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Influence of Education Diversity and Social Diversity on the Performance of State Departments, Kenya

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Abstract:

Purpose: *In today's dynamic business environment, organizational performance is critical for long-term sustainability. This study examines whether diversity in top management teams and organizational processes influences the performance of state departments in Kenya.*
Design/methodology/approach: *Guided by upper echelon theory, the study investigated the effects of educational and social diversity among top managers on departmental performance. A descriptive census design was adopted, covering all 52 state departments in Kenya and a population of 452 top managers. Data were collected from 212 respondents using stratified sampling and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including regression analysis.*
Findings: *The results reveal a strong positive relationship between educational and experiential diversity in top management and departmental performance, while social diversity showed a moderate effect. Combined diversity measures significantly influenced performance ($r = 0.92$, $p < 0.001$). Organizational culture was found to mediate this relationship, with the explained variance (R^2) increasing from 84.5% to 95.7% when culture was included. These findings highlight the importance of inclusive leadership and shared organizational values in enhancing performance.*
Practical implications: *State departments should promote diversity in top management through inclusive recruitment and leadership development programs that encourage exposure to diverse disciplines.*
Originality/value: *The study contributes empirical evidence from the public sector and recommends longitudinal research to better capture the long-term effects of leadership diversity on organizational performance.*

Keywords: *Top management diversity, organizational performance, organizational culture, upper echelon theory, public sector management.*

JEL Classification: *M12, M14, D23, H11, J24,*

Paper Type: *Research paper.*

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1. Introduction

In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving business environment, both short-term and long-term organizational sustainability increasingly hinges on the organization's capacity to improve performance. The reduction in product life cycles, together with the ever-expanding array of substitute products available in the market, has necessitated those businesses adopt diverse strategies to boost their performance (Abosede, Obasan and Alese, 2020).

These strategies incorporate operational, financial, leadership, and the effective coordination of internally available resources. The top management team is pivotal in the strategic realignment of organizational resources and capabilities, thereby enhancing the firm's performance, as they are the primary decision-makers within the organization.

Successful strategic decision-makers reveal diversity in education, age, occupancy, and social perspectives. This diversity within the team is often viewed as a crucial and dynamic factor contributing to the successful functioning of an organization (Ruiz-Jimenez, and del Mar Fuentes-Fuentes, 2018).

A variety of ideas, creativity, and innovation substitute improved team outcomes, as they arise from the diversity present within the top management team of an organization. Jonty and Mokoteli (2015) suggest that this diversity translates into a range of knowledge, enabling decision-making groups within an organization to reach a consensus on the original ideas proposed and effectively implement a strategy, as all managers align their decisions with a common set of strategic priorities.

Boone *et al.* (2019) explored the relationship between the functional diversity of the top management team and the performance of telecommunications companies, discovering that the sharing of CEO experiences is crucial in enhancing the effectiveness of other staff members. Diversity in groups and teams is usually depicted as something favorable that results in the successful operation of an organization (Ruiz-Jimenez *et al.,* 2018). When there is diversity within the top management of any organization, better performance variance is said to be achieved.

In research that sought to determine the effect of gender diversity on performance of pharmaceutical firms in South Africa, Jonty and Mokoteli (2015) assert that a diversified board increases creativity and innovation in decision-making due to differences in cognitive abilities, positively impacting performance.

Women's compliance level is higher than their male counterparts, therefore justifying the need to have a balanced representation of both genders in the decision-making body.

Okyere-Kwakye and Babangida (2022) reinforce the need for board gender diversity by finding that a board with both genders represented registered improved financial performance, and this has been attributed to better risk management.

Odhiambo, Gachoka, and Rambo (2018) advanced the need for creativity and innovation among Kenyan universities to remain competitive. In doing so, public universities should encourage diversity in terms of older and younger employees in the decision-making process because in the fast-paced global environment, the techno-savvy staff were found to be versatile and make faster decisions because of their low-risk affinity in decision-making.

Similarly, the creativity of staff was found to be associated with productivity as measured from the technology-based jobs. Ayega and Muathe (2018) reiterate the importance of cultural diversity as represented by employee religion, ethnicity, social status, and gender and age gap by stating that cultural diversity directly affects a firm's competitive position, which in turn affects their performance.

The earnings quality and timeliness reporting of a firm's financial performance has also been appropriately influenced by gender, age, education, and functional diversity of the top management team in an organization (Omoro, Aduda and Okiro, 2015).

