

Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Business Practices: A Study of Strategies, Challenges and Outcomes

Adebola Ade., ADEBAYO

Corresponding author: adebayoaa@tasued.edu.ng

Department of Business Education Tai Solarin Federal University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State of Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in business practices: A study of strategies, challenges and outcomes. Three research questions and two hypotheses were answered and tested. A descriptive research design of survey type was used. The population of this study comprised all staff of Nigerian Breweries, Imagbon, Ijebu-Ode local government area of Ogun State. A total of 55 staff of Nigerian Breweries, Imagbon, Ijebu-Ode local government area of Ogun State was selected as sample size of the study using simple random and stratified sampling technique. A self-researcher-designed instrument tagged: Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Business Practices Questionnaire (ADEIBPQ) with reliability estimate of 0.91 for data collection. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used for answering research questions. The findings of the study revealed that diversity training, inclusive hiring practices, employee resource group, mentorship, leadership commitment, and inclusive policies and practices were among the effective strategies the business use to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in their practices. The study recommended that there should be leadership commitment, comprehensive diversity training programs, inclusive policies and practices, and the promotion of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to foster a culture of inclusion and equitable opportunities for all employees.

Keywords: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Business Practices

Introduction

Inclusion in business practices means creating a workplace and business environment where everyone, regardless of background or identity, feels valued, respected, and has equal opportunities to participate and succeed. Inclusion is the culture in which the mix of people can come to work, feel comfortable and confident to be themselves and work in a way that suits them and delivers business or service needs. Inclusion goes beyond simply having a diverse workforce. It's about ensuring that everyone feels they belong, their ideas are heard, and they have the same opportunities for growth and advancement as others. Inclusion means providing equal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes for all employees. Creating a culture where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, and where differences are valued and celebrated. Employees feel safe to express their opinions, take risks, and contribute without fear of judgment or discrimination. Leaders play a crucial role in promoting inclusion by setting the tone, removing barriers, and fostering a culture of belonging. Businesses should actively seek out and recruit a diverse workforce to reflect the communities they serve. Diverse perspectives and ideas lead to more creative solutions and problem-solving. Employees who feel valued and included are more likely to be engaged and productive. Businesses with a strong commitment to inclusion are seen as more ethical and socially responsible. Diverse workforce can better understand and serve diverse customer bases.

Inclusion is a multifaceted concept that has been defined and interpreted by various authors within the context of organizational management, education, social sciences, and diversity research. Inclusion refers to the practice of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all people through increasing participation in cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education (Johnstone & Muchmore, 2019). Inclusion is characterized by a culture of psychological safety, where every individual feels valued, respected, and able to bring their authentic selves to work. It involves fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance among employees, regardless of their identity or background (Garcia et al., 2021). Inclusion requires systemic change across all levels of an organization, including policies, processes, and practices. It involves dismantling barriers to participation and addressing structural inequalities that perpetuate exclusion and marginalization (Johnson & Williams, 2021). Brown and Smith, (2021) defined inclusion as a process of cultural transformation within organizations, whereby norms, values, and practices are redefined to embrace

diversity and create environments that are welcoming, supportive, and empowering for all individuals. Chen and Wang (2021) stated that Inclusion goes beyond mere representation and encompasses principles of equity and fairness in the distribution of opportunities, resources, and rewards within organizations. It involves creating a level playing field where all employees have equal access to advancement and recognition. Another perspective frames inclusion as requiring systemic change across all levels of an organization. This viewpoint emphasizes the dismantling of barriers to participation and the addressing of structural inequalities that perpetuate exclusion and marginalization.

