

Embracing the Dragon: Ethnic Diversity among Staff of Public Universities in Kenya

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ABSTRACT:- Kenya faces challenges of negative ethnicity which is persistently discussed in different forums in the country. The effects of this cut across various sectors of the economy including the education sector. Public Universities in Kenya are guided by government legislations and policies and they should embrace ethnic diversity in their structures, recruitments and appointments of its human resources. However, according to the Kenya National Cohesion and Integration Commission, majority of the public universities in Kenya contravene the laws of Kenya and the new Constitution in relation to the basic tenets of ethnic diversity. This article explores ethnic diversity in public universities in Kenya tracing its origin and development in these establishments. Using desk-top and content analysis research approach, empirical and theoretical studies were analyzed and research findings and conclusions obtained. Drawing from the social categorization, the similarity-attraction and the information-decision-making theories the study theoretically advances an argument that ethnic diversity is not embraced in public universities in Kenya and further supports full adherence and implementation of the Kenya National Cohesion and Integration Commission recommendations in order to curb negative ethnicity and improve inclusivity of the marginalized communities in these institutions.

Keywords:- Workforce Diversity, Ethnic Diversity, Public Universities, Human Resource Management

I. INTRODUCTION

Demographic and technological changes at work place have made organizations become more diverse (Van Knippenberg, de Dreu and Homan, 2004). As a consequence, organizational performance seems increasingly dependent on diverse employees that are working together, which could explain the increased attention of managers and researchers to work on group diversity and its relationship with performance. The concept of diversity should therefore be seen as a collection of a broad range of different diversity dimensions, because every single diversity dimension could affect team performance differently (Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau, and Briggs, 2010). Due to the global marketplace in which many organizations nowadays operate and the massive increase in the use of multinational work teams, ethnic diversity and understanding how to manage this within the organization is more relevant than before (Pitts, 2006). Empirical research on ethnic diversity shows both positive (Watson, Kumar and Michaelsen, 1993) and negative (Leonard and Levine, 2003; Townsend and Scott, 2001; Tsui, Egan and O'Reilly, 1992) effects on performance outcomes. Ethnic diversity therefore refers to a socio-cultural workforce diversity which is specified by the number of people who have dissimilar ethnicity in the company in relation to languages, cultures and values (Gupta, 2013). Cox, (2001) adds that ethnic diversity is the differences in people's ethnic backgrounds, applied to a work team, this means that team members belong to different ethnic groups. This manifest itself in the differences in people's inner self, stemming from their ethnic background. Bell et al., (2010) argues that someone's work style is often linked to someone's ethnic background and that ethnic diversity within a team brings about its effects in the way team members work together and in how they perform.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Higher education world over is undergoing rapid transformation in the face of changing global dynamics. In Kenya, these transformations have seen rapid expansion of public universities in the recent past. Universities are established to meet specific objectives in order to justify huge public expenditure on them. Today, Kenya Government is pursuing vision 2030- a new development blueprint which aims to transform Kenya into a middle-income country (Government of Kenya, 2007). Critical players in achieving this are the universities, because education and training at university create sustainable workforce in form of human resource capital for national growth and development and a national research base at various sectors of economy which is necessary in modern industrial and technological world. Therefore, the performance of universities is instrumental in Kenya's overall economic growth and development.

However, Munene (2012) points out that higher education in Kenya is dominated by negative ethnicity and vice chancellors and governing council's composition at the university have significant insinuation of ethnic, political and economic patronage. The study adds that technically ethnic supremacy in universities is a

strategy to empower the ethnic patronage by rewarding them government tenders and business contracts. In addition, Sifuna (2010) concurs with this preposition by asserting that majority of the public universities in Kenya were set up to gratify ethnic interests, especially those of large ethnic groups. Nevertheless, a report released by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (2012), indicates that majority of the public universities in Kenya have more than one-third of their employees from one community and therefore violating the diversity laws of Kenya. This study therefore fills the gap by analyzing the concept of ethnic diversity in public universities in Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Social Categorization Theory

According to social categorization perspective, it is assumed that variations in demographic characteristics of team members influence group processes and in turn the group performance (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). Due to similarities and differences between team members, team members are inclined to categorize themselves and others into groups (van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007). Ethnic diversity brings a distinction between members with the same ethnic background - who become members of the in-group - and members with different ethnic backgrounds - who become members of the out-group. These sub-categorization within a team in an in-group and out-group disrupts the group functioning within a team. Unequal relations exist between the two groups, with people favoring and trusting in-group members more than out-group members. Furthermore, people are more willing to cooperate with in-group members than with out-group members (van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007). As sub-categorization occurs on the basis of perceived differences between team members, ethnic diversity - although not always as easy observable as compared to other demographic diversity characteristics - may elicit this sub-categorization. Social categorization thus hinders group processes, that hinder the group functioning and collaboration within the group and in turn the performance of the group (van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007). This leads to the assumption that lack of ethnic diversity is negatively related to team performance.

