CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *One of the important characteristics of culture is diversity. This makes every nation of the world a unique entity. Rather than a blessing, cultural diversity has become a tool of oppression, domination, nepotism, injustice, disparity and discrimination in the hands of political actors and influential citizens in Nigeria. In the fight against police brutality that gave birth to a dramatic event tagged "End Sars Protest" on 20th December 2020, Nigerian youths demonstrated unity in diversity. On the contrary, the same youths are major instruments of various secessionist movements and agitating groups such as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Movement for The Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSON), The Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), and Yoruba Nation. What a paradoxical situation! Against this background, this study focused on youth's awareness of Nigeria's cultural diversity and its implication for leadership development. The study explored social leadership development theory as a theoretical framework while adopting descriptive survey research design and structured questionnaires to gather information. The population for the study is comprised of the members of the Coalition of Nigerian Youth on Security and Safety Affairs (CONYSSA) alongside the National Youth Council of Nigeria (NYCN). As a result, the study adopted a purposive stratified random sampling method to select a specified number of respondents from each youth organisation within the coalition and National Youth Council of Nigeria. Then, the data collected were analysed by Microsoft Data Analysis Tool Pack and Integrated with Microsoft Excel for easy display and graphical illustration. From the findings, the study recommends that youth organisations in Nigeria should adopt a cultural approach to leadership development in their training schemes. Also, the government of the Nigerian public and private sectors should make a policy of cultural inclusion and create a sensitisation platform to educate people on the uniqueness of Nigeria's cultural diversity.*

KEYWORDS: Cultural Diversity, Leadership Development, Youth.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of getting the right leadership to fight corruption and propel good governance has been a recurring decimal in Nigeria and Africa in general (Anazodo et al., 2015). One of the leadership challenges is cultural inequality. Since independence, there have been several agitations due to the issues of inequalities, cultural divide and disparity against different regions and ethnic groups (Leila et al., 2020). The experience of young people in terms of poor education, unemployment, insecurity, social vices, etc., has made many people conclude that Nigeria is a failed country. Recently, Nigerian youth from different cultural affiliations united to stage a protest tagged "Endsars Protest" against police brutality but an indirect response to leadership corruption.

Unfortunately, the same youths who were united to fight leadership corruption are also major instruments of various secessionist movements and agitating groups such as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Movement for The Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSON), The Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), and Yoruba Nation. What a paradoxical situation! These movements were formed due to various ethnic's perceptions of discrimination, nepotism and marginalisation of resources controlled by the federal government. Therefore, if Nigeria's cultural diversity is not given priority as part of the leadership scheme for youth leadership development, the future of Nigeria as a united entity will be a daydream. In view of this, the study examined youth's awareness of cultural diversity and its relevance for leadership development among youth in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Diversity: The uniqueness of cultural diversity is evident in human existence because human beings are interdependent on one another. In light of this, Radhika (2020) describes cultural diversity as a reality of the co-existence of human beings with different life identities. In the same manner, Jennifer (2021) also considers cultural diversity as where a group comprises individuals from different cultures or ethnic nationalities, taking into account individual personal identities such as language, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, and age. In relation to the above definitions of cultural diversity, no culture is superior or better than the other cultures worldwide. Notably, every culture in the world is unique and important, irrespective of size and location.

Youth and Leadership Development: From the biological concept, youth is the period between puberty and parenthood (Sawyer and Azzopardi et al., 2018). In this sense, youth are young people in their formative period, growing in life experience and knowledge. Youth leadership development is building a generation of future leaders. Experience shows that youth are the lead actors in developmental moves across the globe. It is on record that youth are recognised as a formidable and critical segment of the population of every society whose strength and dynamism are essential in the process of development engineering across the world (Raymond & Paulinus, 2021). Perhaps this is why some individuals challenged the slogan and changed the narrative that "youth are the leaders of today", not tomorrow again. In that case, youth development is fundamental and a foundation for the future of any nation in the world. For a country like Nigeria, cultural diversity is crucial for leadership development at all levels, whether public sector administration or political leadership. One of the best ways

