

**Perceived environment of ethnic diversity as a determinant of organisational identification in the public sector: A mediation-moderation analysis.**

**Word count- 7958 (all text including references and appendices)**

## **Abstract**

**Purpose-** As public sector managers implement the policy of employing people that broadly reflects the social make up of a local society, there is need to ensure that employees have a positive perception of ethnic diversity. Perceived environment of ethnic diversity (PEED) is conceptualised as employees' view of how they are treated at work irrespective of where they come from. This study investigates the relationship between PEED and organisational identification (OID).

**Method-** Data was collected by means of a survey of 908 employees from four public sector organisations in a state in Nigeria. Regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses.

**Findings-** Findings showed that OID may be fostered among multi-ethnic employees through the following framework; first, that PEED had a direct relationship with OID and support was found for which was explained by the mediating role of co-worker social support (CWSS). Second, that the effect of CWSS mediation was moderated by employees' ethnic self-identification (ESI) such that those with strong ESI experienced lower OID.

**Practical implications-** As employee compositions in organisations increase in diversity, CWSS is presented in this study as a veritable measure for managers to foster OID.

**Originality/value-** This study is novel as it is one of the first to examine the mechanisms for linking PEED to OID through mediating effect of CWSS at different levels of ESI. Other contributions are discussed in detail in the study.

## Keywords

Co-worker social support, Ethnic self-identification, Nigeria, Organisational identification, Perceived environment of ethnic diversity

## **Introduction**

Diversity management policies are becoming a regular feature of organisational HR policy frameworks. Their intent typically signals an organisational desire to foster harmony between different social groups and engender respect for individual differences, lessen tensions between groups, and bolster disadvantaged minorities (Bae, Sabharwal, Smith, and Berman, 2017; Zanoni and Janssens, 2007). In the context of ethnicity however, equal treatment of diverse groups within the organisation boundaries may differ from dynamics outside the organisation, and so may profoundly challenge an individual's sense of identity within the organisation. Belonging within organisational boundaries remains underexplored (Cole, 2009; Cole et al. 2016) and this study seeks to investigate the complex mechanisms through which employees' experience ethnic diversity in their organisation may influence their sense of identification with the organisation. The importance of this research is premised on concerns expressed by scholars that increasing representation of different ethnic groups in the workplace may have unintended consequences and may create new forms of exclusion and stereotypes (Dahl, 2004).

To examine the mechanisms that link the perceived environment of ethnic diversity (PEED) and organisational identification (OID), this paper develops a theoretical model derived from two literature streams, diversity management (Avery, 2011; Yang and Konrad 2011) and organisational identification (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Contributing to the literature, the study investigates whether socially supportive relationships (co-worker social support) operates as a mediator between PEED and OID. Recognising that these relationships will be subject to individual differences, the study further extends the analysis to test examine the impact of ethnic self-identification (the extent to which an individual identifies with their own ethnic group) on these relationships.

The perceived environment of ethnic diversity (PEED) refers to the quality of the working environment experienced by an employee in the context of their ethnicity and can be considered at both organisation or inter-individual level (Ashikali and Groeneveld, 2015). At organisational level, it refers to the valence of how employees perceive that the organisation treats them in the context of their ethnicity (Habyarimana, Humphreys, Posner, and Weinstein, 2007; Schmid, Ramiah, and Hewstone, 2014). By contrast, the inter-individual level perspective of PEED refers to employees' views of the interactions and workplace relationships between employees of different ethnic groups themselves (Barak, Cherin, and Berkman, 1998). The importance of examining perceptions of the ethnic environment at the inter-individual level is that workplace relationships can be a precursor to the way that employees view their organisation and come to identify themselves with it (Harrison, Price, Gavin, and Florey, 2002; Milliken and Martins, 1996).

Of particular significance in this study is the impact of employees' experience of their own treatment (in the context of their ethnic group) on their identification with the organisation itself. Organisational identification (OID) refers to an employee's mutual or shared interest with their organisation to the extent that the membership of the organisation becomes a means of self-identification. Individuals with a high organisational identification feel that the organisation's success or otherwise personally affects them (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). OID encompasses the way employees think, feel and behave towards their organisation (Barak, Cherin, and Berkman, 1998). Organisational identification has been studied as a predictor of a range of outcomes such as job satisfaction (Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012), organisational commitment (Marique and Stinglhamber, 2011) and in-role performance (Haslam and Ellemers, 2005). Some research has examined predictors of OID studying for example, occupation (Wilkins, Butt, and Annabi, 2018), employee values and services rendered (De Roeck and Delobbe, 2012). However, studies have not considered the workplace

environment as predictors of OID (Lee, Park and Koo, 2015). This is a significant omission in the context of multi-ethnic organisations because the manner in which employees experience the organisation is likely to be associated with the extent to which employees subsequently identify with the organisation.

