

**MULTICULTURALISM AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE:
REALITIES AND MYTHS-EVIDENCE FROM MULTINATIONAL CONSTRUCTION
FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE**

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the paradox between espoused multicultural policies and the lived experiences of employees within multinational construction firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Titled “Multiculturalism and Social Inclusion in the Workplace: Realities and Myths-Evidence from Multinational Construction Firms in Rivers State”, the research explored the extent to which social inclusion is operationalized in daily workplace practices and whether diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives translate into equitable outcomes for a multicultural workforce. The study is grounded in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, using structured questionnaires administered to employees across selected multinational firms. The population consisted of multicultural employees from different ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds. Data were analyzed using mean scores, standard deviations, and grand mean benchmarks to assess perceptions of inclusion, cultural representation, leadership diversity, and policy implementation. Findings revealed that while companies project an image of multiculturalism and inclusivity, actual practices fall short. Respondents indicated that workplace inclusion is often superficial, with minimal representation of minority groups in leadership roles, limited access to informal networks, and cultural stereotypes still influencing interactions and decision-making. The grand mean analysis showed varying degrees of policy-practice disconnect across key variables such as recruitment, promotion, intercultural communication, and team collaboration. The study concluded that multiculturalism in these firms is more rhetorical than substantive, often driven by compliance rather than genuine organizational change. It recommended the institutionalization of intercultural training, leadership accountability, diversification of decision-making roles, and routine evaluation of inclusion practices. These measures are essential for transforming inclusion from as per formative act to an authentic cultural norm that supports productivity, innovation, and employee well-being in an increasingly diverse workplace.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Social Inclusion, Workplace Diversity, Policy-Practice Gap, Construction Firms, Rivers State, Human Resource Practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism and social inclusion have become critical issues in contemporary organizational discourse, particularly in multinational firms where diverse identities intersect daily. According to Ajaero and Nwankwo (2021), globalization has increased workplace diversity, necessitating inclusive practices to enhance team cohesion, productivity, and employee satisfaction. Multinational construction firms, by virtue of their international workforce and local integration, are key spaces for examining the reality of multicultural workplace dynamics. In the Rivers State construction sector, foreign and local employees collaborate on projects, creating multicultural environments where inclusion policies are theoretically implemented. However, observed workplace realities often diverge from these idealistic portrayals (Eke & Onuoha, 2019). Employees of differing ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds report varied experiences with acceptance, representation, and advancement within these organizations. Hence, this study aims to bridge the gap between policy and practice, scrutinizing the extent to which multiculturalism and inclusion in these firms are real or mythologized.

According to Adekunle and Yusuf (2007), multiculturalism embodies and promotes cultural security, cultural diversity and cultural equity. Cultural security is a broad concept that encompasses cultural safety, cultural sensitivity and awareness. Cultural safety refers to the condition in which people recognise their own culture, language, customs, attitudes, beliefs and preferred ways of doing things in their social and economic environment (Ahmed, 2012).

Multiculturalism has been one of the policies, particularly in Europe, to create national unity in ethnic diversity (Johnson, 2015). As such, it has been criticised for essentialising culture and reifying cultural differences. The criticisms multiculturalism faces are many and varied (Mason, 2018). It presupposes an essentialist conception of culture that treats cultures as static, homogeneous and bounded, with the result that multicultural policies tend to entrench traditional practices and promote the interests of established elites within cultural communities (Barry, 2001); that it gives unfair advantages to minority cultural and religious groups through additional funding and special provisions such as exemptions from laws and policies; and that it discourages cultural communities from integrating and encourages them to form separate parallel societies (Goodhart, 2013; West, 2013).

