



# Handling Workforce Heterogeneity in Ebonyi State Public Secondary Schools

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## Abstract

This study investigated handling workforce heterogeneity in Ebonyi State public secondary schools. A descriptive survey design was used. The population consisted of 446 public junior and senior secondary schools made up of 223 junior and 223 senior secondary schools. The sample was 134 public secondary schools, representing 30% of the total population of 446 schools. A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted. The schools were stratified into junior and senior levels. 67 administrators from junior and 67 from senior secondary schools were selected, making the total of 134 respondents, through a simple random sampling method. A self-developed questionnaire named “Handling Workforce Heterogeneity in Public Secondary Schools Questionnaire” (HWHPSQ) was used to elicit response from the respondents. A modified 4-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from “Strongly Agree” (4 points) to “Strongly Disagree” (1 point) was adopted. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach’s alpha method. A reliability coefficient index of 0.88 was obtained indicating strong internal consistency. Mean and mean set statistics were used to address the research questions, while hypotheses were tested using a z-test at a 0.05 significance level. Based on the findings, it was recommended that, functions should be allotted equally to male and female staff, employees should be encouraged to accord respect to individual cultures and opportunity should be given to those with years of experience to retrain the younger ones.

**Keywords:** Managing, Workforce, Heterogeneity, Public Secondary, Schools, Ebonyi State.

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## INTRODUCTION

Workforce heterogeneity encompasses the differences among individuals in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, educational qualifications, emotional and life experiences, intelligence,

political views, physical abilities, disabilities, and more. The concept of diversity recognizes that these differences exist and can present both opportunities and challenges. Organizations across sectors whether in education, manufacturing, oil and gas, banking, or others are composed of employees with varied backgrounds, values, and perspectives. Bringing together people from different backgrounds to achieve an organization's objectives has become a widely accepted practice that fosters peace, unity, and social cohesion. Diverse perspectives from employees can be valuable in the decision-making process, as administrators can make informed choices by considering these varied viewpoints. In essence, employee diversity refers to the inclusion of people within a workforce who differ from others in the organization. In an inclusive environment, it means having the right people in the right roles with equitable opportunities, regardless of gender, age, religion, or ethnicity. Workforce heterogeneity as viewed by Anjana (2024) is the integration of workers from diverse backgrounds, races, religion, cultures, genders, ages, religions, abilities, experiences within an organization where the collective mix can drive an innovative and growth-oriented workplace.

Handling heterogeneity in the workplace entails treating every employee equally notwithstanding race, colour and sex differences (Garcia-Rodriguez et al., 2020). It means managing differences in the workplace (Ali et al., 2021). Handling heterogeneity in the workplace is also centered on harnessing these differences to create a productive environment where everyone feels valued, where talents are maximized, and where organizational goals are met. Proper heterogeneity management can enhance efficiency and effectiveness in the workplace by recognizing and utilizing differences to improve overall work quality. Consequently, organizations are encouraged to attract, retain, and promote contributions from a diverse range of employees to satisfy customers and stakeholders. Creating an inclusive workplace involves actively removing barriers that may prevent employees from fully participating. This includes promoting equal opportunity and eliminating discrimination, recognizing that talents and skills are not defined by race, religion, gender, age, disability, or educational background. Supporting employees from diverse backgrounds through training, opportunities, and the removal of barriers can provide organizations with top talent, which ultimately supports the achievement of organizational goals. Effective teaching and learning, along with well-managed employee diversity, are essential in achieving educational objectives in schools. School administrators are encouraged to implement policies like equal employment opportunities and affirmative action by recognizing the value each employee brings based on their unique background. These policies ensure that all employees have equal rights and opportunities regardless of gender, religion, or physical ability. Gargelwar (2020) opined that equal opportunities are means of enhancing individuals' chances of life's achievement. This is so because any organization that operates on equal opportunity will have a more committed employees' workforce. While implementing these heterogeneous policies, organizations may encounter environmental and skill-related challenges.

### **Challenges of Workforce Diversity**

- Unconscious bias;
- Resistance to change;
- Unreliable operation;
- Integration problems,
- Inadequate communication

## **Benefits of Workforce Diversity**

- Enhance decision making;
- Creativity and innovation;
- Improved staff engagement and retention;
- Improved organizational reputation

## **Statement of the Problem**

The effectiveness of workforce heterogeneity in achieving organizational goals depends on how well it is managed by administrators. Poor management of diversity can lead to challenges such as conflicts, discrimination, group tensions, miscommunication, and low performance, among others. Observations from discussions with school administrators and teachers indicate that employee diversity remains an enormous challenge. This study, therefore, seeks to explore methods to effectively, handle workforce heterogeneity particularly focusing on sex, ethnicity and experience.

## **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to investigate strategies for handling workforce heterogeneity in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State. Explicitly, the study aims to:

- Identify strategies for handling sex heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State;
- Determine strategies for handling ethnicity heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State; and
- Examine strategies for handling experience heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State.

