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Religion disparity and employees' performance: an examination of higher institutions of learning in Kwara State, Nigeria

Náboženské rozdiely a výkonnosť zamestnancov: Skúmanie vysokoškolských inštitúcií v štáte Kwara v Nigérii

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Abstract: The attention of several educational agencies has been drawn to the need to manage religious disparity in higher institutions of learning to curtail the possible effect on the higher institutions' performance. As a result, the study examines the influence of religious disparity on employees' performance with a reference to the selected higher institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. A survey design was adopted because of its suitability in describing and exploring the nature of the study, which is primarily quantitative. The study population consists of non-academic staff of higher institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria, which stood at 4,500; and from this, a sample of 367 were selected using the Taro Yamani's formula. Linear regression was deployed to test the hypotheses formulated to guide the study. Findings revealed that the β -value for religion disparity is very low (3%), indicating a very low impact on the employees' performance with a p-value greater than 0.05 at a 5% significant level. It was evident that religious disparity does not significantly influence employees' performance among non-academics in higher institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. This suggests that the quality of service and productivity of employees does not reflect religious discrimination; hence, to maintain harmonious relations, there should be a holistic approach among the staff suffering from religious disparity as opposed to the hitherto fragmented and episodic actions taken over time.

Key words: Religion. Disparity. Employee's Performance. Retaliation. Kwara State.

JEL Classification: M14. M50.

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1. Introduction

The concept of religious disparity has grown enormously among professionals and experts in the field of human resource management as a vice in modern workplaces (Grigg & Zenzen, 2019; Andrew et al., 2021). Unfairness occurs when the treatment of a particular category of people is excessive due to their religion affiliation. This is the reason why most enterprises provide equal job opportunities to employees of different sexes, colours, ethnic groups, and religions, among other personal traits in their condition of service (Griffin & Moorhead, 2008; Antoniou et al., 2019). In Nigeria, higher institutions of learning staffing are gradually spread among several cultures, religions, ethnicities among others demographics (Isiaka & Aliyu, 2019). Meanwhile, employees' values are carried over to the workplace and if such employees are religiously diverse across the enterprise, there is a tendency of possible increase of interpersonal conflict resulting from misunderstanding of religious attachment (Acquinas, 2016; Abrams & Frank, 2021). Unfortunately, Cohen and Bailey (2021) affirm the major problem with religion is that different people believe their religion is better than other faiths.

Therefore, the attention of several educational agencies has been drawn to the need to manage religion disparity in higher institutions of learning in order to curb the possible effect of disparity on the performance of those higher institutions (Blanche et al. 2006). This method has been part of the culture imbibed in the entire enterprise, valuing and recognising employee religion disparity is imperative in order to maintain enterprise performance (Abrams & Frank, 2014). Enterprises that promote religion without disparity in the workplace are likely to attract and retain the quality of their workforce and increase customer satisfaction (Carpenter & Fredrickson, 2021). Meanwhile, the perceived inequality has been suggested to have posed a serious threat to unity in the workplace and brought together religious disparities to improve employees' performance (Arredondo, 1996). This is because the failure to manage disparity in terms of religious affiliation usually leads to disparities in pay, promotion, learning and development, mutual agreement, and job satisfaction, among other kinds of inequality in the enterprise (Grigg & Zenzen 2019).

In Kwara state, Nigeria, Muslims are the main dominant, and this appears in most enterprises in the states; yet, there are challenges faced because of the presence of other religions. For example, the information obtained from the Bureau of Statistics (2022) reported that the most dominant religions in Nigeria are Christianity and Islam, but these two religions have different beliefs, ideologies, and doctrines. Unfortunately, the major problem faced with religion is that different people believe their religion is the best and therefore want to treat and satisfy their similar faith (Akinnusi et al. (2017).

