

ASERS

Journal of Research in Educational Sciences

Bi-annually

Volume XVI,

Issue 1(19), Summer 2025

ISSN: 2068 – 8407

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14505/jres>

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Journal of Research in Educational Sciences
<https://journals.aserspublishing.eu/jres/about>
ISSN 2068 – 8407
Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14505/jres>
Issue DOI:
[https://doi.org/10.14505/jres.v16.1\(19\).00](https://doi.org/10.14505/jres.v16.1(19).00)

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Call for Papers

Volume XVI, Issue 2(20)

Journal of Research in Educational Sciences

The Journal is designed to promote scholars' thought in the field of education with the clear mission to provide an interdisciplinary forum for discussion and debate about education's most vital issues. We intend to publish papers that contribute to the expanding boundaries of knowledge in education and focus on research, theory, current issues and applied practice in this area.

The Editor in Chief would like to invite submissions for the **Volume XVI, Issue 2(20), Winter 2025** of the **Journal of Research in Educational Sciences** (JRES).

The primary aim of the Journal has been and remains the provision of a forum for the dissemination of a variety of international issues, empirical research and other matters of interest to researchers and practitioners in a diversity of subject areas linked to the broad theme of educational sciences.

The aims and scope of the Journal includes, but is not limited to; the following major topics as they relate to the Educational Sciences:

- Educational Psychology;
- Engagement and Community;
- Leadership in Education;
- School Improvement;
- Human Resources in Education;
- Education and Information Science;
- Global strategies in Higher Education;
- Learner's Needs in the 21st Century;
- The Role of Education in The Globalization World;
- Technology-Based Learning.

All papers will first be considered by the Editors for general relevance, originality and significance. If accepted for review, papers will then be subject to double blind peer review.

Deadline for Submission:	25 th November 2025
Expected Publication Date:	December 2025
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Formation of Leadership Skills of Students in the Process of Interdisciplinary Integration

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Article info: Received 28 February 2025; Revised 10 March 2025; Accepted 23 March 2025; Published 30 June 2025. Copyright© 2025 The Author(s). Published by ASERS Publishing 2025. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of CC-BY 4.0 license.

Abstract: Interdisciplinary integration facilitates the development of systemic thinking, creativity, and leadership skills necessary for students to successfully adapt to contemporary challenges. The integration of arts, computer science, and English broadens students' opportunities for self-realization and enhances the effectiveness of the educational process. The relevance of this study is driven by the need for modern education to cultivate leadership skills among students that respond to the challenges of globalization, rapid technological advancements, and dynamic social realities. Leadership skills, such as critical thinking, initiative, communication, and teamwork, are key factors in personal development, socialization, and competitiveness in the modern world. The use of interdisciplinary integration in the educational process acts as an effective tool for creating conditions that foster the comprehensive development of these competencies, ensuring students' holistic worldview and their ability to address complex interdisciplinary tasks. The aim of the article is to explore the potential of integrating arts, computer science, and English in developing leadership skills among students in general secondary education institutions.

The research utilized analysis of scientific publications and regulatory documents addressing interdisciplinary integration and leadership skill development, observation of educational processes, and synthesis of practical experience in project-based learning.

The study substantiates the significance of interdisciplinary integration in forming leadership skills, such as initiative, creativity, critical thinking, communication, and teamwork. An example of the integrated project "Castles and Fortresses of Ukrainian Heritage" is detailed. This project aims to foster civic awareness, social and digital competencies. It combines research into cultural and historical heritage, the creation of informational booklets using digital tools, and presenting results in English.

Keywords: leadership; leadership skills; interdisciplinary integration; project-based learning; arts; computer science; English language.

JEL Classification: A12; A22; I29.

Problem Statement

The formation of students' leadership skills is a crucial component of modern education, aimed at preparing competent and socially active individuals. In the current conditions of globalization and rapid technological advancement, there is a need for leaders capable of effective interaction, critical thinking, and making responsible decisions. Leadership skills not only contribute to students' personal development but also determine their competitiveness in the labor market and adaptability to change.

Interdisciplinary integration is an important pedagogical approach that combines knowledge from various subject areas to solve complex tasks. Applying this approach in the educational process enhances students' motivation and creates conditions for the development of their leadership qualities. Students gain opportunities to take responsibility for implementing joint projects, demonstrate initiative, and work in teams, which are essential components of leadership.

Regulatory documents governing the educational process outline the main directions for integrating interdisciplinary components, developing key competencies, and fostering leadership skills in students. They

emphasize the importance of creating conditions for personal development and active participation in collective activities. The State Standard of Basic and Complete General Secondary Education (On the approval of the State Standard for Basic and Complete General Secondary Education: Resolution of November 23, 2011, No. 1392) specifies requirements for the content of education, interdisciplinary integration, and the development of students' key competencies. This standard focuses on fostering skills necessary for teamwork, initiating new ideas, and taking responsibility - skills inherent to leaders. The "New Ukrainian School" concept (<http://surf.li/vjbuvo>) specifies the strategy for modernizing the educational system, emphasizing student-centered learning, critical thinking development, and the ability to integrate knowledge from various fields. Project-based activities, integrated courses, and methods that combine theory and practice play a crucial role in implementing this strategy. The instructional and methodological recommendations of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine regarding teaching subjects/integrated courses in general secondary education institutions for the 2023/2024 academic year (https://osvita.ua/legislation/Ser_osv/89974/) provide practical advice for teachers on organizing integrated lessons. These recommendations also define how to create an educational environment for student collaboration and use modern technologies to stimulate initiative and responsibility.

Analysis of Recent Studies and Publications

The key studies informing this research include works on creating a favorable learning environment (Kovalchuk 2011a), building effective lessons (Kovalchuk 2011b), forming students' leadership skills (Ermak 2022; Ermak and Kozlova 2023; Baranovska 2015), and interdisciplinary integration (Baranovska 2017; Luchko and Zhytaryuk 2024; Ermak 2023; Kovalchuk *et al.* 2021). These studies provide a theoretical basis for implementing innovative approaches to organizing education aimed at developing well-rounded individuals capable of critical thinking, collaboration, independent knowledge acquisition, and adaptation to rapidly changing conditions. Integrating these approaches into the learning process enables the formation of competencies that meet the challenges of modern education and societal life.

Unresolved Aspects of the General Problem

Despite the current format of scientific research, there is, in our view, a lack of a systematic approach to studying the interdisciplinary integration of arts, computer science, and English, as well as its impact on forming leadership skills among students in general secondary schools. Modern research often examines these disciplines separately, limiting the potential for a comprehensive analysis of their integration. Given the importance of interdisciplinary integration for student development, a deeper analysis of how the synergy of these subjects can foster critical leadership qualities such as creativity, communication, critical thinking, and self-development is needed.