## **Research Questions**

The following questions guide this study:

- What are the strategies for handling sex heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?
- What strategies are effective in handling ethnicity heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?
- What are the strategies for handling experience heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study used a descriptive survey design, which is suitable for systematically gathering and describing data on the characteristics, features, or facts related to a particular population. The population for this study consisted of 446 public junior and senior secondary schools in Ebonyi

State, comprising 223 junior and 223 senior secondary schools. The study sample included 134 public secondary schools, representing 30% of the total population of 446 schools.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed, selecting schools from Ebonyi North and Ebonyi South Senatorial Zones and further narrowing down to nine Local Government Areas within those zones. The schools were stratified into junior and senior levels, and 67 administrators from junior and 67 from senior secondary schools were chosen, totaling 134 respondents, through a simple random sampling method. Data were collected using self-developed questionnaire named “Handling Workforce Heterogeneity in Public Secondary Schools Questionnaire” (HWHPSSQ). A modified 4-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from “Strongly Agree” (4 points) to “Strongly Disagree” (1 point) was adopted. To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts. Their feedback was incorporated to improve both the content and face validity of the instrument.

The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach’s alpha method. A reliability coefficient index of 0.87 was obtained indicating strong internal consistency. Mean and mean set statistics were used to address the research questions, while hypotheses were tested using a z-test at a 0.05 significance level. Data were organized, categorized, and weighted according to the response values (4, 3, 2, 1) before applying the statistical analysis. A mean score of 2.50 was established as the threshold for interpretation.

## RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** What are the strategies for handling sex heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?

Table1: Mean and Mean set of administrators on the strategies for handling sex heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State

S/N	Statement	Junior Secondary School Administrators N = 67 Mean	Senior Secondary School Administrator N = 67 Mean	Mean Set	Remarks
1.	Equal allotment of duties to male and female workers	3.52	3.66	3.59	Agree
2.	Gratifying obedient gender				Agree
3.	Work life for male and female should be improved.	3.54	3.66	3.60	Agree
4.	Providing a peaceful coexistence	3.39	3.46	3.43	Agree
5.	Recognize jobs that are exclusive to male and female	3.40	3.43	3.42	Agree
6.	Emphasis on responsibilities rather than socialization	3.18	3.19	3.19	Agree
7.	Mentoring services should be provided	3.37	3.49	3.43	Agree
8.	Prohibition of gender bias	3.40	3.49	3.45	Agree
9.	Advocacy on gender equity	3.45	3.57	3.51	Agree
10.	Legislation on gender disparity	3.22	3.34	3.28	Agree
11.	Inspiring respect for both genders	3.64	3.69	3.67	Agree

The data on table1 show that items 1 to 11 are strategies for handling workforce sex heterogeneity. This is because each of those items has an average mean above 2.50 which is the criterion mean. This implies that the respondents agreed that equal allotment of duties; gratifying obedient gender; work life for male and female should be improved, providing a peaceful coexistence, recognize job roles that are exclusive to male and female, emphasis on responsibilities rather than socialization, mentoring services should be provided, prohibition of gender bias, advocacy on gender equity, legislation on sex disparity and inspiring respect for both genders are strategies for handling employee .sex heterogeneity.

**Research Question 2:** What strategies are effective in handling ethnicity heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?

Table 2: Mean and Mean set of administrators on the effective strategies in handling ethnicity heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State

S/N	Statement	Junior Secondary School Administrators N=67 Mean	Senior Secondary School Administrator N=67 Mean	Mean Set	Remarks
12.	Encouraging shared socialization where all social groups respect value and learn from one another.	3.42	3.57	3.50	Agree
13.	Full incorporation of all social groups so that they are well represented at all levels of the organization.	3.48	3.55	3.52	Agree
14.	An absence of preconception and discrimination	3.52	3.61	3.57	Agree
15.	Equivalent identification of minority and majority group members with the organization goals.	3.39	3.40	3.40	Agree
16.	Responsiveness training which exposes people's cultural boundaries, prejudice, stereotypes to enable them learn how to live and work together.	3.52	3.51	3.52	Agree
17.	Identifying cultural differences and believing that none of the cultures is superior.	3.40	3.55	3.48	Agree
18.	Multiethnic training which stresses on sensitizing employees about the danger of discrimination and bias.	3.45	3.51	3.48	Agree
19.	Disregarding cultural differences.	2.78	3.00	3.89	Agree
20.	Inspiring team work that embraces people from different culture	3.55	3.70	3.63	Agree

Table 2 shows that items 12 to 20 are strategies for handling workforce ethnicity heterogeneity. These items all have an average mean above 2.50 which is the criterion mean. In other words, the

respondents agreed that encouraging socialization where all social groups respect, value and learn from one another; an absence of prejudice and discrimination; equal identification of minority and majority group members with the organization's goals; awareness training which exposes people's cultural boundaries, prejudices, stereotypes to enable them learn how to live and work together, recognizing cultural differences and believing that none of the cultures is superior, cross-cultural training which stresses on sensitizing employees about the dangers of discrimination and bias, ignoring cultural differences and encouraging team work that embraces people from different cultures are strategies for managing employee cultural diversity.