Research into related areas associated with the impact of diversity management policies has suggested that insight might be obtained by examining indirect effects through mediating and moderating variables (Celik et al, 2011; Choi and Rainey, 2014) and this study applies this logic to examine the effect of perceived environment of ethnic diversity on OID. It builds on research in HRM to investigate the role of relationships with co-workers in developing an employee's sense of organisational identification (Frenkel, Restubog, and Bednall, 2012). Moreover, recognising that there are important individual differences in the strength of association people have with their own ethnic group (Agbiboa, 2012; Pratt, 1998), the study also incorporates Ethnic Self-Identification into the model as potential moderator.

### *Setting the context*

This study is conducted in Nigeria where the concept of ethnic diversity differs from the concept of race or country of origin which tends to be used in most North American or European studies (Ashikali and Groeneveld, 2015). In Nigeria, ethnicity refers principally to an individual's place of birth, state or local government area (LGA) within the country. Intra-country ethnicity, and in particular, how people identify with it within an organisational setting is under researched in the literature. Tensions around different ethnic groups hinge largely around the instrumentalist view that ethnic group membership forms a significant part of an individual's identity and that people are *a priori* motivated to benefit their own ethnic group (Higazi and Lar, 2015). In a workplace setting, this creates potential for undue bias or

favouritism between employees of the same ethnicity (Oruwari, Owei, and Jev, 2004) and indeed the supremacy of ethnic identity over organisational identity.

In a bid to foster societal inclusiveness, the Nigerian government enacted the Federal Character Principle (FCP) to address society's call for a representative bureaucracy (Kendhammer, 2014) and which mandated public sector organisations to employ people from different states in the country (Adeosun, 2011; Kendhammer, 2014). The FCP has been successful in creating a more ethnically diverse workforce but has also led to a challenge of heightened sense of differentiation among employees of different ethnic groups (Ng and Sears, 2014). Many public sector organisations therefore are characterised by tensions between different ethnic groups as ethnic diversity has been favoured over internal organisational cohesion. Paradoxically, there is also growing disquiet from employees working in the public sector that which suggests that there may be widespread ethnic discrimination (Creegan, Colgan, Charlesworth, and Robinson, 2003). In this context, workplaces have a high inherent structural probability for tension between different groups that organisations have to work hard to mitigate against through active diversity management initiatives. The Nigerian context is therefore particularly interesting for the study of the influence of local organisational climate (perceived environment of ethnic diversity) on organisational identity.

Empirical data for this study were collected from four public sector organisations in Rivers State, Nigeria. As it is with the Federal Civil Service, employment in the civil service of federating states in Nigeria is managed by the State Civil Service Commission (Mustapha, 2007; Osaghae, 1988). Rivers State has 23 LGAs. The LGAs in the state are broadly categorised into three dominant ethnic groups: Ikwerre (10 LGAs), Ijaw (8 LGAs) and Ogoni (5 LGAs) (Akpome, 2014; Okemini and Adekola, 2012; Oruwari, Owei, and Jev 2004). Additionally, a fourth category representing Nigerian citizens from other states but residing in the state (non-indigenes) are included in this study. Although English language is the official

means of communication in the Service, the LGAs within each of the 3 major ethnic groups are linked together by similarities in local language. Appreciating this linkage is important in the understanding of ethnicity because knowledge of local language is an essential influence of perceived in-group/out-group comparison between employees in a multi-ethnic setting (Ukiwo, 2005).

Drawing on the background outlined above, the rest of this study is structured as follows: first, the study presents theoretical developments that outline the expected relationships between perceived environment of ethnic diversity, organisational identification, co-worker social support and ethnic self-identity. Thereafter, the methods used to conduct the empirical study are described. Findings from data analysis are presented in the fourth section. Discussions and conclusions are presented at the end.