The aim of this study is to determine the potential of interdisciplinary integration of arts, computer science, and English in forming leadership skills among students of general secondary education institutions.

The article will achieve its purpose through the following: by revealing the essence of interdisciplinary integration as a modern pedagogical approach; by describing an example of implementing an integrated project and its role in forming students' leadership skills; and by evaluating the impact of interdisciplinary integration on the development of students' cognitive, social, personal, and civic competencies.

Research Material

The problem of integration at the interdisciplinary level is significant for both theoretical and practical aspects of education. Its relevance stems from new social demands placed on modern general secondary education institutions and changes in science and industry in the context of globalization (Ermak 2023).

Interdisciplinary integration in schools is a modern approach to organizing learning that involves combining knowledge, skills, and competencies from various disciplines to create a holistic view of phenomena or problems. This approach not only facilitates effective material acquisition but also helps students develop systemic thinking, interdisciplinary connections, creative abilities, and leadership qualities essential in contemporary society.

T.M. Zasekina defines the integrative approach as a methodological framework for the educational process, based on the integration of its components (Kovalchuk *et al.* 2021, 77). This highlights the importance of a comprehensive approach to organizing learning. The integrative approach involves the interaction of various components of the educational process, such as the content of learning, methods, and forms of activity organization, ensuring the coherence and harmony of education. This creates conditions for students' development not only within individual subject areas but also fosters interdisciplinary connections. In the context of modern educational demands, integrating different components of learning is essential to create a more flexible and adaptive educational system capable of responding to social, economic, and technological changes. The integrative

approach promotes the development of critical thinking, creativity, and other skills essential for successful socialization and professional activities.

We identified four main groups of students' leadership skills:

Personal: Initiative, time management, adaptability, goal-oriented behavior, responsibility, and stress resilience.

Social: Emotional intelligence, communication, teamwork, social responsibility, and autonomy.

Cognitive: Critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, self-directed learning, and digital and media literacy.

Civic: Civic awareness, volunteering, safety, community participation, and tolerance (Ermak 2022).

O.V. Baranovska examines the issue of interdisciplinary integration in the context of specialized education, particularly its practical orientation and role in reducing the load on the invariant part of the educational content (Baranovska 2015). According to the author, the modern approach to understanding the problem of integration in education is based on key principles such as the fundamentality and integrity of education, as well as systemic and personality-oriented approaches. The integration process is viewed as a strategy for developing a personality with the qualities of a highly educated individual capable of easily adapting to any conditions. The modern resolution of integration problems lies in the ability to study natural and humanities disciplines as components of a unified human culture, emphasizing the value-based aspects of scientific cognition and the use of historical and cultural elements in studying natural sciences (Ermak 2023).

We believe that the effective formation of students' leadership skills is possible through active participation in practical activities that foster the development of these qualities. In this regard, Lyceum No. 157 has implemented an effective system of project-based learning, providing students with real opportunities for the practical application of leadership skills. This system includes various projects in which students actively engage in planning, implementation, and result evaluation, enabling them to develop responsibility, initiative, teamwork, and critical thinking skills (Ermak 2023). In our previous research, we analyzed the implementation of projects using computer modeling within STEM education, which significantly differs from traditional forms of learning. This educational system creates conditions for the development and improvement of students' analytical and creative abilities, providing them with the opportunity to work in teams, enhance independence in acquiring new knowledge, and improve key competencies.

STEM-based project learning also ensures the integration of educational disciplines, equipping students with skills to apply modern technologies and computer modeling in educational and practical contexts.

Such activities contribute to the integration of educational disciplines, fostering students' skills in applying modern technologies and computer modeling in both educational and practical contexts (Kovalchuk *et al.* 2021).

Within the framework of academic freedom, Lyceum No. 157 in the Obolonskyi district of Kyiv implements the educational project "Leadership Based on Values." This project aims to develop leadership skills among general secondary school students and cultivate the value-oriented sociocultural orientation of their personalities. The philosophy of this project lies in fostering students' value-based orientation and their ability for sociocultural self-expression. An innovative aspect of this project work is the flexibility of the educational system, which allows the inclusion of all participants in the educational process, including stakeholders, to create new educational products.

Through the integration of subjects and the application of project-based learning, students and teachers develop creative and critical thinking, enhance digital competencies, and improve communication and self-presentation skills. Moreover, this process broadens students' cognitive skills, enriches their intellectual experience, and facilitates mutual learning across different disciplines.

Specifically, by using self-presentation skills in project work, students engage in socialization, presenting their research that reflects aesthetic taste and collective creativity. This is a crucial step in understanding their achievements and ensuring their preservation and development in the future.

The integration of arts, computer science, and English in the educational process is a powerful pedagogical tool that enables students to develop multifaceted competencies that complement one another, ensuring a comprehensive approach to learning. This integration has several key features that contribute to the development of both creative and technical skills among students while enhancing their capacity for interdisciplinary thinking.

The integration of these subjects provides students with opportunities to demonstrate creativity and an innovative approach to learning. Arts, in its various forms, enables students to express their ideas through graphic, video, and multimedia products. This, in turn, is enriched by knowledge of computer science, as students learn tools for creating and editing digital media. Simultaneously, the use of English as a medium for describing and presenting their work deepens their understanding of terminology and context, expanding their opportunities for communication at the international level.

Integrating arts with computer science and English fosters interdisciplinary skills among students. Creating projects that combine knowledge from different subjects allows students to develop the ability to solve complex problems requiring both creative approaches and technical skills. This may involve using software for creating artistic products as well as writing texts and presentations in English, enabling students not only to master professional tools but also to enhance their linguistic and communicative abilities.

Additionally, the technological aspect of this integration provides students with access to the latest digital technologies, which is an important element of preparation for modern professional demands. For example, students can use digital resources to create multimedia projects that combine art and information technology, while English serves as a means for presenting results on international platforms, fostering their global competencies.

Equally important is the development of communication skills through the use of English to present the results of project-based activities. Students learn to articulate their thoughts and present their achievements both orally and in writing, which is a crucial aspect of academic and professional communication. This contributes to developing students' ability to communicate effectively in various contexts, including international environments.

Integration also fosters the cultural dimension of students' development. Arts not only enable the exploration of cultural characteristics of different nations but also allow students to express their own cultural identity through creative works. Computer science and English provide opportunities for these cultural products to be showcased in a global context, promoting intercultural communication and mutual understanding.

