (Knippenberg et al., 2020).

3.5 Gaps in Measurement

Notwithstanding the increasing literature on diversity and inclusion, a notable deficiency persists in the availability of validated instruments for evaluating diversity management, especially in African or Nigerian contexts. Current instruments, frequently designed in Euro-American contexts, may insufficiently reflect the

distinct social and institutional dynamics present in Nigerian colleges (Olsen, 2012).

These methods often prioritise quantitative measures, overlooking qualitative subtleties such as felt inclusion, informal power dynamics, or context-specific diversity issues.

Moreover, the difficulty of measuring diversity outcomes remains. Factors such as intersectionality, institutional culture, and unconscious prejudice are intricate and can resist straightforward quantification. Consequently, there is an immediate demand in the literature for a diversity management evaluation tool that is contextualised to Nigeria, culturally attuned, and theoretically robust. This tool would bridge the methodological gap and serve as a significant resource for university administrators, policymakers, and researchers aiming to enhance inclusivity and institutional success.

4. Dimensions and Components of Diversity Management Effectiveness

An effective strategy for diversity management in higher education institutions, particularly in the Nigerian setting, must be multifaceted and based on organisational principles that include inclusivity, equity, and cultural awareness. Diversity management is a strategic necessity that influences institutional effectiveness, equity, and cohesiveness.

4.1 Organizational Commitment to Diversity

The cornerstone of every diversity management strategy is the evident and enduring organisational commitment to diversity. This is frequently evident in the institution's goal, mission, and diversity statement, which should clearly endorse the significance of an inclusive academic environment. These declarations transcend mere symbolism; they function as moral and strategic guides, directing the institution's commitment to justice and inclusion.

Furthermore, the deliberate integration of diversity in institutional planning is an essential element of efficacy. Diversity objectives must be included in the university's strategic documents, operational plans, and performance indicators. When diversity is regarded as a fundamental objective—rather than a mere token—it impacts decisions concerning human resources, funding, curriculum development, and community engagement. Institutions that emphasise diversity at the top echelons typically commit sufficient resources, set explicit objectives, and diligently track progress (Ohunakin et al., 2019).

4.2 Inclusive Leadership and Governance

A crucial aspect of diversity management is inclusive leadership and governance. This entails guaranteeing

sufficient representation of diverse groups in leadership positions, encompassing women, ethnic minorities, individuals with impairments, and those from under-represented academic fields. Diverse leadership strengthens the credibility of institutional decisions and exemplifies the values of equity and inclusion.

The fostering of participative decision-making processes is equally significant. Institutions that establish venues for personnel from diverse backgrounds to engage in governance—via committees, boards, and consultative forums—generally cultivate a sense of belonging and empowerment. Such arrangements facilitate the emergence of diverse perspectives, enhance policy relevance, and reduce the possibility of marginalisation in institutional governance (Cho et al., 2017).

4.3 Recruitment, Retention, and Career Development

A fundamental aspect of diversity management is the formulation and execution of fair recruitment, retention, and career advancement strategies. Equity in recruitment necessitates clear processes, anti-bias measures, and outreach efforts aimed at under-represented demographics. Nigerian institutions must guarantee that their hiring policies embody the complete variety of the society they represent.

In addition to recruitment, schools must provide equitable chances for professional advancement. This encompasses fair access to mentorship, research funding, promotions, and leadership development. When all employees believe that their career paths are unimpeded by gender, ethnicity, age, or religious affiliation, it bolsters institutional trust and commitment (Sharma, 2016).

4.4 Diversity Education and Awareness

A fundamental component of diversity management is diversity education and awareness. This entails providing training programmes, sensitisation workshops, and awareness campaigns focused on mitigating unconscious bias, stereotyping, and workplace discrimination. These programmes foster a more compassionate and knowledgeable staff (Ogbo et al., 2014).

