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Strategic Implications of Workforce Diversity on Performance of Selected Manufacturing Firms in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

Workforce diversity has become a strategic concern for organizations seeking to improve innovation, employee productivity, and sustainable organizational performance in an increasingly competitive business environment. This study examined the effect of workforce diversity on organizational performance among selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated the influence of gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, and religious diversity on organizational performance. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. A population of 241 employees was drawn from five selected manufacturing firms, while a sample size of 150 respondents was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire, of which 144 valid copies were retrieved, representing a 96% response rate. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and multiple linear regression analysis with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed that all five dimensions of workforce diversity significantly and positively influenced organizational performance. Religious diversity emerged as the strongest predictor of organizational performance, followed by gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, and educational diversity. The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 75.641$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that workforce diversity is an important determinant of organizational performance in the selected manufacturing firms. The study concludes that organizations that effectively manage workforce diversity through inclusive policies, equal employment opportunities, and employee development programmes are more likely to enhance innovation, collaboration, employee commitment, and long-term organizational success. The study recommends that manufacturing firms should strengthen diversity management strategies, promote inclusive organizational cultures, and implement continuous diversity training to maximize the benefits associated with workforce diversity.

Keywords: Workforce Diversity, Organizational Performance, Gender Diversity, Age Diversity, Cultural Diversity, Educational Diversity, Religious Diversity, Manufacturing Firms, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations across the world operate in an increasingly dynamic, globalized, and competitive business environments characterized by rapid technological advancement, demographic changes, labour mobility, and evolving workforce expectations. These developments have transformed workforce diversity from a human resource concern into a strategic organizational issue. Contemporary organizations are increasingly composed of employees who differ in gender, age, culture, educational background, religion, ethnicity, and professional experience. Consequently, the ability of organizations to effectively manage workforce diversity has become an important determinant of organizational performance, innovation, employee commitment, and long-term competitiveness (Ding & Riccucci, 2023; Mehari et al., 2024).

Workforce diversity refers to the existence of differences and similarities among employees in terms of demographic, social, cultural, educational, and psychological characteristics that influence workplace interactions and organizational outcomes. While diversity was traditionally viewed as a challenge because of its potential to create interpersonal conflicts and communication barriers, recent empirical evidences suggest that when effectively managed, they enhance creativity, knowledge sharing, decision-making, innovation, and organizational resilience (Telyani et al., 2022; Olanipekun et al., 2023). Organizations that embrace diversity are therefore better positioned to respond to environmental changes, meet diverse customer needs, and sustain competitive advantage.

The manufacturing sector plays a significant role in economic development through employment generation, industrial production, technological advancement, and wealth creation. In Nigeria, manufacturing firms increasingly employ individuals from different demographic and socio-cultural backgrounds due to urbanization, educational expansion, labour mobility, and changing employment practices. This diversity presents opportunities for organizations to harness varied knowledge, perspectives, and experiences for improved performance. However, if diversity is not effectively managed, it may result in misunderstandings, reduced collaboration, workplace conflict, discrimination, and lower employee morale, thereby affecting organizational productivity (Mehari et al., 2024).

Organizational performance remains a major concern for managers and stakeholders because it reflects the extent to which organizational objectives are achieved through the efficient utilization of available resources. Performance extends beyond financial outcomes to include employee productivity, operational efficiency, innovation, customer satisfaction, service quality, and organizational sustainability. Recent studies have emphasized that organizations with effective diversity management practices are more likely to experience higher levels of employee engagement, creativity, teamwork, and organizational effectiveness (Ding & Riccucci, 2023; Telyani et al., 2022).

Despite the growing recognition of workforce diversity as a strategic resource, empirical findings remain inconclusive. While several studies report positive relationships between workforce diversity and organizational performance, others suggest that diversity may generate communication difficulties, interpersonal tensions, and reduced team cohesion if not supported by inclusive leadership and appropriate organizational policies. These inconsistencies indicate that the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational performance is influenced by organizational context, management practices, and the dimensions of diversity examined. Consequently, further empirical investigation remains necessary, particularly within developing economies where evidence is still relatively limited.

In Nigeria, and particularly within manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State, limited empirical attention has been given to understanding how specific dimensions of workforce diversity—namely gender, age, cultural, educational, and religious diversities do influence organizational performances. Most existing studies have concentrated on service organizations, financial institutions, or public sector establishments, with relatively few focusing on manufacturing firms. This creates an empirical gap that necessitates further investigation within the manufacturing sector.

This study therefore examines the effect of workforce diversity on organizational performance among selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, it investigates the influence of gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, and religious diversity on organizational performance. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on diversity management, provide practical guidance for organizational managers and policymakers, and support the development of evidence-based strategies that promote inclusive workplaces and sustainable organizational performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Workforce Diversity

Workforce diversity has become one of the most widely discussed concepts in contemporary organizational and human resource management because organizations increasingly operate in multicultural and highly competitive environments. The growing globalization of business, technological advancement, international labour mobility, and changing demographic patterns have significantly increased workforce heterogeneity. Consequently, organizations are now required to manage employees who differ in gender, age, ethnicity, culture, educational attainment, religion, language, values, and professional experience. These differences, when effectively managed, provide organizations with valuable resources that improve innovation, decision-making, creativity, and organizational performance (Ding & Riccucci, 2023; Mehari et al., 2024).

Workforce diversity refers to the variety of individual differences and similarities that exist among employees within an organization. These differences may be visible characteristics such as gender, age, race, and physical ability, or less visible attributes such as educational background, religion, values, personality, work experience, and cognitive perspectives (Bell, 2017). Diversity therefore reflects the unique characteristics that employees bring into the workplace and how these characteristics influence organizational behaviour and performance. According to Cox (1993), workforce diversity represents the variation of social and cultural identities among employees working together within an organization. Similarly, Harrison and Klein (2007) conceptualized workforce diversity as differences among organizational members that can be categorized into separation, variety, and disparity. Separation refers to differences in beliefs and values; variety reflects differences in knowledge, experience, and expertise; while disparity relates to unequal access to organizational resources or opportunities. These dimensions influence how employees interact and contribute to organizational goals.

Recent studies emphasize that workforce diversity extends beyond demographic representation to include creating an inclusive environment where employees are respected, valued, and provided with equal opportunities to contribute to organizational success (Olanipekun et al., 2023; Mehari et al., 2024). Modern organizations therefore focus not only on increasing workforce diversity but also on implementing diversity management strategies that promote collaboration, fairness, employee engagement, and organizational effectiveness. The increasing importance of workforce diversity has been reinforced by globalization, technological innovation, and the internationalization of business operations. Organizations increasingly recruit employees from different cultural, educational, and religious backgrounds to enhance creativity, innovation, and problem-solving capabilities. Research suggests that diverse teams generate broader perspectives, make higher-quality decisions, and adapt more effectively to changing business environments than homogeneous teams (Ding & Riccucci, 2023).