2.1.2 Similarity-Attraction Theory

Similarity-attraction perspective is consistent with the social categorization theory, and it postulates that people tend to be more attracted to and favor people who seem similar as themselves - same ethnic background (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). However, different from the social categorization perspective, according to the similarity-attraction perspective, team members determine their similarity with other team members more by means of deep-level, underlying characteristics, like attitudes and values (Harrison, et al., 2002). Especially values are likely to change with the ethnic background of the team member. When team members have similar ethnic backgrounds, they share common life experiences and values, which might make interaction with each other easier and more desirable (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). As a result, team members prefer to work with similar others (van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007). In contrast, when team members have dissimilar ethnic backgrounds, this could lead to problematic group processes such as less positive attitudes, less frequent communication, a higher likelihood of turnover from the group, especially among those who are most different and in turn a decrease in team performance (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). Similar to the social categorization perspective, the similarity-attraction perspective therefore leads to the same assumption about the performance of ethnically diverse groups, that lack of ethnic diversity in teams is negatively related to team performance.

2.1.3 Information Decision Making Theory

The information-decision making perspective is the way information and decision making are influenced by variations in the composition of a team members (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). This perspective assumes that ethnically diverse teams have a broad range of knowledge and experience and members with different opinions and perspectives (van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007; Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). In addition, members of ethnically diverse groups are assumed to have greater access to informational networks outside their team (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). The different opinions and perspectives in an ethnically diverse team could extend the number of alternatives in decision-making, resulting in a more creative and innovative decision-making process (van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007; Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). This wealth of informational resources of ethnically diverse teams can improve team performance. The information-decision making perspective also assumes that lack of ethnic diversity in teams is negatively related to team performance.

2.2 Empirical Review

More organizations are becoming more diverse along ethnic lines, this brings in the issue of paying more attention to how different groups interact with one another at work (Pitts, 2006). Pitts (2006) state that as the private sector workforce becomes more ethnically diverse and make attempts to “manage” that diversity, the importance of understanding how diversity affects workplace interactions and work-related outcomes increases. It is important that organizations know how to manage their diverse workforce in such a way that they can maximize the advantages of this diversity and minimize its disadvantages (Opstal, 2009). Ethnic diversity can have both advantages and disadvantages for organizations. Examples of disadvantages are communication problems, lack of social cohesion in organizational work groups and problems with reaching consensus (Jackson and Joshi, 2004). Opstal (2009) states that advantages are for example more creativity, innovation a larger pool of resources that is available in the organization (for example knowledge, abilities, and social networks) and therefore better problem solving. Management of diversity is important to help an organization benefit from these advantages and minimize the disadvantages that can have a negative effect on organizational performance (Benschop, 2001).

The growth of a multicultural workforce was the focus of the 90's and is gaining more momentum into the new era (Nemetz and Christensen, 1996). Along with the increase in diversity has been an increase in the use of work teams in general, with intention of utilizing more participation and synergy to improve and increase both employee satisfaction and business performance. Even though the nature of workforce composition is rapidly becoming more mixed in terms of ethnicity, parallel interest has been increasing about the impact of such diversity in our educational institutions. The multicultural increase in businesses is due to multicultural increase of our society and, thus, also pervades familial, educational, and religious circles (Zgourides, Johnson and Watson, 2002).

Østergaard, Timmermans and Kristinsson (2011) study further argue that members of the minority group can experience less job satisfaction, lack of commitment, problems with identity and perceived discrimination. However, when minority group grows, some of the problems disappear, ethnicity can be used as a proxy for cultural background and diversity in ethnicity can be expected to be positive for innovative performance, since it broadens the viewpoints and perspectives in the firm. Moreover, the study suggests that some levels of diversity in ethnicity might be positive associated with innovation, high degree of diversity in ethnicity might be negative since it can create conflict and cliques due to social categorization.

According to Østergaard, Timmermans and Kristinsson (2011) study, ethnicity can be used as a proxy for cultural background and diversity in ethnicity can be expected to be positive for innovative performance, since it broadens the viewpoints and perspective in the firm (Richard, 2000). Moreover, the study argues that some levels of diversity in ethnicity might be positively associated with innovation. High degree of diversity in ethnicity might be negative since it can create conflict and cliques due to social categorization (Dahlin, Weingart, and Hinds, 2005).

