



Managing Workforce Diversity in Nigerian Libraries

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to emphasize the need for workforce diversity in Nigerian libraries considering the events in the current global work place.

Design/methodology/approach: The need for diversity is not just to fulfil legal or moral imperatives but also for growth. A core value and a client-driven professional choice is to develop and promote a diverse staff that reflects the communities libraries serve. This is because of the need to maximise the opportunities that diverse ideas and experiences of heterogeneous workforce brings in to organizations, libraries inclusive. Libraries have always advocated for diversity in their resources and users rather than workforce, but with globalization, immigration and demographic changes, the need for workforce diversity has become expedient. This is in the dimensions of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, culture, and education backgrounds for tolerance, equality and cohesiveness to enhance service delivery to diverse users.

Findings: The consequences for not managing library diversity workforce properly could lead to conflict, poor performance, staff turnover and ineffective service delivery. In order to promote an atmosphere of inclusiveness in Nigeria, different suggestions are given as a way forward, which will enable the library manager to create awareness, educate, build teamwork, and develop policies and standards. Nevertheless, managers face challenges dealing with the peculiarity of human behaviour, discrimination, prejudices, and even their personal beliefs and value systems.

Originality/Value: This paper is novel in the Nigerian context and will contribute to implement policies that will help engage diverse library workforce.

Keywords: Workforce, Diversity, Workforce Diversity, Library Managers, Library Management, Libraries

Introduction

Workforce diversity, originated in the 1920s in libraries in the United States of America (USA). Therefore, it is not a new phenomenon, in the context of the LIS profession (Bolivar, Bryant, Bui, King-Mils, Knapp & Tyner, 2019; Kung, Fraser & Winn, 2020 & Önday, 2016). Workforce diversity refers to the differences between a set of people working within an organisation (Amaliyah, 2015). Workforce diversity refers to employee similarities and differences based on age, gender, cultural background, ethnicity, religion, physical abilities and impairments, and sexual preference. There is no such thing as a duplicate human. As the global advocacy for tolerance and equality becomes more pronounced, organizations including libraries had to focus on managing workforce diversity. For instance, in time past, diversity was

being deployed to reflect the services and collection of libraries, rather than their workforce over the years. However, with globalization, immigration, technology and demographic changes, the need to promote workforce diversity became more obvious.

Put differently, the concept has extended beyond moral imperatives to business profits (Bedi, Lakra & Gupta, 2014). It became an asset that management could harness its benefits through differences in age, gender, cultural, ethnicity, educational background, sexual orientation and disability to maximise the competitive advantage for accomplishment of libraries goals. It spurs innovation, improves performance and gives employee satisfaction. In spite of these opportunities, management is faced with the challenges of how to leverage the uniqueness of

human behaviours, experiences coupled with prejudices, harassment, and discrimination. Different approaches are employed to initiate workforce diversity in libraries as observed in the lop-sidedness of employment. This has resulted in libraries and their different associations advocating for diversity.

For example, in the United States of America, public and academic libraries have held conferences/meetings and produced standards, as well as action plans (Iannuzzi & Brown, 2010; Yarrow, Clubb & Draper, 2008). In Nigerian libraries, there is paucity of literature; nevertheless, extrapolating from the public sectors where majority of the libraries belong, workforce diversity is an issue. Although in the USA its dimension involves under representation of certain groups based on race and gender, in Nigeria, its focus is cultural, age and gender marginalization (Inegbedion, Sunday, Asaleye, Lawal, & Adebajji, 2020; Bolivar, Bryant, Bui, King-Mills, Knapp, & Tyner, 2019). It is against this background that different management theories or approaches such as neo-classic, classical, behavioural, humanistic and contemporary are deployed in managing diverse workforce in libraries (Martin, 2015). On the other hand, other contemporary theories such as system approach, contingency approach, learning organization and management by objectives (MBO) principles have been used directly or indirectly for managing workforce diversity. The advantage of these theories in comparison to extant management theories is that it builds on their limitations and considers the dynamics of knowledge society. It is in line with this that the purpose of this paper is to review how contemporary theories have supported workforce diversity in libraries.

The structure of the paper includes concept of workforce diversity, rationale of workforce, dimension of workforce diversity, importance of workforce diversity, overview of contemporary theories, managing diversity application of contemporary theories, challenges and strategies, way forwards and conclusion.

