
WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between workplace diversity and organizational performance in public universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study focused on three key dimensions of diversity cultural, ethnic, and educational diversity and their relationships with academic performance, resource management, and global engagement, respectively. The study adopted a correlational survey research design, targeting six (6) principal officers from three public universities: University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection, and the reliability of the instrument was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, while face and content validity were ensured. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) with SPSS version 23. Findings revealed strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships between each form of diversity and its corresponding performance indicator. Cultural diversity was positively related to academic performance ($r = 0.897, p < .01$), ethnic diversity was positively related to resource management ($r = 0.908, p < .01$), and educational diversity was strongly correlated with global engagement ($r = 0.925, p < .01$). These results support the conclusion that diversity, when well-managed, is a strategic asset that enhances institutional performance. The study recommends that university management should adopt inclusive policies and practices to maximise the benefits of workplace diversity for improved organizational outcomes.

Keywords: Workplace diversity, Organisational performance, Public universities, Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Workplace diversity is a multidimensional construct describing differences among employees that can include demographic (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity), cultural (values, norms, language), and functional attributes (educational background, skills, experience). Scholars frame diversity both as a potential source of competitive advantage and as a managerial challenge: when effectively harnessed it increases creativity, problem-solving capacity and market insight; when mismanaged it can produce conflict, miscommunication and turnover (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020; Turi et al., 2022). Contemporary research therefore treats diversity not as an end in itself but as a contingent resource whose value to organizational performance depends on leadership, inclusive practices and organizational context. (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020; Turi et al., 2022).

One primary dimension is cultural diversity which refers to differences in values, norms, language, and worldview that employees bring from their national, regional or organizational cultures. Cultural heterogeneity can broaden the range of perspectives used in strategic decision-making and enhance innovation through recombination of ideas (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020). However, cultural differences can also produce misunderstanding or slower coordination unless inclusion and cross-cultural competencies are promoted by leaders and processes. Empirical work suggests cultural diversity tends to be positively associated with creativity and problem-solving outcomes when accompanied by inclusive climate and strong managerial practices (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020; Turi et al., 2022).

A second important strand ethnic diversity captures variation in race, tribe, language groups and related identity markers within the workforce. Ethnic heterogeneity can improve an organization's ability to read diverse markets and to access networks across social groups, which may translate into better performance metrics in heterogeneous markets (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020). But ethnic diversity also interacts with social identity and intergroup dynamics: without fair policies or perceived organizational justice, ethnic differences can undermine cohesion and performance (Turi et al., 2022). Thus the net impact of ethnic diversity on organizational outcomes is often moderated by trust, fairness of HR practices, and leaders' capacity to manage intergroup relations.

Educational diversity differences in formal qualifications, disciplinary backgrounds and skill sets is a third key dimension. A mix of vocational, professional and academic backgrounds increases the breadth of knowledge and problem-solving heuristics available to an organization, supporting adaptability and technical performance (Turi et al., 2022). In project-based and knowledge-intensive settings, complementary educational backgrounds improve team learning and innovation; yet the benefits depend on role clarity, coordinated knowledge integration, and opportunities for cross-training so that different educational perspectives are effectively combined rather than siloed (Turi et al., 2022).

How, then, does workplace diversity relate overall to organizational performance? Recent syntheses and large empirical studies point to a generally positive association especially when firms pair representation (diversity) with inclusion (practices that allow diverse voices to influence outcomes). For example, large cross-country analyses show that more diverse leadership teams are more likely to achieve financial outperformance, while meta-reviews emphasize that leadership accountability and inclusion practices are decisive in turning diversity into performance gains (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020; Turi et al., 2022). In short,

diversity is an asset conditional on organizational systems that promote equal opportunity, mitigate bias, and integrate diverse knowledge into decision processes.

Mechanisms linking diversity to performance typically run through increased information processing, wider repertoires of problem-solving, enhanced market insight and better talent attraction/retention but mediators and moderators matter. Research finds leadership expertise, diversity beliefs, perceived organizational justice and inclusion practices frequently mediate or moderate the diversity performance link (Turi et al., 2022). This means managers who can cultivate inclusive climates, debias HR systems, and orchestrate interdisciplinary collaboration are more likely to capture the performance benefits of cultural, ethnic and educational heterogeneity.

Turning to evidence from Rivers State, studies of organizational contexts in the state suggest similar patterns: workforce heterogeneity (including cultural and age diversity) improves corporate performance where it is strategically managed, but can harm cohesion if left unmanaged. A study of multinational corporations operating in Rivers State reported that cultural and age diversity supported market share and profitability when firms adopted inclusive hiring and management practices (Amaehule & Mebom, 2022). That local finding aligns with broader international evidence that managerial practices and context determine whether diversity translates to measurable organizational gains.

Focusing specifically on public universities in Rivers State, recent empirical work finds that deliberate diversity and inclusion initiatives such as inclusive workplace culture and equitable policies are positively associated with employee engagement, productivity, career growth and other performance indicators in those institutions (Emmanuel, 2025). The Rivers State studies recommend strengthening inclusive policies, leadership training in inclusive practice, and transparent career development systems so that cultural, ethnic and educational differences among academic staff become sources of institutional vitality rather than fault lines. These local findings make a clear case for investigating cultural, ethnic and educational diversity together in Rivers State public universities and for testing how leadership, inclusion climate and policy fairness mediate the diversity–performance relationship in that setting (Emmanuel, 2025; Amaehule & Mebom, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Organizational performance in higher education institutions is a multidimensional concept that reflects the extent to which universities achieve their academic, administrative, and global mandates (Adegbite & Adegbite, 2019). In public universities within Rivers State, performance is commonly assessed through indices such as academic performance, efficient resource management, and global engagement. However, workplace diversity encompassing variations in age, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, academic discipline, and work experience has emerged as both an opportunity and a challenge in achieving optimal performance outcomes (Osibanjo et al., 2020). While diversity can foster innovation and broaden perspectives, it can also generate conflicts and reduce cohesion if poorly managed, leading to suboptimal institutional performance.