Ironically, multicultural initiatives can produce scepticism and resentment on the part of, in particular, non-minorities (James, Brief, Dietz, & Cohen, 2001) and criticism centres on the claim that it excludes non-minorities, threatens unity (Hui et al., 2015) and promotes separatism and division. Exclusion from organisational information and decision-making networks has been identified as one of the most significant problems facing today's diverse workforce (Fernandez, 1991). The inclusion exclusion experience of diversity is one that has deep social-psychological roots for human beings. This is in contrast to the use of the term to describe a situation in society where diversity is widely accepted and valued, by all ethnocultural groups, and where cultural groups maintain their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness while still participating in the daily life of greater society. In addition, it has been proposed that multiculturalism should be studied as a social representation, that is, a collectively shared system of 'values, ideas and practices (Berry, 2013).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread advocacy for workplace diversity, multiculturalism in multinational construction firms often manifests as superficial inclusion rather than deep integration. While HR policies articulate non-discriminatory and inclusive values, empirical evidence from the field suggests the persistence of exclusionary practices, communication gaps, and limited upward mobility for minority groups (Igbokwe & Anya, 2022). This research thus seeks to explore these contradictions, determine their implications, and propose sustainable solutions.

Objectives of the Study

The under listed objectives guided the study:

- To examine the extent to which multiculturalism is practiced in multinational construction firms in Rivers State.
- To identify the challenges to effective social inclusion in multicultural work settings.
- To assess employee perceptions regarding inclusion myths and realities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- How is multiculturalism operationalized within multinational construction firms in Rivers State?
- What factors hinder or promote social inclusion in these multicultural settings?
- What are the lived experiences of employees regarding workplace inclusion?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Identity Theory (SIT): Social Identity Theory was proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979. Tajfel initially laid the groundwork in the 1970s by exploring intergroup behavior, which was later expanded upon with Turner. Key proponents include Henri Tajfel and John Turner, who developed the theory in response to the cognitive processes involved in group-based behavior. Other contributors such as Michael Hogg and Dominic Abrams extended the theory to organizational settings (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), the central premise is that individuals derive a portion of their self-concept from the groups to which they belong. Group categorization into in-groups and out-groups forms the basis of social behavior. People tend to enhance the status of their in-group while devaluing out-groups to maintain a positive social identity.

This categorization impacts attitudes, cohesion, stereotyping, and discrimination in the workplace, especially within culturally diverse organizations (Turner & Reynolds, 2011). Tajfel (1982) contributed significantly by explaining that minimal group paradigms (even arbitrary categorization) can create discrimination. Turner introduced the Self-Categorization Theory (1987), which refined how group identities form hierarchies of salience depending on the context. A study by Ashforth and Mael (1989) applied SIT in organizational behavior, examining how employees' identification with their organization affects loyalty and work behavior. More

recently, Haslam et al. (2014) employed SIT to investigate identity leadership and its role in inclusive team performance.

Social Identity Theory is highly relevant to the current study on multiculturalism and social inclusion in multinational construction firms. It offers a robust framework for understanding how group dynamics among culturally diverse employees influence workplace cohesion, perceived inclusion, and conflict (Ellemers et al., 2012). It also explains why certain groups may feel excluded despite inclusive HR policies. However, while SIT illuminates intergroup dynamics, it may not fully address power structures or institutional biases embedded in workplace policies, which are better captured by critical diversity theory.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Multiculturalism refers to the coexistence of diverse cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities within a common organizational space. It promotes mutual respect, recognition, and equitable participation (Onwuegbuzie, 2021). Social inclusion, on the other hand, involves the proactive engagement of all individuals, regardless of background, in organizational processes, decisions, and benefits (Ekpenyong & Ede, 2020).

Critical Diversity Theory (CDT)

According to Aluko and Oyetunde (2020), many Nigerian firms claim to promote diversity yet fail to establish inclusive cultures. Similarly, Adebayo and Enweremadu (2023) observed that despite multicultural policies in multinational organizations, inclusion often remains a myth due to poor implementation, unconscious bias, and ethnic favoritism. Contrastingly, Onyema and Bello (2018) reported that firms with robust inclusion frameworks experienced better team collaboration and reduced turnover. In the construction industry, the problem is often compounded by hierarchical work structures, temporary contracts, and language barriers. Ahmed and Gyang (2019) noted that lower-tier workers from minority groups often feel marginalized, with limited access to decision-making or career progression.