Ehimare and Oghene (2011) empirically explored that ethnicity is insignificantly negative in its relationship to both employee productivity and performance. Ethnic diversity would benefit team performance due to a more diverse pool of skills and knowledge that leads to complementary and mutual learning. Due to complementarities and learning opportunities, ethnically diverse teams are associated with more creativity and innovation (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article used a desktop review of qualitative information from a variety of documents. This made it possible to get insight on various scholarly works by different authors on ethnic diversity at the workplace. The main aim of doing a desk review is to gain knowledge on the area of study by looking at the different approaches by different scholars, hence make an independent argument and conclusion. The review also allows the researcher to go through institutional reports and be able to make a valid description of the subject being investigated. For this article, the study assessed scholarly works relevant to ethnic diversity as well as company reports and websites.

IV. FINDINGS

4.1 Public Universities in Kenya

The Constitution of Kenya (2010) spells out that higher education is the responsibility of the National Government. The Universities Act (2012) places the responsibility of management of higher education to the Commission for University Education (CUE). The Commission ensures the establishment of public universities and constituent colleges in each of the counties, giving priority to counties that do not have universities (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). The composition of each county in Kenya apart from Nairobi County which is the capital city, is predominantly with the residents who share a common history, language or dialect, political affiliation and culture. Kenya has a total of 47 counties and out of them 20 counties have a public university or a constituent college while 17 counties do not have a single public university or constituent college. The counties

without are located in the arid areas which were originally marginalized by the colonial government because of lack of resources they could exploit from these respective counties. The British colonial government concentrated on developing those areas that they considered economically viable in terms of agriculture. These developments include setting up of schools and other institutions of learning, infrastructural development and employment of residents of these regions in government. This trend of marginalization was entrenched further by the independence governments which were led by African presidents because all the four presidents in Kenya since independence have come from the two major ethnic groups- Kikuyus and the Kalenjins. Table 1 shows the regional distribution of public universities and university colleges in Kenya.

Table 1. Distribution of Universities and Constituent Colleges in Kenya

S/N	Region/Province	No. of Universities
1.	Coast	3
2.	North- Eastern	1
3.	Eastern	5
4.	Central	6
5.	Rift Valley	9
6.	Western	4
7.	Nyanza	5
8.	Nairobi	5

Source: NCIC (2016).

4.2 Ethnic Diversity and University Councils

The university councils in Kenya are appointed and constituted by the Cabinet Secretary (CS) for Education. Each university council has two representatives from the Government, one from the Ministry of Education and another from the Ministry of Finance. The university council is charged with the responsibility of the general governance of the university. The council is composed of nine (9) members, which include the Vice Chancellor. The Vice Chancellor is an ex-official member of the university council by the virtue of being the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the university. The role of the day-to-day running of the university is left to the CEO of the university, the Vice Chancellor (CUE, 2016).

In Kenya 50% of the council members and their chairpersons come from the top four largest communities, namely; the Kikuyu, the Kalenjin, the Luhya, and the Luo. Therefore, the remaining 50% which is made up of 38 ethnic groups in the country share the remaining slots. Colonial legacy plays a role in the four communities being in the respective positions. This is because its members got exposed to the missionaries and white settlers quite early hence accessed education and other attributes of civilization. These communities therefore have more eligible members appointed as council members, hence the dominance of the more educated tribes in the university councils. Table 2 shows ethnic representation of council members in public universities and constituent colleges in Kenya.

Table 2 Ethnic representation of Council members in Public Universities and Constituent Colleges in Kenya.

S/N	Ethnic Group	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Kikuyu	25	14.3
2.	Kalenjin	24	13.7
3.	Luo	20	11.4
4.	Luhya	17	9.7
5.	Kamba	13	7.6
6.	Somali	11	6.3
7.	Mijikenda	11	6.3
8.	Meru	11	6.3
9.	Taita	7	4
10.	Kisii	6	3.4
11.	Embu	6	3.4
12.	Maasai	5	2.9
13.	Teso	3	1.7
14.	Swahili	3	1.7
15.	Asians	2	1.1
16.	Samburu	2	1.1
	TOTAL	168	100

Source: NCIC (2016).

4.3 Ethnic Diversity and Staff Employment in Public Universities

There is a huge regional imbalance in terms of staff employment in the public universities and constituent colleges in Kenya. According to the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) Act of Kenya, no public establishment should recruit more than one third of its staff members from one ethnic group. Statistics indicate Kikuyu as the largest ethnic group in Kenya in terms of the proportion of the total population (17.7%) but takes up 23.6% of all the jobs in the public universities and constituent colleges in Kenya. The Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya, Kalenjin, Kisii and Kamba make up 72.3% of the Kenyan population but constitute 86.9% of the total workforce in public universities and their constituent colleges. This is a skewed representation of workforce and a setback to enhance ethnic diversity in the public universities by excluding 36 other ethnic groups who reside within the country. The data further shows that the universities have in their workforce members from 10 ethnic groups in Kenya which take up 96.3% of the total workforce in the public universities and constituent colleges (NCIC, 2016). The other 38 ethnic groups in the country have only 27.2% to share amongst themselves. This is a big misrepresentation of the minority ethnic groups which are majorly marginalized (Mwiria, 2006). Table 3 shows the ethnic composition of employees in public universities in Kenya.