Concept of Workforce Diversity

In every organisation, there are people who work as a team to ensure the actualisation of the organisational goals. The collection of these people is referred to as workforce. According to Hornby (2005), workforce is the totality of the employees working in a firm. In relation to a library, the workforce is the collection of people working in the entity. On the other hand, Dike (2013) defines diversity as recognising, understanding and accepting individual differences irrespective of their race, gender, age, class, ethnicity, physical ability, race, sexual orientation, spiritual practice and so on". From Dike's definition, diversity can be said to refer to every factor that shows differences between or among people. Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy (2007:119) refer to it as "human characteristics that make people different from one another". This means that diversity is the differences as well as similarities that exist among people.

Put in the organisational perspective, Bedi et al (2014:1) say "workforce diversity is basically concerned with the similarities and differences in such characteristics as age, gender, ethnic, heritage, physical abilities and disabilities, race and sexual orientation among the employees of the organization". This definition provides a vivid description of what diversity in an organisation is. On the contrary, Dessler (2012) avers that workforce diversity entails the ways in which people differ in a business firm. Supporting Dessler's assertion, Thomas (2013) is of the view that workforce diversity is the demographic characteristics that constitute a company's workforce, especially in terms of age, colour, origin, race, culture, disability and so on. Deductively, workforce diversity comprises the distinctive and or common characteristics that exist among people in a library.

Ugwuzor (2011) describes workforce diversity to refer to the demographic composition of a workforce in an organisation. As noted in the previous section, workforce diversity entails the differences and similarities existing among people working in an organisation. As the world is changing and lots of organisations operate in

the global space, the need for diversified workforce is germane. As such, there are various diversities identified in organisations and these include gender, age, race, colour, nationality and tribes. Others may include skills, income, marital status, religion, political affiliations, language, education, ethics (and many other differences). Inegbedion et al (2020) assert that understanding diversity dimension enables one to gain an insight on which influences employees behaviour.

Observably, the National Library of Nigeria has diversified workforce that cuts across age, gender, tribe, religion and political affiliations which is reflected in the branch system it runs across States. Therefore, the success of this library is also tied to its diversified workforce. Barta, Kleiner and Neumann (2012) confirm this by stating that workforce diversity is tied to many performance indicators (such as productivity) in an organisation. Despite many pointers to the fact that workforce diversity is tied to business productivity, Dike (2013:1) submits that “Diversity can be a problem to an organisation but could also be a solution”. He states further that workforce diversity could come with benefits or disadvantages, adding that the challenge is to manage diversity for the improvement of an organisation and its employees. Okoro and Washington (2012:58) conclude that “given the widespread impact of globalization and internationalization, workplace diversity in all forms of organizations, including higher education, is now a fact of life and a trend that will continue for a long time”.

Dimensions of Workforce Diversity

From the aforementioned list of diversities found in organisations, Canas and Sondak (2010) and Dike (2013) classified them into two – primary and secondary. The primary dimensions are age, gender, race, ethnicity and physical abilities. Dike (2013) noted that the primary diversities have the more impact that exhibit the major differences among employees and can be noticed easily in organisations. On the other hand, secondary workforce diversities entail socio-economic status, geographical location, marital

status, religious affiliation and education (Canas & Sondak, 2010). According to Dike (2013), the set of qualities are not noticeable in the first encounter and can even change throughout different encounters. Ashton (2010) adds that secondary workforce diversities are only noticed after interactions occur between individuals. Some of the major dimensions are explained below:

- i. **Age:** Kunze, Boehm and Bruch (2009) refer to age diversity as the differences in age distribution among employees. It is practically impossible to have an organisation with people of the same age from the management team down to the auxiliary staff. This makes it imperative for organisations to pay attention to age diversity amongst workforce in order to avoid age related conflicts amongst its staff, most especially in an environment like Nigeria where age plays important role in relationship (Owoyemi et al., 2011). However, Kunze et al (2009) argue that an age heterogeneous workforce will yield varieties of skills, intellectual styles, morals and preferences that will result in improved productivity. In their contribution, Oluseyi, Olalekan, Adekunle and Temi (2019:3) add that “having an age diverse environment produces and creates better working relationships and enhances social cohesion for all”.
- ii. **Gender:** Gender is the description of masculinity or femininity of employees in an organisation. This is usually referred to as sex distribution. (Oluseyi et al, 2019). According to Elsaid (2012), workforce gender diversity requires equal treatment and acceptance of both males and females in a company, even though only 54% of women within the working age bracket are in the workforce worldwide compared to 80% of men (Kossek, Lobel & Brown, 2015).
- iii. **Religion:** Tuggy (2016) states that religious diversity is the recognition of the fact that there are differences in religious belief and practices in the world

and this is extrapolated to the corporate world. In Nigeria, the two major religions are Islam and Christianity and followers of these religions are found in the workforce of many organisations.