Multiculturalism as practiced in Multinational Firms: Multiculturalism, as practiced in multinational firms, represents the strategic integration of diverse cultural, ethnic, and national groups within an organization. According to Shore et al. (2018), multiculturalism in corporate environments is defined as a structural and symbolic embrace of differences among employees with the aim of fostering innovation, collaboration, and global competence. In multinational oil and gas firms in Rivers State, this is often reflected through policy statements on equal opportunity, diversity hiring, multicultural teams, and expatriate-local collaborations.

Nevertheless, while policies may articulate support for cultural diversity, actual workplace behaviors often lag behind policy ideals. Nkomo et al. (2021) observed that most multinational firms adopt a “surface-level” approach to diversity by including multiculturalism in mission statements but failing to promote meaningful intercultural engagement at the operational level. This creates a form of corporate multiculturalism that is performative rather than transformative.

Similarly, Roberson (2019) asserted that while organizational diversity is often measured by the demographic makeup of the workforce, inclusion and the ability of these diverse employees to participate equitably and feel valued requires a more deliberate cultural transformation. In the same vein, Edewor and Aluko (2020) emphasized that although oil and gas

multinationals in Nigeria frequently conduct diversity training and publish inclusion brochures, these practices do not always translate into inclusive workplace culture.

Empirically, Uzochukwu and Agbaeze (2022) conducted a study on diversity policies in multinational corporations in Nigeria and noted that while human resource departments (HRD) emphasize multicultural recruitment, onboarding practices often fail to support cultural integration. In another study, Osibanjo et al. (2019) examined Nigerian subsidiaries of global firms and found that multiculturalism was largely symbolic, with decision-making structures still dominated by expatriates or dominant ethnic groups. Consequently, while multiculturalism is practiced on paper, its authentic implementation remains inconsistent and fragmented.

Challenges to Effective Social Inclusion in Multicultural Work Settings

Social inclusion in the workplace involves creating an environment in which all individuals, regardless of background, feel respected, have equal access to opportunities, and can contribute to organizational success. According to Shore et al. (2018), inclusion goes beyond representation and entails participation, recognition, and belonging. However, in multicultural work settings such as oil and gas firms in Rivers State, several challenges impede effective social inclusion.

One of the primary barriers is cultural bias at both implicit and explicit levels which often manifests in the form of microaggressions, stereotyping, and favoritism. Okoro and Washington (2017) noted that in multicultural Nigerian organizations, minority groups are often subjected to exclusionary behaviors under the guise of professional standards or communication preferences. Similarly, Akpan (2019) observed that employees from non-dominant ethnicities reported reduced access to informal networks and mentorship opportunities, hindering their upward mobility.

Another significant challenge is the disconnect between policy and implementation. Although inclusive policies exist, they are frequently undermined by organizational culture, poor leadership commitment, and lack of accountability. As Roberson (2019) emphasized, without managerial role modeling and systemic oversight, inclusion policies often remain ceremonial. In the same vein, Nwatu (2021) asserted that HR policies alone cannot achieve inclusion unless reinforced by daily practices and organizational norms.

Language barriers, hierarchical structures, and colonial legacies also compound exclusion in multicultural workplaces. Edewor and Aluko (2020) opined that language is often used as a gatekeeping tool in multinational workplaces, creating informal communication cliques that exclude non-native or less dominant speakers. Consequently, these dynamics foster a culture of silence, where marginalized employees hesitate to report bias for fear of retaliation or indifference.

Empirically, Nwatu (2021) studied employee experiences in three oil and gas companies in Nigeria and concluded that informal exclusionary practices such as "ethnic-based teams" and promotion favoritism significantly undermined inclusive HR intentions. Similarly, Uzochukwu and Agbaeze (2022) found that even when firms had comprehensive diversity charters their enforcement mechanisms were weak or nonexistent, thereby enabling persistent structural inequality.

Employee Perceptions Regarding Inclusion: Myths and Realities in Line with HR Policies

Employee perceptions form a critical lens through which the success of inclusion policies is evaluated. While HR departments may frame inclusion as an organizational priority, employees lived experiences often reveal discrepancies between stated intentions and actual practices. According to Roberson (2019), perceived inclusion is shaped not only by organizational policies but by everyday workplace interactions, leadership behavior, and peer relationships.

