# Management of Academic Staff Diversity for Enhanced University Administration in Rivers State

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#### **Abstract**

This study examined management of academic staff diversity for enhanced university administration in Rivers State. Two research questions and two corresponding null hypotheses were posed to guide the study. The study was anchored on conflict management theory by Karl Marx in 1958. This study adopted a descriptive survey design with a population of 2815 lecturers and management staff of the public universities in Rivers State. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 395 lecturers and management staff. A self-designed questionnaire titled: Management of Academic Staff Diversity for Enhanced University Administration Questionnaire (MASDEUAQ)" was used for data collection. Scoring was done on a modified 4 point likert type scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. Test retest technique was used to determine the reliability index of 0.64 using Pearson Product moment Correlation Coefficient which is high, reliable and adequate for the study. The mean and rank order were used in answering the research questions while z-test statistics were used in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed amongst others that pairing of the old and the younger staff as well as the fusion of the opposite sex when allocating academic duties are the ways staff diversity are managed for enhanced university administration. Based on the findings, the study therefore recommended amongst others that government and other stakeholders in education such as Banks and NGOs should through inservice training such as seminars, conferences make policies that will guide university administrators in the management of diversities among academic staff for effective university administration.

**Key words:** Management, staff, sevice, community.

#### Introduction

Universities are characterised with career opportunities beyond traditional functions of teaching and academic research. The term administration is also an important career area in higher education institutions. University administration as career area involves a wide range of professional areas made up of people with different backgrounds, skills, talents and professional competencies required to work in an academic workplace (Akua, 2014).

University administration therefore provides the matrix which binds together various integral and important parts of the university. It also lubricates the machinery of governance to sustain a smooth and effective operation. Higher education (University) would not function properly without committed, hardworking administrators who take a broad view of the institution's interests.

University administration is an organization with a peculiar administrative structure. The administration of university is a process of making use of the available resources towards the achievement of education goals of the organization. As noted by Anuna (2014), university administration is a process primarily concerned with creating, maintaining and coordinating the resources and energy within educational institutions for the purpose of achieving predefined goals. All these cannot be achieved without the staff who are at the centre of the teaching and learning process.

Staff include the workforce in the organization, one of the main functions of which is teaching, research and community services. It includes a professor, an associate professor, a senior lecturer and assistant. It also includes: Directors, Deans, Associate Deans, and Heads of Departments if their main activity is teaching or research. According to the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel (UNESCO, 2016), university academic staff means all persons in higher education institutions or programmes involved in training and/or pursuit of scholarships and/or research and/or provision of educational services for students or community as a whole. The academic staff is the implementer of the curriculum and the facilitator of the teaching-learning process, whose performance significantly determines the outcome of the process. The staff is also to an extent, involved in the administration of the school. However, these staff are of diverse backgrounds. The areas of diversity include amongst others; gender, age, religion, culture and educational qualifications.

Academic staff diversity is the various individual differences and similarities that exists among the people working in an organization (Obasi & Franca, 2021). It encompasses the similarities and differences among staff in terms of age, cultural background, physical abilities and disabilities, race, religion, gender and sexual orientation. No two human beings are alike. They differ in many respects. They are different in not only gender, culture, race, social and psychological characteristics, but also in their perspectives and prejudices (Okogbe, 2016). Diversity of academic staff recognises the heterogeneity of the human resources of an organization. It involves a variety of differences between individuals in an organization. Diversity not only includes how individuals identify themselves, but also, how others perceive them. Today's managers are responsible for both leading employees and responding to the needs of customers who are more ethnically and culturally diverse, older and in greater need of child and elderly care. Diversity includes all characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individual.

Obasi, (2021) opined that staff diversity management has significant implications for management. This is because diversity management is the process or strategy of promoting the perception, acknowledgement and implementation of diversity in organizations and institutions. Bernadi and DeToni (2019) stressed that diversity management is a strategic management approach to Human Resources Management that is supported by some programmes, activities and tools directed towards the integration and development of inclusivity in organizations. In his own perspective, Roosevett (2018) defined diversity management as an organizational commitment aimed at recruiting, retaining, rewarding and promoting a heterogeneous mix of employees in an organization. Based on

the definitions above, it can be deduced that diversity management therefore concerns itself with the development and deployment of mechanisms that ensures acknowledgement and acceptance of differences in order to create sustainable competitive advantage for the organization. The overarching idea behind diversity management in organizations therefore is that all employees need to be afforded full participation in the operations of the organization no matter who or what they are or where they come from (Sturm, 2010). Such participation according to diversity management theory propounded by Sturm (2011) enables the diverse workforce to thrive, realise their potentials, engage meaningfully in institutional or organizational life and ultimately contribute to the flourishing of self and others.