Thus, the integration of arts, computer science, and English creates an effective environment for forming a wide range of competencies encompassing creative, technical, communicative, and cultural aspects. This approach enables students to not only acquire knowledge in individual subject areas but also prepares them for active participation in global society and professional environments.

The organization of project implementation depends on the initiative of the teacher, who acts as the primary coordinator and moderator of project-based activities. The success of the project's implementation is directly related to the teacher's understanding of the importance of developing leadership skills in students. The teacher serves as a mentor and leader in collaborative work, ensuring the effectiveness and productivity of the learning process. As an example, let us consider the project plan for the subject of arts integrated with computer science and English (Kovalchuk, Ermak and Kozlova 2023) (Table 1) and the project roadmap (Table 2).

Table 1. Project Plan Arts, English, Computer Science "Integrated Project with a Leadership Focus". Grade: 11

Project name:	Castles and fortresses of Ukrainian heritage - the inexhaustible history of the legendary people.
Leadership skills:	1. Life balance skills. 2. Communication and organizational skills.
During the project, students will learn to:	Research the cultural and historical heritage of the Ukrainian nation. Foster patriotism for their country. Use digital technologies to create an informational booklet in English and publish it on social media. Create a work plan for the project. Present their project to the community. Develop self-confidence. Defend and justify their opinions. Interact effectively with peers and make collective decisions. Maintain a culture of speech.
Values the teacher will instill in the educational environment:	Leadership. Responsibility. Belief in success through personal efforts. Creativity. Resilience. Enthusiasm. Faith in goodness

Table 2. Integrated Project Roadmap

Teacher	Topic from the State Program	Activity Goal
Arts		

Art Teacher	Arts of the European Cultural Region	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Actualize students' knowledge about the cultural and historical heritage of the Ukrainian nation. 2. Conduct research on the architecture of fortification structures.
Computer Science		
Computer Science Teacher	Preparation and Implementation of an Information System	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organize collaborative work on the document. 2. Select a layout editor. 3. Develop and choose a color scheme and typography. 4. Apply interactive methods in development. 5. Export the finished product.
English language		
English Teacher	Journey "On the Road"	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Actualize students' knowledge about the passive voice. 2. Use motion-related prepositions in speech. 3. Develop skills for precise and artistic retelling.

Hours	Socially Significant Outcome of Creative Activities	Leadership Skills Developed During the Project
Arts		
5	Creation of a tour booklet "Castles and Fortresses of Ukraine" using Ukrainian and English	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication and organizational skills. 2. Civic skills. 3. Art of self-presentation and eloquence. 4. Creativity. 5. Self-learning and self-development.
Computer Science		
10	Creation of a tour booklet "Castles and Fortresses of Ukraine" using Ukrainian and English	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication and organizational skills. 2. Digital skills. 3. Creativity 4. Self-learning and self-development. 5. Strong character skills ("Code of Honor").
English language		
5	Creation of a tour booklet "Castles and Fortresses of Ukraine" using Ukrainian and English	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cognitive flexibility. 2. Self-learning and self-development. 3. Creativity 4. Art of self-presentation and eloquence.

Source: Original author's development

The project described in the roadmap demonstrates a modern approach to developing students' leadership skills through the integration of multiple disciplines. Its structure is aimed at fostering comprehensive competencies by combining knowledge from arts, computer science, and English. This approach ensures the effective implementation of interdisciplinary integration, allowing students to form a holistic perception of the educational process.

One of the key advantages of the project is its focus on developing communication and organizational skills necessary for leaders. Students are engaged in collaboration, which promotes teamwork, joint decision-making, and responsible task execution. Particular attention is paid to public self-presentation skills, formed through presenting project results to an audience.

The use of digital technologies plays a crucial role in the project's implementation. Students master tools for creating informational materials, which enhances their creativity, digital literacy, and ability to work with modern communication tools. This activity also boosts students' self-confidence and motivates further self-development.

The project fosters civic awareness, as its main theme involves researching Ukraine's cultural and historical heritage. This allows students to appreciate the significance of their identity and strengthen their patriotic stance. The combination of creative and research components encourages students to actively explore the world, engage in critical thinking, and express themselves creatively.

Thus, project-based learning is an innovative educational tool that enables the harmonious integration of subjects, develops key leadership skills, and shapes the value orientations of modern youth.

The integration of arts into the educational process opens up broad opportunities for students and teachers to showcase their work through various formats such as blogs, guides, worksheets, and media resources. This approach enhances the research, cognitive, and cultural aspects of the educational process participants, allowing them to interact more deeply with the material and develop critical and creative thinking. In particular, the use of diverse media formats facilitates the integration of modern technologies into learning, an essential element in preparing students for sociocultural and professional challenges.

The result of the project activity is the creation of the booklet "Castles and Fortresses of Ukraine" (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Examples of Booklets "Castles and Fortresses of Ukraine"



Projects can be accessed via the following link: Google Drive.

During the project, a layout for the workbook "Castles of Ukraine" was developed (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Layout of the Workbook "Castles of Ukraine"



Interdisciplinary integration significantly enhances educational opportunities for students and teachers, encouraging active participation in various project initiatives. Through the implementation of such projects, students not only gain practical experience in knowledge sharing among peers but also actively promote the results of their own research. This approach ensures effective use of digital, communicative, and personal competencies, creating conditions for engaging a broader audience in the educational process, including stakeholders at various levels, thereby strengthening the integrative and educational aspects of learning.

Conclusions

The research has established that developing students' leadership skills is a key task of modern education, gaining particular importance in the face of global challenges. An educational process built on interdisciplinary integration fosters the development of key competencies necessary for students to adapt successfully to a rapidly changing world. Interdisciplinary integration, particularly involving arts, computer science, and English, creates conditions for combining knowledge from various disciplines, stimulating the development of cognitive, social, personal, and civic

skills. Arts, as an integrative component, not only fosters students' aesthetic taste and spirituality but also contributes to developing leadership qualities such as creativity, critical thinking, communication, and teamwork. Developing students' leadership skills through interdisciplinary integration not only expands their opportunities but also contributes to shaping a socio-cultural personality capable of self-realization, adaptation, and active participation in societal life. This underscores the necessity of further refining methods and technologies of interdisciplinary integration in the educational process.

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[https://doi.org/10.14505/jres.v16.1\(19\).02](https://doi.org/10.14505/jres.v16.1(19).02)

Workplace Diversity Education as a Catalyst for Employee Engagement and Performance

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Article info: Received 7 January 2025; Revised 19 January 2025; Accepted 10 February 2025; Published 30 June 2025. Copyright© 2025 The Author(s). Published by ASERS Publishing 2025. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of CC-BY 4.0 license.