Inclusion, from this perspective, involves reshaping policies, processes, and practices to promote fairness, accessibility, and belonging for all employees (Johnson & Williams, 2021). These diverse perspectives reflect the multifaceted nature of inclusion in the workplace and underscore its significance for organizational culture, employee well-being, and performance. By considering these various conceptualizations, organizations can develop holistic approaches to foster inclusive environments where every individual can thrive and contribute effectively (Onuorah & Ntagu, 2024). However, within the context of Nigerian public organizations, which encompass governmental ministries, departments, agencies, and parastatals, managing this diversity presents both opportunities and challenges. Public sector institutions play a pivotal role in shaping national development agendas, implementing policies, and delivering essential services to citizens. Therefore, ensuring inclusivity and representation within these organizations is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic imperative for promoting effective governance and sustainable development (Onuorah & Ntagu, 2024). One of the primary challenges facing Nigerian public organizations is the prevalence of exclusionary practices and a lack of inclusive organizational culture. Deep-rooted biases, stereotypes, and discriminatory attitudes often permeate workplace interactions, hindering the full participation and engagement of employees from diverse backgrounds.

Nigeria is blessed with diversity. Diversity in Nigeria's workplace ranges from socio-cultural differences, geographic, age, learning style, personality traits, gender, language, education, ethnicity, and religion among others. It is however incumbent on organizations that want to gain competitive advantage to widen their perspective on workplace diversity and diversity management. According to Udoyiu and Washington (2023), diversity implies the variety, variegation and multiplicity of

characteristics, both visible and invisible, which constitutes phenomenon in both the inanimate and animate worlds. However, the focus of this work is on workplace diversity. Udoyiu and Washington (2023) also defined diversity as the multitude of individual differences and similarities that exist among the people working in an organization. These similarities and differences are in terms such as age, gender, marital status, social status, disability, sexual orientation, religion, personality, ethnicity, language and culture. Other aspects include lifestyle, years of service, tenure, position in the organization, functional specialty, or geographical location.

Diversity entails the exploration of human differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual (Satus, 2023). Diversity is a reality created by individuals and groups from a broad spectrum of demographic and philosophical differences. It is extremely important to support and protect diversity by valuing individuals and groups free from prejudice, and by fostering a climate where equity and mutual respect are intrinsic. Diversity, therefore, means more than just acknowledging and/or tolerating differences. Diversity according to Clef (2019), includes knowing how to relate to those qualities and conditions that are different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong, yet are present in other individuals and groups. These include but are not limited to age, ethnicity, class, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, sexual orientation, as well as religious status, gender expression, educational background, geographical location, income, marital status, parental status, and work experiences.

Equity refers to the fair and just treatment of all employees, ensuring they have equal access to opportunities, resources, and advancement, regardless of their background or characteristics (Brown & Smith, 2021). Organizational equity aims to create a workplace where everyone is treated fairly and justly, and where opportunities are distributed equitably. While equality means providing the same resources to everyone, equity recognizes that people have different needs and circumstances, and therefore requires providing the resources and support necessary for each individual to succeed. Equity in the workplace involves identifying and addressing systemic barriers and biases that may disadvantage certain groups of employees. Equity is closely linked to diversity and inclusion, as it seeks to create a workplace where everyone feels valued, respected, and has the opportunity to contribute

their best work (Chen & Wang, Y. (2021). In organizational equity practices, it ensuring equal pay for equal work, providing access to training and development opportunities for all employees, creating a culture of open communication and feedback, implementing flexible work policies that accommodate diverse needs, and promoting diversity in leadership and decision-making roles. Equity in organization also increased employee engagement and motivation, improved employee retention, enhanced organizational performance and stronger reputation and brand image.

Nigeria's multi-ethnic society is characterized by historical grievances, power struggles, and identity politics, which frequently spill over into the workplace. Competition for resources, promotion opportunities, and decision-making authority along ethnic lines exacerbate inter-group conflicts and undermine cohesion within organizational settings. As a result, public organizations often struggle to cultivate a sense of unity and common purpose among their diverse workforce (Onuorah & Ntagu, 2024). Furthermore, inequitable access to opportunities represents a systemic challenge in Nigerian public organizations. Despite policies aimed at promoting meritocracy and equal opportunity, nepotism, favouritism, and patronage continue to influence recruitment, selection, and career advancement processes (Ogbonnaya & Ukpabi, 2021). Additionally, Nigerian public organizations often lack the institutional support and resources necessary to effectively manage workplace diversity and inclusion. The absence of comprehensive diversity management policies, inadequate training programs, and limited accountability mechanisms impede efforts to create inclusive work environments and address systemic biases. Moreover, the volatile political climate and bureaucratic red tape further complicate diversity initiatives, leaving organizations ill-equipped to navigate the complexities of Nigeria's diverse workforce (Ogbonnaya & Ukpabi, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the cultural richness and diversity of Nigeria, public organizations often struggle to embrace and harness the full potential of their workforce. Issues such as ethnic nepotism, religious biases, tribal favouritism, and regionalism have historically plagued the Nigerian public sector, leading to inefficiencies, inequalities, and social tensions. Moreover, the legacy of colonialism and post-independence governance challenges have contributed to institutionalized barriers that hinder the advancement of marginalized groups and perpetuate exclusionary practices. Human resources are often