Aim

The study main objective is to examine the effect of religious disparity on employees' performance with reference to an examination of Higher Institutions of Learning in Kwara State, Nigeria. However, the specific objectives are as follows:

1. To determine the influence of disparity in religion on employee productivity among non-academics of Kwara State higher institutions;
2. To explore the influence of religious discrimination on employee quality of service among the non-academics of Kwara State higher institutions.

1.1. Religion Disparity

Religion disparity has been widely discussed in the prior literature because religious differences have increased worry among relevant stakeholders for many decades (Armstrong, 2012; Blackard, 2020). It has emerged as a problem and is being criticised from many angles. Due to the ongoing debate over what constitutes religion, it has become more difficult to settle on a definition on which everyone or the majority can agree (Aquinas, 2016). The term religion refers to approaches to human spirituality that typically include a collection of myths, symbols, beliefs, and practises, frequently with a supernatural or transcendent quality, that give the practitioner's life experiences context by alluding to a higher power or the truth, which may be conveyed, among other ways, via art, ritual, and prayer (Borman et al., 2003).

Grigg and Zenzen (2019) described religion from an individual and societal perspective. Believing that some workers may have turned to religion for consolation and inspiration during difficult times. The main social values, such as integrity, truth, nonviolence, love, discipline, and law, are said to be stimulated by religion (Cohen & Levinthal, 2020). As a result, the practitioners internalise these characteristics and grow into disciplined members of society. Hence, religious disparities include the systematic marginalisation, exclusion, and, in severe instances, genocide that people and communities experience due to their religious beliefs and affiliations. (Hambrick & Mason, 2022).

1.2. Employees' Performance

Historically, employee performance has been defined as carrying out a job or achieving a goal inside a company (Armstrong, 2012). In other words, performance has been defined as how effectively and efficiently people do their assigned duties or perform the criteria of their jobs in order to attain enterprise goals (Jehn et al., 2017). On the other hand, the output of the staff complies with the performance criteria established by the institution's external clientele (Johnson & Johnson, 2010). The effectiveness of an employee's performance may depend on

how social processes are used to carry out a certain job in a way that improves their capacity to collaborate (Mokhlis, 2007). The group's success results in the needs and satisfaction of the workers being fulfilled and employees' performance as they do their organisational tasks (Armstrong, 2012; Blanche et al., 2016).

2. Theoretical Framework

Henri Tajfel and John Turner proposed Social Identity Theory (SIT) in 1979 to examine how people classify themselves and others into distinct social groups and investigate the impact of these group affiliations on behaviour, attitudes, and interactions between different groups (Holland, 1997). The SIT proposes that individuals construct their self-concept and self-esteem based on their groups, resulting in a tendency to favour their group and discriminate against those outside of it (Hambrick & Mason, 2022). It is a common tendency for individuals to exhibit a preference for their in-group as opposed to out-groups. In a setting, where religious diversity is present, workers may tend to display favouritism or prejudice towards those belonging to their religious affiliation (Korte, 2007). This issue can potentially affect attitudes/behaviours towards workers of diverse religious affiliations, possibly influencing disharmony in the workplace (Koontz & Weihrich, 2010).

For instance, Hambrick and Mason (2022) reported a degree of significance attributed to the religious identity in the workplace positively correlates with its potential to impact behaviours attributes. The implications of SIT in the context of religious disparity in the workplace indicate that efficient management of diversity is essential for maintaining a pleasant work environment and employee performance (Josef, 2010; Kan, 2013; Kite et al., 2015).

Empirical Evidence

Gilbert and Ivancevich (2020) investigated the relationship between employee performance and workplace religious disparities. Their findings suggest that despite growing awareness of discrimination based on religion, there has been an increase in religious inequality influenced by various factors, including socio-political dynamics. Similar research was conducted by Cole and Salimath (2023), who looked at the relationship between religious prejudice and the performance of employees in the healthcare system. Additionally, a qualitative technique was used to gather the data. According to their findings, Christian scientists should contact Christian Scientist Practitioners rather than traditional physicians when unwell. The survey also discovered that faith-based enterprises had favourable or negative attitudes towards religious differences.