Academic performance, which involves the quality of teaching, research output, and student learning outcomes, is a critical measure of university effectiveness (Agu & Nwachukwu, 2021). In public universities in Rivers State, the growing diversity of academic staff brings a variety of pedagogical styles, scholarly orientations, and research interests. While this variety has the potential to enrich academic discourse, it may also lead to misalignments in curriculum delivery, disagreements over academic standards, and inconsistencies in student

assessment processes (Olatunji, 2020). These challenges can hinder the ability of the university to sustain competitive academic excellence in a rapidly changing global education environment.

Resource management, another vital component of organizational performance, refers to the effective allocation and utilisation of financial, human, and infrastructural resources to achieve institutional goals (Okpara & Eketu, 2019). In a diverse workplace, differences in work ethics, communication patterns, and expectations can affect teamwork and resource allocation decisions (Chukwuma & Eze, 2021). In some public universities in Rivers State, poorly integrated diversity management strategies have led to inefficiencies in resource distribution, duplication of roles, and internal rivalries that weaken administrative coordination. This, in turn, reduces the institution's ability to achieve optimal operational efficiency.

Global engagement measured by international collaborations, research partnerships, and participation in cross-border academic networks is a growing benchmark for university performance (Ibeh & Onu, 2022). While workplace diversity should ideally enhance a university's global appeal, challenges such as cultural misunderstandings, linguistic barriers, and resistance to change can limit internationalization efforts (Nwankwo & Eze, 2021). In some cases, the inability to harmonise diverse perspectives within the academic workforce has hindered public universities in Rivers State from fully leveraging global partnerships and exchange opportunities, thereby affecting their competitive position in the international academic community.

Workplace diversity in these institutions is often managed without a coherent policy framework or adequate sensitivity training (Osibanjo et al., 2020). This lack of strategic diversity management leads to the marginalization of certain groups, workplace tensions, and the underutilization of the unique skills that a diverse workforce can offer. Consequently, academic productivity suffers, resource allocation becomes politicized, and opportunities for global collaboration are missed.

Moreover, the legacy of structural inequalities, ethnic politics, and socio-cultural biases in Nigeria continues to influence recruitment, promotion, and decision-making processes in public universities (Okafor & Anyanwu, 2019). This entrenched bias undermines meritocracy and reduces staff morale, especially among minority or underrepresented groups. The resulting disaffection can manifest in lower research output, reduced teaching quality, and reluctance to engage in collaborative projects, both locally and internationally.

The persistent gap between the potential benefits of workplace diversity and the actual performance outcomes of public universities in Rivers State raises a pressing concern. While diversity should ideally serve as a catalyst for innovation, creativity, and institutional growth, its mismanagement has, in many cases, led to reduced organizational performance (Agu & Nwachukwu, 2021). The absence of structured mechanisms to reconcile diverse perspectives, mediate conflicts, and harness collective strengths continues to limit the universities' academic standing, efficient resource use, and global visibility.

Therefore, the problem lies not only in the presence of workplace diversity but in the inadequate policies, leadership strategies, and institutional culture required to manage it effectively. Without deliberate and sustained efforts to integrate diversity into the core operational and strategic framework of these institutions, public universities in Rivers State risk falling behind in academic excellence, resource optimization, and global competitiveness.

(Ibeh & Onu, 2022). This situation demands urgent scholarly and policy attention to ensure that diversity becomes an asset rather than a liability to organizational performance.