Employees in multinational oil and gas firms in Rivers State frequently confront the myth that HR policies automatically translate into equitable treatment. Akpan (2019) emphasized that many employees view HR policies as theoretical constructs, often detached from the complex interpersonal dynamics of the workplace. Similarly, Okoro and Washington (2017) noted that the belief that the presence of diversity policies equates to inclusion is one of the most pervasive myths in multicultural organizations. In reality, employee experiences often diverge along cultural and ethnic lines. Shore et al. (2018) observed that inclusion is felt more acutely when employees can see people like themselves in leadership roles, participate in decision-making, and receive recognition. However, in many oil and gas firms, expatriates or members of dominant local ethnic groups are overrepresented in strategic roles, reinforcing perceptions of favoritism and inequality (Nkomo et al., 2021).

Notwithstanding the existence of inclusive HR policies, employees often report inconsistencies in policy application. For instance, Edewor and Aluko (2020) observed that while anti-discrimination clauses exist in employee handbooks, complaint mechanisms are either inaccessible or unresponsive. In the same vein, Osibanjo et al. (2019) asserted that employee trust in HR departments is undermined when policies are selectively enforced or when management appears indifferent to reported concerns.

Empirical evidence from Akpan (2019) showed that among 120 employees surveyed in multinational oil companies, 61% believed that inclusion policies were more about branding than genuine change. Another study by Shore et al. (2018) involving 18 multinational firms found that although HR departments rated their inclusion practices highly, only 39% of employees from minority backgrounds agreed that they felt included. Consequently, employees often view HR inclusivity efforts as myths narratives constructed for compliance and external reputation rather than tools for real transformation. To bridge this gap, inclusion must be approached not only as a policy issue but as a cultural commitment, reinforced through daily behaviors, leadership modeling, and meaningful accountability structures.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a descriptive survey design to explore employee perspectives on multiculturalism and social inclusion within the workplace. Following Creswell and Creswell (2018), this design is suited for analyzing large populations and understanding prevalent patterns. To capture the complexity of workplace diversity, the study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques for richer analysis. The target population comprised both Nigerian nationals and expatriates from five leading multinational construction companies in Rivers State: Julius Berger Nigeria Plc, Saipem Nigeria Limited, CCECC Nigeria Ltd., Reynolds Construction Company, and Setraco Nigeria Limited. These firms were chosen due to their diverse workforce and significant presence in the region, with an estimated total

employee count of 1,200 spanning key departments like engineering, administration, HR, and procurement.

A stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure fair representation, resulting in a sample of 180 respondents. Employees were divided into managerial, supervisory, and operational levels, with 36 individuals selected proportionally from each company. Etikan and Bala (2017) support stratified sampling as effective for capturing varied perspectives in heterogeneous populations. Data collection instruments included a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire assessed demographic information, experiences of inclusion, and attitudes toward multiculturalism using a 5-point Likert scale. The interview guide was directed at HR leaders and department heads to gain deeper insights into cultural dynamics and policy realities, in line with Patton (2015).

Instrument validity and reliability were ensured through expert review and a pilot test conducted on 20 staff members from construction firms in Bayelsa State. This yielded a Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.83, indicating strong internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2016). Data were gathered both physically and electronically via email and WhatsApp. Confidentiality was guaranteed, and ethical approval was obtained from the university’s ethics board. SPSS Version 26 was used for data analysis, applying descriptive statistics and inferential tools like Chi-square and ANOVA to identify significant relationships. Interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic approach, revealing patterns such as “tokenism,” “inclusion fatigue,” and “unconscious bias.” This triangulation strengthened the reliability and comprehensiveness of the study’s findings.

