RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN WESTERN KENYA

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ABSTRACT
The objective of this study was to assess the relationship between ethnic diversity and employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya. The study was guided by positivism research philosophy and descriptive survey research design was adopted. The target population included the chairpersons of departments of the four public universities in Western Kenya. A census of all the head of departments was conducted and primary data was collected using questionnaires pre tested for validity and reliability. Secondary data was collected from university documents and relevant publications in referred journals. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Correlation and regression analysis were used to investigate the relationships between hypothesized variables. Out of the 120 questionnaires sent out, 93 questionnaires were received giving a return rate of 78%. Correlation and regression analysis established a statistically significant positive relationship between ethnic diversity variable and employee performance. The conclusion drawn from the study findings is that ethnic diversity positively influences employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya and majority of the employees in public universities are positive about ethnic diversity practices in their institutions. The study further recommends that public universities in Western Kenya should enhance ethnic diversity initiatives specifically in respecting employees' custom, culture and values.

Keyword: Workforce Diversity, Ethnic Diversity, Employee Performance, Public Universities, Human Resource Management.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Workforce Diversity

Cox (2001) defines workforce diversity as the variation of social and cultural identities among

people existing together in a defined employment or marketing setting. William and O'Reilly (1998) also defines workforce diversity as the degree of heterogeneity among team members on specified demographic dimensions, their theory aiming to explain how such heterogeneity affects team processes and performance. Thomas and Ely (1996) explains that workforce diversity should be understood as the varied perspectives and approaches to work, that members of different identity groups bring. They add that it refers to the co-existence of employees from various social-cultural backgrounds within the company. Workforce diversity therefore requires a type of organizational culture in which each employee can pursue his or her career aspirations without being inhibited by age, gender, race, nationality, religion, physical ability or other factors that are irrelevant to performance (Bryan, 1999). Employee diversity is therefore a concept that recognizes the benefits to be gained from differences. It differs from equal opportunity, which aims to legislate against discrimination, and it assumes that people should be assimilated into the organization, and often relies on affirmative action. Thus managing diversity means understanding its effects and implementing behaviors, work practices and policies that respond to them in an effective way (Cox, 2001).

1.2 Dimensions of Workforce Diversity

Diversity is distinguished along the primary, secondary and tertiary or organizational dimensions. Differences among employees can be can be categorized into two aspects; primary differences such as; ethnicity, age, gender, race etc. and the secondary differences such as; educational background, communication style, etc. (Aydan, 2016).

1.2.1 Primary Dimension

Primary dimension reveals the key dissimilarities among diverse individuals as well as the highest impact on initial encounters, it could be quickly detected and it also serve as a filter through which people view the world. It includes visible identity characteristics such as; age, gender, sexual orientation, physical abilities, ethnicity, race, etc. (Sayers, 2012). Powell (2011) adds that they are those essential unchangeable personal characteristics that exert significant lifelong impacts and they shape our basic self-image sense of identity.

1.2.2 The Secondary Dimension

Secondary differences include; educational background, communication style, marital status, organizational role and position, religion, geographic location, income, work experience and work style, are qualities that are not noticeable in the first encounter and can even change throughout different encounters. These dimensions appear to be less visible, exert a more variable influence on personal, and add a more subtle richness to the primary dimension of diversity (Sayers, 2012). People are usually less sensitive about these aspects because they are element we have made a choice on and we have the power to change them. The secondary dimensions of diversity are referred to by organizational researchers as Experience-based diversity. This form of diversity includes a wide range of differences that are acquired, discarded, and/or modified throughout one's lifetime and as a result, are less pertinent to one's core identity. Powell (2011) said the secondary dimensions are our personal changeable characteristics. Characteristics that over the years we have acquired, we may decide to modify or even abandon throughout our life time.

1.2.3 Organizational Dimension

Organizational dimension deal with characteristics within the organization such as; organizational structure, part time or full time, organizational climate or culture, status, etc. (Sayers, 2012). The basis for secondary and organizational dimensions of diversity is information processing and decision making theory. This perspective suggest that diversity when managed will have positive implications on work group outcomes since such groups will have a wide array of views, skills, and information. Educational background, functional and industrial experience are part of the competencies that one employs when undertaking a task. The ability to productively discuss and examine task related content issues grounded in a diverse set of perspectives can enhance performance.