Diversity education should extend beyond staff development sessions. Intentional curriculum integration and initiatives to involve students in critical discussions regarding diversity, equity, and social justice are essential. Incorporating diversity issues into academic curricula enhances learning and fosters inclusive perspectives among future leaders (Guillaume et al., 2013).

4.5 Policy and Structural Mechanisms

The efficacy of diversity management within an institution is closely linked to the strength of its policies

and structural frameworks. Explicit anti-discrimination measures are crucial to protect employees and students from racism, sexism, religious intolerance, and other types of exclusion. These policies must be implementable, broadly disseminated, and supported by disciplinary structures.

Institutions should equally prioritise accessibility and accommodations for individuals with disabilities. This includes the provision of physical access, assistive technologies, adaptable employment arrangements, and inclusive educational settings. Structural measures guarantee that diversity values are implemented in daily practice rather than remaining purely aspirational (Khan, 2023).

4.6 Organizational Climate and Culture

The organisational environment and culture profoundly affect the experience of diversity among university community members. An inclusive environment is defined by favourable employee impressions, reciprocal respect, and trust. When employees perceive themselves as appreciated, acknowledged, and treated with respect, it bolsters their psychological safety and dedication to the organisation.

Furthermore, the quality of interpersonal relationships—encompassing collegiality, support, and transparency—acts as a benchmark for an inclusive institutional culture. Institutions must allocate resources to systems that facilitate communication, constructively resolve conflicts, and foster cross-cultural collaboration (Urbancová et al., 2020).

4.7 Outcome Indicators

The ultimate element of diversity management efficacy resides in quantifiable outcome indicators. These encompass employee satisfaction levels, indicating the extent to which personnel perceive inclusion and support. Surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews can facilitate the assessment of this statistic.

Moreover, proficient diversity management is demonstrated by diminished workplace conflicts, a reduction in grievances, and enhanced grievance resolution procedures. A diversified and effectively managed workforce correlates with enhanced collaboration, creativity, and innovation, especially in multidisciplinary teaching and research. These results enhance the institution's overall quality and international competitiveness (Choi, 2013).

5. Proposed Structure for the Inclusive Management Assessment Tool

To effectively evaluate the efficacy of diversity management policies in Nigerian higher education institutions, it is imperative to create a comprehensive and contextually appropriate assessment instrument.

This section delineates the proposed framework of the Inclusive Management Assessment Tool (IMAT), specifying the conceptual model, item generation methodology, response format, and scoring and interpretation techniques. The tool aims to be both theoretically robust and practically relevant, enabling institutions to routinely assess their inclusion levels and make data-driven decisions to enhance equitable and performance outcomes.

5.1 Conceptual Model

The conceptual approach for the Inclusive Management Assessment Tool is based on the previously described multidimensional framework of diversity management effectiveness. The proposed model visually illustrates the interconnections among fundamental constructs, including organisational commitment to diversity, inclusive leadership and governance, recruitment and retention practices, diversity education, policy and structural mechanisms, organisational climate, and outcome indicators. Each construct operates as a latent variable, contributing to the comprehensive construct of inclusive management effectiveness. The arrows in the graphical depiction will denote the proposed directions of influence, illustrating how inclusive leadership may propel policy development or how organisational climate may mediate the relationship between diversity policies and employee satisfaction. This model offers the theoretical framework for item creation and subsequent empirical evaluation.

5.2 Item Development

The creation of items for the IMAT will utilise both deductive and inductive methodologies to guarantee content validity and contextual pertinence. The deductive method entails deriving insights from published literature, theoretical frameworks (e.g., social identity theory, institutional theory, resource-based view), and validated measurement instruments within the domain of organisational diversity and inclusion. This will establish a basis of well-validated principles and facilitate benchmarking against international norms.

The inductive approach would entail collecting insights through expert interviews, focus group discussions, and analyses of institutional policy documents, staff handbooks, and diversity mission statements from Nigerian universities. This method will guarantee that the tool accurately represents the lived experiences, cultural subtleties, and operational realities of the Nigerian higher education system. The elements will be meticulously articulated to eliminate ambiguity, enhance clarity, and guarantee relevance across various institutional contexts.

