

The Efficacy of Diversity Training Programs in Improving Workplace Inclusion**Mike Oloo**

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Abstract

Workplace inclusion is a critical aspect of modern organizations, reflecting the extent to which all employees feel valued, respected, and fully involved in the workplace environment. This study explores the efficacy of diversity training programs in improving workplace inclusion, drawing on insights from diverse geographical contexts such as the United States, Canada, parts of Europe, and African countries like South Africa and Nigeria. Through a review of literature, it is evident that diversity training programs have a positive impact on employees' awareness, understanding, and behaviors related to diversity and inclusion. Findings consistently demonstrate significant improvements in participants' attitudes and willingness to engage in inclusive behaviors following the training. However, the study emphasizes that the effectiveness of these programs is greatly influenced by organizational factors such as leadership support and a culture that values diversity. Organizational commitment to diversity training, ongoing reinforcement, and integration of diversity principles into daily practices emerge as crucial elements for success. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of considering innovative training formats, such as immersive experiences like virtual reality training, which can lead to more profound and lasting effects on workplace inclusion. Overall, the findings suggest that while diversity training programs show promise in improving workplace inclusion, they are just one component of a broader strategy that should include sustained efforts, leadership commitment, and a culture that celebrates diversity.

Keywords: *Workplace Inclusion, Diversity Training Programs, Organizational Culture, Leadership Support, Diversity and Inclusion, Effectiveness, Immersive Training, Organizational Commitment*

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Workplace inclusion is a critical aspect of modern organizations, reflecting the extent to which all employees feel valued, respected, and fully involved in the workplace environment. It encompasses various dimensions, including diversity, equity, and belonging, and has gained considerable attention in research and practice across the globe. In the United States, workplace inclusion has been a focal point due to the diverse workforce. For instance, a study by Smith and Johnson (2015) highlighted that inclusive workplaces in the U.S. have higher employee engagement and productivity. This emphasizes the importance of creating an environment where employees of all backgrounds feel accepted and empowered to contribute.

In Canada, workplace inclusion is also a significant area of focus, particularly due to its multicultural society. Research by Gupta, Patel & Li (2018) revealed that organizations in Canada with robust inclusion initiatives have lower turnover rates and higher levels of innovation. This demonstrates that fostering an inclusive workplace not only benefits employees but also has tangible positive impacts on organizational performance. Furthermore, the Canadian government has implemented policies to promote workplace diversity and inclusion, such as the Employment Equity Act, indicating a commitment to these principles (Government of Canada, 2020).

Parts of Europe, such as the United Kingdom, have seen a growing emphasis on workplace inclusion as well. A study by Anderson and Brown (2017) in the UK found that inclusive workplaces have higher job satisfaction and lower absenteeism rates. This suggests that efforts to create inclusive environments positively affect employee well-being and organizational outcomes. European countries like Germany have also been proactive in promoting workplace inclusion. For example, a report by the German Federal Government (2019) highlighted initiatives to support diversity and inclusion in companies, emphasizing the business case for diverse and inclusive workplaces.

Turning to Africa, countries like South Africa have been at the forefront of promoting workplace inclusion, particularly given the history of apartheid and the need for reconciliation and equity. Research by Moyo and Ndlovu (2016) in South Africa emphasized the role of inclusive leadership in creating environments where employees from diverse backgrounds feel valued. This highlights the importance of leadership in driving inclusion efforts. In Nigeria, a study by Adeyemi, Smith & Chen (2020) showcased how inclusive workplaces lead to higher employee morale and commitment to organizational goals, indicating the universal benefits of workplace inclusion regardless of geographical location.

Diversity training programs are designed to educate employees and managers about issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. These programs typically aim to increase awareness, foster understanding, and promote positive behaviors towards individuals from diverse backgrounds. The concept of diversity training has evolved over the years, adapting to changing workplace dynamics and societal needs. In the context of workplace inclusion, diversity training plays a crucial role in creating a more welcoming and equitable environment for all employees. One key aspect of diversity training programs is their focus on raising awareness about various dimensions of diversity. This includes but is not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, and disability. By providing information and insights into different cultural backgrounds and perspectives, these programs help employees understand the value of diversity in the workplace. As noted by Dobbin and Kalev (2016), awareness is a critical first step in building a more inclusive environment, as it allows individuals to recognize their biases and assumptions.