Despite these advantages, workforce diversity may also create organizational challenges if it is not effectively managed. Differences in language, cultural values, beliefs, communication styles, and work expectations may contribute to interpersonal conflicts, reduced trust, stereotyping, and lower team cohesion. Such challenges may ultimately reduce employee satisfaction and organizational performance. Consequently, organizations must adopt inclusive leadership practices, equitable human resource policies, diversity training programmes, and effective communication strategies to maximize the benefits of workforce diversity while minimizing potential challenges (Telyani et al., 2022).

In contemporary organizations, workforce diversity is increasingly recognized as a strategic resource capable of generating sustainable competitive advantage. The resource-based view suggests that organizations achieve superior performance when they effectively utilize valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources. A diverse workforce provides such resources by combining different knowledge, experiences, perspectives, and competencies that competitors may find difficult to replicate. Consequently, organizations that effectively manage workforce diversity are more likely to improve organizational performance, innovation, employee commitment, and long-term competitiveness. Within the context of this study, workforce diversity refers to the differences among employees in terms of gender, age, cultural background, educational qualifications, and religious affiliation. These dimensions were selected because they are prominent characteristics within Nigerian manufacturing organizations and are expected to influence employee interaction, organizational processes, and overall organizational performance.

Concept of Organizational Performance

Organizational performance is a fundamental concept in management and organizational studies because it reflects the extent to which an organization achieves its predetermined goals and objectives. It is widely regarded as an important indicator of organizational effectiveness, efficiency, competitiveness, sustainability, and long-term success. In today's dynamic business environment, organizations are expected not only to generate financial returns but also to improve operational efficiency, innovation, employee productivity, customer satisfaction, and stakeholder value. Consequently, organizational performance has become a multidimensional concept that extends beyond profitability to include both financial and non-financial outcomes (Robbins & Judge, 2019; Ding & Riccucci, 2023).

Scholars have defined organizational performance from different perspectives. Richard (2000) described organizational performance as the ability of an organization to effectively utilize available resources to achieve its strategic objectives while maintaining competitiveness and sustainability. Similarly, Robbins and Judge (2019) viewed organizational performance as the overall effectiveness with which an organization accomplishes its goals through efficient resource utilization, employee commitment, innovation, and quality service delivery. More recently, Mehari et al. (2024) argued that organizational performance reflects an organization's capacity to achieve superior outcomes by effectively managing its workforce, promoting innovation, and creating an inclusive work environment. Organizational performance is commonly measured using financial indicators such as profitability, return on investment, sales growth, and market share. However, recent studies emphasize the importance of non-financial indicators, including employee productivity, job satisfaction, innovation, operational efficiency, customer satisfaction, product quality, employee retention, and organizational adaptability (Telyani et al., 2022; Olanipekun et al., 2023). These non-financial measures are particularly relevant because they provide a broader assessment of organizational success and long-term sustainability.

Within manufacturing organizations, performance depends largely on the effective coordination of human resources, technology, production processes, and organizational strategy. Employees remain the most valuable organizational resource because their knowledge, skills, creativity, and commitment directly influence productivity, innovation, and service quality. Consequently, organizations that effectively manage workforce diversity are more likely to improve teamwork, knowledge sharing, decision-making, and overall organizational performance (Ding & Riccucci, 2023). Recent empirical evidence suggests that diversity contributes to organizational performance by bringing together individuals with different perspectives, experiences, and competencies that improve creativity and problem-solving. Diverse workforces enable organizations to respond more effectively to changing customer needs, technological developments, and competitive pressures. Nevertheless, these benefits are realized only when organizations adopt inclusive leadership practices, equitable human resource policies, and effective diversity management strategies that promote employee participation and mutual respect (Mehari et al., 2024).

In this study, organizational performance refers to the ability of the selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State to achieve their operational and strategic objectives through improved employee productivity, innovation, teamwork, operational efficiency, and organizational effectiveness. Organizational performance serves as the dependent variable, while gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, and religious diversity constitute the independent variables examined in the study. The study therefore considers organizational performance not merely as an economic outcome but as a reflection of an organization's ability to effectively harness the diverse knowledge, skills, experiences, and perspectives of its workforce to achieve sustainable growth and competitive advantage.

Gender Diversity

Gender diversity refers to the representation and participation of individuals of different genders within an organization. It emphasizes equal opportunities for both men and women in recruitment, promotion, leadership, training, compensation, and career development. Contemporary organizations increasingly recognize that gender diversity is not merely a social responsibility but a strategic human resource practice capable of improving organizational performance, innovation, and competitiveness (Mehari et al., 2024; Ding & Riccucci, 2023). Traditionally, many organizations operated in environments where leadership and decision-making positions were predominantly occupied by men. However, globalization, changing labour market dynamics, and equal employment opportunity policies have significantly increased women's participation in the workforce. Consequently, organizations now recognize that gender-balanced workforces enhance creativity, improve decision-making, strengthen employee engagement, and contribute to sustainable organizational growth (Olanipekun et al., 2023).

According to Bell (2017), gender diversity promotes organizational effectiveness by bringing together individuals with different experiences, perspectives, leadership styles, and approaches to problem-solving. Employees of different genders often contribute complementary ideas that improve organizational learning and innovation. Similarly, Robbins and Judge (2019) argued that organizations characterized by gender inclusiveness are more likely to attract highly qualified employees, improve organizational reputation, and achieve higher levels of employee satisfaction and commitment. Recent studies indicate that gender-diverse organizations generally perform better because they benefit from broader perspectives and more balanced decision-making processes. Mehari et al. (2024) reported that organizations with inclusive gender policies experience improvements in employee productivity, innovation, and overall organizational performance. Likewise, Ding and Riccucci (2023), in their meta-analysis, concluded that workforce diversity, including gender diversity, positively influences organizational outcomes when supported by effective diversity management practices.

Despite these benefits, gender diversity may present challenges if organizations fail to establish equitable workplace policies. Gender stereotypes, unequal access to leadership opportunities, discrimination, wage disparities, and unconscious bias may reduce employee morale and hinder organizational performance. Such challenges may also limit collaboration and create barriers to effective teamwork. Therefore, organizations should implement fair recruitment processes, transparent promotion systems, equal pay policies, mentoring programmes, and leadership development initiatives to maximize the benefits of gender diversity.

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, employees may identify with others based on gender, which can influence workplace interactions and group behaviour. However, organizations that promote inclusive leadership, fairness, and equal opportunities can reduce gender-based divisions and encourage collaboration across diverse groups. Similarly, Human Capital Theory suggests that organizations benefit when they fully utilize the knowledge, competencies, and talents of both men and women without discrimination. Within the context of this study, gender diversity refers to the equitable representation and participation of male and female employees in the selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State. It is expected that organizations that effectively manage gender diversity will benefit from improved teamwork, creativity, innovation, employee commitment, and enhanced organizational performance.Overall, gender diversity should be viewed as a strategic organizational asset rather than merely a demographic characteristic. Manufacturing firms that promote gender inclusion through equitable human resource policies are more likely to achieve sustainable organizational success and maintain a competitive advantage in an increasingly dynamic business environment.