- iv. **Background:** Andrade and Rivera (2011) note that after the Climate survey was conducted by the University of Arizona, diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and cultures offer a rich tapestry of experience, insights, and cultures to the workforce. Therefore, the university management asked the library to carry out researches to determine the diverse staff strength of the library. They note that since the communities have people from different background and ethnicity, it is important that libraries employ staff from these different backgrounds.
- v. **Ethnicity/Tribe:** Another major form of diversity found in workforce, especially in Nigeria is tribal diversity. Nigeria is a country with over 300 ethnic groups and so, it is expected for businesses to have diverse workforce in terms of ethnicity. This is not only obtainable in the public service but also among private organisations.
- vi. **Political:** As much as Nigeria has diversified ethnic groups, she also has people of different political affiliations. Although two major political parties (Peoples' Democratic Party, PDP and All Progressive Congress, APC) dominate the political scene in the country, there are several other parties in operation. This is responsible for why, within an organisation workforce, there may be people with different political affiliations. Political diversity simply refers to political differences within the workforce.
- vii. **Ethics diversity:** Ethics refers to the morality of what is good or bad, wrong or right, appropriate or inappropriate. Ethical diversity abounds in corporate entities. Sims (2011) avers that ethics diversity is the practice which is morally accepted as "good" and "right" as

opposed to "bad" or "wrong" in a given situation. Therefore, there are diverse beliefs among the workforce in organizations as to know what are ethically appropriate or inappropriate in their daily workplace situations Max (2011).

- viii. **Education:** Education diversity according to Assefa (2014) is distribution of employees in a library according to their academic qualifications. The qualification ranges from secondary education to PhD level. Each of these qualifications determines the roles and responsibilities the holders play in the library.
- xi. **Subject specialisation:** Diverse workforce will have different groups of individuals with different subject specialities; hence, they are better than homogeneous groups at identifying issues and providing more innovative outcomes to complications. They also perform better than homogeneous groups in scrutinizing information and tasks comprising problem resolving (Kung, & Fraser, & Winn, 2020; Palumbo, Bussmann, & Kern, 2020)

Deductively, it suggests that various forms of diversity exist within workforce in Nigerian organisations, including libraries and these diversities are significant to the organisations' success (Akobo, 2016; Fagbe, Fagbe, & Folorunso-Ako, 2019; Inegbedion, Sunday, Asaleye, Lawal, & Adebajji, 2020). Summarily, workforce diversity is a reflection of a changing market place as diverse employees bring value to organizations. As Green, López, Wysocki, Kepner, Farnsworth and Clark (2019:3) note, "respecting individual differences will benefit the workplace by creating a competitive edge and increasing work productivity". To ensure this, there is need for proper management of workforce diversity in libraries. This shall be discussed in the next section of this paper.

Rationale for Workforce Diversity in Libraries

Public, national, academic or special libraries need to manage diversity because according to employees are assets with ideas irrespective of their diversity dimensions (Rahman, 2019). On the other hand globalization, coupled with information and communication technology led to harvest of different ideas from multicultural employees in order for organization to compete favourably globally (Bedi et al, 2014 & Fagbe et al, 2019). Competitive advantages instituted the need to innovate in order to yield return on investment (Martin, 2015 and Bolivar, et al, 2019). Similarly, Shaban (2016) adds that mergers, strategic alliances, opening of new branches in other geographical locations and internationalization promoted diversity in organizations. The issues of changing demographics especially in workplace such as capturing the experiences, ideas and technical know-how of retiring generation of the those born after the Second World War, generations X, Y and Generation I, have made organizations to consider managing diversity in workplace, library inclusive (Munde, 2010; Önday, 2016 & Van der Walt & Du Plessis, 2010). Besides, the need for organizations to manage talent shortage and diverse customers served irrespective of location, is crucial to show concern for workforce diversity.

On the other hand, libraries are yet to manage diversity effectively and efficiently, Martin (2015) argues that why the aforementioned apply to libraries, one of the major rationales for libraries to manage workforce diversity is to meet the diverse information needs of distinctive users (American library Association (ALA), 2018; 2012; Kung & Fraser, 2020). Besides, it supports collection building to meet under represented and marginalised users within library communities (Bolivar et al, 2019). To support this, ALA (2018) cited the ALA strategic plan on adversity, that 'library work, job training, recruitment, staff development and promotion are needed in order to retain diverse library personnel who are reflective of the society we serve'. Observably, building consortium, inter library loans and resources sharing among libraries demand