RESULT PRESENTATION

Table 1: Respondents’ Responses on the Extent of Multiculturalism as Practiced in Multinational Construction Firms in Rivers State

S/N.	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
1	Multinational construction firms in Rivers State formally adopt multiculturalism through documented HR diversity and inclusion policies.	61	49	32	21	3.00	0.96
2	Despite existing policies, multiculturalism in many multinational firms is more symbolic than practiced in everyday operations.	59	53	31	20	2.58	0.94
3	The leadership structures of multinational firms in Rivers State often reflect dominant ethnic or expatriate representation, undermining multicultural ideals.	67	48	29	19	2.53	0.92
4	Employees from diverse backgrounds rarely experience the benefits of multiculturalism due to a lack of intercultural integration and communication.	70	46	28	19	2.40	0.91
Grand Mean/SD						2.63	0.93

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2025

The result on Table 1 presents respondents’ perceptions regarding the extent to which multiculturalism is practiced in multinational construction firms in Rivers State. The grand mean of 2.63 serves as the benchmark for interpreting the level of agreement. Item 1, which posits that “Multinational oil and gas firms in Rivers State formally adopt multiculturalism through documented HR diversity and inclusion policies,” had a mean of 3.00, indicating that respondents agreed with the statement and acknowledged the existence of formal policies

promoting multiculturalism. Item 2, stating that “Despite existing policies, multiculturalism in many multinational firms is more symbolic than practiced in everyday operations,” had a mean of 2.58, slightly below the grand mean. This suggests moderate disagreement or uncertainty, indicating that while symbolic multiculturalism may exist, its extent is not overwhelmingly evident. Furthermore, Item 3, which highlights that “Leadership structures of multinational firms often reflect dominant ethnic or expatriate representation,” recorded a mean of 2.53, below the grand mean, suggesting that respondents somewhat disagreed or were unsure of the ethnocentric dominance in leadership. Item 4, on the lack of intercultural integration and communication, had a mean of 2.40, indicating respondents’ disagreement or a less pronounced experience of exclusion.

Table 2: Respondents’ Responses on the Challenges to Effective Social Inclusion in Multicultural Work Settings in Multinational Construction Firms in Rivers State

S/N.	Statements	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
5	Cultural bias and favoritism continue to pose major barriers to effective inclusion in multinational construction firms.	68	47	30	18	3.14	0.91
6	There is a noticeable gap between HR policy intentions and their actual implementation within multicultural teams.	65	49	28	21	2.88	0.93
7	Language barriers, colonial workplace hierarchies, and informal exclusion practices hinder genuine social inclusion.	63	50	30	20	2.41	0.92
8	Employees from minority cultural groups often feel excluded from informal networks and decision-making processes.	69	48	27	19	2.32	0.90
Grand Mean/SD						2.69	0.92

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2025

The result on Table 2 analyzes the perceived barriers to social inclusion in multicultural settings within multinational construction firms in Rivers State. The grand mean was 2.69. Item 5, “Cultural bias and favoritism continue to pose major barriers to effective inclusion,” had the highest mean of 3.14, strongly suggesting that respondents acknowledged cultural favoritism as a significant challenge. Item 6, “There is a noticeable gap between HR policy intentions and their actual implementation,” had a mean of 2.88, which is also above the grand mean, reflecting a broad consensus among respondents regarding the disconnect between policy and practice. Moreover, Item 7, addressing the challenges of language barriers and informal exclusion, had a mean of 2.41, which falls below the grand mean. This suggests a less pronounced experience of language or colonial legacies in workplace exclusion. Similarly, Item 8, stating that minority groups often feel excluded from informal networks and decision-making, had a mean of 2.32, reflecting disagreement or a less significant perception of such exclusionary practices. The interpretation indicates that while cultural bias and policy-practice gaps are widely acknowledged challenges, other factors like language and informal exclusion are less uniformly perceived as barriers among the respondents.