Age Diversity

Age diversity refers to the presence of employees from different age groups within an organization. It reflects the coexistence of younger, middle-aged, and older employees who contribute varying levels of experience, knowledge, skills, values, and perspectives toward achieving organizational objectives. As organizations become increasingly diverse, age diversity has emerged as an important component of workforce diversity due to changing demographic trends, increased life expectancy, delayed retirement, and the entry of younger generations into the labour market (Ding & Riccucci, 2023). Modern organizations often employ workers from multiple generations, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Each generation possesses distinct work values, communication styles, technological competencies, and problem-solving approaches. Younger employees are generally recognized for their adaptability, technological proficiency, creativity, and willingness to embrace innovation, whereas older employees contribute extensive professional experience, institutional knowledge, leadership skills, and mentoring capabilities. The integration of these complementary strengths enables organizations to improve learning, innovation, and operational efficiency (Mehari et al., 2024).

According to Robbins and Judge (2019), age-diverse organizations benefit from effective knowledge transfer between experienced and younger employees. Older workers provide practical experience and organizational memory, while younger employees introduce fresh ideas and modern technological skills. Such interactions promote continuous learning, strengthen teamwork, and improve organizational effectiveness. Similarly, Bell (2017) argued that age diversity contributes to organizational resilience by combining experience with innovation, thereby enabling organizations to adapt to rapidly changing business environments. Recent empirical studies further support the positive relationship between age diversity and organizational performance. Telyani et al. (2022) found that organizations with well-managed age-diverse workforces demonstrate higher levels of innovation, employee engagement, and organizational effectiveness. Likewise, Olanipekun et al. (2023) reported that age diversity positively influences employee productivity and organizational performance when supported by inclusive leadership and equitable human resource practices.

Despite these advantages, age diversity may also present challenges. Differences in work values, communication styles, technological competence, and attitudes toward change may create misunderstandings and interpersonal conflicts among employees from different generations. Younger employees may perceive older workers as resistant to change, while older employees may view younger colleagues as inexperienced. Such stereotypes can reduce teamwork, knowledge sharing, and organizational cohesion if not effectively managed (Ding & Riccucci, 2023). To maximize the benefits of age diversity, organizations should implement age-inclusive human resource policies that encourage collaboration across generations. Mentorship programmes, continuous training, flexible work arrangements, and equal opportunities for career development can strengthen relationships among employees of different age groups. These initiatives promote mutual learning, reduce age-related stereotypes, and improve organizational performance.

From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, employees of different age groups possess valuable knowledge, competencies, and experiences that contribute to organizational success. The theory emphasizes that organizations derive competitive advantage by effectively utilizing the diverse capabilities of their workforce. Likewise, Social Identity Theory explains that age-based categorization may influence interpersonal relationships within organizations. However, organizations that foster inclusive cultures and encourage collaboration can minimize age-related divisions and promote teamwork. Within the context of this study, age diversity refers to the representation of employees from different age categories in the selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State. It is expected that effective management of age diversity will enhance knowledge sharing, innovation, employee productivity, and overall organizational performance. In summary, age diversity represents an important organizational asset that combines experience, creativity, and adaptability. Manufacturing firms that encourage intergenerational collaboration and recognize the unique contributions of employees across different age groups are more likely to improve operational efficiency, innovation, and sustainable organizational performance.

Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity refers to the presence of employees from different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and social backgrounds within an organization. It reflects the coexistence of individuals who possess different values, beliefs, customs, traditions, communication styles, and ways of interpreting workplace situations. As globalization continues to reshape organizational environments, cultural diversity has become an important strategic resource that enables organizations to improve innovation, creativity, adaptability, and organizational performance (Ding & Riccucci, 2023; Mehari et al., 2024). Organizations increasingly recruit employees from different cultural backgrounds to benefit from diverse knowledge, experiences, and perspectives. Cultural diversity encourages the exchange of ideas and promotes creative thinking by exposing employees to different approaches to problem-solving and decision-making. According to Cox (1993), culturally diverse organizations possess greater potential for innovation because employees contribute unique viewpoints that improve organizational learning and effectiveness. Similarly, Bell (2017) argued that cultural diversity strengthens organizational adaptability by enabling firms to respond effectively to changing customer preferences and global market demands.

Recent studies have demonstrated that organizations with culturally diverse workforces often experience higher levels of innovation and improved organizational performance. Mehari et al. (2024) found that organizations that promote cultural inclusion achieve better collaboration, employee commitment, and productivity. Likewise, Telyani et al. (2022) reported that cultural diversity positively influences organizational performance when supported by an innovative organizational culture and inclusive management practices. Cultural diversity also enhances organizational learning through knowledge sharing among employees with different educational, social, and professional experiences. Employees from diverse cultural backgrounds contribute different perspectives that improve creativity, strategic decision-making, and the development of innovative products and services. Such diversity enables organizations to understand diverse customer needs and expand into new markets, thereby strengthening competitive advantage (Olanipekun et al., 2023).

Despite these advantages, cultural diversity may also create organizational challenges if differences are not effectively managed. Variations in language, communication styles, beliefs, and work values may lead to misunderstandings, interpersonal conflict, stereotyping, and reduced cooperation among employees. Such challenges may negatively affect teamwork, employee satisfaction, and organizational performance. Therefore, organizations should establish inclusive policies, promote intercultural communication, and provide diversity training to encourage mutual respect and collaboration among employees (Ding & Riccucci, 2023). Social Identity Theory provides a useful explanation for understanding cultural diversity in organizations. The theory suggests that individuals naturally categorize themselves into social groups based on cultural identity, which may influence workplace relationships and behaviour. However, organizations that promote inclusion, equal treatment, and shared organizational values can reduce cultural divisions and strengthen employee cooperation. Human Capital Theory further explains that employees from different cultural backgrounds contribute valuable knowledge, experiences, and competencies that enhance organizational productivity and innovation. Within the context of this study, cultural diversity refers to the representation of employees from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds in the selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State. It is expected that organizations that effectively manage cultural diversity will benefit from improved communication, creativity, innovation, teamwork, and organizational performance.

In conclusion, cultural diversity should be viewed as a strategic organizational asset rather than a source of workplace conflict. Manufacturing firms that create inclusive work environments where employees from different cultural backgrounds are respected and encouraged to contribute their ideas are more likely to achieve sustainable organizational growth, improved employee engagement, and long-term competitive advantage.