1.3 Ethnic Diversity

Ethnic diversity refers to a socio-cultural workforce diversity which is specified by the number of people who have dissimilar ethnicity in the company in relation to languages, cultures and values (Gupta, 2013). Cox, (2001) adds that ethnic diversity is the differences in people's ethnic backgrounds, applied to a work team, this means that team members belong to different ethnic groups. This manifest itself in the differences in people's inner self, stemming from their ethnic background. Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau, and Briggs (2010) argue that someone's work style is often linked to someone's ethnic background and that ethnic diversity within a team brings about its effects in the way team members work together and in how they perform. As a consequence, organizational performance seems increasingly dependent on diverse employees that are working together, which could explain the increased attention of managers and researchers to work on group diversity and its relationship with performance. The concept of ethnic diversity should therefore be seen as a collection of a broad range of different diversity dimensions, because every single diversity dimension could affect team performance differently (Bell et al. 2010).

1.4 Employee Performance

Durga (2017) defined performance as the act of executing a task or an accomplishment or achievement. He adds that employee performance is how well an employee is effectively fulfilling his/ her job requirement or discharging his/ her duties so as to achieve good results. O'Flynn, et al. (2001) citing William and O'Reilly (1998) said employee performance is defined using three criteria. First criteria, is that employees' output meets the standard of performance set by the organization's external customers. Secondly, employee performance can be defined in terms of how the social processes utilized in the performance of their jobs enhances or maintain the capability of the employees to work together on subsequent group tasks. Finally, that employee's personal needs are satisfied instead of them being frustrated by the group performance. O'Flynn, et al. (2001) citing Ancona (1992) argue that there are multiple dimensions when it comes to rating of performance seeing that different constituents have their different performance criteria and access to data. For instance, management may be more interested in looking at the output of the employees whereas; the employees make be interested in creating a productive environment for themselves. Information and decision making theory predict that a positive outcome exist between employee performance in intellectual and complex

tasks and information as employees have diverse knowledge, skills, experience and expertise which results in innovation, new product design and improved decision making.

1.5 Public Universities in Kenya

Public universities in Kenya are charged with the responsibility of providing higher education to all in the country on a competitive yet balanced basis accounting for 80% of the total university students' enrolment in the country. The universities were previously established under individual Acts of Parliament until the enactment of Universities Act No. 42 of 2012 which saw all individual Acts repealed and public universities re-accredited through charter award after institutional quality audits. All public universities in Kenya operate under the oversight of Commission for University Education (CUE) to which they are accredited a move aimed at promoting, regulating, monitoring and dealing with all matters related to university education. Currently there are 22 fully accredited public universities and 9 constituent colleges (CUE, 2013).

The public universities are in different geographical locations in the country are autonomous in matters of management of their human resources. All public universities major funding is by the government and their core activities is teaching, research and consultancy services. Being public establishments, public universities are also affected by legislations and government directives that are deemed to be of national interest and best human resource practices (Nguata, 2013). This forms a ground for investigating the relationship between ethnic diversity and employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya.

1.6 Statement of the Problem

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

However, Munene (2012) points out that higher education in Kenya is dominated by negative ethnicity and vice chancellors and governing council's composition at the university had significant insinuation of ethnic and political patronage. The study adds that technically ethnic supremacy in universities is a strategy to empower the ethnic patronage by rewarding them with the institution tenders and business contracts as opposed to achieving core business of these institutions. In addition, Sifuna (2010) concurs with this preposition by asserting that majority of

the public universities in Kenya were set up to gratify ethnic interests, especially those of large ethnic groups. Nevertheless, a report released by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (2016), indicates that majority of the public universities in Kenya have more than one -third of their employees from one community and therefore violating the basic tenets of diversity laws of Kenya. This study therefore fills the gap by assessing the relationship between ethnic diversity and employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya.

1.7 Objective of the Study
The objective of this study was to assess the relationship between ethnic diversity and employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya.