Age diversity strategy when managed can enhance university administration. Hence, a mixed-age work team can take better informed decisions that can enhance organizational health. It has the potential of reducing employee turnover which is costly and damaging to staff morale. It drives innovation as a result of a collective divergent and collaborative point of view. Onuoha (2021) opined that age diversity strategy offers a variety of skill sets as in collaborating the skills of both young employees and older workers. Age-based diversity is a shared phenomenon that is present in nearly all groupings, such as families, higher institutions, sport teams, and work or team groups with members of varying ages (Mande, Hazel & Charles, 2018). Workforce is unique in its generational diversity, which presents new challenges to organizations attempting to attract, retain, manage, and motivate quality staff. Each generation believes that its strengths are unique and they do not enhance those of other generations. Where age diversity is practiced, the benefits accrue both to the organization and the staff. Having an age diverse environment produces and creates better working relationships and enhances social cohesion for all. Darwin (2013) in his study on age diversity and its impact on employee performance in Singapore, identified age as one of the strategic capabilities that will add value to organizations over their competitors.

In this regard, staff who grew up and are employed in different times and periods have different world views, expectations, values, mode of communication, content of curriculum and method of lecture delivery. The transfer of experience from old staff to new worker, as noted by Rose (as cited in Okogbaa, 2015), leads to more effective problem solving since a more diverse workforce in terms of age provides a wider variety and consequently a higher number of alternative for evaluation. Several studies have shown that the choices, tastes, likes, perceptions, skills, experience and productivity of staff change as their age changes. Age diversity can be effectively managed by ensuring that the school in all her dealings and policy take into consideration the different needs of the various age groups. The issue of diversity in the age of academic staff member is one that school managers are expected to manage cautiously in order to guard against any form of discrimination and intimidation and to enhance university administration.

Gender diversity management is of paramount importance for enhanced university administration in Rivers State. Obasi (2021) opined that diversity on the basis of gender in the workplace is the equal treatment and acceptance of both male and female in an organization. This scholar further maintained that several agitations have been made to propagate the doctrine of gender

equality/balance in the work environment. Hence, the need to carry out an empirical study on management of academic staff diversity for enhanced university administration in Rivers State. Gender in Nigeria generally and Rivers State in particular, focuses on empowering women. In addition, as a key factor in the millennium development goals, it is an essential component in achieving other goals (World Bank, 2012). There is a consistent drive towards educating women and empowering them socially, economically and politically, especially given that the Nigeria Society is patriarchal in nature. Likewise, constitutionally, women are encouraged to hold political positions (Vanguard, 2013). The national constitution reflects this drive towards women's political involvement, which states that there is a 5 percent allocation of legislative seats at the federal, state and local levels to women. However, arguably, women's empowerment or equality cannot be achieved with such a low percentage.

Diversity on the basis of gender in the workplace is the equal treatment and acceptance of both male and female in an organization. Several debates have been made to propagate the doctrine of gender equality/balance in workplace. Okogbe (2016) stressed that gender balance or imbalance affects university administration. This scholar therefore recommended that organizational recruitment process should deliberately ensure that there is gender balance in the number of people recruited. Mboya (2019) argued that gender diversity increases creativity and innovation. The implication is that gender-diversity in university administration creates a richer flow of ideas and thus have the potential to increase creativity and innovation among the academic staff in an organization. In this regards, diversity in the administration of university organization, is a critical management task that requires tactfulness and adequate knowledge of human and material resources' management skills. This is to reduce to the barest minimum, the possible inherent negative effects, while at the same time, the positives are maximized. To that extent, Thomas (1995) in Obasi (2016) remarked that managing the inevitable diversity of the changing workforce is an essential skill for both managers and leaders, diversity management. Diversity management allows everyone to contribute naturally to organisational goals. Successful diversity management ensures that no group of employees is privileged to the disadvantage of others.

