The Relationship between Nationality Diversity and Academic Staff Productivity in Private Chartered Universities in Central Uganda

Toriola Funke**,** funkeseyinde@gmail.com
Sofia Sol Gaite, ssctgaite@yahoo.com
Specioza Asiimwe, asiimwemagunda@gmail.com
Vincent Kayindu, Vincent.kayindu@kiu.ac.

College of Education, Open and Distance learning, Kampala International University, Uganda

Abstract

This report presents part of the findings of the study carried out in Central Uganda among the chartered private universities. It investigated, among other things, the influence of nationality diversity on academic staff productivity. The study followed a mixed research paradigm, with a quantitative and qualitative approaches. The target population in this study was 1109 academic staff from the six (6) chartered private universities in Central, Uganda. A sample of 385 academic staff was selected to fill the questionnaires. In addition, 12 dons were subjected to oral interviews. The response rate of the questionnaires was 93%. The data were analysed using One-way ANOVA. The finding was that there is no significant relationship between nationality diversity and academic staff productivity in chartered private universities in Uganda. The study concluded that some beliefs in favour of a significant relationship between nationality diversity and productivity have no statistical proof in this study and in most of the previous studies the researcher reviewed. So, the productivity of lecturers (in teaching, research and community service) depends more on their personal abilities and acquired experiences. Thus, there is no superiority among the races, when it comes to productivity. Some beliefs in favour of a significant relationship between nationality diversity and productivity have no statistical proof in this study and in most of the previous studies the researcher reviewed. So, the productivity of lecturers (in teaching, research and community service) depends more on their personal abilities and acquired experiences. Thus, there is no superiority among the races, when it comes to productivity. It was recommended that Managers who want staff who are more productive, should consider other factors like age and other motivational and staff capacity development programs. It implies that there is no locket science in getting more productive academic staff, no need of crossing boarders looking for more productive staff, what can be done is to develop their capacities and motivate them more. These arrangements, if well done, can boost productivity of all academic staff irrespective of their nationalities.

Key words*: Nationality diversity; Academic staff productivity; Chartered private universities.*

Introduction

Productivity refers to an assessment of the efficiency of a worker or group of workers. In actual terms, productivity is a component which directly affects the company's profits (Sels *et al.,* 2006). Productivity may be evaluated in terms of the output of an employee in a specific period of time. Typically, the productivity of a given worker will be assessed relative to an average out for employees doing similar work. It can also be assessed according to the number of units of a product or service that an employee handles in a defined time frame (Piana, 2001).

As the success of an organization like academic institutions rely mainly on the productivity of its employees/academic staff, therefore, academic staff productivity has become an important objective for academic institution (Sharma & Sharma, 2014). In this study, academic staff productivity is conceptualized in terms the three functions of higher education: teaching productivity, research productivity and community service or involvement productivity. Productivity in education is taken as the search patterns of school organization that produce the best

student's outcome (Levin, 1993). The idea of production for education depends on seeing education being a production process which means that inputs are transformed into outputs in a standard way.

Literature Review

Nationality can be seen as an assembly of individuals who share common cultural traditions and customary practices and also provide their members with a self-conscious identity as a nation (Sayers, 2012). Implies diversity in language, religions, races and cultures. There has been an increase in multicultural workforce in the organization for utilizing greater participation and energy to improve and increase both academic staff satisfaction and work productivity. National identity is determined by individual's citizenship or their country of origin regardless of where they currently reside, Nationality is a membership that can include people of different races, religions and cultures. Nationality is among the strongest forms of group identity, and can embody a sense of pride, patriotism and sentiment for one's national history and values.

Nationality is self-identification of socio-cultural identity as opposed to something that can be imposed on someone by just gazing at the individual and making judgement about who they are based in what they look like (Sayers, 2012). From the aspect of the social identity theory, since nationality is a surface level characteristic of diversity, it can be quickly used to divide a group of people into nationality backgrounds. People tend to frequently identify with their nationality back ground as it gives them a sense of belonging and connects them to a group of closely related people. It is believed that people tend to favour those who belong to their nationality background more than others and they tend to cooperate and support with each other in the workplace which make them productive.

