Workforce Diversity and Academic Staff Productivity in Private Chartered Universities in Central Uganda

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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 workforce 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 influence of workforce diversity and academic staff productivity in chartered private universities in Uganda. It was concluded that it is important to analyse elements of diversity individually than considering them as a whole. Results of aggregated diversity do not make much sense, because diversity elements are completely different and the way the impact productivity differ. The study recommends that The middle aged are more productive, more energetic and readier to move things, they should be paired up with those in late years of above 50 and those below 30 years to share their experiences for the young ones who have the energy to do.

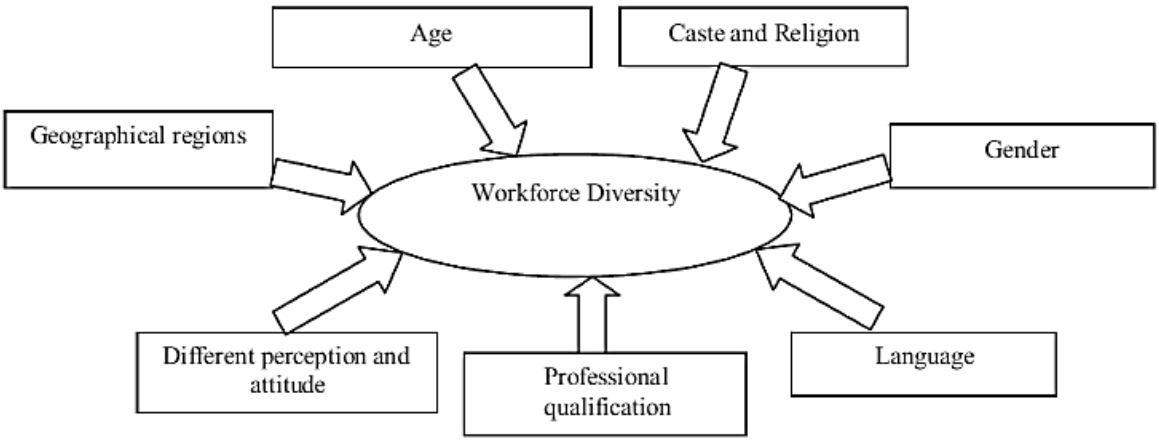
Key words: *workforce diversity; Academic staff productivity; Chartered private universities.*

Introduction

According to the Universities and Other Tertiary Institutions [UOTIA] Act of 2001 (as amended in 2006), by having a charter, it means that such a university is already fully licensed and is now comparable to a public university (Uganda Government, 2001; (Dahlin, Weingart & Hinds, 2018; Asiimwe & Steyn, 2013, Asiimwe & Steyn 2014; Asiimwe & Zuena, 2023). As a result, society expects such a university to play its core role of conducting high-level teaching, research and community engagement. Unfortunately, both public and private universities in Uganda are reportedly not adequately playing their research function. According to the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) (2018), the research productivity of the academic staff of most private universities in Uganda have remained low. In the NCHE's report of 2015/16 on the state of higher education in Uganda, it was reported that the productivity of PhD academic staff in terms of publication, for instance, was less than 10 publications in over 20-year period per staff. This was worrying since the private universities tend to enrol a large number of students comparable to the number of academic staffs that they employ.

Literature Review

Workforce diversity means differences among employees in terms of age, cultural background, physical abilities and disabilities, race, religion, gender and sexual orientation (Xie & Shauman, 1998). People are different in not only gender, culture, race, social and psychological characteristics but also in their perspectives and prejudices. Diversity makes the work force heterogeneous. In today's workplaces, employing a diversified workforce is a necessity for every organization but to manage such diversified workforce is also a big challenge for management (Asmita, 2015; (Dahlin, Weingart & Hinds, 2018; Asiimwe & Steyn, 2013, Asiimwe & Steyn 2014; Asiimwe & Zuena, 2023). The diagram below shows the factors that affect workforce diversity. (Oracle, 2018 and Pitts, 2018).



In order to survive in this type of cut-throat competitive world the organizations have to hire an effective an efficient workforce that can handle such competitive environment. Employing diversified workforce is very necessary for every organization. In the current scenario the organizations that employ quality and competitive workforce regardless of their age, attitude, language, gender, religion, caste can only compete at the marketplace (Goyal, 2018).