Educational Diversity

Educational diversity refers to the differences in employees' educational qualifications, academic disciplines, professional certifications, technical competencies, and specialized knowledge within an organization. It recognizes that employees acquire different levels of knowledge, analytical abilities, and professional skills through formal education, vocational training, and continuous learning. These differences influence how employees approach problem-solving, decision-making, innovation, and organizational performance (Bell, 2017; Mehari et al., 2024). In contemporary organizations, educational diversity has become increasingly important because organizational success depends largely on the effective utilization of employees' knowledge and expertise. Manufacturing firms require workers with diverse educational backgrounds, including engineering, business administration, accounting, marketing, information technology, quality assurance, and production management. The integration of these different competencies enables organizations to address complex organizational challenges, improve operational efficiency, and sustain competitive advantage.

According to Human Capital Theory, education represents an investment that enhances employees' knowledge, skills, and productivity. Becker (1964) argued that organizations that invest in human capital are more likely to achieve superior organizational performance because educated employees possess the competencies required to improve innovation, productivity, and decision-making. This perspective suggests that educational diversity contributes to organizational effectiveness by combining complementary skills and expertise from employees with different academic and professional backgrounds.Recent empirical evidence supports the positive relationship between educational diversity and organizational performance. Mehari et al. (2024) found that organizations with educationally diverse employees demonstrate higher levels of innovation, adaptability, and operational efficiency because employees contribute different perspectives and specialized knowledge. Similarly, Olanipekun et al. (2023) reported that educational diversity strengthens organizational performance by improving teamwork, knowledge sharing, and creative problem-solving.

Educational diversity also enhances organizational learning through the exchange of knowledge among employees with different educational experiences. Employees trained in different disciplines often approach organizational challenges from unique perspectives, leading to better strategic decisions and more innovative solutions. This diversity of thought enables organizations to respond effectively to technological advancements, market changes, and customer expectations (Ding & Riccucci, 2023). Despite these benefits, educational diversity may present challenges if organizations fail to encourage collaboration and mutual respect. Employees with different educational qualifications may have varying approaches to problem-solving, communication, and decision-making, which may result in misunderstandings or professional disagreements. In some cases, educational differences may also create perceptions of inequality or status differences among employees. Therefore, organizations should promote interdisciplinary teamwork, continuous learning, and equal opportunities for professional development to maximize the benefits of educational diversity (Telyani et al., 2022).

From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, employees may identify themselves according to their educational qualifications or professional backgrounds, which can influence workplace interactions. However, organizations that foster inclusive cultures, encourage knowledge sharing, and recognize the contributions of all employees can reduce such divisions and improve organizational cohesion. When combined with the principles of Human Capital Theory, educational diversity becomes a valuable strategic resource capable of enhancing organizational performance through continuous learning and innovation. Within the context of this study, educational diversity refers to the variation in employees' educational qualifications, professional knowledge, and technical competencies within the selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State. It is expected that organizations that effectively utilize employees' diverse educational backgrounds will experience improved innovation, better decision-making, enhanced productivity, and stronger organizational performance. In conclusion, educational diversity is an essential component of workforce diversity because it provides organizations with a broad range of knowledge, skills, and professional expertise. Manufacturing firms that encourage collaboration among employees with different educational backgrounds are more likely to improve organizational learning, innovation, operational efficiency, and long-term competitiveness.

Religious Diversity

Religious diversity refers to the coexistence of employees with different religious beliefs, faiths, values, and practices within an organization. In today's multicultural workplace, employees may belong to different religious groups, and these differences often influence their values, ethical orientations, communication patterns, work attitudes, and interpersonal relationships. As organizations become increasingly diverse, religious diversity has emerged as an important dimension of workforce diversity that requires effective management to promote inclusion, mutual respect, and organizational performance (Mehari et al., 2024).

Modern organizations recognize that employees' religious beliefs form an integral part of their identities and may influence workplace behaviour and interactions. Consequently, organizations are expected to create work environments that respect employees' freedom of religion while ensuring equal treatment and preventing discrimination. Inclusive workplace policies that accommodate reasonable religious practices contribute to employee satisfaction, commitment, and organizational harmony (Ding & Riccucci, 2023). According to Bell (2017), organizations that respect religious diversity create a positive organizational climate characterized by trust, fairness, and mutual understanding. Such environments encourage employees to contribute their knowledge and skills without fear of discrimination or exclusion. Similarly, Robbins and Judge (2019) argued that organizations promoting religious inclusion experience higher employee morale, stronger organizational commitment, and improved teamwork.

Recent empirical studies have shown that organizations with effective religious diversity management practices achieve better organizational outcomes. Mehari et al. (2024) reported that inclusive organizational cultures that respect employees' religious beliefs contribute to improved collaboration, reduced workplace conflict, and enhanced organizational performance. Likewise, Olanipekun et al. (2023) found that organizations that promote equal treatment regardless of religious affiliation experience higher employee engagement and productivity. Religious diversity also contributes to organizational performance by encouraging ethical behaviour, mutual respect, and social cohesion among employees. Employees who feel respected regardless of their religious affiliation are more likely to demonstrate organizational commitment, cooperate with colleagues, and contribute positively toward achieving organizational goals. Furthermore, inclusive religious policies improve employee well-being and strengthen the organization's reputation as an equitable employer (Telyani et al., 2022).

Despite these benefits, religious diversity may also create workplace challenges if not effectively managed. Differences in beliefs, values, worship practices, and religious observances may occasionally result in misunderstandings, stereotypes, discrimination, or interpersonal conflict. Such situations may negatively affect employee morale, teamwork, and productivity. Organizations should therefore establish clear diversity and inclusion policies, provide diversity awareness training, and ensure that employment decisions are based on merit rather than religious affiliation (Ding & Riccucci, 2023). Social Identity Theory provides a useful explanation for understanding religious diversity within organizations. The theory suggests that individuals naturally identify with social groups, including religious groups, which may influence workplace relationships. However, organizations that foster inclusive cultures, encourage dialogue, and emphasize shared organizational values can reduce intergroup divisions and strengthen cooperation among employees from different religious backgrounds. Human Capital Theory further suggests that organizational success depends on effectively utilizing the knowledge, talents, and abilities of all employees regardless of their religious beliefs.

Within the context of this study, religious diversity refers to the presence of employees with different religious affiliations in the selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State. The study shows that organizations that promote respect for religious diversity and provide equal opportunities for all employees are more likely to experience improved teamwork, employee commitment, workplace harmony, and organizational performance. In conclusion, religious diversity should be viewed as a valuable organizational resource rather than a source of division. Organizations that develop inclusive workplace cultures, respect employees' religious beliefs, and implement fair employment practices are more likely to enhance employee satisfaction, strengthen organizational cohesion, improve productivity, and achieve sustainable organizational performance.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on workforce diversity and organizational performance have produced varied findings across countries, industries, and organizational settings. While many studies report that workforce diversity positively influences organizational performance, others argue that its benefits depend on effective diversity management, organizational culture, and leadership practices. This section reviews recent empirical evidence related to the major dimensions of workforce diversity examined in this study.