Conceptual Framework

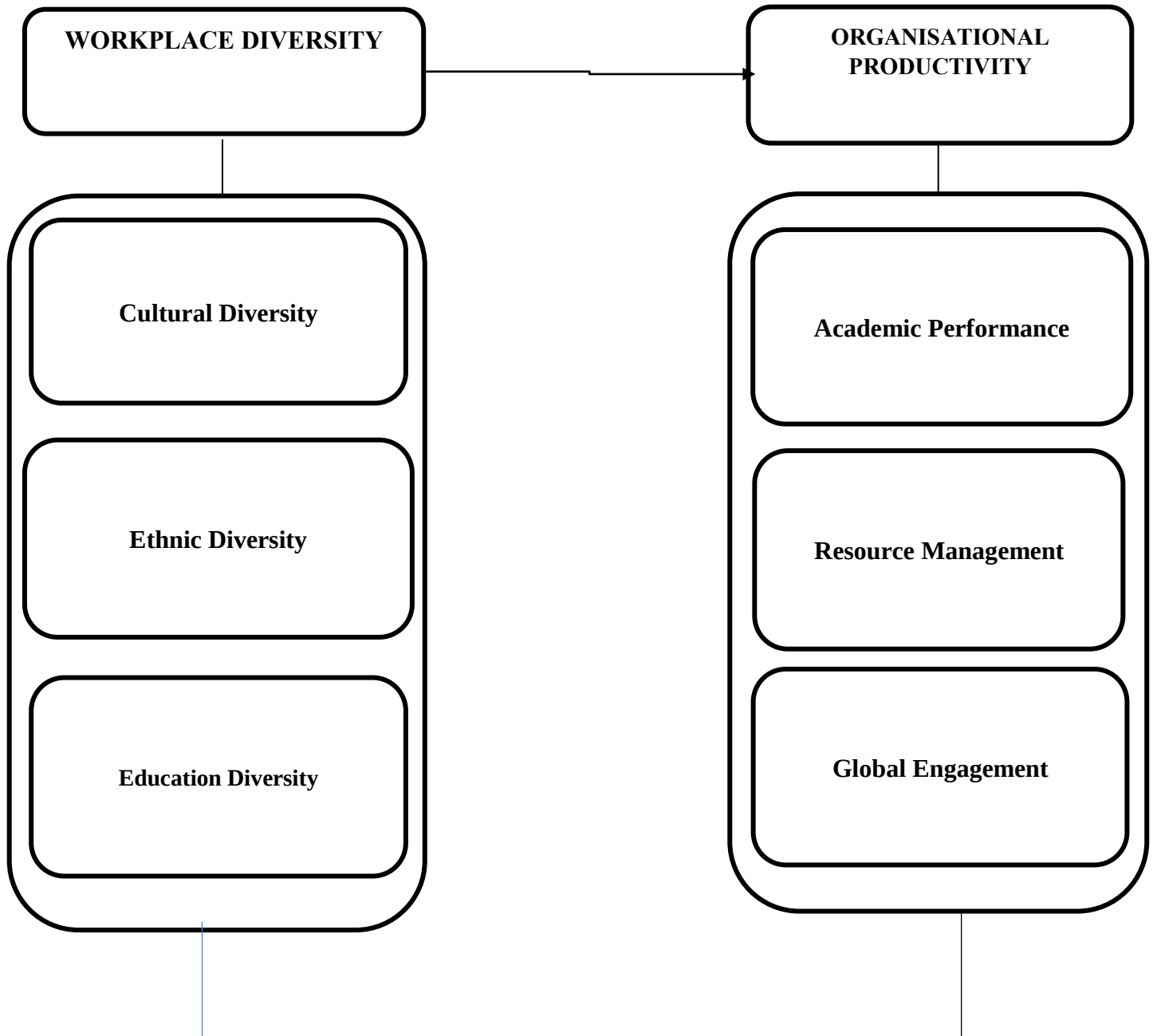


Figure: 1.1: Conceptual Framework of Workplace Diversity and Organizational Performance of Public Universities in Rivers State.

Source: Adopted from Harvey & Green (1993); Johnstone (2004); Altbach & Knight (2007); Earley & Mosakowski (2000) and Mayer et al. (2016)

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between workplace diversity and organizational performance of public universities in Rivers State. Specifically, the objective of the study set to achieve

1. To ascertain the relationship between cultural diversity and academic performance of public universities in Rivers State.
2. To investigate the relationship between ethnic diversity and resource management of public universities in Rivers State.
3. To examine the relationship between educational diversity and global engagement of public universities in Rivers State.

Research questions

The following research question were raised to guide the study

1. What is the relationship between cultural diversity and academic performance of public universities in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between ethnic diversity and resource management of public universities in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between educational diversity and global engagement of public universities in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at a significant level of 0.05.

- H0₁:** There is no significant relationship between cultural diversity and academic performance of public universities in Rivers State.
- H0₂:** There is no significant relationship between ethnic diversity and resource management of public universities in Rivers State.
- H0₃:** There is no significant relationship between educational diversity and global engagement of public universities in Rivers State.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Concept of Workplace Diversity

Workplace diversity refers to the presence and inclusion of individuals from varied demographic, cultural, and experiential backgrounds within an organization, and it encompasses differences in race, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, disability status, sexual orientation, education, and socio-economic background (Shen et al., 2009). It is not limited to visible characteristics such as skin color or physical ability but extends to invisible aspects, such as values, perspectives, and experiences that influence how people work and interact (Patrick & Kumar, 2012). Diversity in the workplace is essential because it brings together individuals with different viewpoints, which can foster creativity, innovation, and problem-solving. In contemporary organizations, diversity management is increasingly viewed as a

strategic tool for achieving competitive advantage, as it helps to tap into the skills and talents of a broader talent pool (Cox & Blake, 1991).

The modern concept of workplace diversity has evolved from being merely a compliance requirement to being recognized as a driver of organizational performance (Guillaume et al., 2017). Historically, diversity initiatives were largely motivated by legal frameworks such as equal employment opportunity laws and affirmative action policies, which aimed to prevent discrimination (Shore et al., 2011). However, in today's globalized business environment, organizations view diversity as a means of enhancing market reach, improving customer relations, and fostering innovation through varied perspectives (Cletus et al., 2018). This shift reflects a broader understanding of diversity as not only an ethical or moral obligation but also a key element in building resilient, adaptable, and high-performing organizations.

In practical terms, workplace diversity manifests through recruitment practices, inclusive organizational cultures, and policies that ensure equitable opportunities for career growth (Roberson, 2006). A diverse workforce allows organizations to better understand and cater to the needs of a diverse customer base, thus creating stronger connections with various market segments (Shore et al., 2011). Additionally, diversity encourages knowledge sharing and learning among employees, as exposure to different perspectives challenges assumptions and stimulates critical thinking. However, to reap the benefits of diversity, organizations must actively manage it by fostering inclusion ensuring that all employees feel valued, respected, and empowered to contribute (Ferdman & Deane, 2014). Without inclusion, diversity initiatives risk becoming tokenistic and ineffective.

Ultimately, workplace diversity is both a reflection of societal pluralism and a strategic organizational priority. It plays a critical role in enhancing employee satisfaction, promoting social justice, and driving business performance (Cox & Blake, 1991). In the 21st century, organizations that embrace diversity not only comply with anti-discrimination laws but also position themselves for success in multicultural and interconnected markets (Guillaume et al., 2017). Effective diversity management involves continuous learning, bias mitigation, and leadership commitment to creating a workplace where differences are celebrated rather than merely tolerated. Thus, workplace diversity, when properly harnessed, becomes a catalyst for innovation, employee engagement, and sustainable organizational growth (Patrick & Kumar, 2012).

Dimensions of Workplace Diversity

Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity refers to the presence of individuals from different cultural, ethnic, and national backgrounds working together within an organization, bringing distinct values, beliefs, traditions, and communication styles (Cox & Blake, 1991). In the workplace context, it is recognized as a critical dimension of overall diversity because it shapes employee perspectives, problem-solving approaches, and interpersonal interactions (Shore et al., 2011). Cultural diversity extends beyond visible differences such as language or dress and encompasses deep-level aspects such as values, norms, and worldview orientations, which influence how employees perceive authority, teamwork, and conflict resolution (Hofstede, 2001). This form of diversity enriches the organizational environment by fostering innovation and creativity, as employees contribute varied viewpoints and experiences, which can be leveraged to address complex business challenges in an increasingly globalized economy (Cletus et al., 2018).