It is expected that workforce diversity positively affects productivity of staff and organisations. Several researchers have produced differing evidences over this. There are findings which indicate that a diverse workforce positively affects productivity while others show that diversity does not significantly affect productivity. Among those studies which support a positive significant relationship between workforce diversity and staff productivity, is one by Asmita (2015), who indicated that one way through which diversity positively affects productivity is that it gives heterogeneity to teams, which is better than homogeneity. This view calls for today's organisations to diversify their workforce as a requirement. According to Asmita (2015) managing a diversified workforce may be a big challenge, implying that, this researcher also believes that a diversified workforce may negatively impact on workforce productivity.

Goyal (2016) indicated that today's organisations need a highly diversified workforce for them to survive in today's cut-throat competitive work environments. Many other researchers support the argument that workforce diversity significantly affects staff productivity (SharbariSaha, Dewpha Mukherjee Patra, 2008; Sharma & Sharma, 2014; (Dahlin, Weingart & Hinds, 2018; Asiimwe & Steyn, 2013, Asiimwe & Steyn 2014; Asiimwe & Zuena, 2023). Most of these scholars' findings and views are supported by the policy requirement argument.

Several researchers' findings indicate that workforce diversity has no serious effect on staff performance. For example, O'Flynn *et al.* (2016) showed that the group to which a staff belongs, has little influence on their performance. They presented findings that showed that experience of person is a more important determinant of productivity than gender and nationality. This suggests that, age may be more important in determining productivity than other diversity variables like gender and nationality.

Many studies have produced findings showing that workforce diversity has no significant effect on employee productivity. For example, Ahmad and Fazal (2019) conducted a study, examining the effect of workplace diversity on employee performance in Allama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan. Their findings indicated that workforce diversity, measured by gender, ethnicity and age, had a negative insignificant relationship with staff performance. Their study findings support the argument that aggregating diversity may provide a misleading analysis. This is so because, their results showed that in general the regression model (when all diversity dimensions are included) was statistically significant, supporting a conclusion that workforce diversity is a significant predictor of employee performance. But considering the coefficients of their regression model results, of the four-dimension factors considered, only experience was significant, the rest were not only insignificant, but also negative, an indication that they reduce performance, instead of boosting it.

Andoh *et al.* (2019) conducted a study examining the impact of workplace diversity on employee performance, a case of some selected private universities in Ghana. Their findings revealed that, in general, workplace diversity had a significant impact on staff performance. Education and age were more influential than gender and ethnicity. Their

findings imply that better understanding of workforce diversity requires considering the dimensions of diversity. It seems that some dimensions of diversity impact significantly on performance of workers while others do not and each has logical truth. For example, age and education, as dimensions of diversity, are different from gender and ethnicity. Age varies directly with one's experience and education enhance one's capacity to do work, due to extra skills acquired, and this is generally agreed upon. But there is a disagreement on whether being a male or female determines one's capacity to perform, especially in-service sector.

Several other studies have produced results with negative coefficients, agreeing with those of Andoh *et al*. (2019) and Ahmad and Fazal (2019) among others. For example, a study by Makudza, Muchongwe and Dangaiso (2020) revealed negative insignificant correlations between age and productivity, but their results on gender relationship with productivity were positive and significant, deviating from results of those researchers discussed above. But the fact that their study was among employees in Government of Zimbabwe, may suggest that the services provided could be different from the services of employees in other sectors such as those of academic staff in private universities. This ala points in the direction of argument that the question of whether workforce diversity impacts on employee productivity, is a big and very wide one, whose conclusion may not be quickly reached and so requires wide and careful investigations, even though much research work has been done already.

O' Flynn *et al*. (2016) argues that the productivity of academic staff is not truly representative of what a group productivity is. Rather, it is the personal experience of group members and the subsequent ability of the academic staff to perform in the future that also defines the employee's productivity. O' Flynn *et al* (2016) citing Ancona (1992) argue that there are multiple dimensions when it come saturating of productivity seeing that different constituents have their different productivity criteria and access to data. For instance, management may be more interested in looking at the output of the academic staff whereas; the academic staff make be interested in creating productive environment for themselves. They make have daily information about their interactions with co-workers or group members and use this data to evaluate productivity. Information and decision-making theory predict that a positive outcome exist between employee productivity in intellectual and complexasks and information as academic staff have diverse knowledge, skills, experience and expertise which results in innovation, new product design and improved decision making (SharbariSaha, Dewpha Mukherjee Patra, 2008; Sharma & Sharma, 2014; (Dahlin, Weingart & Hinds, 2018; Asiimwe & Steyn, 2013, Asiimwe & Steyn 2014; Asiimwe & Zuena, 2023).