Abstract: This study is intended to explore workplace diversity education as a driver of employee engagement and performance in selected universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. During times of fast-growing higher education that need to change with regard to globalization and demographic shifts, diversity education can be used as a strategic lever to create an enabling work environment that fosters employees' commitment and productivity. This research had a descriptive survey design targeting academic staff across many universities. In order to attain these data, this study has adopted a structured questionnaire from stratified random samples. Quantitative data were analyzed to get the descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression analysis; whereas thematic analysis was done in case of qualitative data. The findings indicated a positive and significant relationship between workplace diversity education and employee engagement, such that the more inclusive the training programs, the higher the job involvement, affective commitment, and discretionary effort. Diversity education also improved employee performance by enhancing teaching effectiveness, research output, and professional collaboration.

Keywords: workplace diversity education; employee engagement; academic staff performance; universities; inclusion.

JEL Classification: I20; A12; M14.

Introduction

The need for workplace diversity has been brought to the centre of concern, especially in this dynamic and globalized work environment, where organizations are striving for inclusivity to improve employee outcomes (Makudza, Muchongwe and Dangaiso 2020). Workplace diversity education, which involves structured training programs aimed at enhancing awareness, understanding, and valuing of the diverse workforce, has emerged as a critical strategy for enhancing engagement and performance at work. It equips the employees with the knowledge and ability to conduct themselves appropriately in various work environments; hence, making the workplace more inclusive and collaborative, where productivity and innovation are stimulated.

Employee engagement directly relates to workplace diversity education, as it refers to the extent of enthusiasm and commitment a worker has in executing their job. When employees perceive that a given organization embraces diversity and works toward creating an atmosphere of inclusion, they are more likely to act with a sense of belonging, motivation, and job satisfaction (Tortia *et al.* 2022). Diversity education programs help reduce unconscious bias, foster mutual respect, and improve interpersonal relationships among employees factors contributing to higher engagement levels. Such work teams tend to be more productive, usually with lower turnover intentions and have a higher willingness to give their best efforts toward organizational success.

Diversity education can directly impact employee performance in the workplace by strengthening its adaptability, teamwork, and problem-solving capabilities (Maiwada and Oshionebo 2024). Workforce diversity suggests different perspectives, experiences, and skills that, if well managed through education and training, could be translated into better decision-making and innovation. Workers who receive diversity education can interact and work across cultural, generational, and demographic divides more effectively to achieve better performance for themselves and the organization (Köllen 2019). Further, diversity education builds a working environment where all employees feel appreciated and respected; hence, reducing workplace conflicts and increasing performance efficiency.

This study contributes to the discourse of workplace diversity education, highlighting that it acts as a catalyst that enhances employee performance and engagement. While much scholarship has been engaged in understanding the management of workplace diversity and the dynamics it unleashes, hardly any have directed attention to its educational dimension-how structured diversity training programs shape perception, behaviours and commitment towards organizational goals among employees. The findings of this research shed new light on how knowledge acquisition and awareness create an enabling work environment for higher engagement and better performance with a focus on workplace diversity education. The timeliness of this research is further emphasized by the fact that organizations in modern society are grappling increasingly with a diverse workforce, hence businesses and institutions have a pressing reason to be more proactive in adopting educational strategies that will guarantee inclusivity and maximise human capital potential.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Context of Workplace Diversity Education

Workplace diversity education can be defined as formalized learning processes for improving the awareness, understanding, and skills of employees to deal with and embrace workplace diversity. In diversity education, according to (Zhuwao *et al.* 2019a) programs are designed to build inclusive behaviours, eliminate unconscious biases, and help employees learn the necessary skills for interacting effectively in diverse environments. Such training involves cultural competency, anti-discrimination policies, and inclusive leadership, which makes the workplace cohesive and collaborative. With organizations increasingly appreciating diversity in driving innovation, creativity, and competitive advantage, the relevance of workplace diversity education is growing more than ever (Luu 2018).

Diversity education can be defined in the workplace as programmed activities improving knowledge, sensitivity, and skills related to workplace diversity and inclusiveness (Köllen 2019). The training sessions and workshops, along with policy mechanisms and informal learning, constitute some of the necessary elements that foster an enabling work culture. According to Roberson (2019), workplace diversity education should act as a strategic method or tool for reducing bias in increasing cultural competence and treating all employees justly from different backgrounds. The nature of the working population has evolved and grown more demographically diverse, demanding continuous learning to optimize diverse human capital.

1.2 History of Workplace Diversity Education: Evolution and Policy Frameworks

The concept of workplace diversity education has evolved through changes in demographics, legislation, and organizational commitments to corporate social responsibility. In the United States, diversity education came to prominence in the mid-20th century following civil rights movements and anti-discrimination laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The world over, similar legislative frameworks exist, like the Equality Act 2010 in the United Kingdom and Nigeria's Federal Character Principle, which seeks to ensure fair representation of different ethnic groups in public sector employment (Edewor, 2021). These legal instruments provide a framework for diversity education in that organizations have to adopt policies for equal opportunity and inclusion.

Diversity education has expanded beyond compliance-driven approaches to proactive strategies that align with business objectives. Many multinational corporations now integrate diversity education into leadership development, talent management, and corporate training programs to enhance workforce engagement and innovation (Sabharwal 2014). This shift underscores the recognition that diversity education is not merely a regulatory obligation but a strategic imperative for sustainable business success.

1.3 Workplace Diversity Education and Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is a very important facilitator of organizational performance, and diversity education has emerged as an influential means of nurturing a corporate culture that contributes to enhancing employee engagement. In this respect, the research of Nishii (2013) showed that employees who felt that their companies

were indeed serious about their stance on diversity and inclusion expressed a higher level of engagement and satisfaction with their jobs. Diversity education may, therefore, have a paramount effect on enhancing this process, encouraging psychological safety, reducing work discrimination, and facilitating open discourses among various sets of different employee backgrounds. Further, diversity education by the organization makes individuals feel valued and respected, reinforcing an emotional bond between employees and their organizations as stated by (Shore, Cleveland, and Sanchez 2018). This perceived better fit may heighten their motivation to give rise to extra-role engagement or discretionary effort at work.

1.4 Workplace Diversity Education and Employee Performance

The correlation of workplace diversity education with employees' performance is one of the major issues in human resource management literature (Olu-Ogunleye *et al.* 2023). Diversity education enhances interpersonal, cultural awareness, and adaptability skills that make employees better performers. Arts *et al.* (2023) present the case that providing employees with competencies to perform in diverse environments can make employees more collaborative and innovative, leading to better performance. Besides, Ely and Thomas in 2020 argued that such education reduces friction and misunderstandings between people based on their diversity, thus offering a friendly work environment and therefore increasing the output of the workers in the organization. Workers who obtain training on embracing diversity can develop their growth mindset with problem-solving capacities and hence also work effectively among diverse teams as a way to enhance job performance (Sathyanarayana, Harsha, and Sandhya 2024).