This study was anchored on conflict management theory propounded by Karl Marx in (1958). No human institution can claim to be free from conflicts arising from diverse social interactions. Thus, conflict management entails a continuous process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict at the same time effecting a positive increase in the aspects of the conflict. The objective of conflict management involves enhancing learning and group result, which includes the effectiveness and efficiency of performance in an organizational setting (Rahim, 2012). It could as well be viewed from the position or direction of conflict. When resources are fixed in the relative form at one departments' gains, it is at the detriment of another. At this point, conflict becomes inevitable and expected. Where two sub-units in an organizational system tend to have differentiated aspirations with its attendant goals and are functionally interdependent, it thus means that conditions give provision for the prevalence of conflict. Interdependence aims at producing the desire for partnership and requisite collaboration. This presents a demanding and avoidable occasions for the prevalence of conflict in an organization. Other contextual indices that influence the interaction structure between

departments; have created the milieu for interdepartmental quagmire which include: diverse behaviour and attitude between staff and line units, organizational size directly related to level of problems and standardization which involved inversely related to conflict; also, the physical or communicational barriers between departments, rewards or organizational resources, unequal access to authority and uncertainty or ambiguity in designating rewards or responsibilities to different departments.

These are the sources through which conflict situations prevail in organizations. Again, the effectiveness and success of the necessary procedures can be gauged by the extent to which they end up limiting the conflict behaviour and also the extent by which they aided the achievement of a satisfactory solution. Against the backdrop, the contention of this study anchors on the establishment of the essence of conflict management in tertiary institutions by applying the strategies and techniques of conflict resolution, conflict prevention avoidance, or institutionalization of conflict which is targeted at changing or replacing the coercive behaviour, nevertheless, that is only the injection of behavioural aspect social scientist, acting in a facilitative, non-directive and non-evaluative fashion, put up to achieve a resolution with respect to the basic attitudes, issues and structure of interaction in an organization. If University managements care for optimal methods and techniques of diverse and conflict management, they should, however, give their best support to the skill or strategy that can control diversity and end division or conflict through a satisfactory and self-perpetuating manner.

# **Statement of the Problem**

The academic staff is at the center of the teaching-learning process which is the hub of any educational institution. This is because they are the facilitators and the implementers of the curriculum. Out of logical necessity, they significantly impact on learning outcomes. Among these academic staff exist diversities in different areas. The management of academic staff with diverse backgrounds, to a large extent, determines their level of cohesion, cooperation, dedication, and by extension, administrative effectiveness. Among these staff, exist diversities in terms of age and gender etc. All these bear on their task performance in the school.

However, from what the researchers have observed as educational stakeholders, a close look at universities revealed frequent cases of mutual suspicion, cliqueness, discriminatory behaviours, favouritism and the like. All these lead to conflicts, disharmony, frustration and antagonism in an organization and consequently, impede on the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation. Hence, the problem of this study put in question form is, what are the ways (age based and gender based) diversities are managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State?

# Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study generally was to examine management of academic staff diversity for enhanced university administration in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives were to:

- 1. examine the ways age-based diversity is managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State.
- 2. determine the ways gender-based diversity is managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State.

#### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1. What are the ways age-based diversity is managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State?
- 2. What are the ways gender-based diversity is managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State?

# **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

- **H01:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of lecturers and management staff on the ways age-based diversity are managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State.
- **H02:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of lecturers and management staff on the ways gender-based diversity are managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State.

#### Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised all the 2815 lecturers and management staff of the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. This consisted of 1450 from the University of Port Harcourt, 960 from the Rivers State University and 405 from the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Sources (Establishment Department, 2023). A sample size of 395 lecturers and management staff were drawn from a total population of 2815 using the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The strata is made up of 213 lecturers and 182 management staff. The instrument used for data collection was 10 items questionnaire titled "Management of Academic Staff Diversity for Enhanced University Administration Questionnaire MASDEUAQ)". The instrument was validated by experts in the field of Educational Management and Measurement and Evaluation of the University of Port Harcourt. Test re-test techniques was used to determine the reliability of the study using data from the pilot study carried out on 20 participants outside the sample size. A reliability index of 0.66 was obtained using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient which is high, reliable and adequate for the study. The instrument was administered

personally by the researchers and all the copies distributed were collected on the spot. Research questions were answered using tables, mean, standard deviation and rank order and the mean scores 2.50 and above were seen as agreed while below 2.50 were seen as disagreed. The null hypotheses formulated were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance. The weighted mean scores are as follows:

Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points Agree (A) – 3 points Disagree (D) = 2 points Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point Thus,  $4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = \frac{10}{4} = 2.50$ 

# **Results**

**Research Question One:** What are the ways gender-based diversity is managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State?

**Table 1:** Weighted mean, standard deviation and rank order statistics of lecturers and management staff on the ways age-based diversity are managed for university administration in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	n=213 Lecturers		n= 182 Managemen		Mean set	Rank Orde	Remark s
		t Staff				r		
		$\overline{x}_1$	$SD_1$	$\overline{\times}_2$	$SD_2$	$\bar{x} \bar{x}$		
1.	Administrators often make provision for pairing the old as well as the younger staff when assigning duties.	3.22	0.58	3.21	0.58	3.21	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Agreed
2.	The older as well as the younger staff are often exposed to in-service training such as seminars, conferences and workshop.	3.35	0.53	3.35	0.53	3.35	1st	Agreed
3.	The diverse needs of the various age are considered by the school administration.	3.23	0.62	3.21	0.62	3.22	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Agreed
4.	Every age group is often seen as valuable asset to the organization.	3.17	0.49	3.16	0.49	3.16	4 <sup>th</sup>	Agreed
5.	Every age group is equally treated	3.14	0.34	3.13	0.35	3.13	5th	Agreed
	Grand mean $(\overline{\times})$	16.11	2.56	16.06	2.57			
		3.22	0.51	3.21	0.51			

Table 1 revealed the responses of lecturers and management staff on the question raised. The mean responses of 1-5 by the lecturers were 3.22, 3.55, 3.23, 3.17 and 3.14. The mean items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were agreed for being above the criterion mean of 2.50. On the part of the management staff 1-5 with a mean of 3.21, 3.35, 3.21, 3.16 and 3.13 were all agreed for being above the criterion mean of 2.50 in the final analysis. Item 2 with weighted mean of 3.35 came first, items 3, 1, 4 and 5 with weighted mean of 3.22, 3.21, 3.16 and 3.13 came second, third, fourth and fifth.

**Research Question Two:** What are the ways gender-based diversity is managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State?

**Table 2:** Weighted mean, standard deviation and rank order statistics of lecturers and management staff on the ways gender-based diversity is managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State.

S/N	Items	n=213 Lecturers		n= 182 Managemen t		Mean	Rank Orde r	Remark s
						set		
			Staff					
		$\overline{x}_{1}$	$SD_1$	$\bar{x}_2$	$SD_2$	××		
6.	Administrators often pair staff with their opposite sex when allocating duties.	3.33	0.52	3.33	0.53	3.33	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Agreed
7.	Encouraging equal treatment of both genders in the school system.	3.22	0.53	3.21	0.58	3.21	4 <sup>th</sup>	Agreed
8.	Strict avoidance of gender discrimination among academic staff.	3.35	0.53	3.33	0.53	3.35	1 <sup>st</sup>	Agreed
9.	Responsibilities are assigned based on the orientation of each staff.	3.23	0.62	0.62	3.21	0.62	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Agreed
10.	The various experiences of the different sex groups are harnessed.	3.17	0.49	3.16	0.49	3.16	5 <sup>th</sup>	Agreed
	Grand mean (x̄)	16.30	2.74	16.26	2.75			
		3.26	0.54	3.25	0.55			

Table 2 revealed the responses of lecturers and management staff for items 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10. The responses of lecturers had the mean scores of 3.33, 3.22, 3.33, 3.23 and 3.17 respectively. Item 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 were all agreed for being above the criterion mean of 2.50. Similarly, the responses of management staff to the items produced mean scores of 3.33, 3.21, 3.35, 3.21, 3.16 and 2.74. Items 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 were also agreed for being above the criterion mean of 2.50 in the final analysis. In terms of ranking, item 8 with weighted mean of 3.33 came first, item 6, 9, 7 and 10 with weighted mean of 3.33, 3.22, 3.21 and 3.16 came second, third, fourth and fifth.