Within workplace diversity frameworks, cultural diversity is often considered both a challenge and an asset. On one hand, it may create communication barriers, misunderstandings, or conflicts due to differences in language, social norms, and non-verbal cues (Lauring, 2011). On the other hand, organizations that effectively manage cultural diversity can gain significant competitive advantages, including improved market reach, better customer relations, and enhanced adaptability to change (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2008). For example, culturally diverse teams have been shown to generate more innovative ideas because they draw from broader cognitive resources and problem-solving strategies (Stahl et al., 2010). However, the benefits are only realized when cultural differences are acknowledged, respected, and integrated into inclusive organizational policies and practices, making leadership commitment and diversity training essential components for success.

Ethnic Diversity

Ethnic diversity, as a core dimension of workplace diversity, refers to the representation and inclusion of individuals from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds within an organization. It encompasses the recognition of different ethnic identities, cultural practices, languages, and historical experiences that shape employees' perspectives and contributions (Cletus et al., 2018). In a globalized economy, workplaces are increasingly becoming culturally heterogeneous due to migration, international trade, and multinational business operations (Shore et al., 2011). Ethnic diversity in the workplace not only reflects the demographic realities of society but also has strategic implications for innovation, adaptability, and organizational learning. When managed effectively, it fosters an environment where varying viewpoints contribute to problem-solving and creativity, thereby enhancing organizational performance (Roberson, 2019). However, if unmanaged, it may lead to communication barriers, discrimination, and ethnic clustering, which can negatively affect workplace cohesion and productivity.

In the context of organizational culture, ethnic diversity challenges companies to go beyond mere numerical representation by fostering inclusion and equity (Mor Barak, 2017). Inclusion involves ensuring that employees from all ethnic backgrounds feel valued, respected, and able to participate fully in decision-making processes. The recognition and celebration of ethnic diversity often involve developing policies against discrimination, implementing cultural sensitivity training, and ensuring equitable career progression opportunities (Shore et al., 2011). Ethnically diverse teams tend to outperform homogeneous teams in tasks that require creativity and problem-solving, primarily because diverse perspectives lead to a wider range of ideas and approaches (Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). However, the benefits of ethnic diversity are contingent on the existence of a supportive organizational climate that minimizes bias and fosters cross-cultural collaboration (Roberson, 2019).

Educational Diversity

Educational diversity refers to the variation in employees' educational backgrounds, qualifications, academic disciplines, and learning experiences within an organization. It is a critical dimension of workplace diversity because the educational pathways individuals follow often shape their problem-solving styles, communication approaches, and technical competencies (Roberson, 2019). In a diverse workforce, employees may possess degrees or certifications in different fields, ranging from engineering and business management to arts and social sciences, contributing to a richer pool of perspectives and skills (Shore et al., 2018). This diversity in academic preparation fosters innovation, as individuals with varied educational foundations can approach challenges from multiple analytical angles, increasing

the likelihood of creative solutions (Cox & Blake, 1991). Moreover, educational diversity extends beyond formal qualifications to include informal learning, vocational training, and experiential education, making it a comprehensive and dynamic element of organizational diversity management.

Incorporating educational diversity into workplace practices enhances organizational performance and adaptability. Employees with varied educational experiences bring different cognitive frameworks, enabling the organization to respond effectively to complex, rapidly changing environments (Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). For example, a team consisting of individuals with backgrounds in both technical and social sciences can better integrate technology with user-centered design, producing products and services that meet diverse market needs. However, educational diversity must be managed strategically to avoid challenges such as miscommunication or differences in work methods stemming from contrasting academic training (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Managers play a crucial role in facilitating knowledge sharing, mutual respect, and team cohesion among employees with differing educational backgrounds to ensure that diversity becomes a source of synergy rather than conflict.

Concept of Organizational Performance

Organizational performance refers to the extent to which an organization achieves its predetermined objectives efficiently and effectively. It is often measured through indicators such as profitability, productivity, market share, customer satisfaction, and innovation capacity (Richard et al., 2009). According to Daft (2020), organizational performance encompasses both financial outcomes and non-financial outcomes, making it a multidimensional construct. The concept is rooted in the idea that performance is not just about achieving goals but also about doing so in a sustainable and competitive manner. Performance in organizations is often evaluated using both objective and subjective measures. Objective measures may include revenue growth, return on investment, and production output, while subjective measures involve perceptions of stakeholders regarding quality, service delivery, and organizational reputation (Venkatraman & Ramanujam, 1986). Kaplan and Norton (1996) expanded this perspective through the Balanced Scorecard framework, which emphasises the integration of financial measures with customer, internal process, and learning and growth metrics. This holistic approach ensures that performance assessment captures the overall health of the organization.

The determinants of organizational performance are diverse, ranging from internal factors such as leadership, culture, and resource management to external factors such as market dynamics and regulatory environments (Wang et al., 2015). For example, a strong organizational culture that fosters innovation and adaptability can lead to improved performance outcomes (Denison, 1990). Similarly, effective strategic management practices enable firms to align their resources with environmental opportunities, thereby enhancing performance.

In the context of competitive industries, organizational performance is closely linked to the ability to create value for stakeholders over time. This requires continuous improvement, responsiveness to environmental changes, and the capacity to leverage technology and human capital effectively (Neely et al., 2005). Consequently, performance measurement is not merely an evaluative exercise but a strategic tool for guiding organisational growth and sustainability. In sum, organizational performance serves as both a mirror reflecting the current state of an organisation and a compass pointing toward future strategic direction.

Measures of Organizational Performance

Academic performance, in the context of organizational performance, refers to the measurable output and effectiveness of educational institutions or training units within an organization in achieving their academic goals and objectives. It reflects the extent to which learning outcomes, instructional quality, research productivity, and intellectual contributions align with the institution's strategic mission (Ali et al., 2020). While academic performance is traditionally associated with student grades and achievement, in organizational settings it extends to faculty productivity, curriculum relevance, accreditation status, innovation in pedagogy, and the institution's ability to attract and retain talent (Osman et al., 2019). As a dimension of organizational performance, academic performance serves as a critical indicator of institutional competitiveness, reputation, and sustainability in the knowledge economy (Khan & Yildiz, 2020). It integrates both quantitative measures such as graduation rates, research output, and employability of graduates and qualitative measures such as academic integrity, stakeholder satisfaction, and the capacity for continuous improvement (Adeyemi & Adeyemi, 2014). This multidimensional perspective underscores that academic performance is not an isolated outcome but a product of strategic alignment between educational objectives and organizational resources, processes, and governance structures.