considered the lifeblood of any organization. They play a crucial role in the success and functioning of a company. Human resources encompass the people who work for an organization and they are responsible for managing various aspects related to employees, such as recruitment, training, benefits, performance evaluation, and employee relations. Management and inclusion of a diverse workforce have become a critical concern and significant problem in organizations across all sectors. In developing countries such as Nigeria, the benefits of diversity management and inclusion are yet to be fully established, especially in an archetypal public organisation where there is a multicultural workforce. In an attempt to solved this problem, this study examined advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in business practices: A study of strategies, challenges and outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to examine advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in business practices: A study of strategies, challenges and outcomes. Specifically, the study sough to:

1. identify effective strategies that business use to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in their practices;
2. ascertain the relationship between equity and inclusion in their practices;
3. find out the challenges and barriers that business face in implementing diversity, equity and inclusion in initiatives;

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this study:

1. What are the effective strategies the business use to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in their practices?
2. Is there any relationship between equity and inclusion in their practices?
3. What are the challenges and barriers that business face in implementing diversity, equity and inclusion in initiatives?

Methodology

A descriptive research design of survey type was used for the study. The design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect large volume of data within smallest period of time. The population of this study comprised all staff of Nigerian Breweries, Imagbon, Ijebu-Ode local government area of Ogun State. A total of 55 staff of Nigerian Breweries, Imagbon, Ijebu-Ode local government area of Ogun State were selected as sample size of the study. Simple random and stratified sampling technique were used in the process of selection. A self-researcher-designed instrument tagged: Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Business Practices Questionnaire (ADEIBPQ). ADEIBPQ was used for data collection from respondents regarding effective strategies that business use to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in their practices; and challenges and barriers that business face in implementing diversity, equity and inclusion in initiatives. The questionnaire requested responses on a four (4) – point scale format which is a modification of 5-point Likert scale. The responses rating scales are as follows: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). To ensure the face validity of the instrument copies of the instrument was given to an expert in the Department of Business Education, Tai Solarin University of Education (TASUED). Reliability test of the instrument (ADEIBPQ) was done using a test-retest method. In this case, copies of the instrument (ADEIBPQ) were administered twice on 15 staff of Ministry of Commerce in Oke-Mosan, Abeokuta that are not part of the sample size within a week interval. The collected data were compared using Pearson moment reliability statistic and reliability estimate of 0.91 was reported for the instrument. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used for answering research questions. Any mean score of 2.5 and above was regarded as agree while any one below 2.5 regarded as disagree. For regression analysis, when p_{value} is less than significance level ($p < .05$), the research question is true or positive.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the effective strategies the business use to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in their practices?

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on the effective strategies the business use to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in their practices

Items	Mean	SD
Diversity training	2.78	.986
Inclusive hiring practices	2.94	.949
Employee resource group	3.18	.776
Mentorship	2.84	.932
Leadership commitment	3.22	.708
Inclusive policies and practices	3.01	.699
Cluster Mean	3.00	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 revealed that cluster mean was 3.00 which found to greater than bench mark mean value 2.50. The implications of this result were that diversity training, inclusive hiring practices, employee resource group, mentorship, leadership commitment, and inclusive policies and practices were among the effective strategies the business use to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in their practices.

Research Question 2: Is there any relationship between equity and inclusion in their practices?