1.8 Hypothesis of the Study
The null hypothesis (H_0) of the study was; there is no statistically significant relationship between ethnic diversity and employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Theoretical Framework

Workforce diversity is a very broad field which arguably, has been generalized across many boundaries. Organizational researchers often refer to natural characteristics as dimensions of diversity or social category diversity. The theoretical foundations for primary dimensions of diversity include the social-categorization theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), similarity attraction theory (Byrne, 1971) and the information decision making theory (Simon, 1947).

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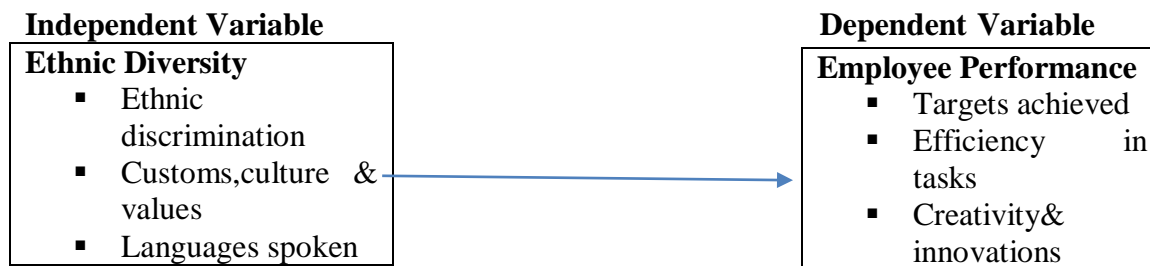
2.1.2 Similarity- Attraction Theory

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

2.1.3 Information Decision Making Theory

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

2.2 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable

Dependent Variable

Ethnic Diversity
▪ Ethnic discrimination
▪ Customs,culture & values
▪ Languages spoken

Employee Performance
▪ Targets achieved
▪ Efficiency in tasks
▪ Creativity& innovations

2.3 Empirical Review

Ethnic diversity can have both advantages and disadvantages for organizations. Examples of disadvantages are communication problems, lack of social cohesion in organizational work groups and problems with reaching consensus (Jackson and Joshi, 2004). Opstal (2009) states that advantages are for example more creativity, innovation a larger pool of resources that is available in the organization (for example knowledge, abilities, and social networks) and therefore better problem solving. Management of diversity is important to help an organization benefit from these advantages and minimize the disadvantages that can have a negative effect on organizational performance (Benschop, 2001).

Østergaard, Timmermans and Kristinsson (2011) found that innovation is an interactive process that often involves communication and interaction among employees in a firm and draws on their different qualities from all levels of the organization. Diversity in ascribed characteristics, such as ethnic background, nationality, gender, and age can have negative affective consequences for the firm. This study further state that members of the minority group can experience less job satisfaction, lack of commitment, problems with identity and perceived discrimination. However, when minority group grows, some of the problems disappear, ethnicity can be used as a proxy for cultural background and diversity in ethnicity can be expected to be positive for innovative performance, since it broadens the viewpoints and perspectives in the firm. Moreover, the study suggests that some levels of diversity in ethnicity might be positive associated with innovation, high degree of diversity in ethnicity might be negative since it can create conflict and cliques due to social categorization.

Loeters (2011) study focused on ethnic diversity in teams. It examined the ethnic diversity-team performance relationship by taking work value diversity into account as a mediator and by taking team tenure into account as a moderator of the relationship between work value diversity and team performance. The study tested the mediating role of work value diversity on the relationship between ethnic diversity and team performance in such a way that ethnic diversity would lead to differences in people's work values and work value diversity would be related to

the performance of the team. Results did not support the propositions about either the relationship between ethnic diversity and team performance mediated by work value diversity or the relationship between work value diversity and team performance moderated by team tenure.

Hoogendoorn and van Praag (2012) argue that one of the most salient and relevant dimensions of team heterogeneity is ethnicity. Their study measured the causal impact of ethnic diversity on the performance of business teams using a randomized experiment. The study followed 550 students who set up 45 real companies as part of their curriculum in an international business program in the Netherlands. The study found out that a moderate level of ethnic diversity has no effect on team performance in terms of business outcomes. However, if at least the majority of team members was ethnically diverse then more ethnic diversity had a positive impact on the performance of teams.