5.3 Response Format

The Inclusive Management Assessment Tool will adopt a Likert-type scale, allowing respondents to indicate

their level of agreement or frequency of experience. A 5-point or 7-point Likert scale will be used, depending on the desired sensitivity and statistical robustness. A 5-point scale (e.g., Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) offers simplicity and ease of response, while a 7-point scale allows for greater nuance in capturing respondent attitudes Alordiah & Ossai, 2023).

Response anchors will vary based on the nature of the items. For attitudinal statements, options such as “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree” will be employed, while behavioural frequency items may use anchors like “Never” to “Always”. Consistency in scaling will be maintained within sections to avoid confusion and ensure reliability.

5.4 Scoring and Interpretation

The IMAT scoring will entail aggregating or averaging responses within each subscale aligned with the specified dimensions. Negatively phrased items will be reverse-coded to ensure interpretative consistency. Composite scores can subsequently be computed to represent overall efficacy in diversity management.

Interpretation will be directed by the establishment of thresholds or cut-off points. Scores may be classified into tiers such as “Low Effectiveness”, “Moderate Effectiveness”, and “High Effectiveness”, according to established parameters. These thresholds will undergo empirical validation during pilot testing to confirm they represent significant distinctions in institutional performance. Ultimately, the tool will serve not just as a diagnostic instrument but also as a benchmarking and developmental guide for institutions striving to foster inclusive academic environments.

6. Psychometric Considerations for Tool Development

The creation of a reliable and credible Inclusive Management Assessment Tool (IMAT) for assessing workforce diversity management in Nigerian higher education institutions necessitates meticulous adherence to psychometric principles. To guarantee that the instrument is scientifically robust and practically useful, essential psychometric properties—specifically validity, reliability, and usability—must be thoroughly addressed. These attributes will not only dictate the quality and interpretability of the tool's results but will also ascertain its acceptability for institutional evaluations, policy formulations, and research applications.

6.1 Validity

Validity is a fundamental issue in scale creation, as it evaluates whether the instrument accurately measures what it claims to measure. For IMAT, many sorts of validity must be demonstrated to augment the instrument's credibility.

Content validity will be evaluated using comprehensive expert review procedures. Subject matter experts in higher education administration, diversity and inclusion research, psychometrics, and human resource development will be solicited to assess the degree to which the items correspond to the conceptual definitions of diversity management constructs. Items will be evaluated for relevance, clarity, and comprehensiveness, ensuring that no significant aspect is under-represented or excluded. This will facilitate the alignment of the tool's content with the theoretical model outlined in preceding sections.

Construct validity will be established through the use of factor analytic techniques, specifically Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). These methodologies will facilitate the identification and validation of latent structures underlying the observable variables, thereby confirming if the items meaningfully cluster around the proposed theoretical dimensions (e.g., inclusive leadership, organisational climate, recruitment procedures). Construct validity will ensure that the instrument accurately reflects the complex nature of diversity management in a statistically cohesive way (Alordiah, 2025).

Criterion-related validity will be examined by assessing the correlation between scores on the IMAT and pertinent external metrics of institutional efficacy. These may include employee satisfaction metrics, staff retention statistics, academic productivity assessments, and conflict resolution records. A statistically significant positive correlation between IMAT scores and these performance metrics will validate the tool's predictive validity and practical relevance.

6.2 Reliability

Reliability signifies the instrument's consistency and dependability throughout time and across various conditions. The internal consistency of IMAT will be evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. This will determine the extent of interconnection among the items inside each subscale, reflecting their collective ability to evaluate a distinct construct. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 or above will be considered acceptable for newly developed subscales.