In addition to awareness, diversity training programs often include components aimed at developing specific skills and behaviors that promote inclusivity. For example, training sessions may focus on

communication strategies that foster respect and understanding among colleagues with diverse backgrounds. Research by Paluck and Green (2020) highlights the importance of skill-building in diversity training, noting that programs that provide concrete strategies for inclusive behavior are more effective in promoting workplace inclusion. Moreover, diversity training programs often incorporate interactive activities and case studies to engage participants actively. These experiential learning approaches can enhance the effectiveness of the training by allowing employees to apply concepts in real-world scenarios. For instance, a study by King, Dawson, Kravitz & Gulick, (2018) found that role-playing exercises in diversity training can lead to increased empathy and perspective-taking among participants, which are essential for creating an inclusive workplace culture.

Another critical aspect of diversity training programs is their alignment with organizational values and goals. When these programs are integrated into the broader mission of the organization, they are more likely to have a lasting impact on workplace culture. Research by Jones and King (2019) emphasizes the importance of organizational commitment to diversity and inclusion, stating that when leaders actively support and participate in diversity training, it sends a powerful message to employees about the company's values. Furthermore, the effectiveness of diversity training programs is closely tied to their evaluation and follow-up mechanisms. Organizations that track outcomes and gather feedback from participants can identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments. This continuous improvement cycle is essential for ensuring that diversity training remains relevant and impactful. As noted by Ely and Thomas (2021), ongoing evaluation allows organizations to measure the long-term effects of diversity training on workplace inclusion metrics such as employee satisfaction and retention.

Additionally, the format and delivery of diversity training programs can vary widely, ranging from in-person workshops to online modules. With advancements in technology, many organizations are turning to e-learning platforms to deliver training to remote or geographically dispersed employees. This flexibility allows for broader participation and accessibility. Research by Smith, Johnson & Brown (2017) suggests that online diversity training can be just as effective as traditional in-person methods, particularly when designed with interactive features and multimedia content. Despite the potential benefits of diversity training programs, it is essential to recognize their limitations. Some studies, such as those by Kalev, Dobbin & Kelly (2016), have found that standalone diversity training without accompanying systemic changes in policies and practices may not lead to significant improvements in workplace inclusion. This highlights the importance of a holistic approach that addresses both individual attitudes and organizational structures.

Moreover, the concept of diversity training itself has evolved to encompass broader notions of inclusion. While early programs often focused on differences among individuals, contemporary approaches emphasize the importance of creating a sense of belonging for all employees. Research by Thomas and Plaut (2018) discusses the shift towards inclusion-focused training, which goes beyond surface-level diversity to cultivate environments where everyone feels valued and respected. Diversity training programs play a vital role in promoting workplace inclusion by increasing awareness, developing skills, aligning with organizational values, and utilizing effective evaluation methods. By engaging employees in experiential learning, integrating training with organizational goals, and adapting to changing technologies, these programs can contribute to a more inclusive workplace culture. However, it is essential to recognize that diversity training is just one component of a broader strategy for creating an inclusive environment. Organizational commitment, systemic changes, and ongoing evaluation are also crucial factors in fostering lasting inclusivity.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to explore the efficacy of diversity training programs in improving workplace inclusion.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

According to a report by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM, 2021), despite the increasing adoption of diversity training programs in organizations, disparities in workplace inclusion persist, indicating a significant gap between the intention of these programs and their actual impact. This study aims to address the problem of whether diversity training programs are effective in improving workplace inclusion. Despite the proliferation of such programs, there remains a lack of consensus on their efficacy, with some studies suggesting positive outcomes while others question their effectiveness (Jones & King, 2019). This inconsistency highlights the need for a comprehensive investigation to fill the research gap and provide clarity on the effectiveness of diversity training programs in enhancing workplace inclusion.

The primary research gap this study intends to fill is the lack of conclusive evidence regarding the impact of diversity training programs on workplace inclusion. While some previous studies have reported positive effects, others have found limited or mixed results (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). This inconsistency could be due to variations in program design, delivery methods, organizational contexts, and measurement approaches. By conducting a thorough investigation, this study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by providing a nuanced understanding of the conditions under which diversity training programs are most effective in fostering workplace inclusion. Additionally, the study aims to explore potential factors that may moderate the relationship between diversity training and workplace inclusion, such as organizational culture, leadership support, and participant characteristics.

The beneficiaries of the findings drawn from this study are multifaceted. Firstly, organizations will benefit from gaining insights into the effectiveness of their diversity training initiatives. By understanding the conditions that optimize the impact of these programs, organizations can tailor their training efforts to better meet the needs of their employees and promote a more inclusive workplace culture. Additionally, HR professionals and diversity practitioners will benefit from evidence-based guidelines on designing and implementing effective diversity training programs. This study aims to provide practical recommendations that can enhance the efficacy of such programs, leading to improved employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention.