Moreover, in higher education and training-oriented organizations, academic performance functions as a driver of overall organizational effectiveness because it directly influences stakeholder trust, funding opportunities, and policy compliance (Mwangi et al., 2021). For example, institutions with high academic performance often enjoy increased enrollment, better staff retention, and stronger alumni engagement, which in turn contribute to financial stability and societal impact (Chaudhry et al., 2019). Effective leadership, adequate resource allocation, robust assessment systems, and a culture of innovation all contribute to sustaining academic performance as a key pillar of organizational performance (Akareem & Hossain, 2016). Furthermore, in the globalized education sector, rankings, international collaborations, and research visibility are increasingly tied to academic performance metrics, thereby reinforcing its strategic importance (Salmi, 2017). This interconnection highlights that academic performance is both a reflection of and a contributor to the broader organizational performance framework, making it a central area of focus for managers and policymakers in the education and training sectors.

Resource Management

Resource management refers to the systematic process of planning, allocating, and optimizing the use of an organization's tangible and intangible resources such as human capital, financial assets, equipment, and technology to achieve strategic objectives effectively (Armstrong & Taylor, 2020). It is a critical dimension of organizational performance because the efficient utilization of resources directly influences productivity, cost-effectiveness, and overall competitiveness (Grant, 2019). Effective resource management ensures that resources are not only available when needed but are also aligned with the organization's priorities, thereby reducing waste and enhancing operational efficiency. According to Barney (1991), the resource-based view (RBV) underscores that unique, valuable, and inimitable resources form the basis for sustained competitive advantage, which is a key driver of long-term organizational performance. Therefore, organizations that manage their resources strategically are more likely to adapt to market changes, optimize workflows, and deliver consistent value to stakeholders.

Moreover, resource management encompasses strategic planning and continuous monitoring to ensure resources are used in the most value-adding manner, fostering innovation and growth (Peteraf & Barney, 2003). In the context of organizational performance, it is not enough to merely possess resources; the organization must also have the managerial capability to deploy them effectively in pursuit of its mission and goals (Wernerfelt, 1984). This process involves balancing competing demands, prioritizing projects, and ensuring that employees have the necessary skills and tools to excel (Kaplan & Norton, 2004). For instance, in project-driven industries, poor resource allocation can lead to delays, budget overruns, and reduced service quality, thereby undermining performance metrics such as profitability, customer satisfaction, and market share (Kerzner, 2017). Consequently, resource management serves as both an operational necessity and a strategic imperative, directly influencing an organization's capacity to deliver results in a competitive environment.

Global Engagement

Global engagement refers to the extent to which organizations actively participate in, adapt to, and influence international markets, networks, and cultural systems in pursuit of sustainable performance. In today's interconnected economy, global engagement is not merely about having an international presence but also about integrating cross-border operations, aligning corporate strategies with global trends, and fostering relationships that transcend geographical boundaries (Friedman, 2016). It involves dimensions such as international market expansion, global partnerships, cultural intelligence, cross-border knowledge sharing, and responsiveness to global regulatory frameworks (Knight & Liesch, 2016). From an organizational performance perspective, global engagement enhances a firm's capacity to innovate, access diverse talent pools, and leverage competitive advantages in multiple markets, thus contributing to long-term profitability and resilience (Jain, 2017). Research has shown that organizations with a high degree of global engagement tend to exhibit greater adaptability to market disruptions, maintain stronger brand recognition, and achieve higher stakeholder satisfaction across regions (Suutari & Brewster, 2019).

Furthermore, global engagement operates as a strategic driver of organizational performance by fostering competitive learning and operational flexibility. Firms that engage globally often develop more robust supply chains, adopt advanced technological practices from multiple markets, and cultivate a diverse workforce capable of generating innovative solutions to complex challenges (Bartlett & Beamish, 2018). The dynamic exchange of ideas across cultures enables organizations to broaden their strategic perspectives, enhance problem-solving capabilities, and align their operations with global best practices (Meyer, Li, & Schotter, 2020). In addition, global engagement strengthens corporate reputation and stakeholder trust, which are critical intangible assets in sustaining performance in highly competitive environments (Cavusgil, Knight, & Riesenberger, 2020). Therefore, as a dimension of organizational performance, global engagement reflects a company's ability to navigate and thrive within the complexities of the global business ecosystem while maintaining strategic alignment with both local and international objectives.

Resource-Based View Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) was popularized by Jay Barney (1991) in his seminal paper "Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage". However, its roots trace back to Edith Penrose (1959) in her book "The Theory of the Growth of the Firm", which laid the foundation for thinking of organizations as bundles of resources. The Resource-Based View argues that a firm's sustainable competitive advantage depends on its ability to acquire,

develop, and deploy resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN framework). Resources help the organization exploit opportunities or neutralize threats, resources are unique and not widely possessed by competitors, resources cannot be easily copied, and there are no other resources that can replace them effectively.

Assumptions of the theory

1. Organizations have different mixes of resources, including human capital; no two firms have identical diversity profiles.
2. Skills, cultural competencies, and unique team dynamics developed through diversity cannot be easily transferred between firms.
3. The benefits of diversity often arise from long-term cultural integration and learning processes.
4. The informal networks, trust, and synergy built within a diverse team are complex and hard to imitate.

Implications of the Theory

1. Firms should recruit, retain, and develop diverse talent as a core competitive resource.
2. A diverse workforce increases creative solutions, leading to better products, services, and processes.
3. Diverse employees can help organizations connect with and serve a wider customer base.
4. Diversity, when effectively managed, meets VRIN criteria and supports long-term superior performance.
5. RBV implies that leveraging diversity requires supportive culture and policies to unlock its potential as a resource.