heterogeneous workforce. Van der Watt and Du Plessis (2010) add that the rationale for being mindful of workforce diversity in academic libraries is due to the changing face of higher education, specifically multicultural students online and offline. More importantly, apart from the social and economic benefits for managing diversity in organization, library inclusive, the moral imperatives has been in existence with legal backing to protect workforce from discrimination, stereotype, harassment and social distancing (Green, Lopez, Wysocki, Kepner, Farnsworth, & Clark, 2015). In Nigeria, Fagbe et al (2019) and Nwokpoku, Chibuzor, and Oliver (2017) pointed out that workforce demographics coupled with diverse backgrounds, experiences and ideologies have influenced the need for workforce management in public organizations, library inclusive. On the contrary, the consequences for not managing workforce diversity include conflict, lack of cohesion among teams and inefficiency at workplace (Inegbedion et al, 2020). Ogbo, Kifordu and Ukpere (2014) asserted that diversity fails in Nigeria because of inability to harness the diverse workforce as a team thus affecting performance.

Benefits of Managing Workforce Diversity in Libraries

Currently, the benefits of workforce diversity accrue not just to the library but the employee and users (Kung et al, 2020). For example, organizations deploy it to harness the different ideas, experiences, skills and knowledge of multicultural and cross cultural, intergenerational age, gender and educational background of workforce to gain competitive advantages in the globalized economy (The Pennsylvania State University, 2016; Van der Walt & Du Plessis, 2014). It also fosters exchange of ideas through socialization, team work and community of practices within organization either local or through cross border thus spurring innovation (Amadeo, 2020 & Ward, 2018). Inversely, organizations reduce cost of training as teams are able to learn through brainstorming, tutoring, mentoring and coaching (Kuusela, 2013). However, Gossen (2016) mentioned that it supports organizations to increase financial base

as more customers are reached thereby increasing sales. In addition, Urbancová, Čermáková, & Vostrovská (2016) avered that the need to manage diversity brings inclusiveness and acceptances of other employees while reducing conflicts that arise due to differences. It increases business market shares. It is easier to interact with other groups or population segmentation using language and demographic indicators (Larsen, 2017). Apart from this, countries benefit from workforce diversity by building stronger economies that could spur collaboration, investment, economic sustainability and strengthen social capital (Gossen, 2016).

The American Library Association (2012) stresses that when libraries manage distinctive characteristics of workforce it would lead to improved performance, sensitivity to users' needs which will enable them to relate better with libraries. Apparently, libraries patronage will increase as services meet users' diverse needs. Communication is enhanced between the libraries and the diverse population served, because as Kung et al (2020) and Van der Walt & Du Plessis (2014) noted library users identify and relate with library workers with whom they share similar characteristics in language, race, age, ethnic and gender. This helps library to collaborate better with users and create innovative services to meet their diverse needs (Fagbe et al, 2019). Besides, Munde (2010) adds that libraries with intergenerational employee could aid to ease transfer of leadership, particularly between retiring baby boomers to generations' X and Y occupying managerial positions in libraries. On the other hand, libraries are well positioned to serve not just local communities but also international communities especially immigrants (Euler & Wike, 2009).

Similarly, libraries cross cultural or multicultural exchange programmes have helped librarians to better understand other cultures, thereby applying the experiences in services while eliminating cultural shocks (Bolivar et al, 2019). Fagbe et al (2019) argue even though diversity provides opportunity to learn other peoples' culture, it erodes the freedom of speech to a certain degree, as workforce apply caveat in

sharing their ideas. Besides, Bolivar et al (2019) state that it helps library managers to have an insight of their personal bias in dealing with other employees which has enabled them to take objective decision concerning promotion, recruitments and professional development. One other benefit according to Kunnsela (2013) is that it fosters closely-knitted cooperation among teams and employees. It means that diversity is a key strategy for libraries to survive and showcase their relevance for rebranding internally and externally.

Challenges of Managing Workforce Diversity in Libraries

Managers of libraries encounter similar challenges in managing workforce diversity like other organizations. In Nigeria, Nwokpoku et al (2017) made mention of employee's individualistic behaviour especially their ideologies and belief systems. Humans are complex and complicated with varying personality, which can influence the degree to which changes can be accepted in libraries. Put differentlies, managers face resistance in implementing new policies or changes in a workplace. According to Rahman (2019), a manager's lack of skills and initiative as well as inability to communicate ideas hinders implementation of diversity policy. In the same vein, lack of institutional commitment on the part of libraries, creates challenges for managers (Wagner & Willms, 2010).