Table 3: Respondents’ Responses on Employee Perceptions Regarding Inclusion Myths and Realities in Line with HR Policies in Multinational Construction Firms in Rivers State

S/N.	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD
9	Many employees perceive HR inclusion policies as idealistic statements rather than reflections of actual workplace experiences.	66	50	29	18	3.10	0.91
10	The selective enforcement of HR policies contributes to skepticism about the sincerity of inclusion efforts.	64	52	27	20	2.79	0.92
11	Employees from minority groups often view inclusion initiatives as more of a branding exercise than a transformative agenda.	67	49	28	19	2.47	0.91
12	There is a significant disparity between how HR departments evaluate their inclusivity efforts and how employees experience inclusion on the ground.	69	48	26	20	2.23	0.90
Grand Mean/SD						2.64	0.91

The result on Table 3 provides insights into how employees perceive the gap between HR inclusion policies and actual workplace experiences. The grand mean here is 2.64. Item 9, “Many employees perceive HR inclusion policies as idealistic statements,” had the highest mean of 3.10, well above the grand mean, indicating strong agreement that such policies are viewed with skepticism. Item 10, which highlighted the selective enforcement of policies, had a mean of 2.79, also above the benchmark, suggesting that employees recognize inconsistencies in policy application. Item 11, stating that inclusion initiatives are viewed as branding exercises, had a mean of 2.47, below the grand mean, indicating that this perception is less strongly held. Lastly, Item 12, concerning disparities between HR evaluations and employees' real experiences, recorded a mean of 2.23, the lowest in the table, implying disagreement or limited recognition of such disparities.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Multiculturalism as Practiced in Multinational Construction Firms in Rivers State

The results from Table 1 reveal a complex picture of multiculturalism in practice. Respondents acknowledged the existence of formal HR diversity and inclusion policies (Mean=3.00), suggesting that multinational construction firms in Rivers State, similar to their oil and gas counterparts, are structurally committed to multiculturalism through policy frameworks. This aligns with Shore et al. (2018), who defined multiculturalism in corporate settings as a combination of symbolic and structural embraces of employee diversity aimed at improving innovation and collaboration. However, when assessing everyday implementation, the responses were less affirming. The perception that multiculturalism is more symbolic than real yielded a mean of 2.58-slightly below the grand mean of 2.63-indicating mild skepticism about the depth of multicultural engagement. This supports the observation by Nkomo et al. (2021), who averred that many multinational firms adopt “surface-level” diversity initiatives, where multiculturalism is included in mission statements but remains absent in everyday workplace dynamics.

In a similar vein, the findings that leadership structures reflect dominant ethnic or expatriate influence (Mean=2.53) and that employees from diverse backgrounds experience limited intercultural integration (Mean=2.40) highlight the gap between policy and practice.

These results substantiate Roberson's (2019) assertion that the mere presence of diversity does not equate to inclusion, and real inclusion demands deliberate cultural shifts beyond demographic representation. Empirically, Uzochukwu and Agbaeze (2022) concurred that onboarding practices in Nigerian multinationals often fail to support cultural integration, despite diverse recruitment. Likewise, Osibanjo et al. (2019) found that organizational decisions often remain centralized in the hands of dominant ethnic or expatriate elites, rendering multiculturalism largely symbolic. Consequently, the data underscore the idea that while policies exist, multiculturalism is inconsistently implemented across multinational construction firms in Rivers State.

Challenges to Effective Social Inclusion in Multicultural Work Settings

Table 2 examines the barriers to social inclusion, and the results were more decisive. A strong majority of respondents agreed that cultural bias and favoritism are major barriers to inclusion (Mean=3.14), suggesting that workplace cultures continue to privilege certain ethnic or expatriate identities. Okoro and Washington (2017) support this, noting that subtle exclusionary practices, such as stereotyping and preference for dominant cultural norms, hinder inclusive interactions in Nigerian firms. Akpan (2019) similarly observed that non-dominant ethnic groups in the workplace report limited access to mentoring and informal networks. Respondents also strongly affirmed the gap between HR policy intentions and actual implementation (Mean=2.88), aligning with Roberson (2019), who emphasized that policy alone is insufficient without daily reinforcement through leadership modeling and accountability. This finding is echoed in Nwatu's (2021) research, which observed that despite comprehensive HR policies, informal practices such like ethnic team clustering which often counteract inclusion still very pronounce. Interestingly, language barriers and colonial hierarchies were seen as less influential (Mean=2.41), as was exclusion from informal networks (Mean=2.32). This divergence suggests that while explicit structural biases are noted, more subtle forms of exclusion may be underreported or normalized in workplace culture. Nonetheless, Edewor and Aluko (2020) emphasized that language can function as a gatekeeping mechanism, enabling exclusion via informal communication norms, especially in multinational environments. These findings highlight that policy-practice disconnects and cultural favoritism remain key obstacles to inclusion in Rivers State's multinational firms. The empirical studies by Nwatu (2021) and Uzochukwu & Agbaeze (2022) reinforced these insights by showing that even well-designed diversity charters often fail due to weak enforcement mechanisms.