Additionally, test-retest reliability will be utilised to evaluate the temporal stability of the instrument. The instrument will be administered to the same respondents at two separate periods, and the correlation between the two score sets will be calculated to assess consistency. A robust correlation will indicate that the tool produces consistent results over time, hence enhancing its dependability as a credible assessment instrument (Alordiah, 2025).

6.3 Usability and Cultural Appropriateness

Beyond statistical robustness, the practical application of the tool within Nigerian universities requires keen attention to usability and cultural sensitivity. The language used in the IMAT must be clear, concise, and free from technical jargon to ensure accessibility to respondents across varying educational and cultural backgrounds. Special care will be taken to ensure that the terminology is relevant and understandable within the Nigerian higher education context (Alordiah, 2020). Additionally, the items must resonate with the lived experiences of academic and non-academic staff across public and private institutions. This requires that the tool be contextually grounded, reflecting the ethnic, religious, generational, and gender complexities that characterise Nigerian universities. By incorporating these considerations, the IMAT will be both scientifically valid and practically meaningful, laying the foundation for improved diversity management and institutional development.

7. Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

The creation of an Inclusive Management Assessment Tool (IMAT) for higher education institutions in Nigeria has substantial implications for policy development, institutional practices, and future research endeavours. This tool provides a structured and empirically based method for assessing the efficacy of diversity management, addressing measurement deficiencies and establishing a framework for evidence-based decision-making. The subsequent subsections delineate the impact of this tool's implementation on policy formulation, institutional management methodologies, and academic research.

7.1 Policy Implications

The IMAT offers an essential framework for the institutionalisation of diversity audits in universities and other higher education institutions. Diversity audits are as crucial as financial audits for maintaining fiscal responsibility, ensuring that institutions uphold commitments to equity, inclusion, and representational fairness. The implementation of these audits, supported by the IMAT, will permit regular assessments of institutional diversity policies, thereby allowing university administrators and governing bodies to discern advancements, stasis, or setbacks in inclusive practices.

Furthermore, the accessibility of measurable and disaggregated data on diversity measures will enable policymakers to pursue data-informed policy development. Decision-makers will utilise validated, context-specific metrics that accurately represent staff makeup, inclusion levels, and organisational atmosphere, rather than relying on anecdotal or assumptive frameworks. This evidence-based

methodology would enable the formulation of policies specifically adapted to the distinct cultural and structural intricacies of Nigerian institutions, hence improving the responsiveness and pertinence of diversity-related policies.

7.2 Practice Implications

The IMAT has significant implications for institutional leadership and management in practical implementation. A critical aspect is the necessity for leadership training and development focused on inclusive government. University administrators, departmental leaders, and senior management personnel must possess the skills necessary to lead diverse teams, arbitrate cross-cultural conflicts, and cultivate environments of mutual respect. Training programmes utilising the characteristics assessed by the IMAT can be developed to enhance cultural intelligence, emotional awareness, and inclusive decision-making capabilities among leaders.

Moreover, the execution of the IMAT promotes ongoing surveillance and feedback systems within organisations. The consistent use of the instrument can function as an internal benchmarking mechanism, enabling institutions to monitor variations in diversity performance over time. By integrating these findings into their strategic planning and human resource management processes, institutions can promptly modify recruitment strategies, staff development initiatives, and organisational policies that influence diversity and inclusion. This pragmatic incorporation of data into daily operations guarantees that diversity management is regarded as a continuous institutional priority rather than a singular undertaking.

7.3 Research Implications

The academic ramifications of the IMAT are similarly extensive. The tool encourages additional validation research to assess its psychometric strength across several institutional categories, including public versus private universities and federal versus state-owned institutions. This research would augment the comprehension of the tool's performance across many contexts and demographics, hence improving its generalisability.

Furthermore, the IMAT facilitates cross-cultural comparisons between Nigerian institutions and colleges in other nations that share analogous postcolonial, multi-ethnic contexts. Comparative research would enhance global discussions on educational diversity and underscore indigenous methods and difficulties frequently neglected in the literature.

