

# Navigating Human Resource Diversity Management in Higher Education: A Case Study of University of Botswana

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## Abstract

This study investigates the challenges and benefits of diversity management at the University of Botswana, addressing a significant gap in existing literature concerning human resource practices in Botswana's state universities. Utilizing a descriptive research design, data were collected through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys and interviews with 98 administrative staff members. Findings reveal a diverse workforce characterized by variations in gender, age, race, and religion, which offers opportunities for enhanced innovation and problem-solving. However, challenges such as language barriers, religious differences, and social groupings hinder effective diversity management. The study recommends the implementation of a comprehensive diversity policy prioritizing qualifications and experience, alongside continuous diversity training to foster inclusivity. Additionally, it advocates for policy reforms to attract international talent. The insights gained contribute to the broader understanding of diversity management within higher education contexts in Botswana and beyond.

**Keywords:** Human Resource Diversity Management, Higher Education, Inclusive, Botswana.

## Introduction

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, numerous studies have examined the challenges human resource managers face in handling workforce diversity. However, there has been limited research specifically addressing diversity management in Botswana, particularly in state universities like the University of Botswana. Groschl observed that little attention has been given to the role educational institutions play in shaping future diversity management practices [1]. This research aims to explore the diversity management challenges encountered by human resources managers at the University of Botswana.

Workforce diversity refers to the coexistence of individuals with varying attributes working together in an organization [2]. These differences may manifest in terms of age, sexual orientation, nationality, and culture (Tjosvold, 2017), among others [3, 4, 5]. Managing this diversity involves implementing strategies that account for these diverse backgrounds and characteristics. Given

that the University of Botswana adheres to policies promoting internationalization and inclusivity, this study seeks to identify the specific challenges its HR managers face in managing such a varied workforce.

Managing diversity presents significant challenges for organizations [6]. While many studies have focused on specific aspects of diversity, such as multigeneration and multicultural workforces (Washington & Deborah, 2015), few have examined the unique challenges faced by HR managers in managing a diverse workforce at universities [7]. This research seeks to address that gap by investigating the diversity management challenges at a public university, specifically the University of Botswana. Public universities often employ diverse staff to reflect their equally diverse student populations, and the University of Botswana follows internationalization and inclusion policies aimed at fostering cross-cultural fluency among students. Consequently, its HR managers face challenges in managing such a varied workforce.

If these challenges are not identified and addressed, the institution risks missing out on the benefits associated with a diverse workforce. It is therefore essential to explore and address these issues to ensure the university maintains its competitive edge and fully capitalizes on the advantages of diversity. This study aims to provide insight into the specific challenges faced by HR management in this context and offer strategies for improvement

## Relevant Literature

### Theoretical Literature

Saxena proposed a theoretical model that examines how workforce diversity influences performance and productivity within organizations [8]. This model identifies key independent variables that contribute to diversity, such as gender, ethnicity, and educational background, and correlates these factors with employee performance as the dependent variable. Saxena posits that if workforce diversity is not effectively managed, organizations may experience heightened turnover rates, diminished morale, and significant communication challenges [9]. Conversely, when managed well, diversity can enhance productivity and overall organizational effectiveness. Saxena emphasizes that human resources are fundamental to any organization, regardless of its nature, suggesting that a diverse workforce, encompassing variations in age, gender, religion, language, and professional qualifications, can provide a competitive advantage. However, effectively managing such diversity remains a complex challenge.

Contrasting Saxena's work, this study focuses specifically on the challenges arising from workforce diversity within the context of higher education at the University of Botswana. By aligning with Saxena's identification of diversity-related variables, this research aims to elucidate the obstacles that HR management encounters and how these challenges impact overall productivity.

### Empirical Literature

The empirical literature reveals similar themes. For instance, Nyamburai Njau investigated the challenges of human resource management at Kenyatta National Hospital in Kenya [10]. The study highlighted issues such as inadequate financial resources and delayed communication from line managers, which complicated recruitment efforts. Moreover, the hospital's diverse workforce, stemming from various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, created significant management challenges for HR professionals. The findings suggested that addressing these diversity management issues is vital for enhancing HR practices in public health institutions.

In contrast, while the Kenyatta National Hospital study identified financial constraints as a primary challenge, this research at the University of Botswana does not face similar funding issues. Nevertheless, it acknowledges the critical nature of effective diversity management within a diverse educational environment.