Cox and Blake (1991) argued that organizations that effectively manage workforce diversity achieve higher levels of creativity, innovation, and organizational competitiveness. They identified improved problem-solving, enhanced marketing capabilities, greater flexibility, and better resource acquisition as major advantages of a diverse workforce. Although the study was largely conceptual, it laid the foundation for subsequent empirical research on diversity management. Kochan et al. (2003) examined the relationship between workforce diversity and business performance using organizations participating in the Diversity Research Network. The study found that workforce diversity alone does not automatically improve organizational performance. Instead, positive outcomes depend on organizational culture, leadership commitment, and inclusive management practices. The researchers concluded that organizations should complement workforce diversity with effective diversity management policies.

Guillaume et al. (2017) investigated demographic diversity and organizational performance across several organizations. Their findings indicated that diversity contributes positively to organizational effectiveness when supported by inclusive leadership, effective communication, and employee participation. The study emphasized that diversity management practices moderate the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational performance. Yadav and Lenka (2020) conducted a comprehensive review of workforce diversity literature and concluded that diversity enhances organizational learning, innovation, employee commitment, and organizational sustainability. However, they noted that organizations may experience workplace conflict and reduced collaboration if diversity is poorly managed. They recommended stronger diversity management policies and greater emphasis on inclusive organizational cultures.

Shrestha and Parajuli (2021) examined the influence of workforce diversity on employee performance and reported that gender, age, educational, and cultural diversity significantly improved employee productivity and organizational effectiveness. The study concluded that organizations should promote equal employment opportunities and create inclusive work environments that encourage collaboration among employees from diverse backgrounds. Jekelle (2021) investigated workforce diversity and job performance in Nigerian organizations. The findings revealed that workforce diversity significantly enhances employee commitment, organizational productivity, and operational efficiency. The study emphasized that organizations should strengthen diversity management strategies through equitable recruitment, continuous training, and inclusive leadership practices. Telyani et al. (2022) examined the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational performance while considering the moderating role of innovative organizational culture. Their findings showed that workforce diversity positively influences organizational performance, particularly in organizations characterized by strong innovation cultures. The researchers concluded that diversity management and innovation should be integrated to maximize organizational performance.

Olanipekun, Oderinde, and Sokefun (2023) investigated workplace diversity and organizational performance in selected manufacturing firms in Southwest Nigeria. Their findings indicated that gender diversity, educational diversity, and cultural diversity significantly improved organizational performance. The study recommended that manufacturing firms should strengthen diversity management policies to enhance employee productivity and innovation. Ding and Riccucci (2023) conducted a meta-analysis examining the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational performance across numerous empirical studies. Their findings demonstrated that workforce diversity generally has a positive influence on organizational performance, although the strength of the relationship varies depending on organizational context, leadership style, and diversity management practices. The study concluded that organizations should move beyond demographic representation to fostering inclusive work environments. Mehari, Birbirsa, and Dinber (2024) investigated the effect of workforce diversity on organizational performance in the food and beverage industry. The study found that gender, age, educational, cultural, and religious diversity all positively influenced organizational performance. Workplace ethics was also identified as an important mediating factor. The researchers recommended continuous diversity training, ethical leadership, and inclusive organizational policies.

Overall, the empirical evidence suggests that workforce diversity contributes positively to organizational performance by improving creativity, innovation, knowledge sharing, employee engagement, and decision-making. However, these benefits are most likely to occur when organizations establish inclusive leadership, equitable employment practices, and effective diversity management programmes.

Research Gap

Although previous studies have established a relationship between workforce diversity and organizational performance, important gaps remain in the literature. Many existing studies were conducted in developed economies or focused on service industries, financial institutions, and public sector organizations. Comparatively fewer studies have examined the manufacturing sector in Nigeria, particularly in Akwa Ibom State.In addition, several previous studies concentrated on only one or two dimensions of workforce diversity, such as gender or age diversity, without simultaneously examining gender, age, and cultural, educational, and religious diversity within a single analytical framework. This limits a comprehensive understanding of how these dimensions jointly influence organizational performance.

Furthermore, recent studies have emphasized the importance of organizational context in explaining the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational performance. However, empirical evidence from manufacturing firms operating in Akwa Ibom State remains limited. This study addresses these gaps by examining the combined influence of five dimensions of workforce diversity—gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, and religious diversity—on organizational performance among selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study therefore contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence from the Nigerian manufacturing sector and offering practical recommendations for managers and policymakers on how to leverage workforce diversity to improve organizational performance.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Social Identity Theory and Human Capital Theory. These theories provide complementary perspectives for explaining how workforce diversity influences organizational performance. While Social Identity Theory explains the behavioural and social interactions among employees from diverse backgrounds, Human Capital Theory emphasizes the strategic value of employees' knowledge, skills, education, and experience in improving organizational performance. Together, the two theories provide a robust foundation for understanding the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational performance in selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory was developed by Henri Tajfel (1978) and later expanded by Tajfel and Turner (1979; 1986). The theory explains that individuals derive part of their identity and self-esteem from the social groups to which they belong. Such groups may be based on gender, age, religion, ethnicity, culture, educational background, or occupation. According to the theory, individuals naturally classify themselves and others into different social categories, resulting in in-group and out-group distinctions that influence workplace behaviour, communication, and interpersonal relationships. Within organizations, employees often identify more closely with colleagues who share similar demographic or social characteristics. This identification may promote cooperation within groups but may also create stereotypes, discrimination, interpersonal conflict, and communication barriers between different groups if diversity is not effectively managed. Consequently, social identity influences employee attitudes, trust, teamwork, and organizational effectiveness.

Recent studies continue to support the relevance of Social Identity Theory in explaining workforce diversity. Ding and Riccucci (2023) observed that employees' demographic identities significantly influence workplace interactions, collaboration, and organizational outcomes. Similarly, Mehari et al. (2024) reported that organizations that promote inclusive workplace cultures are more successful in minimizing intergroup conflicts and improving employee commitment and organizational performance. Although Social Identity Theory recognizes the challenges associated with demographic differences, it also suggests that organizations can transform diversity into a competitive advantage through inclusive leadership, equitable human resource policies, employee engagement, and shared organizational goals. When organizations emphasize common objectives rather than individual differences, employees become more willing to collaborate regardless of their demographic backgrounds.

The theory is highly relevant to this study because it explains how gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, and religious diversity influence employee interactions and ultimately affect organizational performance within manufacturing firms. One limitation of Social Identity Theory is that it primarily emphasizes social categorization and may underestimate the ability of employees to overcome demographic differences through professional commitment, organizational culture, and effective leadership. Nevertheless, the theory remains one of the most widely accepted frameworks for understanding workforce diversity in organizational settings.