### **Theoretical development and hypothesis**

Ashforth and Mael (1989) noted that OID is a form of self-identification and thus may be explained using social identity theory. Social identity theory (SIT) recognises that employees may have multiple sources of identity that are linked to the groups they belong to (Tajfel, Turner, Austin, and Worchel, 1979) for example, family, social class, organisation and ethnicity. The theory is relevant for organisations that operate in multi-ethnic contexts because strong identification with a specific ethnic group can influence relationships within the workplace. Central to SIT line of reasoning is that people in a group with similar attributes (in-group) seek to perceive others different from them (out-groups) negatively. As the group is considered as an extension of self, increasing the status of oneself also serves to enhance the image of the group. Studies have shown that in-group/ out-group comparisons pose challenges for organisations with multi-ethnic employee composition, because employees may associate

themselves more strongly as members of their ethnic group than their organisation (McKay and Avery, 2015).

Discussing perceived environment of ethnic diversity within the context of an organisation is important because it may affect how employees feel about their organisations (D'Hondt, Eccles, Van Houtte, and Stevens, 2017). Employees who have a positive perception of an organisation's environment of ethnic diversity may have a lowered view of the inherent in-group-out-group tensions that are experienced in broader society. As such, the organisation may become a place where all feel welcome and may want to identify with. Employees who sense a non-discriminatory environment may feel valued and part of the organisation (Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff, 2003). In this context, employees are expected to be better able to focus their attention on getting work done and this may reduce potential conflicts arising from ethnic attribution (Bies and Moag, 1986; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, and Rhoades, 2002). A more positive experience of the environment is likely to be associated with greater organisation identification (Yang, Johnson, Zhang, Spector, and Xu, 2013). It is for this reason that Yang et al. (2013) and Winkler (2012) noted that employees identification with their organisation may be influenced by their perception of environment of ethnic diversity.

**Hypothesis 1:** Perceived environment of ethnic diversity has a positive relationship with organisational identification.

To explain the underlying mechanisms through which perceived environment of ethnic diversity might influence an employee's organisational identity, this study considers co-worker social support (CWSS) as a potential mediator. CWSS refers to behaviours from co-workers which show care and concern for one another to the extent that a positive and friendly atmosphere is perceived (Nelson and Quick, 1991). When employees perceive a positive



environment of ethnic diversity, they will judge the treatment received at work to be fair (Mor Barak et al., 1998). It is expected that the positive perceptions of the environment of ethnic diversity will facilitate supportive workplace relationships in which people willingly extend and accept extra role support to colleagues of different ethnic groups without suspicion (Agbibo, 2012; Barron et al., 2011). These supportive workplace relationships may create a sense of cohesion internally (Tajfel, 2010) allowing employees to forge workplace relationships beyond their ethnic group.

It is for this reason that Farmer and Van-Dyne (2010) suggested a reciprocal relationship between co-worker social support and group identification. Although perceived environment of ethnic diversity and co-worker social support manifest at individual and workteam levels, it is likely that that employees will extend this sense of identification to the organisation as a whole. Thus, localised positive workplace relationships and interactions enjoyed at workteam levels may serve as a signal of the overall work culture in the organisation (Gountas et al. 2014). In line with SIT, when a social group (e.g. an organisation) exhibits characteristics that members (e.g. employees) can identify with, they tend to associate themselves with the group (McKay and Avery, 2015). As such, the organisation, in addition to the local workteam may become a source of self-enhancement and pride for the employee. It is for this reason that we propose the following relationship to explain the CWSS-OID relationship:

**Hypothesis 2:** Co-worker social support mediates the positive relationship between perceived environment of ethnic diversity and organisational identification.

A further strand of investigation is the influence that ethnic self-identification may have on the relationship between CWSS-OID relationship. Ethnic Self Identification (ESI) is an individual difference which refers to behavioural manifestation of an individual's ethnic heritage (Barron, Hebl, and King, 2011) such as explicitly learning about one's own ethnic background, as well as attaching significant emotional value to the membership of a particular

ethnic group (Tajfel, 1974). SIT is used to explain this line of investigation in the theoretical model because in the context of this study, organisations form a multi-ethnic space in which a strong auto-ethnic identification can influence the broader dynamics of relationships at work (Barron et al., 2011; McKay and Avery, 2015). The co-existence of employees from diverse ethnicities may make the organisation susceptible to society-wide ethnicity tensions (Pepple, 2018) and influence how employees behave and perceive the way other colleagues of different ethnicity relate with them (Lee and Reade, 2015; Pugh et al., 2008).