2. Statement of the Problem

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

Theory is a set of properly argued ideas intended to explain a phenomenon by specifying variables of the laws that relate the variables to each other (Davidson, 2008). This study was anchored on the Upper echelon theory

2.1.1 Upper Echelon Theory

Hambrick and Mason (1984) proposed the theory of the Upper Echelon which presupposes that the performance threshold of an organization is an expression of its top managers' values and thinking abilities. According to the supporters of the upper echelon theory, although an executive may be able to make an individual managerial view, which influences the evaluation of options and eventually, the outcomes of the decision-making process at an individual and corporate level, all of them are intellectually anchored, value-based and have tangible private attributes (Chen, Tjosvold and Liu, 2016).

The strategic decisions made by top management team encompass a broad spectrum of organization principles and management science and accumulate towards the product innovation to diversification, leverage to capital intensity as well as achievements and unions and managerial convolution to organizational design (Carson *et al.,* 2007).

Certo *et al.* (2007) observed that youthful managers will tend to undertake risky strategies like mass investment or product innovation (2007). The upper echelon theory fails to acknowledge that a diverse top management team may experience slower decision-making processes due to the need to take into account the opinions of all staff members, ineffective communication, and potential conflicts among employees. This theory has contributed to the understanding of education diversity, social diversity and the performance of state departments in Kenya.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Lombard and Craford (2015) suggest that well educated managers are in a better position to draw out implications for various functions and formulate sub-level strategies and appropriately deal with employee's resistance to change that result from the introduction of various strategies that will affect their routine operations.

Cho, Kim and Barak (2017) assert that top management team that has a diverse educational level has improved competency level and with the wide range of competencies and capabilities, the top management can take better strategic actions and more readily achieve its intended competitive position. Therefore, in the case of a business organization, top management team with diverse educational capability tend to have a broader, more precise business perspective and are expected lead to improved performance.

Mutinda, Otinga and Kitonga (2024) opine that educational diversity of top management is an important resource that a firm can use in decision making. Educational diversity stimulates debate on an issue before an optimal decision is made.

Abdullah and Ku Ismail (2017) reinforce this position by arguing that top managers with diverse educational backgrounds result in a balanced collaboration and interrogation of a challenge at hand and this is expected to improve the decision-making because members from various backgrounds having different perspectives are involved in the process. Optimal decisions lead to improved organizational performance.

Harrison and Sin (2006) explain that social diversity refers to the obvious differences between staff members, such as sex, gender, and age, which are easy to notice by others in the organization. These differences help group people into different categories.

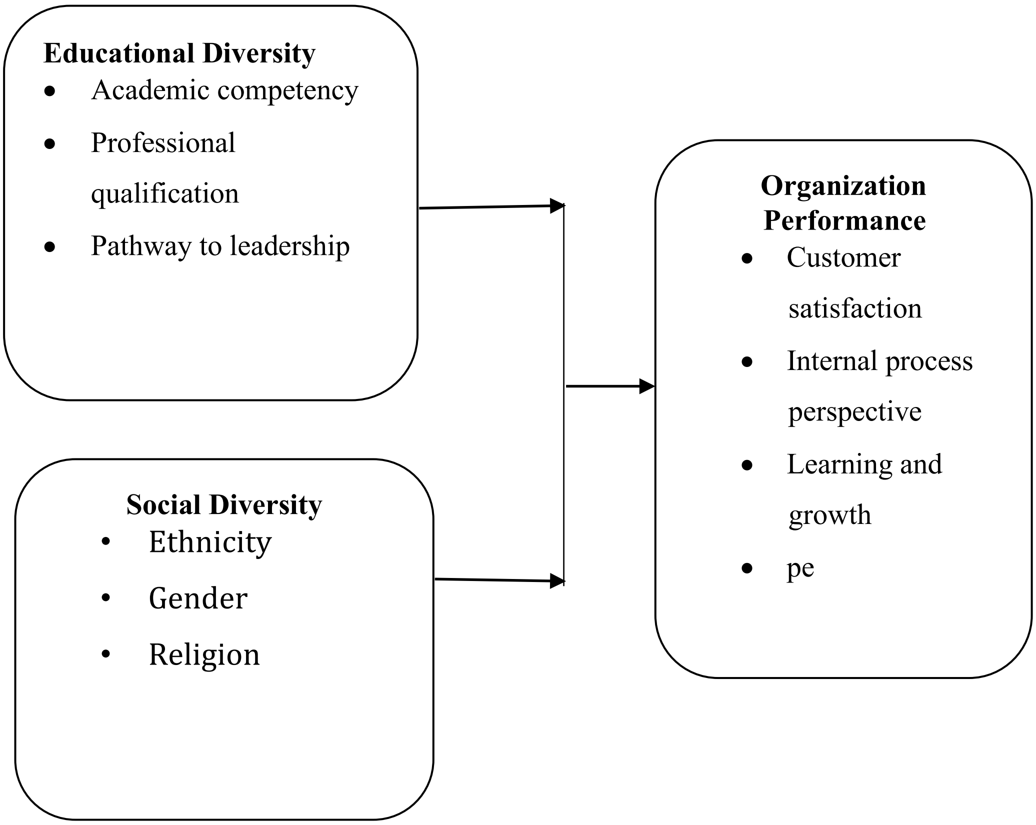
Wei and Wu (2013) say that when people share similar knowledge, emotions, and values with others, they become part of a group. Li *et al.* (2016) found that having a diverse gender and ethnic makeup in a company is linked to better financial results. Allen, Wheatley, and White (2017) found that age diversity can hurt a company's performance because people of the same age may make biased decisions.