2. Empirical Review

Empirical studies strongly support the fact that workplace diversity education has a positive influence on employee engagement and performance. Organizations with structured diversity education programs reported higher employee engagement scores and lower turnover rates (Uhuru, Ehule, and Ned 2025). Similarly, Souza, (2024) showed that teams with diversity training interventions exhibited improved problem-solving capabilities and increased productivity. On the other hand, diversity education has been shown, in a meta-analysis by Adeleye *et al.* (2019); Okilo *et al.* (2023) to positively affect attitudes, behaviours, and knowledge retention of employees; all of these further contribute toward better workplace performance. These establish, in due measure, the pragmatic relevance of diversity education as a strategic means toward an inclusive and high-performance workforce.

3. Theoretical Framework

Several theoretical frameworks support the linkage between workplace diversity education, employee engagement, and performance. According to the Social Learning Theory by Bandura, (1986), people learn behaviours, attitudes, and competencies through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. Workplace diversity education operates within this framework by providing employees with models of inclusive behaviour and reinforcing positive interactions through training and development programs.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) explains how an individual's self-concept and self-esteem are shaped by their affiliation with social groups (Kiran 2023). According to this theory, people categorize themselves into various groups based on attributes such as gender, ethnicity, occupation, or organizational affiliation. These group memberships significantly contribute to an individual's sense of identity, influencing their attitudes, behaviours, and interactions with others. Organizational settings show that workers often identify themselves with either certain teams, departments, or the entire organization itself (Mothe and Nguyen-Thi 2021). Such identifications build their allegiance and solidarity in their groups; this occasionally leads to what is termed an in-group favouritism phenomenon whereby people show partiality toward members of their group in comparison with other groups. Employees may feel a stronger bond and allegiance to their immediate team compared to colleagues in other departments.

SIT further posits that group affiliations play a crucial role in shaping how individuals perceive themselves and others, thereby influencing attitudes, behaviours, and workplace performance (Bharadwaj 2023). The theory also provides insight into intergroup dynamics, including the development of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Strong identification with a particular group often leads individuals to internalize the group's norms and values, which can sometimes result in stereotypical perceptions of others. Employees from one department may develop stereotypes about colleagues in another department, attributing differences in work style or personality to group characteristics (Owusu, Gregar, and Ntsiful 2021).

4. Materials and Methods

The targeted population comprised academic staff derived from the selected universities in Ondo State. A multistage sampling technique was adopted to derive a representative sample across various disciplines and faculties. First, a purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of universities based on such factors as institutional diversity policies and their commitment to workplace diversity education. In the stratification, random sampling included a selection based on participants' academic ranks, namely professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, and assistant lecturers, who would be represented in proportion. The sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula for determining sample size among large populations, and a total of 336 respondents were surveyed.

It was a structured questionnaire supported by semi-structured interviews to ensure in-depth insights into the issues. The sections of the questionnaire are bio-data, workplace diversity education initiatives, employee engagement level, and perceived performance outcomes. The research instrument used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to measure the perceptions of the respondents. A pilot study was done on the questionnaire for validity and reliability among 30 academic staff in a university that did not form part of the main study.

Data collection lasted for a period of six weeks. The questionnaires were administered using both physical copies and electronic versions through Google Forms to ensure high returns. Ethical approval was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee before the conduct of this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, with assurance of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Anonymity was maintained throughout the study, and participants had the right to withdraw at any stage without consequences.

The data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, SPSS, version 26 Descriptive statistics were performed in summarizing data on mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions. Regarding workplace diversity education with employee engagement and performance, Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analyses were performed as inferential statistical tests.

5. Research Methodology

For this study, quantitative methods were used to collect data from employees of selected universities in Ondo state. The quantitative data collected from the surveys will then be analysed using statistical techniques such as correlation analysis and regression analysis (Kumasey 2014).

The Taro Yamane Formula was used in the sample size determination.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where n represents the sample size, N is the total population, e is the error term depending on the confidence level, and P = 0.05 is assumed for the equation.

If n = Sample Size

N = 2,102

e = 5% or 0.05

CL = 95%

Therefore, n = 336 employees

6. Research Results

Table 1.1. Pearson Correlations on the relationship between workplace diversity and employee performance

		Diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences	Promotion diversity inclusion	of and	Employee performance
Diversity backgrounds, perspectives and experiences	Pearson Correlation	1		.676**	.629**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	196.278		125.909	115.069
	N	331		331	331
Promotion of diversity and inclusion	Pearson Correlation	.676**	1		.808**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	125.909		176.943	140.477

	Diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences	Promotion diversity inclusion	of and	Employee performance
	N	331	331	331
Employee performance	Pearson Correlation	.629**	.808**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	115.069	140.477	170.767
	N	331	331	331

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 and 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher’s survey, 2025

Table 1.2. Regression Model Summary on the critical factors that contribute to enhancing workplace diversity education and employee performance

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2		
1	.852 ^a	.727	.723	.320	.727	172.842	5	325	.000	2.208

a. Predictors: (Constant), Employee resource groups or diversity councils; Clear performance expectations and goals; Training and education programs, Leadership commitment to diversity and inclusion; Recognition and rewards for good performance.
 b. Dependent Variable: Workplace diversity and employee performance.

Source: Researcher’s survey, 2025

6. Discussions

This study found that workplace diversity is clear to employees, workplace diversity is important for fostering creativity and innovation, ethnic and racial diversity is valued and promoted in my workplace and so on. The outcomes of this study are consistent with the research conducted by (Héliot *et al.* 2020), which defines workplace diversity as the variations in characteristics among the employees of a business. These variations can stem from factors such as linguistics, race, ethnicity, ancestry, culture, education, geographic area, religion, gender, marital status, age, physical ability, experience, and more. Workplace diversity refers to the inclusion of individuals with different characteristics such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as varying talents and limits (Sundari 2018). The study’s understanding of diversity aligns with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), which suggests that individuals develop a sense of belonging and derive positive self-esteem from identifying with social groups that share characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and educational background. Consequently, this has an impact on their attitudes, habits, and performance inside the organisation (Sahabuddin *et al.* 2023). However, (Orga and Ogbo, 2012) state that workforce diversity poses several issues for organisations, including interpersonal conflicts, personal prejudices, resistance to change, segment-based communication networks, conflicts between individual and group interests, group cohesiveness, and lobbying. (Chaarani, Skaf and Khalife, 2022) found that inadequate management of workplace diversity might lead to confusion and conflict among employees and management. According to (Shaban 2016), businesses that embrace diversity as a means of fostering innovation, growth, and development are more inclined to provide behavioural support and assist its implementation with increased emphasis, perseverance, and dedication.