Employees with heightened ethnic self-identity may continue to see other colleagues from different ethnic groups as an out-group (Tajfel, 2010). Thus, in developing a sense of organisational identity, having multi-ethnic employee composition may act as an inherent barrier (Steele, 1997; Tajfel and Turner, 1986) by activating strong sense of ethnic-identification who value ethnic group membership (Barron et al., 2011). Notwithstanding organisations' effort to provide an inclusive environment, employees with heightened ESI may take a suspicious view of co-worker social support which will attenuate the link between CWSS and OID as they continue to see other colleagues from different ethnic groups as out-group (Tajfel, 2010).

**Hypothesis 3:** The relationship between CWSS and OID is moderated by ESI, such that the relationship will be weaker for employees with high ESI.

See Figure 1 for path model for hypothesis relationship linking perceived environment of ethnic diversity to organisational identification.

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## **Methodology**

Having secured approval with the organisations and followed the relevant ethical guidelines, survey booklets were distributed in study format to employees of four ministries (health, education, power and works). 1,400 survey booklets were distributed to employees. 1,015 questionnaires were returned and 107 were not usable for the following reasons; incomplete filling, having more than one answer to a question, inconsistent response with questions reworded or reversed. At the end of the data screening exercise, 908 questionnaires were included in the current analysis. 52% were of Ikwerre ethnic origin, 32% of Ijaw ethnic origin, 16% of Ogoni ethnic origin and 11% were non-indigenes. 70% of the sample had been employed by their organisation for over 5 years. 53% of the employees surveyed were classified as senior staff category and about 14% were employed at managerial level. Additionally, 50% of participants have been on their current position for more than 5 years. 59% of respondents were male. More than 50% of the sample had a bachelor's degree or higher.

## **Measures**

Perceived environment of ethnic diversity (PEED) refers to the positive or negative evaluation of acceptance and fairness in the organisation irrespective of their ethnic group. The Mor Barak, Cherin, and Berkman (1998) Diversity Perception Scale (DPS) was used which measured employee perceptions of working in an environment that has a different demography (Mor Barak et al., 1998). Sample items were: 'People are treated fairly irrespective of their LGA background in my organisation' and 'I feel at ease with people from backgrounds other than my own'. The 13-item scale reported a Cronbach alpha of 0.81.

Organisational identification (OID) was measured using organisational identification (OID) scale by Mael and Ashforth (1992). Sample items were: 'When I talk about my

organisation, I usually say ‘we’, rather than ‘they’ and ‘My organisation’s success is my success’. The five-item scale reported a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.80.

Co-worker Social Support (CWSS) was measured using the Caplan, Cobb, and French (1975, pp. 251-252) scale. Sample items were: ‘I know I can rely on my colleagues when things get tough at work’ and ‘My colleagues go out of their way to do things to make my work life easy for me’. The five-item scale reported a Cronbach alpha of 0.75.

Ethnic Self-Identification (ESI) was measured using a the multi group ethnic identity measure (RMEIM) scale proposed by Phinney (1992) and revised by Phinney and Ong (2007). Sample items include: ‘I have a strong sense of belonging to my LGA or state of origin’ and ‘I understand pretty well what my LGA or state membership means to me’. The seven-item scale gave a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.84.

The study controlled for the effect of differences in ethnic groups, gender and tenure in organisation. This is because of the suggestion that employees of dominant ethnic groups may experience PEED-OID relationship differently than minority employees (Gera, 2016). The controlled for gender is premised on findings that suggest that male employees have stronger sense of ethnic identification compared to female employees and as such may experience lower OID (Barak et al., 1998). Lastly, tenure in organisation was included in the control in line with theorisation that suggest that employees that have spent loner time in employment may have formed networks at work and as such have higher OID (Pittman, Davis, Shaffer, Herrera, and Bennett, 2014).

## **Data analysis**

Prior to hypothesis testing, an initial multi-level regression approach with employees at level 1 and organisations at level 2 was used to determine whether there were variations in the PEED-OID relationship as respondents were nested in employing organisations. Results

showed that variations at the organisation level was not significant,  $p=.09$ . Additional analysis that was conducted to establish agreement of respondent irrespective of their organisation using Interclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) reported the following Cronbach alpha PEED .84, OID .84, CWSS .75 and ESI .67. An ICC value above .06 suggest a substantial agreement in the responses irrespective of the organisational differences (Landis and Koch, 1977). Thus, the analysis of data in this study was presented at the individual level data only.