to change old leadership narratives in Nigeria is to invest deliberately in youth leadership development with a special focus on Nigeria's cultural diversity.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research adopted a descriptive survey design method. Hence, the primary data was primarily generated through a field survey using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions designed so the respondents could identify their level of awareness about cultural diversity, and it was administered through an electronic platform, specifically Google Forms. The study population is comprised of the leaders and members of the Coalition of Nigerian Youth on Security and Safety Affairs. Also, the rationale behind the choice of the population of the study is that the leaders and members of various organisations that formed the coalition are from different cultural groups in the country and are equally members of the National Youth Council of Nigeria. Out of five hundred targeted (500) respondents, three hundred and six (306) people participated in the study. The study adopted a purposive stratified random sampling method to select a specified number of respondents from each youth organisation within the coalition and National Youth Council of Nigeria.

The researchers explored the Microsoft Data Analysis Tool Pack and integrated it with Microsoft Excel for easy display and graphical illustration.

Consequently, the researchers considered Social Leadership Development Theory relevant to this study. According to the Center for Management and Organization Effectiveness (CMOE 2021), Social Leadership Development Theory gives credence to the value of social interactions, settings and factors in learning skills and gaining knowledge. Thus, in relation to the focus of this study, the condition of the social environment of Nigeria is paramount for leadership effectiveness. Nigeria is home to people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This leadership development theory emphasises that learning can be based on shared experiences among people from different cultural backgrounds.

Assessment of Youth Awareness of Cultural Diversity

Age Distribution of Respondents

The researcher considered the demographic data of the respondents selected from the National Youth Council of Nigeria. The researcher leaned on the definition of youth as contained in the Africa Youth Charter and the sociological definition of a youth age to determine the expected age range of his respondents. The age of the respondent ranged from 18 years to 45 years to cover for the extended period of youthful age.
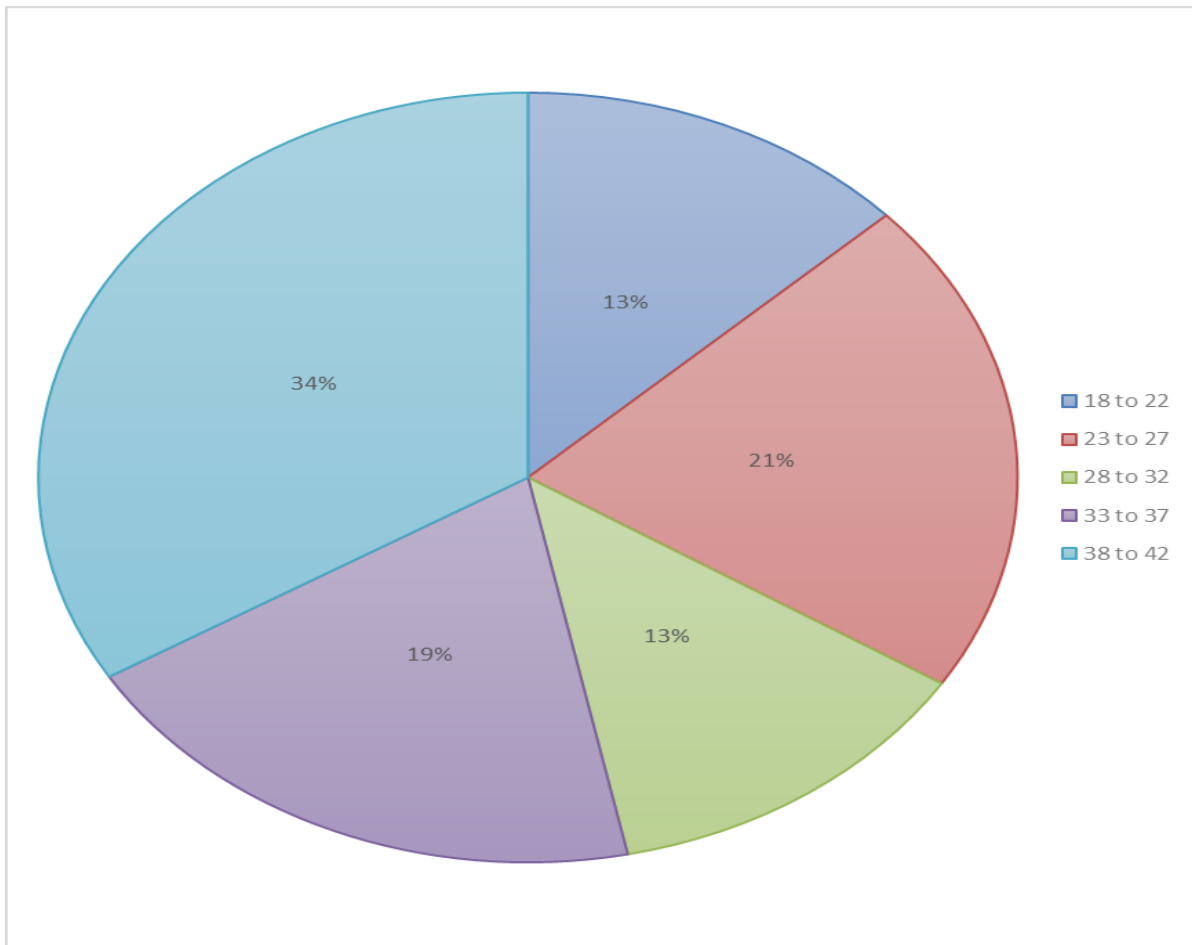
**Figure1: Frequency distribution of the age of respondents**