Finally, the IMAT establishes a basis for longitudinal impact studies that can examine the enduring benefits of inclusive management practices on institutional performance indicators, including staff morale, student happiness, academic output, and conflict resolution.

Future research areas will enhance the knowledge foundation on diversity management and reinforce the importance of social science in fostering equitable and transformative educational settings.

8. Challenges and Considerations in the Nigerian Context

When creating and implementing a context-sensitive Inclusive Management Assessment Tool (IMAT) for Nigerian higher education institutions, it is crucial to address the unique socio-political and institutional issues inherent in the Nigerian environment. These issues, while not insurmountable, necessitate meticulous study to guarantee the validity, acceptance, and sustainability of the evaluation instrument and its related activities. The primary problems encompass political and ethnic sensitivities, opposition to change, and limitations regarding data availability and participation in evaluating processes.

8.1 Political and Ethnic Sensitivities

A major challenge in managing diversity inside Nigerian institutions stems from deep-rooted political and ethnic factors. The federal character concept, a constitutional requirement aimed at guaranteeing fair representation of Nigeria's various ethnic groups in public institutions, frequently interacts with institutional recruitment processes and personnel allocation. The principle, initially designed to foster national unity and reduce marginalisation, occasionally challenges the implementation of purely meritocratic regimes. The quota system, which mandates minimum representation for various geopolitical zones in educational access and recruitment, serves as both an instrument for inclusion and a possible constraint on institutional excellence if not adequately harmonised with meritocratic principles (Yadav, 2020).

Consequently, any diversity evaluation framework must traverse this intricate landscape. A crucial factor is acknowledging and recording representational diversity while avoiding the reinforcement of stereotypes or the promotion of tokenism. Institutions may be cautious regarding the interpretation of diversity statistics, especially if such data affects public accountability or institutional rankings. To ensure the IMAT is effective and recognised, it must be crafted with consideration for Nigeria's federal framework and historical grievances, providing a balanced perspective that fosters both representative equity and institutional efficacy.

8.2 Resistance to Change

A notable impediment is institutional resistance to change. Nigerian institutions, akin to several bureaucratic entities, frequently demonstrate inertia, wherein outdated policies endure despite evolving circumstances. This inertia is generally exacerbated by passive leadership that hesitates to confront the status

quo or enact reforms requiring transparency and accountability. Diversity programs may be viewed as externally mandated or as challenges to existing power dynamics, particularly if they aim to undermine entrenched systems of favouritism, nepotism, or informal networks (Ashikali, 2015).

Therefore, establishing institutional preparedness for change is essential. It is essential to foster leadership endorsement, engage in participatory planning, and develop internal advocates for diversity to ensure that the IMAT is not merely a symbolic endeavour. Training and capacity-building initiatives must highlight the enduring institutional benefits of successful diversity management, assisting staff and administrators in seeing that inclusion is not only a moral obligation but a strategic asset.

8.3 Data Availability and Willingness

The effective execution of the IMAT depends on the availability of precise and comprehensive data. Nonetheless, the Nigerian setting poses issues about data transparency, inadequate documentation methods, and a lack of staff willingness to engage in surveys or evaluation research. Fear of retaliation, doubt over data utilisation, and mistrust in institutional confidentiality measures may inhibit candid and truthful responses. Moreover, the absence of centralised or digitised personnel records in numerous colleges can impede foundational evaluations of diversity (Alordiah, 2023; Knippenberg et al., 2020).

To surmount these obstacles, it is essential to cultivate a culture of transparency and ethical research practices. Institutions must implement explicit rules for data protection, anonymised reporting, and feedback distribution. When employees perceive that their opinions are valued and that data is utilised effectively, engagement and trust are likely to enhance. Furthermore, coordination with academic unions and staff associations can enhance the tool's legitimacy and increase engagement.