Even though organizations like universities differ in many ways, they are united by one similarity; diverse workforce. So, the way in which these organizations view and handle their diverse workforce, determines the impact such diversity can have on productivity of the staff and the entire organisation. Some scholars have argued that the positive side of a more diverse workforce far outweighs the disadvantages. For example, in the Harvard Business Review (2018), some of the benefits are provided, including increased profitability, increased organizational effectiveness, productivity, learning, creativity, flexibility, organizational and individual growth, increased access to new segments and ability of institutions to adjust rapidly and successfully, among others. According to White (2019), the biggest negative effect of diversity is increased conflicts, which arise largely due to ignorance, prejudice feelings or derogatory comments that cause lack of acceptance. These lead to negative dynamics such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping, cultural or gender or nationality clashes with the feeling of being superior to others. If management ignores such conflicts the productivity of academic institutions may suffer (Otike & Mwalekwa, 2005; (Dahlin, Weingart & Hinds, 2018; Asiimwe & Steyn, 2013, Asiimwe & Steyn 2014; Asiimwe & Zuena, 2023).

Some researchers have gone to the extent of categorising the levels of nationality mix, indicating that, a moderate level of nationality diversity has no effect on team productivity (Gupta, 2013; Sayers, 2012; Pitts, 2010; Opstal, 2009). According to Gupta (2013), where majority of team members are nationality diverse, it is referred to as high level of nationality diversity, adding that such a high level has a positive impact on productivity. Following the rise in levels of diversity in recent times, there is a clear need for more studies on understanding ethnic diversity and how it affects productivity of academic staff and the institution as a whole (Watzon, Johnson & Zgourides, 2002).

Other scholars, Ahmad and Fazal, 2019; Zhuwao, (2017) have argued that nationality diversity is like a sword with two edges, meaning that, it has both advantages and disadvantages. On the positive side, Ahmad and Fazal (2019); Elsaid (2012); Opstal (2009) argued that the different nationalities can bring into the institutions "innovative and creative" ways of doing work, thereby improving performance among staff. Other researchers have also argued that, the growth of multi-cultural private universities today comes as a result of the increase of different workforce views. Watzon, Johnson and Zgourides (2002) indicated that, the increase in productivity of teams comes as a result of the diverse nationality composition of academic staff and this is seen as the benefit of embracing various nationality perceptions for finding solutions to problems and enhancing the outcome of team members after they have learned ways in which they can make use of their dissimilarities for their advantage.

Based on the study of Timmermans, Ostergaard and Kristinsson (2018), nationality can stand as a placement or substitute for cultural background and nationality dissimilarity can enhance creativity and innovativeness among staff, who may be encouraged to change the way they look at things, especially as it expands the point of view of academic staff in the organization. This implies that low levels of nationality dissimilarity could have a positive correlation with creativity and innovation while a higher degree of nationality diversity could have a negative effect

because it has the tendency to create in-groups due to social categorization, create conflict among academic staff and cause poor cohesion among work team (Dahlin, Weingart & Hinds, 2018; Asiimwe & Steyn, 2013, Asiimwe & Steyn 2014; Asiimwe & Zuena, 2023)..

Many scholars have however looked at the negative side of nationality differences. For example, Kiglai (2006), as cited in Ahmad and Fazal (2019), noted that nationality differences can bring clashes due to differences in customs and traditions, which affect quality, quantity, sales and profits of the organization. This view is supported by the study of Dahlin, Weingart and Hinds (2005), who produced findings pointing to the fact that "conflicts, clashes and collision in organizations sampled, emerged due to "ethnic diversity and social categorization". Van Esbroek (2008) advocated for proper management of diverse workforce so as to protect its benefits to the institution and eliminate its weakness and dangers.

According to Harrison and Klein (2018), academic institutions can experience negative consequences of having demographic diversities like race/ ethnicity, nationality, gender, and age. It is important to note that individuals from the minority groups are more likely to be less satisfied with their jobs, less committed to the organization, have problems with their identities and feel or experience discrimination (Milliken & Martins, 2018). Nevertheless, as the minority group grows, most of the problems encountered tend to fade away.