Additionally, It was discovered that the work environment, training and development opportunities, leadership and management practices, employee motivation and engagement, performance evaluation and recognition of employees are all contributors to improved employee performance. A study conducted by (Jaiswal and Arun, 2021) yielded a similar outcome, revealing that training and development is an active process that induces a transformation in an individual's behaviour, attitude, knowledge, and skills, consequently enhancing employee performance. The studies conducted by (Hee *et al.* 2019) and (Rus and Băban, 2019) support the findings of this study, which indicate that employee performance refers to the actions and achievements of employees as they fulfil their assigned responsibilities following organisational policies, standards, and expectations. This performance is influenced by various factors, including training and development, employee motivation, effective communication, performance evaluation, rewards, and employee recognition (Zhuwao *et al.* 2019b). This finding aligns with the research conducted by (Idowu and Olu-Ogunleye, 2024) which demonstrated that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play a substantial role in enhancing employee performance. (Smith and Bititci, 2017) conducted

a study in the UK banking business, which revealed that employee engagement had a substantial and beneficial influence on employee performance. Nevertheless, a comprehensive worldwide study indicates that unengaged individuals harm both the company and the nation (Hambler 2016). Managers have acknowledged the importance of employee performance in guaranteeing the survival and expansion of a business (Armstrong and Taylor 2020).

This study found that there is a significant relationship between workplace diversity and employee performance in the context of Nigerian Universities. The results of this study support the findings of (Rizwan *et al.* 2016) regarding the influence of workplace diversity on employee performance. The study found that diversity in terms of educational background, ethnicity, age, and gender has a significant and positive impact on employee performance. Other studies have supported the conclusions of this study and have discovered a favourable correlation between workforce diversity and employee performance (Faloye and Owoeye 2019; Karwal and Tandon 2021; Pal and Jain 2021). These studies have indicated that diversity enhances employee performance by fostering creativity, innovation, and more effective decision-making processes. When individuals with varied backgrounds collaborate, they contribute distinct perspectives, talents, and experiences, improving problem-solving capabilities and ultimately enhancing organisational success (Zhuwao *et al.* 2019b). In a study conducted by (Adil *et al.* 2019) in Jordan's hotel business, a favourable correlation was discovered between workforce diversity and job effectiveness. (Kundu and Mor, 2017) conducted a study in the Indian IT sector to assess the influence of a diversified workforce on the perceived performance of businesses. The study revealed that the perceived performance of businesses is enhanced by the notion of gender-based workforce diversity. However, (Joseph and Selvaraj, 2015) conducted a study where they measured workforce diversity using ethnicity, gender, and age. Their findings indicated that ethnicity, gender, and age had no significant impact on employees' performance. If workforce diversity is not effectively managed, it is apparent that it will lead to unfavourable consequences. However, (Inegbedion *et al.* 2020a) proposed contradictory findings, suggesting that groups with diverse members perform worse than groups with members that have commonalities.

Conclusions and Further Research

The findings of the study have clearly established that workplace diversity is central to creativity, innovation, and performance of employees in Nigerian Universities. Most respondents agreed to an understanding of workplace diversity and how such a concept was important for the realization of organizational objectives. They agreed upon these as well: that such initiatives promoting workplace diversity, like providing gender representation and valuing ethnic and racial inclusion, are well implemented in the organization. This shows that the university is committed to making the workplace an inclusive place where every employee is valued and respected regardless of their background.

Also, there was support from the work environment, as well as leadership and management best practices. Respondents strongly recommended constant feedback with a view to regular performance evaluations and recognition that this helps retain employees in universities who are highly motivated and fully committed to work.

The study also found a positive and significant relationship between workplace diversity and employee performance. It means that diversity and inclusion have a direct impact on organizational outcomes: it creates an atmosphere of cooperation, innovation, and engagement of employees. Critical drivers for such a relationship were employee resource groups, leadership commitment to diversity, and recognizing individual contributions. Overall, the study concludes that workplace diversity is not only a social responsibility but also a strategic advantage that positively impacts employee performance. The findings show that university diversity and inclusion initiatives are effective and contribute significantly to its organizational success. These results point to the need for further investment in diversity programs and leadership commitment to foster a dynamic, inclusive, and high-performing workforce.

Acknowledgements:

Keep acknowledgements brief, naming those who helped with your research; contributors, or suppliers who provided free materials. You should also disclose any financial or other substantive conflict of interest that could be seen to influence your results or interpretations.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement:

Itunu Olu-Ogunleye: formal writing, conceptualization, literature review, methodology and original draft.

Babatunde Akanji: supervision, editing and review.

Declaration of Competing Interest:

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of Use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies:

The authors declare that they have not used generative AI (a type of artificial intelligence technology that can produce various types of content including text, imagery, audio and synthetic data. Examples include ChatGPT, NovelAI, Jasper AI, Rytr AI, DALL-E, etc) and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process before submission, but only to improve the language and readability of their paper and with the appropriate disclosure.

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[https://doi.org/10.14505/jres.v16.1\(19\).03](https://doi.org/10.14505/jres.v16.1(19).03)

Enhancing Academic Mobility and Innovation in Sierra Leone's Higher Education: A National Policy Proposal for Diversified Tuition Waivers across Universities

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Article info: Received 23 May 2025; Received in revised form 6 June 2025; Accepted 17 June 2025; Published 30 June 2025. Copyright© 2025 The Author(s). Published by ASERS Publishing 2025. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of CC-BY 4.0 license.

Abstract: This article critically examines the current practice of tuition waivers for academic staff pursuing higher degrees within their home institutions in Sierra Leone's universities. While commendable efforts by university leadership, such as the University of Sierra Leone's Vice Chancellor's call for staff to seek postgraduate and doctoral studies beyond their institutions, aim to foster academic diversity and innovation, the existing tuition waiver policies remain institution-bound. This paper argues for a transformative policy reform to diversify and extend tuition waivers across universities nationally, enabling academic staff to study at any accredited institution within Sierra Leone with financial support. Such a policy would mitigate academic inbreeding, promote cross-institutional collaboration, and enhance the overall quality and global competitiveness of Sierra Leone's higher education system. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of academic mobility and institutional innovation, this policy article outlines the rationale, potential benefits, implementation challenges, and strategic recommendations for stakeholders in Sierra Leone's higher education sector.