Mitroff and Denton's study (1999) investigates religious disparity and its practical implications on employee performance. Additionally, the study analyses the challenges faced by human resources practitioners in managing the effects of religious disparity on employee performance. Furthermore, Reskin (2014) emphasised the importance of politically established systems, such as laws, voting rights, and historically established church-mosque state relations, about the impact of religious disparities on employee performance. Their existence directly affects the extent to which the state accommodates religious minorities. Nevertheless, the research did not provide a comprehensive analysis of the importance of the question or any potential solutions or treatments for addressing this significance.

Hypotheses Development

Prior studies have indicated that even though religion can play a crucial role in people's sense of self, its influence on job efficiency among non-academic might not be as significant as previously thought (Arredondo, 1996). One main discovery is that companies often prioritise job contentment, leadership efficiency, and corporate atmosphere over religious distinctions when evaluating productivity standards. For example, a study by Cohen and Bailey (2021) revealed that team unity and mutual objectives had a more powerful impact on productivity than religious variety in the workforce. This suggests that effective management techniques that encourage teamwork and a helpful workplace environment could lessen any potential adverse consequences of religious variations on productivity.

Furthermore, a Dunmade et al. (2023) study reveals that workers typically focus on their job skills and completing tasks rather than dealing with religious matters. In addition, companies that embrace diversity and respect various beliefs tend to provide a supportive environment where employees feel appreciated, regardless of their religious backgrounds. Therefore, although there may be religious diversity among non-academic, it seems to have little impact on employee productivity when organisations prioritise inclusivity and professional performance standards; thus, a hypothesis is formed:

H0₁: disparity in religious differences does not significantly influence employee productivity.

Despite the widespread existence of religious discrimination in various communities, especially in areas with diverse religious populations like Kwara State, Nigeria, its impact on the quality of service provided by employees seems to be minimal among non-teaching staff. Prior studies have shown that even when faced with religious discrimination, non-teaching staff prioritise their professional duties and deliver high-quality service regardless of their religious beliefs (See Kelly, 2018; Isiaka & Aliyu, 2019). This pattern indicates that job satisfaction,

organisational environment, and personal dedication to professionalism may influence service quality more than religious bias.

Furthermore, the literature highlights that effective measures to tackle discrimination, training programs focused on diversity, and providing inclusive organisational environments can all help create a workplace where employees feel appreciated and respected regardless of their religious beliefs. As a result, while religious bias may be present to some extent among non-academic staff in Kwara State's higher education institutions, its effect on the quality of service delivered by employees seems to be lessened by a variety of organisational factors and support systems that promote inclusivity; thus, the hypothesis is developed:

H0₂: Religion discrimination does not significantly influence employee quality of service.

3. Material and methodology

A descriptive approach was used to obtain the necessary data directly from the target population in Kwara State, Nigeria's higher education institutions. Because variables can only be seen and quantified rather than changed, a broad range of quantitative and qualitative approaches may be applied to study them, which is why the descriptive design was chosen (Kothari, 2004). The study population comprises non-academic staff in selected higher institutions in Kwara State; their number stands at 4,500, including senior and junior employees. Determination of sample size was done using Yamane's formula to arrive at three hundred and sixty-seven (367) respondents:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \quad 1)$$

where n is the sample size, N is the population, and e is the margin of error.

$$n = \frac{4500}{1 + 4500(0.05)^2} = 367 \quad 2)$$

Both primary and secondary data were employed; primary data were obtained using a structured questionnaire to elicit information from respondents. The questionnaire was structured into 3 parts (Part A: demographic variables, Part B: view on religion disparity, and Part C: view on employee performance). Meanwhile, the secondary data were obtained from relevant textbooks, internet search engines, journal and publications materials found in different databases such as Google Scholar, Academia, Research Gate, Sage, EBSCOhost, Emerald Insight, Elsevier, JSTOR, Proquest, Semantic Scholars, BASE, among others (Daft, 2008; Gasper et al. 2010). The research instrument was subjected to content validity, while the pilot

study was conducted for the reliability test. The result obtained from reliability shows that the instrument is valid and reliable, as the score was above 0.70 (Grubb, 2016).