Chaudhry and Sharma (2016) study on the role of gender and ethnicity diversity on the performance of employees in selected companies in India, argues that increasingly changing business environment, in information technology sector, has forced many organizations to adopt the strategy of recruiting diverse workforce for the growth and overall development. Results of the study indicates that there is positive relation between gender and employee performance, as there value of correlation coefficient is between 0.21 and 0.40. The significance of the relationship is 0.000 which was less than the 0.01. On Ethnicity, result indicated that there is positive relation between ethnicity and employee performance, as there value of correlation coefficient is between 0.21 and 0.4. The relationship significance is 0.000 which is less than the 0.01. Therefore the relationship between ethnicity diversity and employee performance is significant.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) define descriptive research as a process of collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of study. The study adopted purposive sampling and chairpersons of departments from the four public universities were chosen as the appropriate respondents. A census approach was used since the units were not many, concentrated in one region and well defined there by favoring costs, time and other resources (Sekaran, 2008). Pilot testing of the questionnaire for validity and reliability was carried out on a small and similar group to the one that was used in the research. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire and secondary data was collected from university documents and relevant publications in referred journals. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. ANOVA tests was used to test the hypothesis and results were presented in tables.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The study examined Ethnic Diversity indicators which were, ethnic discrimination, ethnic

customs, culture and values and languages in relation to how they influenced the employee performance of public universities in Western Kenya. The research results are shown in Table 4.1. using a Likert scale of 1-5 where 5= Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2= Disagree; 1 = strongly disagree, M= Mean, SD= standard deviation and % = Percentage of Respondents.

Table 1. Ethnic Diversity

S/N	Statement		1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
a)	Team leaders don't discriminate members based on ethnic background	%	3.2	21.5	20.4	36.6	18.3	3.45	1.12
b)	Ethnic differences in work group doesn't causes conflicts	%	6.5	21.5	24.7	25.8	21.5	3.34	1.22
c)	My organization respects employees' customs, cultures and values	%	6.5	19.5	35.5	26.9	11.8	3.18	1.08
d)	Ethnic diversity in teams helps finding creative solutions	%	2.2	19.4	30.1	32.3	16.1	3.41	1.05
e)	Different languages used in informal groups affect professional relationships	%	10.8	21.5	23.7	22.6	21.5	3.23	1.30
f)	I am positive about ethnic diversity in my work place	%	5.4	20.4	20.4	18.3	35.5	3.58	1.30
Overall Mean								**3.37**	**1.17**

The results of table 1, results for ethnic diversity show that 36.6% agreed and 18.3% strongly agreed that team leaders do not discriminate members based on their ethnic background. 20.4% of the respondents were neutral on this while 21.5% disagreed. Nevertheless 3.2% strongly disagreed with this statement. A mean of 3.45 indicating that to a large extent team leaders do not discriminate members based on their ethnic background in public universities. On ethnic differences and conflict results show that 25.8% of the respondents agreed and 21.5% strongly agreed. The results further show that 24.7% of the respondents were neutral while 21.5% disagreed and 6.5% strongly disagreed. The mean was 3.35 indicating that to a moderate extent ethnic differences in work groups do not cause conflicts in public universities. The study also sought information on organization's respect for employees' customs, culture and values and results indicate that cumulatively 38.7% agreed and 35.5% were neutral. A total of 21.6%

disagreed with this statement. With a mean of 3.18 the results indicate that to a moderate extent public universities in Kenya respect employees' customs, culture and values.

The study also wanted to know if ethnic diversity in teams helps in finding creative solutions and the results show that a total of 48.4% agreed with this while 30.1% were neutral and a total of 21.6% of the respondents disagreed. A mean of 3.41 indicating that to a moderate extent ethnic diversity in teams helps in finding creative solutions in public universities. The study was also interested to know the extent to which different languages used in informal groups affect professional relationships. The results indicate that a total of 44.1% agreed and 23.75% were neutral. Cumulatively 32.3% of the respondents disagreed. The mean was 3.23 indicating that different languages used in informal groups in public universities to a moderate extent affect the professional relationship. Finally, respondents were to give information on the level of being positive about ethnic diversity. A majority of them 35.5% strongly agreed and in addition 18.3% agreed on being positive about gender diversity. 20.4% of the respondents were neutral while a total of 25.8% disagreed with the statement. A mean of 3.58 indicated that to a large extent employees in public universities are positive about ethnic diversity.