Keywords: academic mobility; tuition waiver; academic inbreeding; higher education policy; staff development; postgraduate studies; Sierra Leone universities; academic innovation; cross-institutional collaboration.

JEL Classification: I23; I28; I22; H52; O15; J24.

Introduction

This study contributes a novel policy perspective on enhancing academic mobility through diversified tuition waivers in Sierra Leone's higher education system—a topic largely underexplored in national education policy discourse. By integrating global theoretical models with context-specific policy challenges, the article offers a strategic, locally grounded solution to mitigate academic inbreeding and foster institutional innovation. It is the first national-level proposal to advocate for a system-wide tuition waiver reciprocity mechanism, thereby setting a precedent for sustainable reforms aligned with both the Universities Act No. 5 (2021) and the broader goals of equity and excellence in African higher education.

Globally, higher education systems recognize academic mobility and cross-institutional collaboration as critical drivers of innovation, research excellence, and institutional growth (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Teichler, 2015). Many countries have implemented policies that facilitate academic staff pursuing advanced degrees across institutions, often supported by inter-university tuition waiver agreements or national scholarship schemes, to mitigate academic inbreeding and foster diverse intellectual environments (Marginson, 2016; Horta & Santos, 2016). For example, consortium models in the United States and Europe enable faculty and students to access courses and degrees beyond their home institutions, enhancing knowledge exchange and institutional competitiveness (Teichler, 2015).

In contrast, Sierra Leone's higher education sector grapples with chronic underfunding and structural challenges that constrain its capacity to deliver quality education and foster academic innovation. Historically, education expenditure in Sierra Leone has been insufficient to provide quality education to all school-age children, with higher education institutions facing severe financial constraints due to delayed government subsidies and

students' inability to pay fees on time (World Bank, 2023; Duramany-Lakkoh, 2015). The University of Sierra Leone (USL) Vice Chancellor, Professor Aiah R. Lebbie, recently urged academic staff to pursue advanced degrees beyond their home institutions to mitigate academic inbreeding and stimulate innovation, as emphasized in an official notice reported by SierraLoaded on April 15, 2025. This notice highlights concerns that relying solely on internal academic training could affect future growth and innovation at USL.

While this vision is laudable, it confronts practical barriers, notably the institution-bound nature of tuition waiver policies that limit staff's financial access to external universities. This policy limitation restricts academic mobility and cross-institutional collaboration, which are critical for enhancing research quality and teaching innovation (Jalloh, 2024). This article argues for a transformative policy reform: diversifying and extending tuition waivers across Sierra Leone's universities to enable academic staff to study at any accredited national institution with financial support. Such a policy aligns with national development goals, addresses systemic funding challenges, and promotes academic excellence through cross-institutional mobility (Duramany-Lakkoh, 2015; Jalloh, 2024).

1. Theoretical Framework

Academic mobility is widely recognized as a cornerstone of institutional innovation, knowledge exchange, and global competitiveness in higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Teichler, 2015). The theoretical foundation for this policy proposal draws on several key models and concepts:

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Marginson's Model of Academic Capital Mobility

Simon Marginson's (2016) model of "academic capital mobility" posits that the movement of academic staff and students across institutional and national boundaries is fundamental to the creation, circulation, and enhancement of knowledge. According to Marginson, academic mobility not only enriches individual capabilities but also strengthens institutional networks and the overall research ecosystem. Marginson argues that systems encouraging mobility-through mechanisms such as tuition waivers, scholarships, and inter-institutional agreements-enable universities to access diverse intellectual resources, promote innovation, and avoid the pitfalls of academic inbreeding.

Theories of Academic Inbreeding and Innovation

Horta and Santos (2016) highlight the risks of academic inbreeding, a phenomenon where staff obtain all their qualifications from a single institution, leading to intellectual stagnation and reduced research productivity. Their work demonstrates that academic inbreeding limits exposure to new ideas, methodologies, and collaborative opportunities, ultimately undermining institutional growth and innovation. This is particularly relevant in contexts like Sierra Leone, where limited mobility options exacerbate these risks.

Internationalization and Cross-Institutional Collaboration

Altbach and Knight (2007) and Teichler (2015) emphasize the importance of internationalization and cross-institutional collaboration in higher education. They argue that policies facilitating academic mobility-such as tuition waiver reciprocity and collaborative degree programs-are essential for fostering diverse academic environments, enhancing research quality, and building robust institutional partnerships. These frameworks are evident in higher education consortia in the United States and Europe, where faculty and students routinely benefit from inter-institutional agreements that support mobility and knowledge sharing.

Application to the Sierra Leone Context

Applying these theoretical perspectives to Sierra Leone, the current institution-bound tuition waiver policies restrict the flow of academic capital and limit the potential for innovation and collaboration. By diversifying and extending tuition waivers across universities, Sierra Leone can operationalize these global best practices, promote academic mobility, and build a more dynamic and innovative higher education system.

2. The Funding Context of Higher Education in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's public universities operate under significant financial constraints. As public entities, they are mandated by law to generate revenue through research, consultancies, and tuition fees; however, government

subsidies are often delayed and insufficient to meet operational costs (International Journal of Education, Learning and Development, 2015). The University of Sierra Leone alone serves nearly 20,000 students, many reliant on government support, yet government funding falls short of covering the real costs of higher education (Guerrero & Urbano, 2014). This funding gap affects the universities' ability to offer comprehensive staff development programs, including tuition waivers for postgraduate studies.

The economic realities of Sierra Leone-characterized by low per capita income and high unemployment-render it difficult for students and staff to afford tuition fees without subsidies or financial aid (Kamara & Momoh, 2023). Consequently, the sustainability of higher education financing requires innovative approaches that balance cost-sharing with equitable access to learning opportunities.

Academic Mobility and Tuition Waivers: Theoretical and Practical Imperatives

Academic mobility is a well-established driver of institutional innovation and knowledge exchange. Exposure to diverse academic environments enhances research quality, pedagogical approaches, and institutional networks (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Conversely, academic inbreeding-where staff obtains all qualifications internally-has been linked to intellectual stagnation and diminished research productivity (Horta & Santos, 2016).

Tuition waiver policies are critical enablers of academic mobility. In many higher education systems, inter-institutional tuition waiver reciprocity facilitates staff development across institutions, promoting collaboration and innovation (Marginson, 2016). Sierra Leone's current practice, however, restricts tuition waivers to staff studying within their employing university, limiting the potential for cross-institutional learning and innovation.