To determine construct validity, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability index (CRI) (Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle, and Mena, 2012) were calculated. The rule of thumb is for the results to be  $\geq 0.50$  and  $\geq 0.70$  for AVE and CRI respectively (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The values of AVE and CRI for the variables ranged from 0.70 to 0.91, thus confirming the validity of the constructs used in the analysis. See Table 1.

To reduce the chances of common method bias, the procedures suggested by Podsakoff et al., (2003) was used. First, questionnaire design reduced participants evaluation apprehension by guaranteeing participants anonymity. Second, inconsistent responses with questions recoded were not included in the study. Third, improvement of the questionnaire by providing explanation for the scale on a visible section at the top of each page of the survey. In addition to the procedure, Harman's Single Factor test was undertaken to test for an indication of common method bias. The single factor reported a total variance of 24%, which is far less than 50% to suggest that the threat of common method bias was low (Lin and Hsieh, 2010)

To test the hypotheses, contemporary practices of moderation and mediation advocated by Hayes (2013) were adopted. Conditional process analysis examines and describes relationships that are conditional nature, in this case, moderated by ESI. To estimate the conditional indirect effect of the independent variable PEED (X), through the mediator CWSS (M), on the outcome variable OID (Y), with ESI included as a moderator (V), the PROCESS

macro for SPSS (v. 2.1.3.2) Model 14 was used (Hayes, 2013). This enabled the moderating effect of ESI to be tested on path between CWSS and OID. Ethnic origin was included as control. The Process macro generates (bias-corrected) 95% confidence intervals for the estimated indirect effects at various values of the moderator variable and allows results to be probed at various point estimates by generating 5000 bootstrapped samples. The co-efficient for path between CWSS and OID were calculated separately for different levels of ESI: ‘high’ (mean plus one standard deviation), ‘mean’ ESI (mean) and ‘low’ ESI (mean minus one standard deviation).

## **Results**

The results from a correlation analysis among variables show that Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of the constructs were acceptable with values greater 0.70 (Olckers and Zyl, 2016). See Table 2. The correlation coefficients of some variables were strong. Thus, a multicollinearity analysis was undertaken and reported the following variance inflation factors (VIF); ethnic self-identification (1.660), ethnic diversity perception (1.518) and organisational identification (1.763). A VIF value lower than 3 suggest that there is no multicollinearity error.

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### **Results from hypothesis testing**

Results in Table 3 summarise the conditional process analysis. Using the PROCESS macro, the first multiple regression tested whether PEED (X) was associated with the mediator CWSS (M) and was observed to have a positive significant association with CWSS ( $\beta = 0.64$ ,

CI: 0.59, 0.69). In the second regression, the effects of PEED as well as the interaction between CWSS and ESI (CWSS x ESI) on the outcome variable OID were examined. Both the direct effect of the predictor variable PEED and the interaction of CWSS x ESI were observed to exert a significant effect on OID ( $\beta = 0.23$ , CI: 0.16, 0.29;  $\beta = -0.06$ , CI -0.12, -0.003). Significant indirect effects were observed at three levels for of the moderator and were found to be significant at each level. Further analysis show that the control variables were not significant, thus they were not included in the model.

The moderation of ESI is further illustrated in Figure 2 and shows the relationship between CWSS and OID at three different levels (low, medium and high) of ESI. The slope of CWSS-OID relationship was less steep for employees with high ESI than for those with low ESI indicating that the strength of the relationship between CWSS and OID is weaker for employees with high ESI employees than for lower ESI employees. These results support both the mediating effect of CWSS predicted in Hypothesis 2 and the moderating effect of ESI predicted in Hypothesis 3.

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### **Discussions and conclusions**

This study makes important contributions to diversity management and organisational identification debates. Existing studies suggest that there was limited literature that explored the effect of ethnic diversity policies at inter-individual level perspective (Ashikali and Groeneveld, 2015). There was also a lack of literature that explored the implication of group interactions and relationships on an employee’s overall identification with an organisation (Wilkins, Butt, and Annabi, 2018). Thus, this study advances the understanding of the antecedents of organisational identification (Ellemers et al., 2003). It set out to investigate the relationship between perceived environment of ethnic diversity and organisational

identification by examining the mediating effect of co-worker social support at different levels of ethnic self-identification. Overall, the results underscore that there is a positive relationship between perceived environment of ethnic diversity and organisational identification that can be explained partially by co-worker social support. These relationships differed according to the level of an employee's ethnic self-identification.