Rahman, Hussain and Hussain (2018) stated that academic staff productivity can be determined based on three factors; work environment, ability and motivation, thus expressed by the formula; Productivity (work environment x ability x motivation). Ability here has to do with the academic staff physical, emotional and intellectual capability to carry out his task. That is, the academic staff possesses the skills and knowledge needed for the job. Robert, Leonard and Leonard (2015), listed productivity indicators as ability that is competencies, commitment and self-efficacy (self-efficacy is a motivational factor and it is that believe that an academic staff has concerning his or her ability to perform the task assigned to him/her); motivation- contingencies, goal-task clarity, feedback; system-technology, task interference opportunity, workplace layout. System factors include factors such as poor relationship among academic staff, lack of adequate training, and others. Motivation looks at the academic staff desire and commitment to his job (SharbariSaha, Dewpha Mukherjee Patra, 2008; Sharma & Sharma, 2014; (Dahlin, Weingart & Hinds, 2018; Asiimwe & Steyn, 2013, Asiimwe & Steyn 2014; Asiimwe & Zuena, 2023).

A number of studies have been conducted by different researchers in different parts of the world, to produce evidences on what really explains variations in staff productivity, in different institutions and organisations (Qais & Hussein, 2021; Fatema & Qais, 2020; Gikonyo, 2017; Hagberg, 2014; Coole, 2012; Marten, 2012; Lawrence, 2010; Elliot, 2009; (Dahlin, Weingart & Hinds, 2018; Asiimwe & Steyn, 2013, Asiimwe & Steyn 2014; Asiimwe & Zuena, 2023). Various factors have been studied by different scholars in different countries and organisations. Factors like motivation, training and development, skills, workplace environment, discipline, job satisfaction, staff appraisal, monitoring and supervision, experience, technology among others (Qais & Hussein, 2021; Fatema & Qais, 2020; Gikonyo, 2017; Hagberg, 2014; Coole, 2012). The findings from previous studies present different positions, regarding the strength of effect, direction and statistical significance. There is no generally agreed upon list of factors to which variations in employee productivity can be attributed to. Since there are many factors, with different ways in which they affect productivity in organisations of different types, targets, products, locations, ownerships and so on, it is difficult to isolate the most significant factors in all situations. It is, therefore, better to study a group of factors in a given context. For this matter, this section of review, presents a discussion on three diversity factors that were assumed to be having a significant relationship with staff productivity. These staff diversity investigated in

this study factors include gender diversity, age diversity and nationality diversity.

Problem Statement

Previous research has shown that majority of the lecturers in Ugandan public universities are underperforming their job or not productive specifically, the study of Nassuna (2017) indicates that over 80% of one of the university lecturers who participated as respondents revealed that they did not conduct all the lectures assigned to them and 70% were not regularly available to supervise research students allocated to them. The study of Kakulu (2016), revealed that over 78% of another University lecturers who participated as respondents failed to teach all the lectures assigned to them, with 67% of them been inadequate prepared prior to delivering most of the lectures to students and 56% delaying to evaluate students, thereby causing the students, especially at the postgraduate level, to miss graduating in time. According to Ddungu (2017), most the lecturers assigned to supervise research students do not guide the students as scheduled even when the students make efforts to fix appointments prior to meeting them.

The lecturers frequently call off the appointment at the last minute and postponed the supervision to another on fixed date, citing being caught up in other research projects. Furthermore, the level of most of the lecturers participating in community service is far below expectations (Ddungu, 2018a), and their involvement in research and publication leaves a lot to be desired (Ddungu, 2018b). Similar findings appear in the study of Wakida, Maling and Obua (2018), when they conducted a study in a University of Science and Technology. The preceding studies indicate that the majority of lecturers in most public universities in Uganda are underperforming or less productive in their jobs. The underperformance or low productivity however does not take place in a vacuum but under the influence of various factors.

Findings

The researcher wanted to examine whether workforce diversity has a significant effect on academic staff productivity in private chartered universities, in Central Uganda. To achieve this objective, the researcher tested a null hypothesis that; workforce diversity has no significant effect on academic staff productivity in private chartered universities in Central Uganda. To test this null hypothesis, the researcher aggregated all the three measures of productivity (teaching, research and community service productivity) into one index. To determine the extent to which gender, age and nationality can predict the perceived productivity of academic staff, the ordinary least square regression method (OLS) was employed. To use the OLS, Amin (2005) indicates that, one should have categorical data on the independent variable(s) and the predicted variable may be numerical. In this study the variable workforce diversity (independent variable) was composed of three predictors (gender, age and nationality), all of which were categorical and the dependent variable (productivity) was numerical. Thus, an OLS regression model was built with the three variables (gender, age and nationality) as the predictors and the overall numeric index on productivity as the predicted variable. The results of this test are that workforce diversity has no significant effect on overall academic staff productivity ($F = 0.740$; $p = 0.6362$) as presented in table 1.