9. Conclusion

The goal of diversity and inclusion in Nigerian higher education transcends equity and social justice; it is a strategic necessity for national development, institutional relevance, and global competitiveness. As the world progresses towards knowledge-based economies, a university's efficiency increasingly depends on its capacity to leverage the diverse talents, views, and experiences of its academic workforce. Nigerian universities must adopt inclusive methods that reflect the nation's rich pluralism and advance quality in teaching, research, and innovation.

This discussion has continuously highlighted that diversity in the academic workforce—encompassing gender, race, religion, generational identification, ability

status, and professional background—is fundamentally connected to institutional performance. Empirical literature from both global and local contexts substantiates the assertion that efficient management of diversity improves staff morale, boosts organisational innovation, enhances problem-solving strategies, and promotes administrative efficiency. Nonetheless, these advantages do not manifest spontaneously. Their existence stems from intentional, strategic initiatives in diversity management, founded on inclusive leadership, transparent policies, culturally competent training, and structural systems that foster equity and belonging.

Regrettably, the Nigerian higher education system continues to contend with numerous obstacles to efficient diversity management. This encompasses the politicisation of work practices via the federal character principle, entrenched ethnoreligious divisions, gender inequities, generational conflict, and institutional inertia that frequently obstructs revolutionary change. Furthermore, a significant deficiency persists in the assessment and evaluation of diversity-related practices and outcomes, hindering institutions from identifying their inadequacies, tracking advancements, or comparing themselves to best practices.

In this context, a decisive appeal is issued: Nigerian universities must create and implement a standardised, theoretically informed, and culturally sensitive Diversity Management Assessment Tool. The instrument must be methodologically rigorous, contextually pertinent, and psychometrically valid. It must incorporate global best practices while being customised to the Nigerian context, reflecting the intricacies of institutional processes and the socio-political realities that influence diversity outcomes. The proposed instrument must evaluate organisational commitment, inclusive leadership, recruitment and retention practices, diversity education, anti-discrimination policies, and institutional climate, all while adhering to Nigeria's historical, cultural, and constitutional nuances.

This instrument must be integrated into institutional quality assurance systems. It should not be regarded as a singular audit tool but as a dynamic, flexible platform for ongoing enhancement. It provides policymakers with an empirical foundation for developing more effective diversity-related initiatives. For administrators, it functions as a reflection to assess the inclusivity of their governance frameworks. It presents researchers with novel opportunities for longitudinal studies, inter-institutional comparisons, and rigorous evaluations of inclusion outcomes.

The objective is to establish a Nigerian university system that is equal, inclusive, high-performing, and globally competitive. A system in which brilliance flourishes irrespective of ethnicity, gender, age, or religious affiliation. A system that recognises variety and utilises it to achieve success. This ambition is

achievable, provided that institutions are prepared to transcend mere rhetoric and implement evidence-based, culturally informed techniques for diversity management. The moment for action is at hand.

10. Recommendations

- Institutions should collaborate with experts and diversity committees to develop and implement a standardised assessment tool.
- University administrators should mandate regular diversity audits through the university's quality assurance and diversity offices.
- University leadership should direct policy development teams to integrate diversity goals into institutional strategies and policies.
- Institutions should provide leadership training focused on inclusive leadership practices through HR departments and leadership development programmes.
- Universities should establish inclusive recruitment and retention strategies overseen by HR departments and diversity committees.
- Institutions should offer ongoing cultural competence training programmes for staff, facilitated by HR and diversity offices.
- University leadership should actively promote a culture of inclusion through policy initiatives, communication, and community engagement.
- University governance bodies should establish clear procedures for transparent decision-making regarding diversity initiatives.
- Academic departments should integrate diversity education into curricula, with the support of faculty and curriculum development teams.
- Research departments and academic staff should lead longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of diversity management practices in Nigerian higher education.
- Institutions should work with legal departments to strengthen anti-discrimination policies and ensure accessibility for all staff and students.
- University leaders should allocate sufficient resources to enhance diversity management infrastructure and capacity-building efforts.

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