**Research Question 3:** What are the strategies for handling experience heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State?

Table 3: Mean and Mean set of administrators on the strategies for handling experience heterogeneity among workforce in public secondary schools in Ebonyi State

S/N	Statement	Junior Secondary School Administrators N=67 Mean	Senior Secondary School Administrator N=67 Mean	Mean Set	Remarks
21.	Providing rewards for better-quality performance	3.48	3.78	3.63	Agree
22..	Gathering best practices data on experience from departments.	3.40	3.42	3.41	Agree
23.	Encouraging corporations among experienced and less experienced employees.	3.42	3.64	3.53	Agree
24.	Sponsoring discourse and team working	3.58	3.57	3.58	Agree
25.	Authorizing people through participation in decision-making	3.66	3.45	3.56	Agree
26.	Appreciating knowledge or experience of employees	3.58	3.48	3.53	Agree
27.	Establishing training on experience diversity	3.43	3.45	3.44	Agree
28.	Making sure that new employees work under the supervision of experienced ones.	3.63	3.58	3.61	Agree
29.	Providing mentoring services.	3.33	3.60	3.47	Agree
30.	Encouraging respect for both experienced and less experienced employees.	3.52	3.57	3.55	Agree

Table 3 points out that items 21 to 30 are some of the strategies for handling workforce experience heterogeneity. All of the items have an average mean above 2.50 which is the criterion mean. These items include, providing rewards for better quality performance; gathering best practices data on experience from departments; encouraging partnerships among experienced and less experienced employees; promoting dialogue and team working; empowering people through participation in decision-making, valuing knowledge or experience of employees; organizing training on experience diversity; making sure that new employees work under the supervision of experienced ones; providing mentoring services; and encouraging respect for both experienced and less experienced employees.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Sex Heterogeneity**

The findings from research question one indicate several strategies for handling sex heterogeneity among the workforce. These include equitable task distribution among male and female staff, rewarding non-aggressive behaviors, enhancing work-life quality for both genders, identifying roles suited to specific genders, focusing on tasks rather than social relationships, providing mentorship opportunities, eliminating gender equity barriers, raising awareness about gender equality, enforcing effective legislation to combat gender disparity, and promoting mutual respect across genders. These findings align with the work of Mboya in Ossai & Oyibokure (2024), which suggested that sex heterogeneity focused on equal treatment of both male and females in the workplace. It creates a better stream of ideas with the potential of increasing innovation and creativity among employees in an organization. Ajayi in Ossai & Oyibokure (2024) also emphasized that creating a school environment that enhance individual value and respect notwithstanding their sex is very paramount. Garson (2022) advocated gender neutral policies, which will address flexible work arrangements, parental leave and work-life balance. Kalev (2020) preached on how employees should be engaged on training that will make them recognize and overcome bias.

### **Ethnic Heterogeneity**

The findings from research question two on workforce ethical heterogeneity reveal strategies such as fostering reciprocal respect and learning among cultural groups, ensuring all groups are integrated across organizational levels, eliminating prejudice and discrimination, aligning minority and majority group members with organizational goals, offering awareness training to address biases, promoting teamwork across cultures, and valuing cultural differences without ranking one as superior. Adeyemo (2020) supported these strategies, stating that organizations can manage ethnic heterogeneity through inclusive policies, training and developmental programs as proper handling of this heterogeneity may foster and improve teachers' retention, reputation of school and the academic success of students. He emphasized that critical ethical heterogeneity awareness is paramount and should be advocated among teachers and administrators for inclusive school culture. Obeidat (2022) suggested moral awareness training for employees on diverse cultural norms, values and practices. Likewise, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (2021), vowed that open communication, active listening and clarity be encouraged with employees.

### **Experience Heterogeneity**

Findings on experience heterogeneity indicate that strategies like rewarding improved performance, collecting departmental best practices, fostering partnerships between experience and less experience workforce, encouraging team collaboration, valuing employee experience, facilitating mentoring, and promoting respect across experience levels can help manage experience heterogeneity. Hewlet (2023) supported this by suggesting inclusive leadership which nurtures a culture of psychological protection, responsiveness and sincerity as ways of handling experience heterogeneity. Similarly, Kahn (2023) endorsed strategies like varied hiring practices

such as applying blind hiring, targeted recruitment, and diverse interview panels. Sharmas (2023) was of the opinion that employee resource group be established to connect them in order to foster collaboration and support for one another.

## CONCLUSION

In consonance with the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that the use of the aforementioned strategies will be of help to school administrators in resolving the challenges of workforce diversity in public secondary schools in Ebony state.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, it was recommended that:

- Functions should be allotted equally to male and female staff.
- Employees should be encouraged to accord respect to individual cultures.
- Opportunity should be given to those with years of experience to retrain the younger ones.

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