However, having more women in top management can help the company pay more attention to checking for risks during planning.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is full representation of principles and ideas that the research in question seeks to follow in order to achieve its objectives. Figure 1 represents the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables.

Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*



Source: *Own study.*

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional descriptive survey approach. Descriptive research gives a complete picture of the topic being studied and is often used in both natural and physical sciences because it describes events, structures, and situations

(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2015). Surveys are a good way to quickly gather accurate information and allow for collecting data from many people, which helps understand their views, skills, attitudes, knowledge, and beliefs (Khanzode, 1995). This method was chosen because state departments operate in different ways, so it's important to consider other perspectives.

3.2 Target Population

The target population is the aggregate or group of persons or corporate bodies of interest to the researcher (Hancock and Algozzine, 2017). The target unit of analysis was 52 state departments. As of the end of 2023, the total number of policy makers (Job Group S and above) based at the headquarters in Nairobi was 203, and the senior management (Job Group P to R) comprised 249 staff in the senior management cadre. In the current research, the unit of analysis was employees at the different cadre levels of policy makers and senior management in the 52 state departments in Kenya.

3.3 Sampling Design and Techniques

A stratified sampling and simple random sampling method were used. First, senior managers from the State departments who belonged to the two groups (Job Group S and above, and Job Group P to R) were selected as strata from which participants were chosen. Since the population was diverse, each stratum was considered based on its own characteristics. The researcher used Kothari's (2015) formula to calculate the number of respondents in each group; $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$.

Where: n = sample size; N = total population, meaning the total number of people in the two groups, and e = error tolerance.

The study used a 95% confidence level, which means the error margin was 0.05. The following formula was used to calculate the sample size: $n = 452 / (1 + 452 * 0.05^2)$; $n = 452 / 2.13$; $n = 212$. To find the sample size for each group, the researcher divided the total number of targeted employees proportionally to arrive at 212 respondents.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Structured questionnaire consisting of both closed-ended and open-ended questions were used to collect primary data from the respondents. Open-ended questions were given respondents the freedom to respond in their own view without restrictions while the closed ended questions facilitated fast responses from the available choices. Section A covered respondents' demographic information while section B sought to establish the top management diversity of education and social dimensions on the performance of state departments in all the 22 ministries.

Mugenda (2008) notes that the use of questionnaire ensure that confidentiality is upheld, saves on time and is easy to administer.

3.5 Diagnostic Test and Analysis

Completed questionnaires were arranged and amended to ensure completeness, accuracy, usefulness and thoroughness, followed by coding and classification of data. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze data. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software was employed to analyze data to establish relationships between variables

3.6 Diagnostic Test

Before starting the regression analysis, diagnostic tests are run to see if the data on the study variables is acceptable for generating conclusions. A variety of diagnostic tests will be performed. These include the normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity tests. Normality test was carried out to establish distribution of the data based on normality criterion.

Normality of data enhances precision of the findings which also enhances internal consistency of the data values. Any correlation of independent variables in a sample is known as multicollinearity (Wooldridge, 2016).

High degrees of multicollinearity raise the p-values in a regression model, which leads to inaccurate predictions. The correlation matrix is used to determine the degree of correlation between the predictor variables.

3.7 Data Analysis

The data was measured at the interval and ratio levels; hence the distribution was presented in terms of variability and central tendency. Descriptive statistics that were used include mean scores, composite means, standard deviations, and composite standard deviations, coefficient of variation, ranges, frequency distribution and percentages. This helped in explaining data more accurately and in details than in graphical displays.