There are also some studies that have revealed that nationality is not a significant predictor of staff productivity, while others have showed that it is a predictor in one way or the other. Some studies have showed that nationality diversity has a positive effect, while others have indicated that it has a negative effect. For example, White (2019) has showed that nationality diversity has a negative significant effect on productivity, through promoting conflict among staff. White (2019) explained that conflict arise when members of the foreign community fail to be accepted in a foreign land. This makes them uncomfortable, which may affect the productivity of foreign academic staff, especially when they are the minority.

This is in line with the findings of Harrison and Klein (2016) who revealed that institutional productivity is negatively and significantly affected by nationality diversity. In line with this finding, Milliken and Martins (2018) explained how nationality diversity adversely affects staff and institutional productivity. They explain that the job satisfaction and commitment levels of the minority groups of academic staff may be significantly lowered, due to increased conflicts, failure to be accepted and feelings of discrimination. Similar views were also produced by Timmermans, Ostergaard and Kristinsson (2018) who revealed that, if the numbers of minority groups grow, moany of their acceptance and discrimination problems fade away. This argument suggests that institutions with high levels of ethnic diversity, enjoy high levels of growth arising from high levels of creativity and innovativeness. What is referred to as high levels of nationality diversity is however not well defined in literature, showing a need for more research on this point of view.

Problem Statement

With the advent of private universities in Uganda, many religious bodies, business partners, ethnic groups and individuals have founded universities. Whereas some of them follow all the quality-related guidelines as stipulated by the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), others do not. Some private universities have hired lecturers from Nigeria, Asia and other African countries to beef up the productivity in their universities. The NCHE has on many occasions questioned the productivity of these private universities and has, on other occasions questioned their capacity to produce many PhDs (NCHE, 2018). The current study was carried out to find out whether or not academic staff productivity in these universities is a function of their nationality.

Findings of the Study

The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between nationality diversity and academic staff productivity in private chartered universities in Central Uganda was tested using the ANOVA. The researcher compared the three numerical indices of productivity (teaching, research and community service) and the overall productivity index with respect to respondents' nationality and the results were that nationality does not significantly affect academic staff productivity as shown in table 1.

Table 1: ANOVA Results for Variations in Staff Productivity by Nationality

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F-value	p-value	
Teaching	Ugandan	273	3.38	0.49	.119	.949	Positive

Productivity	Kenyan	35	3.38	0.40			Insignificant
	Nigerian	20	3.43	0.37			
	Rwandese & others	14	3.43	0.37			
	Total	342	3.39	0.47			
Research Productivity	Ugandan	269	2.86	0.67	.688	.560	Positive Insignificant
	Kenyan	35	2.80	0.45			
	Nigerian	20	2.69	0.45			
	Rwandese & others	14	2.73	0.32			
	Total	338	2.84	0.62			
Community Service Productivity	Ugandan	273	2.90	0.64	.152	.928	Positive Insignificant
	Kenyan	35	2.92	0.42			
	Nigerian	20	2.98	0.46			
	Rwandese & others	14	2.96	0.58			
	Total	342	2.91	0.61			Positive Insignificant
Overall productivity	Ugandan	273	3.05	0.49	.016	.997	
	Kenyan	35	3.04	0.21			
	Nigerian	20	3.04	0.23			
	Rwandese & others	14	3.04	0.25			
	Total	342	3.05	0.45			

As per the findings in Table 1, there are no significant variations in productivity of academic staff based on their nationality. So, teaching, research and community service is independent of their nationality. Based on these results, the null hypothesis is accepted for all the three individually and taken together. A conclusion is taken that productivity of academic staff in private universities in Central Uganda, is not affected by their countries of origin.

Discussion

The findings indicated that nationality diversity has no significant effect on academic staff overall productivity ($F = 0.016$; $p = 0.997$). All the three productivity measures taken individually were not affected by differences in nationality of academic staff. The results suggest that, nationality is not a significant predictor of academic staff productivity. So, the productivity of lecturers (in teaching, research and community service) does not depend on their nationalities or the country where they came from. Rather their personal abilities, some of which are natural and others are acquired abilities (Sayers, 2012).