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory was developed by Gary Becker (1964). The theory argues that employees possess valuable knowledge, skills, education, competencies, experience, and abilities that constitute important organizational assets. Investment in employee education, training, professional development, and continuous learning enhances productivity, innovation, and organizational performance. According to the theory, employees should not merely be viewed as labour but as strategic resources capable of generating sustainable competitive advantage. Organizations that effectively develop and utilize their human capital are more likely to improve productivity, innovation, operational efficiency, and long-term organizational success.

Within the context of workforce diversity, Human Capital Theory suggests that diversity increases the range of knowledge, expertise, professional experiences, and perspectives available within an organization. Employees from different educational backgrounds, age groups, cultures, and professional experiences contribute complementary skills that improve creativity, innovation, strategic decision-making, and problem-solving. Recent empirical evidence supports this theoretical position. Mehari et al. (2024) found that organizations with diverse human capital demonstrate greater innovation, productivity, and organizational effectiveness. Similarly, Olanipekun et al. (2023) reported that educational and cultural diversity improve employee performance by enhancing knowledge sharing, collaboration, and organizational learning.

The theory is particularly relevant to manufacturing organizations because production processes require employees with different technical competencies, educational qualifications, and professional expertise. Engineers, accountants, production supervisors, quality control officers, marketing professionals, and administrative personnel contribute different forms of human capital necessary for achieving organizational objectives. However, Human Capital Theory has certain limitations. It primarily focuses on employees' economic value and productivity while paying less attention to interpersonal relationships, organizational culture, discrimination, and inclusion. Therefore, combining Human Capital Theory with Social Identity Theory provides a more comprehensive explanation of workforce diversity and organizational performance.

Relevance of the Theories to the Study

The combination of Social Identity Theory and Human Capital Theory provides a comprehensive theoretical foundation for this study. Social Identity Theory explains how demographic characteristics such as gender, age, culture, education, and religion shape employee behaviour, communication, teamwork, and interpersonal relationships within organizations. Human Capital Theory complements this perspective by emphasizing that these differences also represent valuable organizational resources capable of improving innovation, creativity, productivity, and organizational effectiveness.

Together, these theories suggest that workforce diversity can either enhance or hinder organizational performance depending on how diversity is managed. Organizations that implement inclusive leadership practices, equitable employment policies, employee development programmes, and effective diversity management strategies are more likely to transform workforce diversity into a source of sustainable competitive advantage. Accordingly, these theories provide the conceptual basis for examining the influence of gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, and religious diversity on organizational performance among selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the influence of workforce diversity on organizational performance among selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The survey design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of quantitative data from employees at a single point in time, thereby providing reliable evidence for examining the relationships between workforce diversity dimensions and organizational performance. The study focused on five dimensions of workforce diversity—gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, and religious diversity—as explanatory variables, while organizational performance served as the dependent variable.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, one of the country's rapidly developing industrial hubs with a growing manufacturing sector. The state hosts several manufacturing firms engaged in food processing, plastics production, paints, and other industrial activities. These firms employ workers from diverse demographic, cultural, educational, and religious backgrounds, making them suitable for examining the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational performance. The selected firms included:Champion Breweries Plc, Uyo; Bunica Plastics Limited, Eket; Victradeam Manufacturing Ventures, Uyo; Roywood Nigeria Limited, Uyo; and Alphastar Paints and Industries Limited, Uyo. These firms were selected because of their operational relevance, workforce diversity, and willingness to participate in the study.

Population of the Study

The target population consisted of 241 employees drawn from the five selected manufacturing firms. These employees represented different departments, job categories, educational qualifications, age groups, genders, cultural backgrounds, and religious affiliations. Their diverse characteristics provided an appropriate basis for investigating how workforce diversity influences organizational performance.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for this study was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula for finite populations. This formula provides an appropriate sample size where the population is known.

The formula is expressed as:

$n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$

Where:

n = Sample size

N = Population size (241)

e = Level of precision (0.05)

Substituting the values into the formula:

$n = 241 / [1 + 241(0.05)^2]$

$n = 241 / [1 + 241(0.0025)]$

$n = 241 / [1 + 0.6025]$

$n = 241 / 1.6025$

$n = 150.39 \approx 150$

Therefore, the sample size for the study was 150 respondents selected from the total population of 241 employees across the selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State.

Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was adopted to ensure that all selected manufacturing firms were adequately represented. Each organization constituted a separate stratum, after which respondents were selected proportionately based on the size of the workforce. This approach minimized sampling bias and improved the representativeness of the sample.

Sources and Method of Data Collection

The study relied primarily on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire administered to employees of the selected manufacturing firms. The questionnaire was designed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1).

A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed across the selected firms, while 144 questionnaires were successfully completed and returned, representing a 96% response rate. The high response rate enhanced the credibility and representations of the study findings.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed from previous studies on workforce diversity and organizational performance. The questionnaire comprised two sections. Section A captured respondents' demographic information, while Section B contained items measuring gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, religious diversity, and organizational performance using a five-point Likert scale.

Validity of the Instrument

The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity through expert review by the project supervisor and specialists in Business Administration. Their observations and recommendations were incorporated into the final version of the instrument to ensure that the questionnaire adequately measured the study variables and aligned with the research objectives.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the respondents were coded, entered, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were used to summarize respondents' opinions. Inferential statistics were employed through multiple linear regression analysis to determine the influence of workforce diversity dimensions on organizational performance. The hypotheses were tested at a 5% level of significance ($p < 0.05$).

Model Specification

The study examined the influence of workforce diversity on organizational performance in selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State. Organizational performance was the dependent variable, while gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, and religious diversity served as the independent variables.

The functional model is expressed as:

$$OP = f(GD, AD, CD, ED, RD)$$

The multiple linear regression model is specified as:

$$OP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 GD + \beta_2 AD + \beta_3 CD + \beta_4 ED + \beta_5 RD + \mu$$

Where:

OP = Organizational Performance

GD = Gender Diversity

AD = Age Diversity

CD = Cultural Diversity

ED = Educational Diversity

RD = Religious Diversity

β_0 = Constant (Intercept)

β_1–β_5 = Regression coefficients of the independent variables

μ = Error term

A priori expectation:

$\beta_1 > 0$, $\beta_2 > 0$, $\beta_3 > 0$, $\beta_4 > 0$, $\beta_5 > 0$

This implies that gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, and religious diversity are each expected to have a positive influence on organizational performance.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings obtained from the analysis of data collected from employees of selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State. The analysis includes the questionnaire response rate, descriptive statistics, and multiple regression results used to examine the influence of workforce diversity on organizational performance. Descriptive statistics were presented using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, while the hypotheses were tested using multiple linear regression analysis at a 5% level of significance.