3.8 Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics was used to establish the relationships between independent variables, that is, education diversity and social diversity. Regression analysis was part of this process. It helped find out how changes in these independent variables relate to changes in the dependent variable. A 95% confidence interval was chosen because it's a standard and useful way to interpret results in social studies, as mentioned by Mense (2011).

The study adopted linear regression model for assessment of the effect of education diversity and social diversity on organizational performance in state departments. The regression model is specified in equation 1 below.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ED + \beta_2 SD + \varepsilon \qquad (1)$$

Where; Y_t = performance of state departments,
ED = is education diversity
SD =is social diversity
B_0 = is the intercept,
β_1 = are the regression coefficients,
ε = is the Error term

4. Research Findings and Discussions

4.1 Questionnaire Return Rate

Of the 212 questionnaires distributed to respondents, 118 were filled out and submitted back to do the data analysis. As a result, the rate of return indicated 55.7%. The level of the returns was satisfactory on the purposes of the study. A minimum rate of return of 50 percent is considered satisfactory for conducting research in respect to social sciences research (Saunders et al., 2009). Data analysis showed an obtained response rate of 55.7%, which corresponds to those, as stated by Cooper and Schindler (2006), taking place in 2006, and Nachmias and Nachmias (2015).

Table 1. *Questionnaire Return Rate*

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires Returned	118	55.7%
Questionnaires Not Returned	94	44.3%
Total	**212**	**100%**

Source: *Researcher (2025).*

4.2 Educational Diversity

Having different educational backgrounds in top management helps State Departments work better by bringing in a range of skills, thoughts, and knowledge. A mix of education backgrounds makes it easier for leaders to make good choices, solve problems, and adjust to new situations. When organizations encourage educational diversity through training, scholarships, and fair promotions, they are more likely to run smoothly and create new ideas.

To understand how much educational diversity affects the performance of State Departments, people were asked to rate different aspects of educational diversity on a 5-point scale. A 5 means it has a very big effect, 4 means a big effect, 3 means some effect, 2 means a small effect, and 1 means no effect. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Educational Diversity*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Management team different academic backgrounds	118	4.115	0.880
Training on how to handle complex information related to administrative, planning, and budgeting issues.	118	3.717	1.111
Organization's sponsorship to the top management to undergo relevant training in different countries.	118	3.704	1.006
Continuous training programs for different groups of top management team.	118	3.436	0.653
Management team different professional qualifications	118	3.415	1.091
Promotion to top management based on educational qualifications.	118	3.161	1.094
Overall Mean		**3.591**	

Source: *Own study.*

According to the study findings, respondents indicated to a very great extent, the organizations top management team hold diverse academic qualifications (M= 4.115, SD= 0.880) and that the top management are continuously being trained to handle complex information related to administrative, planning, and budgeting issues (Mean = 3.717, SD = 1.111).

This suggests that equipping management with the necessary skills to navigate complex organizational processes enhances efficiency and informed decision-making. Similarly, the study revealed that the organization sponsorship to the top management undergo relevant training in different countries to equip them with necessary leadership skills (M=3.704, SD= 1.006).

This finding implies that a variety of academic perspectives enriches leadership capabilities, fostering well-rounded decision-making and problem-solving approaches.

From the lower side of the continuum, the results suggest that the respondents were non-committal (M=3.116, SD=1.094) that promotion to top management is based on educational qualifications and that in terms of the leadership professional qualification, they are diverse (M= 3.115, SD= 1,091).

Continuous training programs for different groups of top management were similarly regarded as crucial (mean = 3.436, SD = 0.653), underscoring the importance of lifelong learning in maintaining leadership effectiveness.

4.3 Social Diversity

The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which social diversity influences the performance of State Departments. Social diversity encompasses variations in demographic and cultural attributes such as ethnicity, age, gender, marital status, and religious beliefs. A diverse workforce contributes to organizational performance by fostering inclusivity, broadening perspectives, and improving decision-making.

The study sought to determine how different aspects of social diversity impact leadership effectiveness and overall institutional success. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale: 5 - Very great extent, 4 - Great extent, 3 - Moderate extent, 2 - Little extent, and 1 - No extent. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Social Diversity*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Diversity in ethnic backgrounds.	118	3.814	1.139
Diversity in age groups.	118	4.254	0.764
Difference in economic status	118	4.144	1.096
Gender diversity	118	4.254	0.971
Difference in marital status	118	4.297	0.799
Difference in religious beliefs	118	4.178	0.984
Overall Mean		**4.157**	

Source: *Own study.*

Based on these study findings, respondents indicated largely that marital status differences positively influence State Departments' performance (mean = 4.297, SD = 0.799).