Empirical Review

Omosanya, & Olanipekun, (2023), Workplace diversity and organisational performance. A case study of Allied Atlantic Distilleries Ltd., Igbesa (Ogun State). Examine the effect of cultural diversity on adaptive performance and investigate relationship between age diversity and task performance. Survey; sample size 84 employees (table shows N=84 for correlation tests); data collected by questionnaire; analysis included regression, ANOVA and Pearson correlations. Instrument validity/reliability details are not fully visible in the public copy but standard practice in the journal article indicates construct testing (regression/ANOVA tables presented). The study found that there is strong, positive and statistically significant effect of cultural diversity on adaptive performance ($R^2 \approx 0.931$; $p < .001$). Age diversity significantly correlated with task performance ($r = .812$, $p < .01$). The study concluded that properly managed cultural and age diversity can significantly improve adaptive and task performance; and the study recommended that management should put policies and HR practices in place that harness cultural differences for creativity and adaptive capacity.

Yusuf, et'al (2025), investigated experiential diversity and employee commitment in the Ministry of Communications & Digital Economy (federal parastatals) workplace diversity in the public sector. Examine the effect of experiential diversity on employee commitment (a proxy for employee performance) in Federal Government parastatals under the Ministry. Descriptive survey; questionnaires administered 429 copies (39 added as 10% buffer; 406 retrieved) to staff of selected federal parastatals; sampling used convenience technique; sample determined by Taro-Yamane formula; analysis with linear regression. Validity/reliability: the paper discusses instrument measurement and regression diagnostics.

Experiential diversity showed a positive but not statistically significant effect on employee commitment ($\beta \approx 0.0535$, $p > .05$). The authors interpret this as indicating that experiential heterogeneity alone does not automatically strengthen commitment without effective management practices. The study Public organisations should foster knowledge-sharing cultures and supportive HR practices so experiential diversity yields higher commitment and innovation; broader studies across more ministries suggested.

Gaps in Literature

The main objective of the study was to ascertain the relationship of workplace diversity and organizational performance of public universities in Rivers State. Over the year several, empirical studies have been investigated on the relationship between workplace diversity and organizational performance in the research works of Omosanya, & Olanipekun, (2023), and Yusuf, et'al (2025), However, their empirical studies unveiled that no research work has been investigated on the relationship between the dimensions of workplace diversity such as cultural diversity, ethnic diversity and educational diversity) on the dimensions and measures of organizational performance such as (academic performance, resource management and global engagement) of public universities in Rivers State. This has resulted in a dearth of research evidence on the relationship between the predicator and criterion variable under study and a gap in knowledge that the study intended to fill.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a correlational survey research design to investigate the relationship between workplace diversity and organizational performance in public universities in Rivers State. This design was chosen because it allows the researcher to statistically determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables without manipulating them.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised the three public universities in Rivers State, namely:

1. University of Port Harcourt
2. Rivers State University
3. Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

The target population consisted of principal officers in these universities, including Vice Chancellors, Registrars, Bursars, Directors on academic planning, and Librarian. In total, six (6) principal officers across the three universities were included in the study.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study adopted a census sampling technique, meaning that the entire population of principal officers was studied. Due to the small and manageable size of the population, all six (6) principal officers from the three universities were selected as respondents. This approach ensured complete coverage of the relevant decision-makers across all institutions under study. 6 respondents multiplied by 3 institutions give us a total of 18 respondents.

Instrument for Data Collection

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to capture detailed information on: Various dimensions of workplace diversity. performance indicators of the institutions

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument: Face validity was established through expert review to confirm that the questionnaire items were clear and appropriate. Content validity was ensured by aligning the items with existing literature and the study's objectives. To ensure reliability, the Cronbach Alpha reliability test was conducted. The reliability coefficient obtained met the accepted benchmark ($\alpha \geq 0.70$), indicating that the instrument was reliable and internally consistent.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using the following methods: Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to summarise and describe the demographic characteristics of respondents and their responses. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses and determine the relationship between workplace diversity and organisational performance. All data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Cultural Diversity and Academic Performance

	N	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev
Cultural diversity in the university enhances the quality of academic programs.	18	1	5	56	3.11	1.323
A culturally diverse academic staff brings innovation to teaching and research.	18	1	5	53	2.94	1.434
Students from different cultural backgrounds perform better academically when diversity is encouraged.	18	1	5	60	3.33	1.188
Cultural diversity has no significant impact on academic performance.	18	1	5	60	3.33	1.328
Valid N (listwise)	18					

Source: Research Survey Data (2025) via SPSS version 23.

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the descriptive statistics reveal respondents' perceptions of the relationship between cultural diversity and academic performance in public universities in Rivers State. Out of 18 valid responses: The statement "Cultural diversity in

the university enhances the quality of academic programs” had a mean score of 3.11 and a standard deviation of 1.323, indicating moderate agreement among respondents with some variability in their views. The item “A culturally diverse academic staff brings innovation to teaching and research” recorded a mean of 2.94, which also suggests moderate agreement but with slightly lower consensus. The higher standard deviation of 1.434 shows greater variation in responses. The statement “Students from different cultural backgrounds perform better academically when diversity” is encouraged received a relatively higher mean score of 3.33, suggesting a stronger level of agreement among respondents. The standard deviation was 1.188, indicating more consistency in responses.

Similarly, the reverse-phrased item “Cultural diversity has no significant impact on academic performance” also had a mean of 3.33, with a standard deviation of 1.328. This response may suggest either confusion due to negative wording or a divided opinion. Overall, the mean scores across all four items range between 2.94 and 3.33, indicating a generally positive perception that cultural diversity contributes to improved academic performance, though with some variability in respondents' views.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Ethnic Diversity and Resource Management

	N	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev
Ethnic diversity in leadership promotes equitable distribution of university resources.	18	1	5	53	2.94	1.392
Ethnic inclusivity enhances transparency in resource management.	18	1	5	48	2.67	1.534
Ethnic diversity often leads to conflict in the management of university resources.	18	1	5	55	3.06	1.259
Effective resource allocation is achievable in ethnically diverse institutions.	18	1	5	55	3.06	1.392
Valid N (listwise)	18					

Source: Research Survey Data (2025) via SPSS version 23.