Source: *Field Work, 2023*

The pie chart above shows the age distribution of the respondents. Out of the 306 participants, respondents from the age of 38 to 42 years accounted for 34% of the distribution with 103 responses, whilst the least frequency of respondents was from the 18 to 22 and 28 to 32 years age group, as shown in figure 1 above.

**Table 1: A summary of responses on youth awareness of cultural diversity**

S/N	Description	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Every culture is unique and important, but some are superior to others	34	81	26	108	57
2	Achieving cultural diversity and cultural humility involves a commitment to learning over a lifetime	94	184	16	10	2
3	Cultural diversity recognises individual personal identity, languages, religious, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender or age?	145	143	6	11	1
4	Cultural diversity is a reality of co-existence of human beings with different identities of life in a particular place?	170	128	5	2	1

Source: *Field Work, 2023*

Graphical representation of youth awareness of cultural diversity in Nigeria
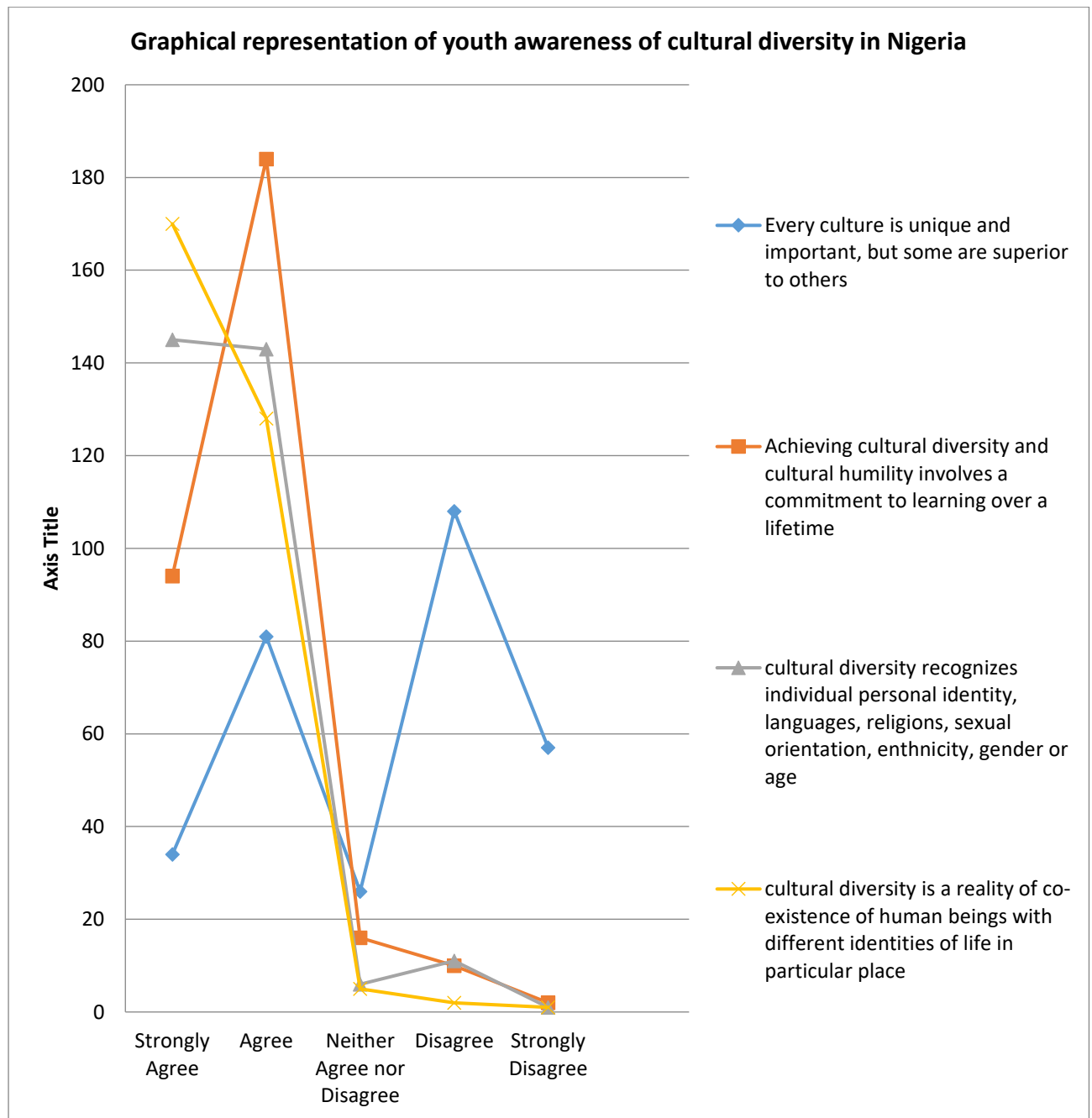
Source: *Field Work, 2023*

In order to examine the respondents' in-depth understanding of the respondents about cultural diversity, the researchers sought to test their opinion of the respondents on cultural superiority, which is one of the problems in Nigeria. Interestingly, the response analysis was quite polarised, as shown in the figure below:
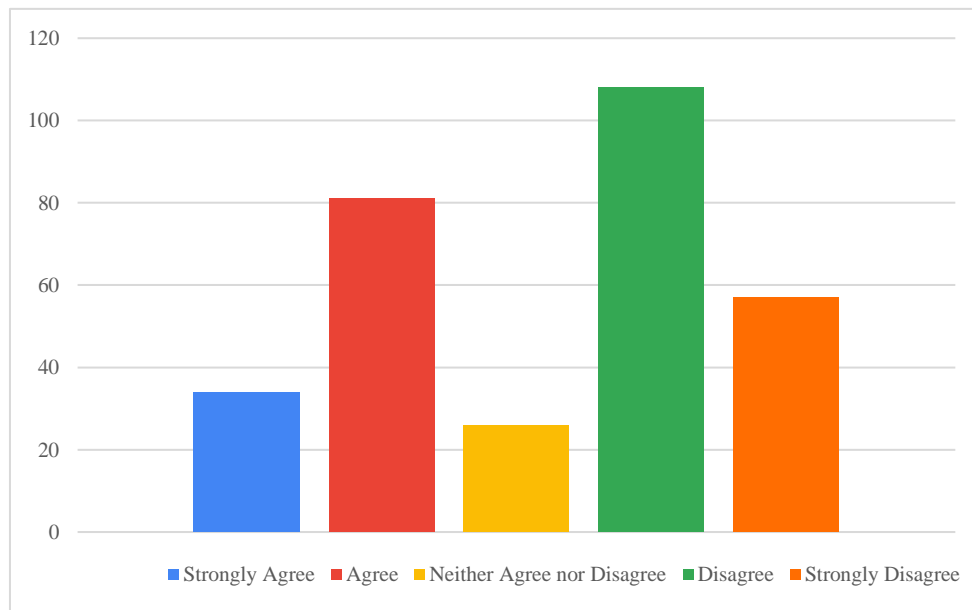
Figure 2: To what extent do you agree with this statement- Every culture is unique and important, but some are superior to others.