# **Test of Hypotheses**

**H01:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of opinions of lecturers and management staff on the ways age-based diversity is managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State.

**Table 3:** Summary of z-test analysis on the mean scores of opinions of lecturers and management staff on the ways age-based diversity is managed for university administration in Rivers State.

Subjects	n	X	Sd	Level of sig.	df	Z-cal	Z-crit	Decision
Lecturers	213	3.22	0.51					
Management staff	182	3.21	0.51	0.05	393	0.07	+1.96	Not significant
	395							

From table 3, the  $\overline{x}$  scores of lecturers and management staff stand at 3.22 and 3.21 respectively. These mean scores are not significantly different from each other. Furthermore, at 0.05 levels of significance and 393 degree of freedom, the calculated z-scores of 0.07 was by far less than the z-critical value of +1.96. Based on the above observations, since the z-calculated value of 0.07 was by far lesser than the z-critical value of +1.96, we failed to reject the null hypothesis and therefore established that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of opinions of lecturers and management staff on the ways age-based diversity are managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State.

**H02:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of opinions of lecturers and management staff on the ways gender-based diversity is managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State.

**Table 4:** Summary of z-test analysis on the mean scores of lecturers and management staff on the ways gender-based diversity is managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State.

Subjects	n	X	Sd	Level of sig.	Df	Z-cal	Z-crit	Decision
Lecturers	213	3.26	0.54					
Management staff	182	3.23	0.55	0.05	393	0.08	+1.96	Not significant
	395							

From table 4, the  $\overline{\times}$  scores of lecturers and management staff stand at 3.26 and 3.23 respectively. These mean scores are not significantly different from each other. Furthermore, at 0.05 levels of significance and 393 degree of freedom, the calculated z-scores of 0.08 was by far less than the z-critical value of +1.96. Based on the above observations, since the z-calculated value of 0.08 was by far lesser than the z-critical value of +1.96, we failed to reject the null hypothesis and therefore established that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of opinions of lecturers and management staff on the ways gender-based diversity are managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State.

# **Discussion of Findings**

# Ways Age-based Diversity are Managed for Enhanced University Administration

It was generally found that the ways age-based diversity are managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State are: Administrators often make provisions for pairing the old as well as the younger staff when assigning duties, the older as well as the younger staff are often exposed to in-service training such as seminars, conferences and workshop, the diverse needs of the various age are considered by the school administration, every age group are often seen as valuable asset to the organization and every group are equally treated. These findings is supported by Rose (as cited in Okogba, 2015) who noted that the transfer of experiences from old staff to new worker leads to more effective problem solving since a more diverse workforce in terms of age provides wider variety and consequently a higher number of alternatives for evaluation.

### Ways Gender-Based Diversity are Managed for Enhanced University Administration

The results of the analysis signified that the ways gender-based diversity are managed for enhanced university administration include: Administrators often pair staff with their opposite sex when allocating duties, encouraging equal treatment of both genders in school system, strict avoidance of gender discrimination among academic staff and responsibilities are assigned based on the orientation of each staff. This finding is in line with Mboya (2019) who argued that gender diversity increases creativity and innovation. The implication is that gender diversity in university administration create a richer flow of ideas and thus have the potential to increase creativity and innovation among the academic staff in an organization.

#### Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that pairing of the old as well as the younger staff when assigning duties and the fusion of the opposite sex when allocating academic duties are the ways staff diversity are managed for enhanced university administration in Rivers State.

#### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study as well as the conclusion, the researchers therefore recommended the following for implementation.

- 1. Government and other stakeholders in education such as Banks, NGOs should through inservice training such as seminars and conferences make specific policies that will guide university administrators in the management of diversities among academic staff for effective university administration.
- 2. Finally, since diversity ensures creativity and innovativeness, therefore, stringent rules and regulations should be put in place to discourage discrimination based on age and gender.

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