Policy Rationale: Why Diversify and Extend Tuition Waivers?

Mitigating Academic Inbreeding

Restricting tuition waivers to internal study perpetuates academic inbreeding, which undermines institutional growth and innovation. Diversified tuition waivers would encourage staff to pursue degrees at other universities, exposing them to varied curricula, research cultures, and academic networks (Teichler, 2015).

Promoting Inter-University Collaboration

Cross-institutional tuition waivers incentivize partnerships and resource sharing among universities, fostering a collaborative national academic ecosystem. This aligns with Sierra Leone's Universities Act No. 5 (2021), which mandates university leadership to promote academic excellence and innovation.

Enhancing Research Quality and Innovation

Diverse academic experiences broaden scholarly perspectives, leading to innovative research outputs and improved teaching practices. This is crucial for Sierra Leone, where research output remains low despite increasing undergraduate enrollment (Guerrero & Urbano, 2014).

Addressing Equity and Staff Development

A national tuition waiver policy would ensure equitable access to professional development opportunities across all universities, regardless of institutional affiliation or geographic location. This is essential in a country where economic constraints limit staff's ability to self-finance advanced studies (Kamara & Momoh, 2023).

3. Methodology for Policy Implementation

This policy article recommends a multi-phase approach:

Stakeholder Engagement: Convene representatives from universities, the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, and staff unions to co-design the tuition waiver framework.

Policy Design: Develop standardized criteria for eligibility, waiver amounts, and administrative procedures to ensure transparency and accountability.

Inter-Institutional Agreements: Formalize memoranda of understanding among universities to recognize and honor tuition waivers reciprocally.

Pilot Program: Implement a pilot involving select universities to refine processes and assess impact.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish metrics to evaluate academic mobility rates, research outputs, and staff satisfaction.

4. Implementation Challenges and Strategic Recommendations

Funding Constraints

Given Sierra Leone's limited higher education funding-exacerbated by delayed government subsidies and insufficient tuition revenue (International Journal of Education, Learning and Development, 2015)-expanding tuition waivers requires sustainable financing models. Cost-sharing mechanisms, such as income-contingent loans adapted to the local context, could complement tuition waivers (Kamara & Momoh, 2023).

Administrative Coordination

Effective implementation demands coordination among universities and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education to establish standardized eligibility criteria, waiver amounts, and administrative procedures. Formal inter-institutional agreements would ensure mutual recognition and accountability.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Robust monitoring systems should track academic mobility, research outputs, and staff satisfaction to assess the policy's impact and inform iterative improvements.

Conclusion

Diversifying and extending tuition waivers across Sierra Leone's universities represents a strategic policy innovation with the potential to transform the country's higher education landscape. By enabling academic staff to access financial support for study at any accredited national institution, Sierra Leone can mitigate academic inbreeding, foster inter-university collaboration, and enhance research quality and innovation. This policy aligns with the Universities Act No. 5 (2021) and addresses the pressing financial and developmental challenges confronting the sector. To realize this vision, stakeholders must collaborate to design sustainable funding mechanisms, harmonize administrative processes, and commit to continuous evaluation. Such a reform would not only empower academic staff but also position Sierra Leone's universities for greater national and global competitiveness.

Acknowledgments:

The author acknowledges the leadership of Professor Aiah R. Lebbie and the academic community of Sierra Leone for inspiring this policy discourse.

Declaration of Competing Interest:

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper

Declaration of Use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies:

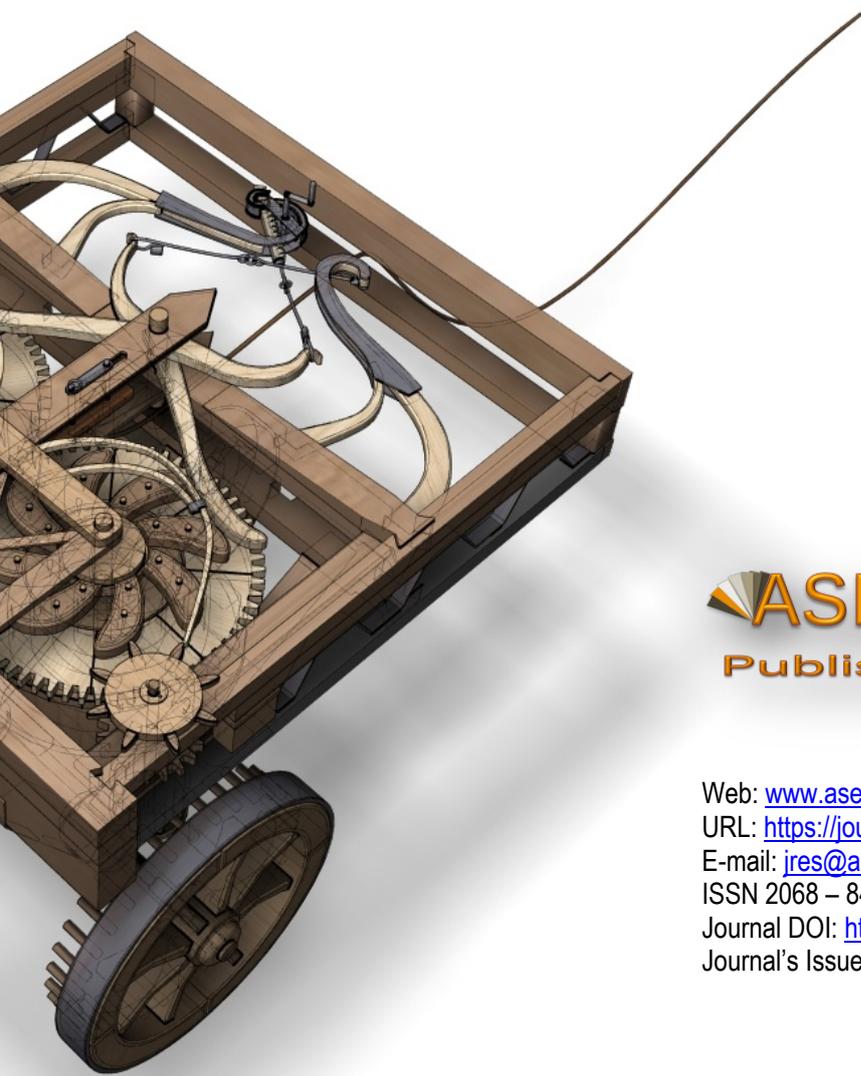
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ISSN 2068 – 8407

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14505/jres>

Journal's Issue DOI: [https://doi.org/10.14505/jres.v16.1\(19\).00](https://doi.org/10.14505/jres.v16.1(19).00)