Table 2: Relationship between equity and inclusion in their practices

Variables	Mean	SD	df	r-value	p-value
Inclusion practices	53.781	25.947			
Equity practices	34.814	16.372	53	.592	.002

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 depicted that there was significant relationship between the explanatory variable and the dependent variable in the order of ($r = 0.592$, $p < .05$). On this premise, the researcher concluded that there was a positive relationship between equity and inclusion in their practices.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges and barriers that business face in implementing diversity, equity and inclusion in initiatives?

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on the challenges and barriers that business face in implementing diversity, equity and inclusion in initiatives

Items	Mean	SD
Lack of leadership buy-in	2.90	1.003
Limited resources	3.36	.723
Persistence from employees	3.26	.732
Difficulty measuring effectiveness	3.72	.777
Cluster Mean	3.31	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 showed that cluster mean was 3.31 which found to greater than bench mark mean value 2.50. These results suggested that lack of leadership buy-in, limited resources, persistence from employees, and difficulty measuring effectiveness were among the challenges and barriers that business face in implementing diversity, equity and inclusion in initiatives.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that diversity training, inclusive hiring practices, employee resource group, mentorship, leadership commitment, and inclusive policies and practices were among the effective strategies the business use to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in their practices. These findings were in agreement with Udoyiu and Washington (2023) discovered among others that Cox's individual, group/intergroup as well as organizational levels of diversity hold swear in Nigeria's workplace; only 35% of Nigeria's leading companies have at least a tolerable level of diversity, equity and inclusion. A number of strategies recommended among others include; enacting a strong legal framework that governs DEI practices and compliance in the workplace; inclusive leadership and unconscious biases training; relationship building; flexible work model. Jejeniwa1 et al. (2024) concluded by presenting a conceptual framework that maps out the critical influences on diversity and inclusion practices in the workplace across both settings. This framework aims to serve as a foundational guide for future research, policy formulation, and practice, offering insights into the optimization of diversity and inclusion strategies in varying socio-economic and cultural contexts.

It was also showed that there was a positive relationship between equity and inclusion in their practices. These findings were in correlation with Olele and Achugo (2023) found that strategies and practices in fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Nigerian workplaces and understanding the benefits of a diverse workforce and that these critical drivers of organizational success and sustainability, fostering creativity, innovation, and employee engagement. However, the implementation of DEI initiatives in Nigeria faces specific challenges due to the country's unique cultural, social, and economic landscape. The findings emphasize the need for HR strategies sensitive to Nigeria's diverse cultural dynamics. This research contributes to evidence-based practices tailored to Nigerian workplaces, promoting an inclusive and equitable environment.

Furthermore, the findings of the study depicted that lack of leadership buy-in, limited resources, persistence from employees, and difficulty measuring effectiveness were among the challenges and barriers that business face in implementing diversity, equity and inclusion in initiatives. These findings were in tandem with Onuorah and Ntagu (2024) who found that challenges such as cultural differences, religious diversity, gender inequality, lack of inclusive policies, and resistance to change are identified, alongside opportunities for growth and success including increased creativity, enhanced problem-solving abilities, and improved organizational performance.

Conclusion

The study examined advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in business practices: A study of strategies, challenges and outcomes, the following conclusions were drawn based on the findings of the study that diversity training, inclusive hiring practices, employee resource group, mentorship, leadership commitment, and inclusive policies and practices were among the effective strategies the business use to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in their practices. There was a positive relationship between equity and inclusion in their practices. Lack of leadership buy-in, limited resources, persistence from employees, and difficulty measuring effectiveness were among the challenges and barriers that business face in implementing diversity, equity and inclusion in initiatives. There was significant composite contribution of explanatory variables (advancing diversity and equity) on the dependent variable and about 75% variation in inclusion in business practices was accounted for

by explanatory variables (advancing diversity and equity) and that there was significant relative impact of diversity, equity and inclusion on business performance and reputation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are provided:

1. There should be leadership commitment, comprehensive diversity training programs, inclusive policies and practices, and the promotion of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to foster a culture of inclusion and equitable opportunities for all employees.
2. HR professionals, organizational leaders, and policymakers, fostering unity, social cohesion, and prosperity through workforce management.

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