To some degree the findings of this study agree with common sense and logical expectations that the productivity of an academic staff is independent of their national identities. However, there are some factors caused by differences in origin, which according to White (2019) can cause conflicts among staff and hence affect in one way or another their productivity. For example, White (2019) argues that one of such factors is lack of acceptance in a foreign community, may affect the productivity of an academic staff who is on foreign land. Where there is lack of acceptance, there is poor relationship and ineffective teams. These according to Otike and Mwalekwa (2005) result into negative dynamics like ethnocentrism, stereotyping, cultural clashes and feelings of superiority/inferiority among some staff against others. These views try to suggest that nationality diversity may negatively affect those academic staff in a foreign university. However, the differences which were observed from this study do not provide enough evidences to such arguments. However, according to Otike and Mwalekwa (2005), management may not ignore such conflicts because they may negatively affect institutional productivity.

The findings of this study on one side disagree with those of Gupta (2013), who indicated that the effect of nationality diversity on productivity depends on the level or extent of diversity. Gupta implied that low and moderate levels nationality diversity have no effect on staff productivity, but where majority of the staff members are nationality diverse, then nationality diversity will impact productivity positively. If this argument is to be true, then

the findings of this study are justified because close to 76% of the academic staff in the sampled universities were found to be locals (nationals), a finding which agrees with Gupta's point of view. However further empirical verifications may still be needed to arrive a more reliable conclusion.

The findings of this study do not also agree with those of Watzon, Johnson and Zgourides (2002) who talked of the increasing levels of nationality diversity in today's academic institutions. This study found no strong evidence of such increasing levels, as the number of foreign academic staff was found to be generally low in the sampled chartered private universities. The findings of Watzon *et al*(2002) also showed that high levels of nationality diversity led to increased productivity of teams and this comes as a result of embracing various nationality perceptions in finding solutions to problems. This diversity enhances the ability of team members and their output increases, through learning the different ways of dealing with task completion issues. This is however on condition that the staff appreciate and they learn how to make use of their dissimilarities for their advantage other than conflicting about them.

Another conflicting finding is presented by Harrison and Klein (2016) who revealed that institutional productivity may be significantly negatively affected by diversities of nationality nature. In agreement with these researchers, Milliken and Martins (2018) explained that job satisfaction and commitment levels of academic staff in the minority groups may be significantly lowered, due to increased problems of identity and feelings discrimination. This argument is also alluded to by Timmermans, Ostergaard and Kristinsson (2018) who showed that, when the numbers of these minority groups grow, most of the problems they experience fade away. Timmermans et al. (2018)'s findings suggested nationality diversity is a positive correlate of academic staff creativity and innovativeness, all of which have a positive significant effect on staff productivity, through expanding their point of view. This argument suggests that institutions with high levels of nationality diversity, enjoy high levels of growth arising from high levels of creativity and innovativeness. The evidences from this study did not reach this kind of analysis, pointing to the need for further reach.

Conclusion and recommendation

Generally, nationality diversity has no bearing with academic staff productivity, whether taken individually or as a whole. So, one's productivity does not depend on their tribe or nationality nor race. Some beliefs in favour of a significant relationship between nationality diversity and productivity have no statistical proof in this study and in most of the previous studies the researcher reviewed. So, the productivity of lecturers (in teaching, research and community service) depends more on their personal abilities and acquired experiences. Thus, there is no superiority among the races, when it comes to productivity. All nationalities have the same potential perform better. A white staff is not superior to a black and a black staff is not superior to a white. Therefore, managers need to consider the fact that local employees, if well motivated can be as productive as foreign staff. Universities may be more productive if they employ local staff than when they employ foreign staff, since their productivity can be equally the same. Managers who want staff who are more productive, should consider other factors like age and other motivational and staff capacity development programs. It implies that there is no locket science in getting more productive academic staff, no need of crossing boarders looking for more productive staff, what can be done is to develop their capacities and motivate them more. These arrangements, if well done, can boost productivity of all academic staff irrespective of their nationalities.

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