This suggests that having a mix of individuals with varying family responsibilities and life experiences contributes to well-rounded decision-making and a balanced work environment. Similarly, diversity in age groups was highly rated (mean = 4.254, SD = 0.764), implying that a workforce comprising younger and older employees fosters knowledge transfer, mentorship, and a blend of innovative and experienced leadership. Gender diversity was also significantly impacted performance (mean = 4.254, SD = 0.971), highlighting the importance of equitable gender representation in leadership and decision-making processes.

Furthermore, differences in religious beliefs were seen as an important factor in organizational performance (mean = 4.178, SD = 0.984), indicating that embracing diverse religious backgrounds fosters an inclusive workplace culture that respects varied perspectives. Economic status diversity also played a notable role (mean =

4.144, SD = 1.096), suggesting that individuals from different financial backgrounds bring unique insights and experiences contributing to equitable policy formulation and decision-making.

Lastly, diversity in ethnic backgrounds was rated relatively lower (mean = 3.814, SD = 1.139), implying that while it is acknowledged, it may not be as strongly perceived as other social diversity factors in influencing performance. The findings suggest that fostering an inclusive environment that embraces social diversity enhances collaboration, broadens perspectives, and strengthens institutional effectiveness in State Departments.

4.4 Performance of State Departments

The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which various performance indicators is evident in the State Departments. Performance in public sector institutions is often evaluated based on financial management, service delivery, citizen satisfaction, and internal capacity-building efforts. A well-performing State Department is expected to operate within budgetary constraints, improve service efficiency, and foster positive public engagement. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Performance of State Departments*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Operating within the budget	118	4.114	0.864
Numbers of citizens seeking services from our office.	118	4.178	0.873
The number of complements from our clients	118	3.637	1.051
The number of customers complains has reduced	118	3.209	0.894
The efficiency in service delivery	118	3.475	1.202
Number trainings of our staff	118	3.805	0.870
Overall Mean		**3.736**	

Source: *Own study.*

According to the study findings, respondents indicated to a large extent their organizations has been able to operate within the budget (M=4.114, SD=0.864) and that the number of citizens visiting their offices seeking services has increased (M=4.178, SD=0.873).

The results also suggest that the number of citizens seeking services in the state department has increased (M=4.178, SD=0.873) and this has been accompanied by increased number of compliments from their clients (M=3.637, SD=1.051) and thus the number of customer complaints had reduced (M=3.209, SD=0.894). Overall, the findings suggest that State Departments are making progress in key performance areas, particularly in reducing complaints, enhancing financial discipline, and improving citizen satisfaction. However, efforts should be made to further strengthen training initiatives and service efficiency to sustain long-term improvements.

4.5 Inferential Statistics

This part explains the inferential analysis that was done. The analysis uses multiple regression to measure how strong and in which direction the relationship is between the variables. It also includes a model summary that shows how well the predictor variables explain the outcome, with values like R-squared and adjusted R-squared.

5. Regression Analysis for Education Diversity and Social Diversity on Performance of State Departments in Kenya

A multiple linear regression analysis was done with education diversity, social diversity and Performance of State Departments. Thus, there were two predictors: educational diversity and social diversity. Table 5 presents the findings of the study.

Table 5. *Summary of Regression Analysis for Education Diversity, Social Diversity and Performance of State Departments in Kenya*

		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
		0.920[a]	0.846	0.812	1.0355		
ANOVA[a]							
Model			**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
		Regression	98.848	4	24.712	21.580	0.000[b]
		Residual	129.396	113	1.1451		
		Total	228.244	117			
Coefficients[a]							
Model			**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardized Coefficients**	**t**	**Sig.**
			B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
	(Constant)		3.936	0.765		5.145	0.0000
	Educational diversity		0.741	0.236	0.646	3.140	0.0032
	Social diversity		0.549	0.2654	0.442	2.069	0.0452

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of State Departments in Kenya
b. Predictors: (Constant), Educational diversity and social diversity
Source: *Own study.*

The results from the regression analysis show that having diverse top management in State Departments in Kenya is very important for how well they perform. This diversity includes differences in education and their social backgrounds.

The high R-squared value of 0. 846 ($p <.001$) means that 84. 6% of the changes in performance can be explained by these different types of diversity. This matches what earlier studies have found about how diverse leadership can make an organization more effective.