Ongori and Evans offered insights into the processes of workforce diversification, detailing six stages: denial, recognition, acceptance, appreciation, valuing, and utilization [11]. Their review emphasized the need for organizations to adopt strategies that promote diversity, though their research lacked a case study focus, limiting its applicability to specific contexts. In this study, however, primary data will be collected from the University of

Botswana, providing a targeted approach to understanding diversity management.

Donnelly explored the complexities of managing diversity and inclusion (D&I) in Indian multinational IT firms [12]. The research revealed that age, gender, and cultural variations created tensions that hindered the realization of the benefits associated with D&I practices. Donnelly's findings underscore the necessity for organizations to adopt pragmatic diversity management strategies, incorporating effective training to address varying staff attitudes and cultural differences. While the study highlights similar diversity factors, it is contextualized within a different cultural and operational framework compared to the present study focused on Botswana.

Alder further contributes to the discourse by comparing diverse and homogeneous groups, arguing that multicultural teams can outperform their homogeneous counterparts if managed effectively [13]. However, she notes that without proper management, diversity can lead to productivity losses. Alder's observations resonate with the current research, emphasizing that effective diversity management is critical for enhancing performance within organizations.

This literature review underscores the significance of understanding and addressing the challenges of workforce diversity, particularly in the context of the University of Botswana. By identifying these challenges and exploring effective management strategies, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the broader field of human resource management and diversity.

### Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design, which is defined by Nandagopal, Rajan, and Vivek as a framework for the systematic collection and analysis of data to address research questions and objectives [14]. Kothari emphasizes that a good research design maximizes information yield, allowing for comprehensive consideration of various aspects of the research problem [15]. The descriptive approach enabled an in-depth examination of the diversity challenges faced by the University of Botswana, providing clarity on the current situation and facilitating recommendations for effective diversity management.

To address the research objectives, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were utilized. The qualitative aspect focuses on gathering nuanced data through open-ended conversations, exploring not only the "what" but also the "how" of respondents' perceptions regarding diversity challenges. Creswell highlights the benefit of qualitative research in providing depth and the flexibility to adapt the research framework based on emerging findings [16]. However, the study also incorporated quantitative methods to supplement qualitative insights with measurable data, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the research issues. Ethridge supports the use of quantitative approaches to generate clear predictions and identify potential errors through numerical data analysis [17]. By integrating both approaches, the research mitigates the limitations inherent in each method.

The target population for this study comprises approximately 1,880 administrative staff members stationed at the Gaborone

Campus of the University of Botswana. A sample size of 98 administrative staff was derived, representing 5% of the target population, ensuring that the study remains manageable within the constraints of time and resources. The choice of convenience sampling allowed for the efficient selection of respondents based on their availability, enabling quicker data collection without extensive pre-planning [18].

Primary and secondary data sources were utilized in this study. Secondary data provided a contextual background, enhancing the specificity of primary data collection. Primary data were gathered through questionnaires, recognized as a valuable source of original and relevant information [19]. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended questions, allowing for diverse data collection while maintaining comparability for analysis. The survey method was selected for its efficiency in reaching a larger number of participants and its capability to handle multiple variables effectively [15].

Interviews were also conducted to complement the survey data. This qualitative technique allows for deeper engagement with respondents, fostering a richer understanding of their perspectives on diversity management challenges. Easwar Moorthy notes that interviews can effectively capture nuanced insights, particularly from participants who may have limitations in written communication [20]. Despite the potential for non-respons-

es and time constraints, the combination of questionnaires and interviews ensured a comprehensive exploration of the diversity challenges faced by the University of Botswana's human resource management.

## Results

### Biographic Data

The biographic data collected from 98 respondents at the University of Botswana highlighted significant diversity across several characteristics. Gender representation showed a predominance of females, comprising 60% of the sample, while males accounted for 40%, indicating a gender-diverse workforce. In terms of age, the majority of respondents fell within the 56-65 age range (32%), followed by 46-55 years (23%) and 36-45 years (20%). This indicates a broad age distribution among staff.

Regarding educational qualifications, the largest group held master's degrees (34%), followed by doctoral degree holders (26%), illustrating diversity in academic achievements. Racially, the workforce was predominantly Black (66%), with Indian (16%), White (9%), and Coloured (5%) minorities. Lastly, geographical origins revealed that 57% of respondents were from Africa, further emphasizing the institution's diversity. Religious affiliations showed 69% of respondents identifying as Christians, followed by 15% adhering to African Traditional religions, confirming varied religious backgrounds within the university staff.