Table 1 Reliability Score

Variable	No. of items	Cronbach Alpha (α)
Disparity in religious differences	10	0.851
Employee productivity	5	0.964
Employee quality of service	5	0.792

Source: SPSS output

After data collection, descriptive and inferential statistics were employed as data analysis methods. Linear regression analyses were employed to analyse the relationships among the independent variable of religion disparity, dependent variables of employees' performance among non-academic students in Kwara State higher learning institutions.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents. This includes the gender of the respondents, their age, marital status, and educational background, as presented in Table 2:

Table 2 Demographic features

Constructs	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	187	52.7
Female	168	47.3
Age		
26-40 years	117	33.0
41-50 years	140	39.4
above 50 years	98	27.6
Marital Status		
Married	354	99.7
others	1	.3
Ethnic group		
Igbo	10	2.8
Yoruba	231	65.1
Hausa	93	26.2
Others	21	5.9
Religion		
Christian	128	36.1
Muslim	227	63.9
Education		
OND/ NCE	125	35.2
HND/ B.SC	173	48.7
MBA/ M.SC/ Ph.D	57	16.1
Experience		

Constructs	Frequency	Percentage
1-5 years	26	7.3
6-10 years	144	40.6
11-15 years	113	31.8
16 years and above	72	20.3

Source: Author (2023)

Table 2 shows analyses of gender, age, marital status, ethnic group, religion, education, and experience with reference to non-academics of Kwara State higher institutions. To fully comprehend, a detailed examination of various demographic variables was done. Demographic variables can influence how people view and react to religious disparity in the workplace. Furthermore, one's level of education and experience can affect their ability to navigate religious disparities. For our study, ethnicity and religion are not specific for this analysis; therefore, the hypotheses will map out the gap in further analysis that predisposing factors affect employees' performance.

Test of Hypotheses

The goal of hypothesis testing is to ascertain if sufficient statistical data can substantiate or refute a prediction about a phenomena. This section will present the analysis of the hypotheses formed to guide the conduct of this study.

H01: Disparity in religious differences does not significantly influence employee productivity.

Table 3 Effect of Disparity in Religion on Employees' Productivity

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	2.645	0.155		15.220	0.000	2.397	3.027
	Effect of religion disparity on employee's productivity	0.002	0.46	0.003	0.47	0.962	.171	.360
a. Dependent Variables: employee productivity R=0.003; R ² =0.000								

Source: Author, 2023

The cost structure is not healthy, and the 51% share of wage costs is the highest among all types of transport. Even if the fixed expenses are higher than 80% of the total import transport expenses, this type of transport is the most profitable. Salary costs are the highest with a share of 51% of the total, even if a new technology (SCADA) has been implemented. Cost optimization corrective actions can be applied to salary expenses and third-party work expenses.

Table 3 presents the value of $R=0.003$, which is positively correlated between observed and predicted values of the independent variable i.e. religion disparity and coefficient of determination of R^2 value of 0.000, which shows the dependent variable i.e. employees' productivity accounted for 3% and the remaining 97% may be explained by the other variables that are not included in the model. Table 2 further revealed that (β -value 0.003; $p=0.000$) represents the estimates of the model and was used to check the model's predictive power. The analysis shows that the β -value for religion disparity in Kwara State higher institutions is low at 3%, indicating a very low influence on the performance of employees in those institutions with a p -value greater than 0.05. With the low representation, it can be established that religion disparity has no significant impact on employees' productivity among non-academic in Kwara State higher institutions at a 5% significance level.