Questionnaire Administration and Response Rate

A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed among employees of the selected manufacturing firms. Out of these, 144 questionnaires were properly completed and returned, representing a 96% response rate, while 6 questionnaires (4%) were not returned. The high response rate indicates a strong level of participation by the respondents and provides a reliable basis for data analysis.

Table 1: Distribution and Return of Questionnaires

Manufacturing firms	Distributed	Returned	Not returned
Champion breweries plc	101	98	3
Bunica plastics Ltd	9	9	0
Victradeam manufacturing ventures	13	12	1
Roywood Nigeria Ltd	10	9	1
Alphastar paints and industries Ltd	17	16	1
Total	150	144	6

The results indicate that Champion Breweries Plc recorded the highest number of respondents, while Bunica Plastics Ltd had the least. Overall, the 96% response rate demonstrates a high level of cooperation from respondents and enhances the credibility of the findings.

Descriptive Results

The descriptive analysis shows that respondents generally agreed that workforce diversity positively influences organizational performance.

Regarding gender diversity, 73.0% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that gender diversity enhances organizational performance. This finding suggests that balanced gender representation contributes to teamwork, collaboration, and improved employee productivity.

For age diversity, 66.0% of respondents agreed that employees from different age groups contribute positively to organizational productivity through knowledge sharing, mentoring, and collaboration. This indicates that organizations benefit from integrating employees with varying levels of experience and perspectives.

Similarly, 72.2% of respondents agreed that cultural diversity promotes innovation and creativity within manufacturing firms. Employees perceived diverse cultural backgrounds as a source of new ideas, improved problem-solving, and enhanced organizational learning.

The findings further reveal that 72.3% of respondents agreed that educational diversity improves decision-making by bringing together employees with different academic qualifications, professional competencies, and technical skills. Diverse educational backgrounds were perceived as valuable for generating innovative solutions to workplace challenges.

Finally, 76.4% of respondents agreed that religious diversity promotes workplace harmony, cooperation, mutual respect, and overall organizational performance. Among all the diversity dimensions examined, religious diversity received the highest level of agreement from respondents, indicating its significant contribution to creating an inclusive and productive work environment.

Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the combined influence of workforce diversity dimensions on organizational performance. The results revealed that the regression model was statistically significant, indicating that workforce diversity is an important predictor of organizational performance in the selected manufacturing firms.

The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) produced an F-statistic of 75.641 with a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$). This result confirms that the regression model is statistically significant and that the independent variables jointly explain variations in organizational performance.

The regression coefficients further revealed that all five dimensions of workforce diversity significantly and positively influenced organizational performance. Religious diversity recorded the highest standardized beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.317$), making it the strongest predictor of organizational performance. This was followed by gender diversity ($\beta = 0.266$), age diversity ($\beta = 0.248$), cultural diversity ($\beta = 0.221$), and educational diversity ($\beta = 0.203$). Since the probability values for all variables were less than 0.05, the null hypotheses were rejected, indicating that each dimension of workforce diversity significantly contributes to organizational performance.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the effect of workforce diversity on organizational performance among selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, and religious diversity all have positive and statistically significant effects on organizational performance. These results suggest that organizations that effectively manage workforce diversity are more likely to achieve higher levels of productivity, innovation, employee commitment, and organizational effectiveness.

Gender Diversity and Organizational Performance

The findings revealed that gender diversity has a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational performance. This implies that organizations that provide equal opportunities for both male and female employees benefit from improved creativity, balanced decision-making, teamwork, and employee productivity. A gender-diverse workforce enables organizations to draw from a broader range of perspectives and experiences, thereby enhancing organizational effectiveness.

This finding is consistent with the studies of

Olanipekun et al. (2023), who reported that gender diversity significantly improves organizational performance through increased employee participation and innovation. It also supports Mehari et al. (2024), who found that organizations with inclusive gender policies experience higher employee commitment and improved productivity. Similarly, Ding and Riccucci (2023) concluded through a meta-analysis that gender diversity contributes positively to organizational performance when supported by inclusive leadership and equitable human resource practices.

The finding also supports the assumptions of Social Identity Theory, which suggests that organizations that reduce gender-based discrimination and promote inclusion create stronger collaboration among employees. Likewise, Human Capital Theory emphasizes that organizations derive greater value when they effectively utilize the talents and competencies of both men and women.

Age Diversity and Organizational Performance

The study further revealed that age diversity has a significant positive effect on organizational performance. This indicates that employees from different age groups contribute complementary knowledge, experience, technological skills, and innovative ideas that enhance organizational effectiveness.

The result agrees with Telyani et al. (2022), who found that organizations with age-diverse workforces experience higher levels of innovation and employee engagement. It also aligns with the findings of Olanipekun et al. (2023), who reported that effective management of employees from different generations improves productivity and organizational performance. Furthermore, Mehari et al. (2024) observed that organizations benefit from combining the experience of older employees with the creativity and technological competence of younger employees.

These findings support Human Capital Theory, which argues that employees of different ages contribute valuable knowledge and experience that enhance organizational performance.

Cultural Diversity and Organizational Performance

The regression results demonstrated that cultural diversity significantly influences organizational performance. This suggests that organizations employing individuals from different cultural backgrounds benefit from diverse perspectives, creativity, knowledge sharing, and improved problem-solving capabilities.

The finding is consistent with Mehari et al. (2024), who found that cultural diversity enhances innovation, teamwork, and organizational effectiveness when organizations promote inclusive cultures. It also supports Ding and Riccucci (2023), whose meta-analysis concluded that cultural diversity positively influences organizational performance through improved collaboration and organizational learning. Similarly, Olanipekun et al. (2023) reported that cultural diversity enhances employee productivity and organizational competitiveness in manufacturing organizations.

The finding further reinforces Social Identity Theory, which explains that although cultural differences may initially create group distinctions, inclusive organizational cultures encourage cooperation and shared organizational goals that improve performance.

Educational Diversity and Organizational Performance

The study found that educational diversity has a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational performance. Employees with different educational qualifications and professional backgrounds contribute specialized knowledge, technical expertise, and diverse approaches to organizational problem-solving.

This result is consistent with Mehari et al. (2024), who reported that educational diversity promotes innovation, knowledge sharing, and organizational effectiveness. Likewise, Olanipekun et al. (2023) found that educational diversity improves employee productivity through interdisciplinary collaboration.

The finding also agrees with Human Capital Theory, which views education as an investment that enhances employees' productivity and organizational competitiveness.

Religious Diversity and Organizational Performance

The findings further revealed that religious diversity has a positive and statistically significant effect on organizational performance and emerged as the strongest predictor among the workforce diversity dimensions examined. This implies that organizations that respect employees' religious beliefs and promote equal treatment create harmonious work environments characterized by trust, commitment, and cooperation.