Based on the data presented in Table 2, the descriptive statistics provide insights into respondents' perceptions regarding the relationship between ethnic diversity and resource management in public universities in Rivers State. From the 18 valid responses: The item “Ethnic diversity in leadership promotes equitable distribution of university resources” recorded a mean score of 2.94 with a standard deviation of 1.392, suggesting moderate agreement among respondents, with some variation in their responses. The statement “Ethnic inclusivity enhances transparency in resource management” had a slightly lower mean of 2.67, indicating a more neutral to moderate level of agreement. The standard deviation of 1.534 reflects a wider spread of opinions on this issue. Interestingly, the negatively worded item “Ethnic diversity often leads to conflict in the management of university resources” had a mean score of 3.06, suggesting that some respondents agreed with this statement, implying concerns about challenges associated with ethnic diversity. The standard deviation of 1.259 indicates a relatively moderate variation in responses.

The item “Effective resource allocation is achievable in ethnically diverse institutions” also recorded a mean of 3.06, reflecting a generally positive view on the potential of ethnically diverse institutions to manage resources effectively, with a standard deviation of 1.392. Overall, the mean scores range from 2.67 to 3.06, indicating that while respondents generally recognize some positive aspects of ethnic diversity in resource management, there are also concerns about potential conflicts and inconsistencies in implementation. The responses suggest a mixed but slightly leaning positive perception of ethnic diversity's impact on effective resource management.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics on Educational Diversity and Global Engagement

	N	Min	Max	Sum	Mean	Std. Dev
Educationally diverse faculty members improve the global competitiveness of the university.	18	1	5	50	2.78	1.437
Exposure to diverse educational backgrounds enhances international collaborations.	18	1	5	43	2.39	1.577
Educational diversity among staff limits the university's global engagement.	18	1	5	50	2.78	1.263
Universities with diverse educational backgrounds are more likely to attract international partnerships.	18	1	5	50	2.78	1.396
Valid N (listwise)	18					

Source: Research Survey Data (2025) via SPSS version 23.

Based on the data presented in Table 3, the descriptive statistics highlight respondents' views on the relationship between educational diversity and global engagement in public universities in Rivers State. From the 18 valid responses: The item “Educationally diverse faculty members improve the global competitiveness of the university” had a mean score of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 1.437, indicating a moderately positive perception with a notable spread in responses. The statement “Exposure to diverse educational backgrounds enhances international collaborations” received the lowest mean score of 2.39, suggesting a more neutral or less favorable perception of this relationship. The relatively high standard deviation of 1.577 shows significant variation in opinions among respondents. The negatively worded item “Educational diversity among staff limits the university's global engagement” had a mean of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 1.263. This suggests a generally neutral stance, with responses spread across agreement and disagreement. The statement “Universities with diverse educational backgrounds are more likely to attract international partnerships” also recorded a mean of 2.78, with a standard deviation of 1.396, indicating moderate agreement with varying degrees of certainty. Overall, the mean scores in this section ranged from 2.39 to 2.78, reflecting a generally neutral to moderately positive perception of the impact of educational diversity on global engagement. The relatively high standard deviations suggest that respondents' views were quite diverse, indicating no strong consensus on the issue. This may imply that while educational diversity is acknowledged, its direct influence on global engagement is not uniformly recognized among university leaders.

Hypotheses Testing

H01: There is no significant relationship between cultural diversity and academic performance of public universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: Correlations on Cultural Diversity and Academic Performance

		cultural diversity	academic performance
cultural diversity	Pearson Correlation	1	.897**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	18	18
academic performance	Pearson Correlation	.897**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	18	18

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the results presented in Table 4, the hypothesis H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between cultural diversity and academic performance of public universities in Rivers State was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The analysis revealed a very strong positive correlation between cultural diversity and academic performance, with a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.897. This indicates that as cultural diversity increases, academic performance also tends to improve in public universities within the state. Furthermore, the p-value is 0.000, which is less than the 0.01 significance level. This implies that the relationship is statistically significant, and the null hypothesis (H₀₁) is therefore rejected. There is a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between cultural diversity and academic performance in public universities in Rivers State. This suggests that enhancing cultural diversity among staff and students may contribute positively to academic outcomes in these institutions.

H02: There is no significant relationship between ethnic diversity and resource management of public universities in Rivers State.

Table 5: Correlations on Ethnic Diversity and Resource Management

		ethnic diversity	resource management
ethnic diversity	Pearson Correlation	1	.908**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	18	18
resource management	Pearson Correlation	.908**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	18	18

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the findings in Table 5, the hypothesis H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between ethnic diversity and resource management of public universities in Rivers State was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The result shows a very

strong positive correlation between ethnic diversity and resource management, with a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.908. This indicates that as ethnic diversity within the universities increases, the effectiveness of resource management also tends to improve. The p -value is 0.000, which is less than the 0.01 level of significance, indicating that the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected. There is a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between ethnic diversity and resource management in public universities in Rivers State. This suggests that greater ethnic diversity, especially in leadership and administrative roles, may contribute to more effective and equitable management of university resources.

H03: There is no significant relationship between educational diversity and global engagement of public universities in Rivers State.

Table 6: Correlations on Educational Diversity and Global Engagement

		educational diversity	global engagement
educational diversity	Pearson Correlation	1	.925**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	18	18
global engagement	Pearson Correlation	.925**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	18	18

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the data presented in Table 6, the hypothesis H_{03} : There is no significant relationship between educational diversity and global engagement of public universities in Rivers State was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The analysis shows a very strong positive correlation between educational diversity and global engagement, with a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.925. This indicates that universities with higher levels of educational diversity among staff are more likely to experience increased levels of global engagement, such as international collaborations, partnerships, and visibility. The p -value is 0.000, which is less than the 0.01 significance level, confirming that the relationship is statistically significant. As a result, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) is rejected. There is a statistically significant and very strong positive relationship between educational diversity and global engagement in public universities in Rivers State. This suggests that institutions that embrace diverse educational backgrounds among their academic and administrative staff are more likely to strengthen their global relevance and international collaborations.