In conclusion, According to Pitts (2006) study, organizations are becoming more ethnic diverse, so it is necessary to focus on the interaction of diverse groups in an organization. Based on a research by Opstal (2009), ethnic diversity can affect organizations positively or negatively. Nonetheless, organizations should understand how to manage their diverse workforce where it can increase the pros of such diversity and eliminate its cons.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

The study correlation strengths were interpreted using Cohen (1988) decision rules where r values from 0.1 to 0.3 indicate weak correlation, 0.31 to 0.5 indicate moderate correlation strength and greater than 0.5 indicate a strong correlation between the variables. Correlation is statistically significant at 0.05 levels if p values are 0.05 and are not statistically significant if p values are more than 0.05. Table 2 shows the correlation results.

Table 2. Correlation between Ethnic Diversity and Employee Performance

		Ethnic Diversity	Employee Performance
Ethnic Diversity	Pearson Correlation	1	.206*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.048
	N	93	93
Employee Performance	Pearson Correlation	.206*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.048	
	N	93	93
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

A correlation analysis was carried out and the results reveal that there is a significant weak positive association between ethnic diversity and employee performance in public universities in

Kenya,r=0.206, p=0.048, CL=95%. This means that when ethnic diversity improves, then employee performance also improves in public universities in Western Kenya. The results agrees with Gupta (2013) study which found out a comparable positive effect of ethnic diversity on sales, efficiency, market share, creativity and innovativeness among employees in firms. In addition, Van and Bunderson (2005) also noted improved performance in ethnic diverse multidisciplinary teams in oil and gas industry.

4.3 Regression Analysis

Table 3. Regression between Ethnic Diversity and Employee Performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	16.295	1.776	9.175	.000	12.767	19.823		
Ethnic Diversity	.129	.065	2.005	.048	.001	.258	1.000	1.000

The regression model was as follows;
Y = 16.295 +0.129 X + 1.841
A regression analysis was carried out and the results tabulated in table 3, show that there is a significant positive association between ethnic diversity and employee performance. If ethnic diversity increases by one unit, employee performance increases by 0.129 units. The results corroborates with Watson, Johnson, & Zgourides (2002) findings that the increase in performance of teams comes as a result of the diverse cultural composition of employees and this is seen as the benefit of embracing various ethnical perceptions for finding solutions to problems and enhancing the outcome of team members after they have learned ways in which they can make use of their dissimilarities for their advantage. Therefore, as ethnic diversity increases in an organization, there is an increase in employee performance.

4.4 Hypothesis Testing
The null hypothesis of the study was;**H₀. There is no significant relationship between ethnic diversity and employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya.** The results are shown in table 4.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing on Ethnic Diversity and Employee Performance

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1232.208	19	64.853	9.076	0.000
Within Groups	521.598	73	7.145		
Total	1753.806	92			

The study tested the null hypothesis (H_0) that there is no significant relationship between ethnic diversity and employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya. The F distribution table gave a reading of critical value= 2.74 and *F (19, 73)* =26.796, 2.74< 9.076, because the calculated value is greater than the critical value, therefore we reject the null hypothesis; this means that it is statistically very unlikely that the null hypothesis (H_0) is true. We revert to the alternative hypothesis (H_1) that there is a significant relationship between ethnic diversity and employee performance in public universities in Western Kenya. The study agrees with Hoogendoorn and van Praag(2012) study which measured the causal impact of ethnic diversity on the performance of business teams using a randomized experiment. The study found out that a moderate level of ethnic diversity has no effect on team performance in terms of business outcomes. However, if at least the majority of team members was ethnically diverse then more ethnic diversity had a positive impact on the performance of teams.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
In conclusion, ethnic diversity positively influences employee performance in public universities in Kenya. There is a statistically significant positive association between ethnic diversity and employee performance. Majority of the employees in public universities are positive about ethnic diversity practices in their institutions and team leaders do not discriminate members based on ethnic background in public universities. The study then recommends that public universities in Western Kenya should enhance ethnic diversity initiatives specifically on respects for employees' custom, culture and values.

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