For example, Richard *et al.* (2017) says that having a diverse group of leaders helps make better decisions because they bring in more varied ideas, skills, and experiences. Van Knippenberg *et al.* (2020) also point out that a diverse leadership team encourages innovation and flexibility, which leads to better strategic results.

The significant regression coefficients further support the notion that each dimension of diversity contributes meaningfully to organizational performance. Educational diversity ($B = 0.741$, $p = .0032$) suggests that varying academic backgrounds among top managers promote knowledge exchange and comprehensive problem-solving, which is consistent with the findings of Hambrick and Mason's (1984) Upper Echelons Theory.

Social diversity ($B = 0.549$, $p = .0452$) shows a moderate influence, echoing the conclusions of Cox and Blake (1991), who noted that social diversity contributes to organizational success by promoting inclusivity and reducing groupthink.

These results reinforce the argument that education diversity and social diversity enhances institutional performance by fostering varied perspectives, increasing adaptability, and encouraging innovative problem-solving. This is consistent with findings from prior research (Homan et al., 2015; Joshi and Roh, 2009), which emphasize that diverse leadership teams are better equipped to navigate complex and dynamic environments, ultimately leading to improved service delivery and efficiency in public institutions.

6. Summary of Findings

The study findings indicate that educational diversity among top management significantly influences the performance of state departments in Kenya. Departments with leaders who possess varied educational backgrounds benefit from a broader range of knowledge, perspectives, and problem-solving approaches, which enhances strategic decision-making and innovation.

A diverse educational background fosters adaptability and the ability to navigate complex policy environments, leading to improved efficiency and service delivery. Furthermore, educational diversity enhances cross-disciplinary collaboration, ensuring that multiple facets of governance and public administration are effectively addressed.

The study establishes that social diversity within top management improves state department performance by fostering inclusivity, collaboration, and broader representation. A socially diverse leadership team encompassing differences in gender, ethnicity, and culture enhances decision-making by incorporating diverse perspectives and ensuring that policies and programs are equitable and representative of the wider population. Social diversity also strengthens stakeholder engagement and trust, as departments led by diverse teams are more likely to effectively address the needs of various societal groups.

7. Conclusions

The study concludes that educational diversity among top management is a critical driver of performance in state departments in Kenya. Leaders with varied academic backgrounds bring unique perspectives, specialized knowledge, and innovative problem-solving skills that enhance decision-making and strategic planning.

The ability to integrate insights from multiple disciplines fosters creativity and adaptability, which are essential for addressing the dynamic challenges in public administration. Furthermore, educational diversity contributes to knowledge sharing and continuous learning within state departments, promoting efficiency and improved policy formulation.

These findings suggest that recruitment and leadership development programs should emphasize a mix of educational qualifications to maximize organizational effectiveness.

Social diversity is also a key factor in helping state departments work better. Leaders from different backgrounds, including different genders, ethnic groups, and religions, help make decisions that are more inclusive and fairer. This kind of diversity makes policies and services more reflective of the needs of the whole population. It also builds trust between the government and the people it serves, as different groups feel that their voices are heard.

The study suggests that increasing social diversity among top leaders is important for making public services more responsive and promoting fair development. Finally, the study says that the culture of an organization plays a big role in how well diversity in leadership helps performance.

8. Recommendations

Based on the study’s findings, it is recommended that state departments actively promote educational diversity in top management to enhance organizational performance. Government agencies should establish policies that encourage hiring and promoting leaders with varied academic backgrounds.

This can be achieved by implementing recruitment strategies that emphasize interdisciplinary knowledge and fostering leadership development programs that expose managers to different fields of study.

Additionally, capacity-building initiatives such as cross-training, executive education, and mentorship programs should be introduced to ensure that leaders continuously expand their knowledge base. By embracing educational diversity, state departments can improve decision-making, encourage innovative problem-solving, and enhance adaptability to complex policy and governance challenges.

The study also suggests that state departments should increase social diversity in top management by implementing inclusive hiring and promotion policies. Affirmative action measures should be strengthened to ensure that leaders come from different genders, ethnic groups, and religious backgrounds.

This can be done through targeted recruitment efforts, training programs for underrepresented groups, and awareness campaigns within government agencies.

Diversity and inclusion policies should also be part of human resources practices, ensuring that work environments are inclusive and free from bias. By promoting social diversity, state departments can make their leadership more representative, improve trust with stakeholders, and create governance structures that reflect the needs of the broader population.

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