Intergenerational issues sometimes can be difficult for managers, especially human resources to leverage in an organization (Kuusela, 2013). Besides, Van der Walt & Du Plessis (2014) studied intergenerational difference in South African libraries and found that management will have to contend with how to balance the differences in intergenerational conflicts, especially between experienced older librarians and inexperienced younger librarians in situation where the latter oversees the former. The study also revealed that libraries in four academic libraries investigated lacked succession planning which made it difficult to transfer skills and knowledge. The above scenario is feasible as librarianship is a second career entry point for

older generation especially in USA (Bolivar et al, 2019). However, Munde (2010) argues that conflicts between intergenerational employees is due to power struggle, technology and expression of ideas differently.

Discrimination is another issue that has plagued managers, with underlying factors linked to gender, disability and culture, which could emanate from managers, individuals and teams (Martins, 2015). Bolivar et al (2019) averred that manager's personal bias and perception of people can colour their decision-making process especially in recruitment, and promotion of staff. Despite managers' employment of contemporary theories principles, Shaban (2016) points out that managers deal with social distancing in the workplace especially among individuals that does not share similar dimension of ethnicity, culture and sexual orientation. Apparently, social distancing can affect sharing of ideas or knowledge, which can pose threat to innovation. On the other hand, the structure and organizational culture, which an organization operates, can become a challenge. Studies revealed that in Nigeria public services, in which majority of libraries operate, hierarchy structure of communication can become a challenge for contemporary managers (Abugu & Jerry, 2018; Inegbedion et al, 2020 & Nwokpoku et al, 2017).

Strategies and Approaches for Managing Workforce Diversity in Libraries

A number of approaches have been applied to manage the challenges that workforce diversity brings to libraries. These have encouraged managers at workplace to promote inclusiveness, prevent, inequality stereotypes, prejudices, oppression, harassment among workforce (Heskett, 2018). Some of the common approaches that library managers have deployed to promote workforce diversity include formulation of policies, drafting of strategic action plans and production of standards to support the implementation and enforcing workforce diversity as operational in the USA and Canada (ALA, 2010; 2012; 2018 & Kung et al 2020). Some of the focal points are transfer of knowledge, recruitment bilingual training, peering mentorships; marketing campaigns;

residence, mentorships and internships; providing scholarship and promotion (Bolivar et al, 2019). In Nigeria, the need for policy is advocated to assist in addressing complaints of any form of discrimination and marginalization (Fagbe et al, 2019).

In addition, approaches of training and creation of awareness have been deployed in a number of libraries. This is to enlighten employees about the benefits of workforce diversity and consequences of prejudices, marginalization and other forms of relegation (Kuusela, 2013). Onetime training session cannot impact much despite the cost and time (Green et al, 2015 & Munde, 2010). Similarly, a number of team building approaches are also used in libraries, which assist to promote acceptances, bridge ignorance and social distancing (Inegbedion et al, 2020 & Shaban, 2016). Besides, managers of libraries need to update their knowledge and enhance their skills to enable them adapt to different situations associated with the complexity of heterogeneous workforce (Martin, 2015). On the contrary, Önday (2016) added that approaches deployed are also based on the region. In the USA, hands-on approach and incentives are used. In Europe, internal persuasion and lobbying are used while in Asia any style that suits the situation is deployed. Munde (2010) suggests that auditing of workforce as it relates to age, in order to ascertain the age spectrum of the workforce can help to create an atmosphere for equality when managing diversity in libraries. Besides, multicultural language collection is an approach deployed to engage employees from other cultural backgrounds (Wagner and Willms, 2010).

Conclusion

Globally, the opportunity of managing a diverse workforce in libraries cannot be overemphasized in this period of information age, globalization, immigration and demographic changes. This is because ideas and experiences of heterogeneous workforce can result in innovation and meeting of library user needs. In order to promote inclusiveness, different management theories are applied, such as contemporary approaches which have enabled library managers to create

awareness, educate, build team work, develop policies and standards. Nevertheless, managers face challenges dealing with the peculiarity of human behaviour, discrimination, prejudices, and their personal beliefs and value systems. The consequences for not managing library diversity workforce can include conflict, poor performance, staff turnover and ineffective service delivery.

Way Forward

The following are suggested as the way forward:

1. Libraries should organize training for employee on quarterly basis to educate and create awareness on the benefits of tolerating others.
2. Libraries should formulate appropriate policies on managers' workforce diversity.
3. Libraries should encourage team projects rather than individualistic work.
4. The librarians' Registration Council of Nigeria should draft standards on diversity and inclusion in libraries.
5. The Nigerian Library Association should address diversity issues during conferences to support institutional efforts.

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