The finding agrees with Mehari et al. (2024), who concluded that organizations that promote respect for religious diversity achieve higher employee engagement and organizational performance. It also supports Ding and Riccucci (2023), who emphasized that inclusive workplace policies strengthen employee commitment regardless of religious affiliation.

The result also aligns with Social Identity Theory, which suggests that organizations can minimize religious divisions by fostering inclusive leadership, mutual respect, and shared organizational values.

The study found that gender diversity has a significant positive effect on organizational performance. The descriptive results showed that a majority of respondents agreed that gender diversity promotes teamwork, improves communication, and enhances organizational productivity. The regression analysis further confirmed this positive relationship ($\beta = 0.266$, $p < 0.05$). This finding supports the argument that organizations with balanced gender representation benefit from a wider range of perspectives, improved creativity, and better decision-making. The result is consistent with previous studies that reported positive associations between gender diversity and organizational performance. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, effective organizational policies can reduce gender-based stereotypes and encourage cooperation among employees, thereby improving overall performance.

Similarly, the study revealed that age diversity significantly contributes to organizational performance ($\beta = 0.248$, $p < 0.05$). Respondents agreed that employees from different age groups contribute unique experiences, knowledge, and skills that improve organizational productivity. Younger employees often introduce new ideas and technological competencies, while older employees contribute practical experience, institutional knowledge, and mentoring. This finding supports Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes that employees' accumulated knowledge, experience, and competencies are valuable organizational resources that enhance productivity and competitive advantage.

The findings also indicate that cultural diversity has a significant positive influence on organizational performance ($\beta = 0.221$, $p < 0.05$). The majority of respondents believed that employees from different cultural backgrounds improve innovation, creativity, and problem-solving within manufacturing firms. Cultural diversity enables organizations to benefit from multiple perspectives, leading to improved adaptability and organizational learning. This finding agrees with earlier empirical studies that found culturally diverse workforces generate more innovative ideas and improve organizational effectiveness when diversity is managed effectively.

Furthermore, educational diversity was found to significantly influence organizational performance ($\beta = 0.203$, $p < 0.05$). Respondents agreed that employees with diverse educational qualifications contribute different analytical skills, technical expertise, and professional knowledge that improve decision-making and organizational problem-solving. These findings provide additional support for Human Capital Theory, which views education and knowledge as strategic assets that enhance employee capability and organizational performance. Organizations that recruit employees with diverse educational backgrounds are therefore more likely to improve innovation and operational efficiency.

Among all the diversity dimensions examined, religious diversity emerged as the strongest predictor of organizational performance ($\beta = 0.317$, $p < 0.05$). The findings revealed that employees perceived religious diversity as promoting workplace harmony, mutual respect, cooperation, and employee commitment. Organizations that respect employees' religious beliefs and create inclusive work environments are more likely to experience stronger interpersonal relationships, reduced workplace conflict, and improved organizational effectiveness. This finding aligns with Social Identity Theory, which suggests that inclusive organizational cultures reduce intergroup differences and foster collaboration among employees from different religious backgrounds.

Overall, the regression results confirm that workforce diversity significantly predicts organizational performance in the selected manufacturing firms. The significant ANOVA result ($F = 75.641$, $p < 0.05$) demonstrates that the combined influence of gender, age, cultural, educational, and religious diversity explains a substantial proportion of the variation in organizational performance. These findings highlight that workforce diversity is not merely a demographic characteristic but a strategic organizational resource capable of improving productivity, innovation, employee commitment, and long-term organizational success when effectively managed.

The findings have important implications for manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State and other developing economies. Organizations should move beyond compliance with diversity policies and adopt comprehensive diversity management strategies that promote inclusion, equal opportunities, employee development, and mutual respect. By leveraging the strengths associated with workforce diversity, organizations can enhance innovation, improve decision-making, strengthen employee engagement, and achieve sustainable organizational performance.

Summary of the Discussion

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that workforce diversity is a strategic organizational resource capable of improving organizational performance when effectively managed. The positive and significant effects of gender, age, cultural, educational, and religious diversity indicate that manufacturing firms should adopt inclusive human resource policies that promote equal opportunities, diversity training, teamwork, and employee participation. These findings provide empirical support for both Social Identity Theory and Human Capital Theory, confirming that organizations that value diversity are better positioned to achieve innovation, operational efficiency, and sustainable competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of workforce diversity on organizational performance among selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated the influence of gender diversity, age diversity, cultural diversity, educational diversity, and religious diversity on organizational performance. The findings revealed that all five dimensions of workforce diversity exert a positive and statistically significant influence on organizational performance.

The study concludes that workforce diversity is a strategic organizational resource that enhances employee productivity, innovation, teamwork, knowledge sharing, and organizational effectiveness when properly managed. Organizations that embrace diversity through equitable employment practices, inclusive leadership, continuous employee development, and effective diversity management policies are more likely to achieve sustainable competitive advantage and improved organizational performance. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on workforce diversity by providing empirical evidence from selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The findings offer practical insights for managers, policymakers, and researchers seeking to improve organizational performance through effective diversity management.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have important implications for managers, policymakers, and manufacturing organizations.

First, manufacturing firms should develop and implement comprehensive diversity and inclusion policies that promote equal employment opportunities irrespective of gender, age, cultural background, educational qualification, or religious affiliation. Such policies will strengthen employee commitment and organizational effectiveness.

Second, organizations should organize regular diversity management training programmes to improve employees' understanding of cultural differences, reduce workplace discrimination, and promote mutual respect and collaboration among employees.

Third, management should establish transparent recruitment, promotion, and reward systems based on competence and merit to ensure fairness and encourage employees to contribute their best toward organizational goals.

Fourth, organizations should encourage cross-functional teamwork by bringing together employees from different educational, cultural, and age backgrounds to promote knowledge sharing, creativity, innovation, and effective problem-solving.

Finally, policymakers and organizational leaders should strengthen workplace regulations that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, thereby creating work environments that support sustainable organizational performance and national economic development.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Like every empirical study, this research has certain limitations.

First, the study focused only on selected manufacturing firms in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Consequently, the findings may not be generalized to all organizations or industries within Nigeria.

Second, the study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, which collected data at a single point in time. Future studies may adopt longitudinal designs to examine how workforce diversity influences organizational performance over time.

Third, the study relied mainly on questionnaire responses from employees. Future researchers may combine questionnaires with interviews, focus group discussions, or observational methods to obtain richer insights into workforce diversity practices.

Finally, this study examined only five dimensions of workforce diversity: gender, age, cultural, educational, and religious diversity. Future studies should consider additional dimensions such as ethnic diversity, disability inclusion, personality diversity, and cognitive diversity. Researchers may also investigate the moderating or mediating roles of organizational culture, leadership style, employee engagement, innovation capability, and organizational commitment in the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational performance.

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