Table 1: T-test on Gender, Age and Nationality and their influence on Academic Staff Productivity

Predictors	Categories	Coef.	Std. Err.	T	P>t	[95% Conf.	Interval]
	Male	*Ref*					
Gender	Female	-0.02	0.05	-0.41	0.680	-0.12	0.08
	20-30 years old	*Ref*					
	31 - 40 years old	0.01	0.06	0.2	0.845	-0.11	0.13
	41 - 50 years old	0.05	0.06	0.78	0.436	-0.07	0.17
Age	51yrs+	-0.20	0.11	-1.76	0.079	-0.42	0.02
	Ugandan	*Ref*					
	Kenyan	-0.03	0.08	-0.33	0.745	-0.19	0.13
	Nigerian	-0.02	0.10	-0.16	0.876	-0.22	0.19
	Rwandese & others	-0.03	0.12	-0.28	0.781	-0.28	0.21
Nationality	_cons	3.05	0.05	63.58	0.000	2.96	3.15

F(7, 334) = 0.74	Prob > F =0.6362	R-squared = 0.0153			

A look at the dummy coefficient for gender where the male staff were in the reference category, results show that, on average being a female was associated with a decrease in perceived productivity. This is indicated by the negative value of -0.02. Even though the coefficient is statistically insignificant (0.680>0.05), results indicate that keeping other factors constant, female academic staff rated their productivity to be on average of 0.02 units lower than that of males. These results are indeed in conformity with the bivariate results (Table 4.9) where the t-test values showed the mean value for females ($\overline{x}_f = 3.03$) was slightly lower than that of males ($\overline{x}_m = 3.06$).

Considering age diversity, results in Table 1 indicate that a closer look at the coefficients for the various age groups, where the 20 – 30 age group was used as the reference category, the findings indicate that on average being in the age groups of 31 – 40 and 41 - 50 was associated with an increase in perceived productivity but being in the age group of 51 years and above is associated with a reduction in perceived productivity. This is so because, the regression coefficients for the age groups of 31 – 40 and 41 – 50 years are positive (0.01 and 0.05 respectively), while the coefficient for the age group of 51 years and above (-0.20) is negative. It can therefore be predicted that, keeping other factors constant, the staff in the middle age groups (30 – 50 years) are more likely to be perceived as more productive compared to those in the lower age group of 20 – 30 years, although the impact of being middle aged is not statistically significant.

However, keeping other factors constant, it can be said that an academic staff in the age group of 51 years and above is more associated with a reduction in productivity and these results are statistically significant at 0.05 level. In other words, a one unit increase in age of a staff who is in the age group of 51 years and above is likely to result into a 0.20 units reduction in his or her productivity than a one unit increase in age of a staff who is in the age group of 20 – 30 years. These results are indeed in agreement with ANOVA results (Table 4.10) where the mean values for staff in the age group of 20 – 30 years (3.04) was significantly higher than that of staff in the age group of 51 years and above (2.92).

Finally, as for nationality, we find no significant differences in the productivity levels of staff from different countries. This is because the p-values associated with the coefficients are all above 0.05. It therefore follows that nationality or one's ethnic background is not an important factor that determines productive and non-productive academic staff. As regards the R-squared value, the results imply that holding other variables constant, approximately only 1.53% of the variations in teaching productivity is explained by the three explanatory variables (gender, age and nationality). And as indicated by the p-value associated with the model F-statistic, the model is not statistically significant, suggesting that the variables included in the model have a small contribution towards variations in academic staff productivity. This implies that other factors not considered in this study could be accounting for the biggest percentage of the variations in staff productivity.

Discussion

This study revealed that, workforce diversity has no significant effect on overall academic staff productivity ($F = 0.740$; $p = 0.6362$). Keeping other factors constant, all the three explanatory variables (gender, age and nationality) taken together, contribute only 1.53% of the total variations in academic staff productivity. These results imply that the three explanatory variables (gender, age and nationality) included in this study, have a very small contribution in explaining variations in academic staff productivity. Thus, other factors outside this study might be better in explaining these variations in academic staff productivity.