Furthermore, employees themselves stand to benefit from the findings of this study. A more inclusive workplace environment not only enhances job satisfaction and well-being but also fosters creativity, innovation, and collaboration (Paluck & Green, 2020). By shedding light on the factors that contribute to successful diversity training outcomes, this research can empower employees to actively engage in these programs and contribute to a more inclusive organizational culture. Finally, policymakers and advocacy groups focused on diversity and inclusion initiatives will find value in the study's insights. The findings can inform policy decisions and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting diversity training as a means of creating equitable and inclusive work environments across industries and sectors.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Social Identity Theory

Main Theme: Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept from the social groups to which they belong. According to this theory, people categorize themselves and others into groups based on shared characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, and organizational affiliation. This categorization leads to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination, as individuals strive to maintain a positive social identity by enhancing the status of

their own group. Social Identity Theory also emphasizes the importance of social comparison, where individuals compare their group with other groups to enhance self-esteem and belongingness. Social Identity Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how diversity training programs can improve workplace inclusion. The theory suggests that individuals are motivated to enhance the status and positive image of their in-group. When applied to the context of diversity training, this theory suggests that effective programs can influence employees' perceptions of their group's status within the organization. By promoting understanding and positive attitudes towards diverse groups, such programs can enhance employees' identification with the inclusive goals of the organization. This, in turn, can lead to reduced intergroup biases and increased inclusivity.

Moreover, Social Identity Theory highlights the role of leadership and organizational norms in shaping group dynamics. Leaders who actively support diversity training and promote inclusive behaviors send a signal to employees that diversity and inclusion are valued within the organization. This aligns with the tenets of Social Identity Theory, where a positive organizational identity as inclusive can lead to stronger in-group identification among employees. When employees perceive that the organization values diversity, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that support inclusivity, such as collaboration, respect for differences, and openness to diverse perspectives.

Additionally, the theory's emphasis on social comparison is relevant to the study of diversity training programs. Employees often compare their group's treatment and status with other groups within the organization. Effective diversity training can provide employees with the tools to challenge stereotypes and biases, leading to more positive intergroup comparisons. By fostering a sense of common identity that transcends individual differences, diversity training programs can contribute to a more cohesive and inclusive organizational culture. Social Identity Theory offers a robust theoretical foundation for understanding how diversity training programs can improve workplace inclusion. By addressing the dynamics of group identity, intergroup relations, and social comparison, this theory provides insights into the mechanisms through which such programs can lead to positive changes in attitudes and behaviors towards diversity.

2.2 Empirical Review

Smith & Garcia (2021) investigated the effectiveness of diversity training programs in enhancing workplace inclusion within a large multinational corporation. The purpose was to assess the impact of a newly implemented diversity training initiative on employees' attitudes and behaviors towards diversity. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining surveys to measure perceptions before and after the training, as well as focus group discussions to gather qualitative insights. Findings revealed a significant positive shift in employees' awareness and understanding of diversity issues post-training. However, the study also identified the need for ongoing reinforcement and integration of diversity principles into daily practices. Recommendations include regular refresher sessions, leadership modeling of inclusive behaviors, and embedding diversity goals into performance metrics.

Chen & Williams (2018) examined the role of organizational culture in mediating the effects of diversity training on workplace inclusion. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from employees across various departments of a mid-sized tech company. The study found that while diversity training alone had a modest impact on employees' perceptions of inclusion, the presence of a supportive and inclusive organizational culture significantly enhanced these effects. Specifically, employees in departments with a strong culture of inclusivity reported higher levels of engagement with diversity training content and greater willingness to apply inclusive behaviors. The study recommends that organizations not only invest in diversity training but also prioritize creating a culture that reinforces these principles.

In this study, the effectiveness of online diversity training programs in improving workplace inclusion was examined by Gupta, Patel & Lee (2017). A randomized controlled trial was conducted among employees of a financial services firm, with participants assigned to either an online diversity training module or a control group. Surveys administered before and after the training assessed changes in attitudes and behaviors. Results indicated that participants in the online training group showed significant improvements in their understanding of diversity issues and reported greater willingness to engage in inclusive behaviors. The study suggests that online training can be an effective and scalable method for promoting workplace inclusion.

Brown & Lee (2016) explored the long-term effects of diversity training programs on workplace inclusion. A longitudinal study was conducted over two years in a manufacturing company, with data collected at multiple time points. Findings revealed that while there was an initial positive impact of the training on employees' attitudes and behaviors, these effects diminished over time without reinforcement. However, departments with ongoing diversity initiatives and leadership support showed sustained improvements in workplace inclusion metrics. The study emphasizes the importance of continuous reinforcement and integration of diversity principles into organizational practices.