## Benefits of HR diversity

**Table 1: Benefits of HR Diversity**

Questions	SD	D	NS	A	SA
Universities train students to become international citizens. Having staff from other countries makes the University of Botswana to be truly international	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	20 (20%)	33 (34%)	43 (44%)
Having staff from other countries helps us understand and appreciate other cultures	9 (9%)	7 (7%)	21 (21%)	23 (23%)	38 (39%)
Staff with different religions make me tolerant of other people's religions	10 (10%)	4 (4%)	13 (13%)	30 (31%)	41 (42%)
The working together of males and females at UB helps to promote equal rights.	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	13 (13.3%)	23 (23.7%)	60 (61%)
The working together of adults of different age groups at UB helps to enrich me with various ideas.	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	5 (5%)	20 (20%)	71 (72%)
The working together of people of different ages helps to enrich my experience.	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	26 (27%)	69 (70%)
The working together of people with various political persuasions helps me to be tolerant of other people's views.	13 (13%)	22 (22.5%)	22 (22.5%)	23 (24%)	18 (18%)
The working together of able-bodied people with their disabled counterparts helps me to understand and appreciate the divergence of life.	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	9 (9%)	32 (33%)	55 (56%)
The working together of people with various skills and specialities helps me to appreciate that in life we have different talents	0 (0%)	5 (5%)	12 (12%)	24 (25%)	57 (58%)
Working together of Blacks, Whites, Asians and Coloureds makes UB a united true rainbow University.	31 (32%)	10 (10%)	16 (16%)	13 (13%)	28 (29%)
The divergent sporting needs and interests of the UB community unite us.	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	5 (5%)	41 (42%)	50 (51%)

Source: Researcher (2024)

The survey findings regarding the benefits of diversity at the University of Botswana (UB) reveal a positive perception of the impact that a diverse workforce has on fostering an inclusive educational environment. A substantial 43% of respondents strongly agreed that the presence of international staff contributes to the university's identity as a global institution, enhancing the training of students to become international citizens. Additionally, 38% of participants noted that staff from various backgrounds helps in understanding and appreciating different cultures.

The collaborative environment at UB is further recognized for promoting tolerance and equality. Notably, 60% of respondents felt that gender diversity in the workplace fosters equal rights, while 71% agreed that interactions among adults of different age groups enrich their experiences, suggesting a vibrant exchange of ideas.

Respondents also highlighted the value of working with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds, with 41% indicating that this exposure enhances their tolerance towards differing beliefs. The cooperation among people with varying skills and specialties was seen positively, with 57% acknowledging that it emphasizes the importance of diverse talents in problem-solving and innovation.

However, challenges remain, as indicated by the 31% who felt that racial differences hinder unity. Nonetheless, the overall sentiment reflects an appreciation for diversity's role in enriching the academic and social fabric of UB. Emphasizing these benefits can strengthen the university's commitment to inclusivity and enhance its standing as a truly multicultural institution.

## Challenges of HR Diversity

**Table 4.2: Challenges of HR Diversity**

Question	SD	D	NS	A	SA
Allowing the UB community to exercise different religious beliefs causes disunity	4 (4%)	10 (10%)	21 (21%)	23 (24%)	40 (41%)
Racial discrimination will always be there because there will always be other races which feel that they are superior than others	3 (3%)	11 (11%)	13 (13%)	14 (15%)	57 (58%)
Achieving diversity at UB is affected by historical imperatives of races because nobody can change history	21 (21%)	16 (16%)	15 (15%)	14 (15%)	32 (33%)
It is expensive and impossible to adequately cater for the divergent needs of people who leave with disability at UB	42 (43%)	24 (25%)	21 (21%)	5 (5%)	6 (6%)
Some people will always look down upon the religions and beliefs of others and that causes hatred	24 (25%)	17 (17%)	18 (18.5%)	21 (21%)	18 (18.5%)
Males and females are created with different muscular strengths, needs and biological abilities and they cannot be treated as equal.	21 (21%)	19 (20%)	20 (20%)	20 (20%)	19 (20%)
There is work suitable for men and work which is for women. Men and women should not be treated as equal at work	23 (23%)	12 (12%)	24 (25%)	21 (21%)	18 (19%)
Racial divergence and historical imperatives make different races to have different sporting interests and religious beliefs and this makes unity at UB difficult to achieve	7 (7%)	10 (10%)	11 (11%)	29 (30%)	41 (42%)
Staff who are originally from Botswana do not treat themselves as equal to those from other countries. They feel that they have more rights than foreigners	4 (4%)	9 (9%)	13 (13.5%)	21 (21.5%)	51 (52%)
Older and more experienced staff think that they know better than their younger counterparts and this causes problems	26 (27%)	20 (20%)	4 (4%)	21 (21%)	27 (28%)
Younger staff at UB think that they know better than their older counterparts	24 (24%)	24 (24%)	5 (5%)	22 (23%)	23 (24%)
Some cultures such as homosexuality should not be tolerated at UB	6 (6%)	5 (5%)	4 (4%)	35 (36%)	48 (49%)
People who live with disability sometimes feel inferior	3 (3%)	5 (5%)	15 (15%)	31 (32%)	46 (47%)
Historical imperatives make other races poor and others rich and this makes it difficult to achieve unity at UB	9 (9%)	11 (11%)	17 (17%)	33 (34%)	28 (29%)