Given the findings for the previous three objectives, the impact of workforce diversity on academic staff productivity would be better analysed by looking at the individual explanatory variables than their aggregate (diversity). Due to the small contribution of each of these variables and the varied nature of their impact, aggregating them may not yield good conclusions. Also, due to the varied nature of productivity measures, and the way it is affected by the different diversity factors it is better analysing them individually. This is based on the fact that, as indicated in Table 4.12, the direction of effect of these variables is not the same. So, aggregating them may be misleading. For example, being a female was associated with a decrease in the productivity index as compared to being a male. But because the productivity is also aggregated, this finding may not stand if the productivity measures are assessed individually. In another analysis within the same result, being in the age groups of 31 – 40 and 41 - 50 was associated with an increase in productivity but being in the group of 51 years and above was

associated with a reduction in perceived productivity. This alone may also vary if we disaggregate the productivity index into its individual measures. For example, a higher age of 51 and above, may give an advantage in research productivity or in community service but may be a disadvantage in in teaching.

These findings are somewhat surprising because, a diverse workforce gives heterogeneity to teams, which is expected to play positively towards productivity than homogeneity. This point of view is in line with Asmita's (2015) view about the current requirements for organisations to diversify their workforce. This legal requirement, must have originated from well researched evidences before it is instituted into policy requirement. But Asmita (2015) provided a contradicting argument showing that managing a diversified workforce is a big challenge. But if this is true, it would suggest a negative significant impact of workforce diversity on productivity. This was not the case with the findings of this study.

The findings to a big extent provide a diverse implication to other findings and arguments. For example, some researchers on workforce diversity like Goyal (2016) indicate that organisations need a highly diversified workforce for them to survive in today's cut-throat competitive work environments. The researcher argues that hiring an effective efficient workforce requires proper recruitment procedures than focusing on diversity. Recruitment on merit may help organisations get a more productive workforce, in today's competitive environments than simply employing a diversified group. I therefore believe that, given the current study's findings, while employing universities need to look for qualified and competitive workers irrespective of their gender, age and nationality, among others. So, looking at this point of view, the findings of this study are not a surprise to the researcher. Many of those who support the view that workforce diversity is a positive significant determinant of productivity (Sharma and Sharma, 2014; SharbariSaha, Dewpha Mukherjee Patra, 2008), advance mainly the policy requirement argument. This to me is not real and is just a forced argument. Otherwise, the capacity of an academic staff to perform depends more on their personal abilities than naturally determined factors like gender or country of origin.

A number of findings support the findings of this study, indicating diversity of staff has a little bearing with their productivity. For example, O'Flynn *et al*. (2016) revealed that the group to which a staff belongs, has little influence on their productivity. They instead presented evidences that experience of person is more important than them being male or female or originating from country A or Z. So, a female staff who is more experienced will perform better than a male staff who is less experienced; but not because of being a female but due more experience. Secondary productivity is not static, it may improve with time or it may reduce but variables like gender are static, so their ability to influence the changing productivity is limited.

Several other studies provided findings which agree with those of this study. For example, Ahmad and Fazal (2019) had findings which agreed with negative but insignificant relationship between gender and age with academic staff productivity. Although this study showed a positive relationship between age groups of 31 – 50 years and productivity, there was a negative link between the age of 51 years and above and productivity. Their study also agreed with the argument that aggregating diversity may not provide a good analysis, as the revealed that some other diversity factors like experience, have a positive significant effect on academic staff productivity. Another study by Makudza, Muchongwe and Dangaiso (2020) revealed negative insignificant correlations between age and productivity, but their positive significant results on gender relationship with productivity deviate from the current study's findings. However, their study was among government employees in the Government of Zimbabwe, where the services provided could be different from the services academic staff in private universities offer.

Conclusion and recommendation

When analysis is done with aggregated variables, it was concluded that workforce diversity is not a significant determinant of academic staff productivity. The three common diversity variables in existing studies (gender, age and nationality) have a very small contribution in explaining variations in academic staff productivity. Even this small contribution seen is mainly attributed to age. It is important to analyse elements of diversity individually than considering them as a whole. Results of aggregated diversity do not make much sense, because diversity elements are completely different and the way the impact productivity differ. Also, diversity studies with significant results on productivity examined other significant elements beyond the three personal characteristics of gender, age and nationality. So, the diversity concept is widely conceptualised and the analysis of its impacts on productivity needs to be clustered, for better conclusions. This study examined only the three common elements of diversity. Therefore, since slight differences in academic staff productivity can be more attributed to their differences in age, it is important that managers of these institutions consider this factor in their strategic management decisions to improve

institutional productivity. For example, the management should ensure that the biggest percentage of their workforce is composed of those in middle age of 31 – 50 years, with few starters (30 years or below) and elders (above 50 years). Managers of universities should ensure that when grouping or teaming up staff for tasks like teaching, research and community engagements; it is better to mix up the age groups. The middle aged are more productive, more energetic and readier to move things, they should be paired up with those in late years of above 50 and those below 30 years to share their experiences for the young ones who have the energy to do.

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