H0₂: Religion discrimination has no significant influence on employee quality of service

Table 4 Influence of Religion Discrimination on Quality of Service Among Non-academic

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	4.352	0.080		54.509	0.000	3.229	3.837
	Influence of religion discrimination on the quality of service	0.013	0.024	0.029	0.544	0.544	.043	.225
a. Dependent Variables: Employees quality of service $R=0.029$; $R^2=0.01$								

Source: Author, 2023

Table 4 revealed the outcome of religious discrimination and the quality of service in Kwara State higher learning institutions. The coefficient of $R=0.029$ indicates no relationship between religious discrimination and employee's quality of service among non-academics. It evidenced that the $R^2=0.01$, approximately 1%, implies that change in religious discrimination can be explained by other variables not included in the model. Meanwhile, the coefficients of β -value=0.029 represent the estimates of the model and were used to check the model's predictive power. From Table 4, the β -value for religious discrimination is 29%, indicating a weak positive influence on employees' quality of service with p -value <0.05 . It is therefore established that religious discrimination does not significantly affect employees' quality of service among non-academics in Kwara State higher learning institutions.

Discussion Findings

Firstly, the study hypothesised that disparity in religious differences does not significantly influence employee productivity among non-academics in Kwara state higher institutions. The

result revealed that the value of R was 0.003, implying a weak positive and significant impact. As a result, it was concluded that disparity in religious differences does not significantly influence employee productivity among non-academics in Kwara state higher institutions since the p-value is 0.962, greater than the 0.05 level of significance ($p > 0.05$). This aligns with the study of Fenggang Yang's (2012) 'triple market' model of religious provision (Ryan, 2014). Fenggang Yang's (2012) model of religion presents a detailed view of how religion functions in modern society. The model categorises the religious sphere into three separate arenas- governmental, commercial, and community-based. This model encourages a more thorough examination of how government regulations, economic influences, and grassroots movements influence the practice of religion, offering valuable perspectives on the connection between religion and society in the contemporary era.

Hypothesis two, religious discrimination, has no significant influence on employee quality of service among non-academics in Kwara state higher institutions. The result revealed that the value of R was 0.029. Table 4 shows that the R^2 , which is the coefficient of determination, is 0.001. As a result, religious discrimination has no significant influence on employee quality of service among non-academics in Kwara State higher institutions because p-values are greater than 0.05 level of significance ($p > 0.05$). Kelly (2018) supported our findings on the nature of religious disparity, highlighting their many dimensions. Adding that various socio-cultural, economic, and historical elements influence religious disparities. His results highlight the dynamic relationship between religion and societal systems, revealing discrepancies in the availability of resources, opportunities, and influence among various religious communities.

5. Conclusion

An existing literature and survey analysis found that disparity in religious differences does not significantly influence employee productivity among non-academics in Kwara state higher institutions. Based on the analysis presented, the disparity in religious differences should not be found among non-academics in Kwara state higher institutions. It was also found that religious discrimination has no significant influence on employee quality of service among non-academics in Kwara state higher institutions; religious discrimination does not reduce employee's quality of service and the capability of the employees to work together as a team on subsequent group tasks was not a cause from religion discrimination.

Religious disparity significantly influenced employees' service quality among non-academics in Kwara state higher institutions. For instance, it is evident that variations in religious views can greatly affect staff members' attitudes, actions, and relationships, influencing the quality of service they offer. This study has discovered the importance of

creating a work environment that is inclusive and respectful of diverse religious perspectives by encouraging understanding, acceptance, and cooperation among individuals from different religious backgrounds. Therefore, the institutions can minimise the negative consequences of religious differences and promote a more peaceful and efficient workforce.

The study, therefore, recommends that there should be a holistic approach to non-academics experiencing religious disparity as opposed to the hitherto fragmented and episodic actions taken over time. In addition, there should be enlightenment about religious disparity and its effect on enterprise performance, quality of service, and productivity in other establishments.

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