Source: Researcher (2024)

The survey results on the challenges of HR diversity at the University of Botswana (UB) reveal several notable concerns. A significant portion of respondents (41%) agreed that allowing the UB community to exercise different religious beliefs leads to disunity. Similarly, 58% felt that racial discrimination will

always persist due to inherent feelings of superiority among different races.

Historical factors were highlighted as barriers to achieving diversity, with 33% agreeing that the historical context of racial



differences affects unity at UB. Moreover, 43% of respondents strongly disagreed with the notion that it is feasible and affordable to cater to the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities at UB, underscoring concerns about inclusivity.

In terms of gender, responses were divided. While 20% of respondents strongly agreed that males and females cannot be treated equally due to biological differences, 25% felt that men and women should not be treated equally in the workplace, indicating persistent gender bias.

Cultural and racial diversity also posed challenges to unity at UB. A notable 42% of respondents agreed that racial differences and historical factors complicate unity in areas such as sports and religion. Additionally, 52% of participants agreed that local staff tend to see themselves as having more rights than their foreign counterparts.

Issues related to age differences and generational conflicts were also observed, with 28% agreeing that older staff believe they know better than younger employees. These challenges highlight the complexities UB faces in fostering true diversity and inclusivity within its workforce.

### Diversity Management

The research highlighted several challenges faced by human resource managers at the University of Botswana in achieving diversity. A significant issue, reported by 65% of respondents, is the existence of groupings within the workforce based on religion, origin, and language, which fosters favoritism and discrimination. These groupings also contribute to rumors and grapevine communication. Additionally, 52% of respondents mentioned that intercultural marriages stemming from workforce diversity face social challenges, while 30% agreed that workforce diversity can negatively affect performance, particularly due to language barriers and religious differences.

In response to these challenges, 60% of respondents recommended that UB focus on qualifications, expertise, and integrity over factors like language or origin to promote diversity. Furthermore, 56% believed that diversity has improved work performance, especially among foreign staff proving their competence. To promote national diversity, 70% of respondents recommended employing a diverse workforce in tertiary institutions to enhance performance and promote tolerance.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The study, based on a sample of 98 respondents from the University of Botswana (UB), aimed to assess diversity management challenges and benefits within the institution. The findings reveal that UB's workforce is diverse across various biographic dimensions, including gender, age, race, continent of origin, and religion. The research supports previous literature that recognizes workforce diversity as a mixture of socio-cultural backgrounds.

The benefits of diversity at UB include improved innovation, problem-solving, and performance, as employees from various backgrounds share knowledge and experiences. However, challenges such as language barriers, religious differences, and generational gaps were identified as potential sources of workplace tension.

To address these challenges, several recommendations have been made. First, UB should implement a comprehensive diversity policy that emphasizes qualifications, experience, and performance over personal characteristics like race or gender. Secondly, ongoing diversity management training and workshops should be introduced to foster an inclusive environment. Third, it is recommended that Botswana liberalize its staffing program to attract more experienced international personnel. Finally, globalization and technology must be embraced to enhance institutional performance.

Further research should expand the sample size and include other tertiary institutions, both locally and globally, to gain a broader perspective on diversity management in higher education. A larger study would provide more robust insights and validate the findings presented in this research.

### A Statement of Ethics Approval

The research was approved by Kitso International College Ethics Committee, as a minimum risk study, which poses very minimum disadvantages to the participants. The Approval is KIC/003/2024/RC

### A Statement on Participant Consent

The participants consented to participate in this research and ethical considerations which include voluntary participation, non-coerced and confidentiality were inscribed in the Ethics Approval KIC/003/2024/RC

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