Source: Field Work, 2023

From the figure 2 above, 108 and 81 respondents disagreed and agreed with the statement respectively, whilst 57 and 34 respondents strongly disagreed and strongly agreed respectively. Twenty-six respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Implication of Cultural Diversity for Youth Leadership Development I Nigeria

The result reveals that the level of youth awareness of cultural diversity in Nigeria is high. For example, a larger percentage of respondents' responses on questions 2, 3, and 4 aligned with the conceptual understanding of cultural diversity as a reality of the co-existence of human beings with different identities of life (Cong, 2021). Likewise, another scholar also corroborates the assertion that cultural diversity takes cognizance of individual personal identities such as language, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender and age, as mentioned in the questionnaire (Jennifer, 2021).

However, this study also discovered the challenge of cultural superiority, which may be responsible for nepotism, ethnic disparity and cultural divide in Nigeria.

 For instance, about 81 respondents agreed that some cultures are superior to others, while 108 disagreed. It is obvious that the margin between those who agree and those who disagree is so close. This confirms the claim by a people group in Nigeria that they are born to rule. The

implication is that those youths who believe in cultural superiority tend to promote nepotism or ethnic disparity if appointed or elected to leadership positions. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse federation. Therefore, if any youth with a mindset of cultural superiority mindset assumes a leadership position, the country is likely to be polarised.

Consequently, saying one culture is superior to another culture negates the general concept of culture as a way of life, what shaped human life, identity, behaviour, and values (Jason, 2020). It can be considered inhuman to say one's way of life, identity or value in life is superior to others. It will also contradict the principle of existence because human beings are interdependent on one another. No cultural group can survive alone without others. This usually characterised public administration operations, political life and democratic process in Nigeria.

The reality of cultural diversity is crucial to efficient leadership and effective service delivery in Nigeria. Those youths who aspire to occupy leadership positions must recognise the uniqueness of every culture in the country. Nigerian youth should understand that cultural superiority is inhuman and derogatory to human existence. In actual fact, the world is designed in a way that no human being is absolute. We need one another to survive no matter the size or location of any cultural or ethnic group.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from this study that one of the leadership challenges in Nigeria is cultural superiority among the citizens. The politics of ethnicity has promoted nepotism, ethnic disparity and cultural divide in Nigeria. This was evident in the last general election, where cultural affiliation, ethnic identity, and religious orientation determined the voting pattern in Nigeria. The future of Nigeria as a united country lies in recognition, openness and respect for every culture regardless of location or size. There is a need to create more awareness and educate emerging youth leaders on the uniqueness of every culture in Nigeria. If the reality of cultural diversity in Nigeria is ignored or neglected in leadership development for youth, the future of Nigeria's unity is still being determined.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that the government of Nigeria at all levels should recognise every people group, their cultural values and identity. The government should identify the reality of cultural diversity and deal with inequality, discrimination and oppression, which can affect people's appointment into political office and engagement in civil service or public administration.

Political leaders and public administrators should employ a cultural approach to leadership and prioritise cultural diversity in Nigeria. Federal Character Commission (FCC) of Nigeria should ensure that all its policies recognise the worth of every culture and people group in the country.

In addition, since public and private organisations' workforce and working environment in Nigeria comprises people from diverse cultural backgrounds, therefore every citizen should

accept the reality of cultural diversity and consider every culture as unique and important. More so, the public and private sectors should make a policy of cultural inclusion and create a sensitisation platform to educate people on the uniqueness of Nigeria's cultural diversity. Similarly, the leadership of various youth organisations should prioritise cultural diversity in their organisational leadership development training scheme.

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