Table 7: Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision	Interpretation
H ₀₁	Cultural Diversity & Academic Performance	0.897	0.000	Rejected	Strong, positive, and significant relationship
H ₀₂	Ethnic Diversity & Resource Management	0.908	0.000	Rejected	Very strong, positive, and significant relationship
H ₀₃	Educational Diversity & Global Engagement	0.925	0.000	Rejected	Very strong, positive, and significant relationship

Source: Research survey Data (2025)

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis One (H₀₁):

There is no significant relationship between cultural diversity and academic performance of public universities in Rivers State.

The result of the correlation analysis (Table 4) shows a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between cultural diversity and academic performance ($r = 0.897$, $p < 0.01$). This implies that increased cultural diversity within public universities in Rivers State is associated with improvements in academic output and overall institutional effectiveness. The finding suggests that when staff and students from diverse cultural backgrounds interact, it can foster broader perspectives, knowledge exchange, and innovative teaching approaches, thereby enhancing academic performance. This result is consistent with the findings of Omosanya & Olanipekun (2023), who examined cultural diversity and adaptive performance in a private-sector manufacturing context (Allied Atlantic Distilleries Ltd., Ogun State). Their study also reported a strong, positive, and significant effect of cultural diversity on adaptive performance ($R^2 \approx 0.931$; $p < 0.001$), affirming that cultural diversity, when managed properly, contributes significantly to employee adaptability and organisational outcomes.

Although the contexts differ private manufacturing vs. public universities both studies affirm the positive value of cultural diversity in enhancing performance. The consistency strengthens the argument that diversity-oriented policies, inclusive practices, and cross-cultural understanding can positively impact productivity across different sectors.

Hypothesis Two (H₀₂):

There is no significant relationship between ethnic diversity and resource management of public universities in Rivers State.

The results from Table 5 indicate a very strong and statistically significant positive relationship between ethnic diversity and resource management ($r = 0.908$, $p < 0.01$). This

suggests that ethnically diverse leadership and staff are perceived to contribute to better resource distribution, transparency, and fairness in the management of institutional resources.

While Omosanya & Olanipekun (2023) did not directly assess ethnic diversity, their broader conclusion supports the idea that diversity in workforce composition, including ethnicity, can enhance organisational adaptability and task performance when properly managed. This indirectly aligns with the present study's finding that ethnic diversity contributes positively to operational aspects such as resource allocation. Additionally, this finding contrasts with some negative assumptions in literature that associate ethnic diversity with conflict or inefficiency in resource management. Instead, this study supports the idea that when ethnic diversity is embraced and strategically managed, it enhances institutional governance and accountability, particularly in public sector institutions such as universities.

Hypothesis Three (H₀₃):

There is no significant relationship between educational diversity and global engagement of public universities in Rivers State.

The correlation analysis in Table 6 reveals a very strong and significant positive relationship between educational diversity and global engagement ($r = 0.925$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that public universities with faculty and staff from diverse educational backgrounds are more likely to establish international collaborations, attract global partnerships, and maintain competitive international reputations.

This finding expands on the diversity-performance literature by showing that educational diversity often overlooked compared to cultural or ethnic diversity is a significant driver of global institutional relevance in the higher education sector. It implies that diverse academic training backgrounds enable institutions to respond more effectively to global academic standards, research collaborations, and international accreditation demands. Compared to Yusuf et al. (2025), whose study found that experiential diversity had a positive but statistically non-significant effect on employee commitment in federal parastatals ($\beta \approx 0.0535$, $p > .05$), the current study reveals a much stronger and statistically significant impact of diversity (educational) on performance (in this case, global engagement)

Conclusion

The findings of this study have established that workplace diversity significantly influences organizational performance in public universities in Rivers State. Specifically, cultural diversity was shown to enhance academic performance, ethnic diversity was associated with more effective resource management, and educational diversity was positively linked to global engagement. These outcomes highlight the importance of managing diversity not just as a compliance measure, but as a strategic tool for institutional growth and competitiveness. The results align with existing literature, including Omosanya & Olanipekun (2023), who found that cultural and age diversity significantly impact adaptive and task performance, and Yusuf et al. (2025), who emphasized the need for proper management of experiential diversity. This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge affirming that diversity, when intentionally managed, leads to stronger institutional performance, innovation, and global relevance, especially in higher education institutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Public universities should develop and enforce diversity and inclusion policies that encourage the representation of various cultural, ethnic, and educational backgrounds in both academic and administrative roles.
2. Training programs should be organized to improve cultural awareness and sensitivity among staff, fostering a more inclusive environment that supports academic collaboration and innovation.
3. Management should ensure that resource allocation and decision-making processes are transparent and inclusive, reflecting the diverse ethnic backgrounds of stakeholders to enhance fairness and trust.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE FORM

Structured Questionnaire Items

S/N	Questionnaire Item	SA	A	D	SD
Objective 1: Cultural Diversity and Academic Performance					
1	Cultural diversity in the university enhances the quality of academic programs.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	A culturally diverse academic staff brings innovation to teaching and research.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Students from different cultural backgrounds perform better academically when diversity is encouraged.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Cultural diversity has no significant impact on academic performance.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Objective 2: Ethnic Diversity and Resource Management					
5	Ethnic diversity in leadership promotes equitable distribution of university resources.	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Ethnic inclusivity enhances transparency in resource management.	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Ethnic diversity often leads to conflict in the management of university resources.	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	Effective resource allocation is achievable in ethnically diverse institutions.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Objective 3: Educational Diversity and Global Engagement					
9	Educationally diverse faculty members improve the global competitiveness of the university.	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Exposure to diverse educational backgrounds enhances international collaborations.	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	Educational diversity among staff limits the university's global engagement.	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	Universities with diverse educational backgrounds are more likely to attract international partnerships.	☐	☐	☐	☐