Martinez & Johnson (2019) examined the impact of supervisor support on the effectiveness of diversity training programs in improving workplace inclusion. Data were collected from employees in a retail organization through surveys and interviews. Results indicated that employees who perceived higher levels of support from their supervisors reported greater engagement with diversity training content and demonstrated more inclusive behaviors. Supervisor support was found to act as a significant moderator, enhancing the effects of the training on employees' attitudes and behaviors. The study recommends that organizations emphasize the role of supervisors in promoting and reinforcing diversity principles.

Wang & Nguyen (2020) investigated the impact of immersive diversity training experiences on workplace inclusion. Using a quasi-experimental design, employees in a healthcare organization were assigned to either a traditional classroom-style training or an immersive virtual reality (VR) training. Surveys and observations were used to measure changes in attitudes and behaviors. Results indicated that participants in the VR training group showed significantly greater improvements in empathy, perspective-taking, and inclusive behaviors compared to those in the traditional training group. The study suggests that immersive training methods can lead to more profound and lasting effects on workplace inclusion.

In this study, the impact of mandatory vs. voluntary diversity training programs on workplace inclusion was examined by Li & Chen (2015). Data were collected from employees in a large consulting firm through surveys and interviews. Results indicated that while both mandatory and voluntary training led to improvements in awareness and knowledge of diversity issues, voluntary training participants showed higher levels of engagement and willingness to apply inclusive behaviors. However, mandatory training was found to be more effective in reaching a broader audience and ensuring a baseline level of understanding across the organization. The study recommends a combination of both types of training for optimal results in improving workplace inclusion.

2.3 Research Gaps

Despite the valuable insights provided by the aforementioned studies on the efficacy of diversity training programs in improving workplace inclusion, several research gaps remain that warrant further investigation. Firstly, there is a need for more research focusing on the long-term sustainability of the effects of diversity training. While some studies have explored the immediate impact of training programs, such as the study by Brown and Lee (2016), there is limited research on how these effects evolve over extended periods. Future research could employ longitudinal designs spanning several

years to track changes in attitudes and behaviors towards diversity to determine if there is a decay effect or if certain organizational factors can sustain the positive outcomes.

Secondly, there is a gap in understanding the optimal format and delivery methods of diversity training programs. The studies by Gupta et al. (2017) and Wang & Nguyen (2020) touched on different delivery modes such as online training and immersive VR experiences, but more comparative research is needed to determine which methods are most effective for different organizational contexts. Additionally, research could delve deeper into the content of training programs, investigating which specific elements contribute most to improved workplace inclusion. This could involve experimental designs that manipulate the content of training modules to identify the most impactful components.

Lastly, there is a need for more research on the role of organizational leadership and climate in mediating the effects of diversity training on workplace inclusion. While some studies, such as Martinez & Johnson (2019), have explored the influence of supervisor support, broader organizational factors such as top management commitment, HR policies, and cultural norms are also critical. Future studies could employ multilevel analyses to examine how different levels of leadership impact the effectiveness of diversity training programs. Moreover, qualitative research methods such as interviews and focus groups could provide deeper insights into the organizational dynamics that either facilitate or hinder the successful implementation of diversity initiatives.

While the existing literature has contributed significantly to our understanding of diversity training programs' impact on workplace inclusion, there are several research gaps that warrant future investigation. These include the long-term sustainability of training effects, optimal delivery methods, content analysis of training programs, and the role of organizational leadership and climate. Addressing these gaps will not only enhance the effectiveness of diversity initiatives but also contribute to the development of evidence-based practices for creating more inclusive workplaces.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study conducted a comprehensive examination and synthesis of existing scholarly works related to the role of agroecology in sustainable livestock practices. This multifaceted process entailed reviewing a diverse range of academic sources, including books, journal articles, and other relevant publications, to acquire a thorough understanding of the current state of knowledge within the field. Through a systematic exploration of the literature, researchers gain insights into key theories, methodologies, findings, and gaps in the existing body of knowledge, which subsequently informs the development of the research framework and questions.

FINDINGS

The study yielded several key findings. Firstly, it was found that diversity training programs have a positive impact on employees' awareness, understanding, and knowledge of diversity issues within the workplace. Participants in the training programs showed significant improvements in their attitudes towards diversity, reporting greater openness to diverse perspectives and a willingness to engage in inclusive behaviors. Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of organizational factors such as leadership support and a culture of inclusivity in enhancing the effectiveness of these programs. Employees in departments with strong leadership support and a culture that values diversity demonstrated higher levels of engagement with the training content and were more likely to apply inclusive behaviors in their daily interactions. Overall, the findings suggest that while diversity training programs can contribute to improving workplace inclusion, their effectiveness is greatly influenced by organizational context and support structures. Thus, organizations aiming to foster a more inclusive environment should not only invest in diversity training but also ensure that leadership actively promotes and reinforces inclusive behaviors throughout the organization.

CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY, PRACTICE AND POLICY

5.1 Conclusion

After a thorough examination of the effectiveness of diversity training programs in improving workplace inclusion, several conclusions can be drawn from the study. Firstly, the findings consistently indicate that diversity training programs have a positive impact on employees' attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors related to diversity and inclusion. Studies such as those by Gupta et al. (2017) and Smith & Garcia (2021) demonstrated significant improvements in participants' understanding of diversity issues and their willingness to engage in inclusive behaviors following the training. This suggests that diversity training can serve as a valuable tool for organizations seeking to create more inclusive work environments. Secondly, the role of organizational support and culture emerges as a crucial factor in maximizing the effectiveness of diversity training programs. Research by Chen & Williams (2018) and Martinez & Johnson (2019) highlighted the importance of a supportive organizational climate in reinforcing the messages and principles conveyed in training sessions. When employees perceive that their organization values diversity and actively supports inclusion efforts, they are more likely to engage with and apply the knowledge gained from the training.

Moreover, the choice of training format and delivery method can also impact the outcomes of diversity training programs. Studies such as the one by Wang & Nguyen (2020) suggested that immersive experiences, such as virtual reality training, can lead to more profound and lasting effects on workplace inclusion compared to traditional methods. This underscores the importance of considering innovative approaches to training design that can enhance participants' empathy, perspective-taking, and ability to apply inclusive behaviors in real-world scenarios. Lastly, while diversity training programs show promise in improving workplace inclusion, it is essential to recognize that they are just one component of a broader strategy. Longitudinal studies, such as the one by Brown & Lee (2016), indicate that sustained efforts and reinforcement are necessary to maintain the positive effects of training over time. This suggests that organizations should complement diversity training with ongoing support, leadership commitment, and a culture that values and celebrates diversity in all its forms.

5.2 Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy

The study makes significant contributions to theory, practice, and policy in several ways. Firstly, from a theoretical perspective, the research adds to the growing body of literature on Social Identity Theory. By investigating how diversity training programs impact employees' identification with inclusive organizational goals, the study provides empirical support for the theory's concepts of group identity and intergroup relations. It offers insights into how these programs can influence employees' attitudes and behaviors towards diversity, enhancing our understanding of the mechanisms through which social identity processes operate in organizational contexts. Secondly, the study contributes to practice by offering practical recommendations for organizations seeking to improve workplace inclusion through diversity training. The findings highlight the importance of ongoing reinforcement and integration of diversity principles into daily practices. Organizations can use this information to design more effective training programs that go beyond awareness-building to foster lasting changes in employee behavior and attitudes. Moreover, the study underscores the role of leadership in promoting a culture of inclusivity, suggesting that leaders should actively support and participate in diversity initiatives.

From a policy perspective, the study provides evidence to support the implementation of diversity training as a means of creating more equitable and inclusive workplaces. Policymakers can use the findings to advocate for the incorporation of diversity training programs into organizational practices, particularly in industries where diversity and inclusion are crucial. The study also highlights the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of these programs and suggests that organizations should track outcomes and gather feedback to identify areas for improvement. Furthermore, the study's focus

on the impact of diversity training on workplace inclusion has practical implications for HR professionals and diversity practitioners. It underscores the need to design training programs that not only raise awareness but also develop specific skills and behaviors that promote inclusivity. HR professionals can use these insights to tailor training initiatives to the unique needs of their organizations, ensuring that they are relevant and impactful.

Moreover, the study contributes to the broader discourse on organizational culture and its role in shaping attitudes towards diversity. By highlighting the mediating effect of organizational culture on the effectiveness of diversity training, the research emphasizes the importance of creating a culture that reinforces diversity and inclusion principles. This aligns with existing research emphasizing the role of culture in driving organizational outcomes. In conclusion, the study on the efficacy of diversity training programs in improving workplace inclusion makes valuable contributions to theory, practice, and policy. It advances our understanding of Social Identity Theory, provides practical recommendations for organizations, offers evidence to support policy decisions, and informs HR practices. By shedding light on the mechanisms through which diversity training influences workplace inclusion, the research provides a roadmap for organizations to create more inclusive and equitable workplaces.

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