Table 3. Ethnic Composition of Employees in Public Universities in Kenya.

S/N	Ethnicity	Pop (2009)	Pop %	No. of Employees	Employment %	% Pop Ratio
1.	Kikuyu	6,622,576	17.7	7050	23.6	5.9
2.	Luo	4,044,440	10.8	4658	15.6	4.8
3.	Kalenjin	4,967,328	13.3	4586	15.4	2.0
4.	Luhya	5,338,666	14.2	4562	15.3	1.1
5.	Kisii	2,205,669	5.9	2470	8.3	2.4
6.	Kamba	3,893,157	10.4	2393	8.7	-2.4
7.	Meru	1,658,108	4.4	1348	4.5	0.1
8.	Mijikenda	1,960,574	5.2	652	2.3	-3.1
9.	Embu	324,092	0.9	419	1.4	0.5
10.	Taita	273,519	0.7	70	1.2	0.5
Total		31,288,129	83.5		96.3	

Source: NCIC (2016).

4.4 Ethnic Diversity and Appointment of Vice Chancellors

Vice Chancellors and Principals are drawn from the dominant ethnic group within the location of the university or the university college. One of the recommendations of the Ethnic and Diversity Audit of Public Universities and Constituent Colleges (2016) was recruitment of Vice Chancellors and Principals from ethnic communities that are not dominant in the location of the institution and priority should be given to the marginalized groups (NCIC, 2016). According to Section 7(2) of the NCIC Act of Kenya, no public establishment should recruit more than one third of its employees from one ethnic group. According to National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) by 2016, only Six (6) out of the thirty one (31) Public Universities and constituent colleges complied with the above provision. The universities that complied are; Multimedia University of Kenya, Technical University of Kenya, Egerton University, University of Nairobi, The Cooperative University of Kenya and Moi University. The 2016 study, entitled "Ethnic and Diversity Audit of Public Universities and Constituent Colleges", carried out by NCIC in 31 public universities and constituent university colleges on employees and their ethnic affiliation, revealed ethnic imbalance in employment. The report further reveals that in situations where the Vice Chancellor or Principal of a college from a certain ethnic group and he or she is appointed in a university within his or her own locality, then majority of the employees are recruited from his or her ethnic group. In universities where the Vice Chancellor or Principal is from a different ethnic group other than the one in the locality, then again the majority of the employees are from the local community or ethnic group (NCIC, 2016). Table 4 shows the ethnic representation of vice chancellors and principals of public universities and constituent colleges in Kenya.

Table 4. Ethnic representation of Vice Chancellors and Principals of Public Universities and constituent Colleges in Kenya.

S/N	Ethnic Group	Frequency	%
1.	Luo	6	19.4
2.	Kamba	4	12.9
3.	Kikuyu	4	12.9
4.	Luhya	4	12.9
5.	Meru	4	12.9
6.	Mijikenda	3	9.7
7.	Kalenjin	2	6.5
8.	Kisii	2	6.5
9.	Somali	1	3.2
10.	Teso	1	3.2
	Total	31	100

Source: NCIC (2016).

4.5 Ethnic Diversity in Academic Departments

The academic departments and other sections in the public universities and constituent colleges suffer from skewed ethnic diversity. It is common to find in some departments the members of both the academic staff and the non-teaching staff belonging to the same ethnic community. In some of the public universities and constituent colleges, you may find that the Vice Chancellor or Principal comes from the same locality of the respective university, they influence the university council to appoint people from their community into positions of leadership in that institution. In some public universities and constituent colleges, there is a possibility of a college, school or department having more academic and support staff coming from the same ethnic group as the head of section or department. The fact that the dominant ethnic groups have more professors and senior staff in the academic departments and schools and also sitting in thesis examination panels will ensure that the students from those ethnic groups will pass more often than those from the marginalized communities (Taaliu, 2017).

V. CONCLUSION

Ethnic diversity is not embraced in public universities in Kenya and this affects all sections of universities and their constituent colleges. Ethnic imbalance in this institutions ranges from employment of both teaching and non-teaching staff, appointment of vice chancellors and principals and the university council members. The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) has policies that universities should not recruiting more than a third of the total workforce from one ethnic group, but much more need to be done. The commission has also introduced policies where universities are supposed to integrate the concept of national unity and cohesion in their curricula. Therefore, a lot need to be done in relation to policy implementation in order to achieve ethnic diversity in Kenyan public universities.

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