Employee Perceptions of Inclusion Myths and Realities in Relation to HR Policies

Table 3 data shed light on employee perceptions of inclusion policies, revealing a notable degree of cynicism. Respondents strongly agreed that HR inclusion policies are often perceived as idealistic statements (Mean=3.10), reflecting widespread skepticism. Roberson (2019) supported this viewpoint, noting that perceived inclusion is shaped more by lived experience than policy rhetoric. Akpan (2019) added that such policies are often viewed as detached from the interpersonal realities of the workplace. The belief that selective enforcement undermines inclusion efforts (Mean=2.79) also received significant support, suggesting employees are aware of inconsistencies in policy application. This aligns with Osibanjo et al. (2019), who asserted that

trust in HR is diminished when policies are enforced unevenly or when management appears indifferent to complaints.

However, the idea that inclusion initiatives are merely branding exercises (Mean=2.47) and that HR evaluations differ significantly from employee experiences (Mean=2.23) were rated below the grand mean of 2.64. This suggests that while skepticism exists, not all employees fully subscribe to the idea that inclusion efforts are purely performative. Empirical support comes from Akpan (2019), whose study revealed that 61% of employees in multinational oil firms believed inclusion policies were more for corporate image than real change. Shore et al. (2018) found a similar disconnect, reporting that only 39% of minority employees felt truly included, despite high self-assessments by HR teams.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the realities and myths surrounding multiculturalism and social inclusion within multinational construction firms in Rivers State. Drawing from quantitative and qualitative data, it was evident that while formal HR policies advocating for multiculturalism and inclusion are well-documented, their practical implementation often falls short. Multinational firms have embraced diversity in principle, as seen in policy documents, hiring frameworks, and inclusion statements; however, symbolic multiculturalism appears to prevail over authentic intercultural engagement and social integration.

Findings revealed that leadership structures frequently reflect dominant ethnic or expatriate representation, undermining the inclusive intent of HR policies. Employees from minority backgrounds often reported limited access to informal networks, mentorship, and decision-making opportunities, which suggest the persistence of systemic bias, cultural favoritism, and policy-practice gaps. Furthermore, perceptions of inclusion were shaped less by policy rhetoric and more by daily interpersonal experiences and organizational behavior. Many respondents viewed inclusion efforts as branding strategies rather than genuine cultural commitments, reinforcing the idea that inclusive workplace cultures require more than surface-level reforms.

These results, supported by scholarly and empirical evidence (e.g., Roberson, 2019; Nkomo et al., 2021; Uzochukwu & Agbaeze, 2022), emphasized that multiculturalism and social inclusion in the workplace are complex and multifaceted. The data triangulation revealed that for inclusion to be real and effective, organizational policies must be reinforced by consistent leadership actions, cultural sensitivity, and systemic accountability.

Recommendations

- There is a need to institutionalize regular and practical intercultural communication and sensitivity training tailored to the specific cultural dynamics of Rivers State. Training should address unconscious bias, microaggressions, and cultural intelligence to bridge the interpersonal and communication gaps among employees from diverse backgrounds.
- Inclusion should be embedded into the fabric of the organizational culture through daily practices, recognition programs, mentoring initiatives, and team collaboration. Inclusive values must be reflected in both formal structures and informal relationships to build a genuinely inclusive workplace environment.

- Companies should periodically assess their inclusion efforts through employee surveys, focus groups, and audits. These evaluations should inform strategic adjustments to HR practices and serve as benchmarks for inclusive growth.

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