Findings from this study are consistent with previous studies that have reported a direct relationship between perceived environment of ethnic diversity and organisational identification (Groeneveld and Verbeek, 2012). As expected, employees who had a positive view of environment of ethnic diversity identified themselves positively with their organisation. However, these studies especially that of Cole et al. (2016) did not provide a rationale for linking both variables. This study extends the existing debate by examining the underpinning explanatory mechanism, focusing in particular on the mediating effect of co-worker social support on the relationship between perceived environment of ethnic diversity and organisational identification. A study by Farmer and Van- Dyne (2010) suggested that positive group interactions result in members' identification with the organisation. The mediation analysis presented in this study supports this notion and suggests that an employee's view of the organisation is influenced by positive interactions with co-workers.

Existing studies that have attempted to explain why diversity management initiatives will affect attitudes and behaviours of employees of different ethnic groups differently have suggested that the affirmative action view of diversity management was responsible for the way that minority and majority employee groups attitude and behaviours were influenced (Avery, 2011; Yang and Konrad 2011). Additionally, Kravitz (2008) suggested that diversity management side-lined the group that policies were not targeted at (the majority group). Others have argued that diversity management increases the similarity levels of different ethnic groups in an organisation which may result in higher number of subgroups (Groeneveld and Van de



Walle, 2010). Consequently, Ashikali and Groeneveld (2015) study showed that in an organisation in Netherlands, diversity management resulted in a positive attitude and behaviour among non-native employees, compared to native employees. This study takes a different line of reasoning to further explain why employees' attitudes and behaviours are influenced by their ethnicity. It highlights the importance of perceptions and workplace interactions for employees by suggesting that the way employees perceive their environment of ethnic diversity and the social support they receive from co-workers are likely determinants of employee attitudes and behaviours rather than numerical representation and affirmative action policies (Andrews and Ashworth, 2015).

A significant contribution of this study is the investigation of the moderating role of ethnic self-identification which differs from how other studies have used it. These results supported the hypothesis that addresses the moderating effect of ethnic self-identification. This result of the slope was not surprising because of the theoretical expectation of social identity theory (Steele, 1997; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). The negative interaction re-echoes the heightened in-group/out-group categorisations that may create tensions in the relationship between employees of different ethnicities at work and consequently affect how such high ESI employees perceive their organisation.

While other studies have considered the moderating effect of ethnicity from the point of demographic dissimilarity (Andrews and Ashworth, 2015), this study takes the debate somewhat further by considering the implications of ethnicity from the perspective of an employee's self-identity. The moderation results explain why managers of organisation with multi-ethnic employee composition face a daunting task of fostering organisational identification as employees who strongly identify with their ethnic group may still prefer to work with co-workers of similar heritage and exhibit lower organisational identification (Agbibo, 2012; Bae et al., 2017). Notwithstanding, the positive significant CWSS-OID slopes

at all levels of ESI employees reported in this study could give some confidence to managers that employees are open to CWSS.

Employee orientation in the Nigerian public sector is highly dependent on their ethnic identity (Gera, 2016). This ethno-centric orientation means that in Nigeria, there is a sense of entitlement around government organisations (Musa, 2015; Ukiwo, 2005). There is a notion that government belongs to everyone; thus, the struggle by public sector organisation to have employees that are reflective of the federating states at the national level and LGAs at the state level (Adeosun, 2011; Kendhammer, 2014). Employees are unintentionally attached to their ethnic heritage such that their feelings and actions are in most instance geared towards improving the lots of their regions. Our findings show that higher co-worker social support is required for employees with high ethnic self-identification to experience organisational identification. As a consequence, we suggest that organisations should actively seek to create an atmosphere that welcome employees irrespective of their ethnicity, as this may foster social interactions and relationships among co-workers and transfer individual/ethnic identification to achieve the benefits of organisational identification. Additionally, public sector managers are advised to create an atmosphere that may allow for social interaction at work; such as sharing work spaces, assigning new colleagues to buddies as part of their orientation programme and having safe spaces where employees can chat freely.

The findings presented in this study are not without limitations. For example, employees' identification with their organisation may be influenced by time, thus, the single source cross-sectional data approach used for this study makes it a limitation. Future studies are recommended solicited using data from different sources. Additionally, the cross-sectional approach limits our ability to establish causality relationship among the variables. We also note that the context of our study was highly collectivist, and people attach much importance to ethnic identification in terms of location (state or LGA of origin) (Oruwari et al., 2004).

However, if similar studies are conducted using the region to delimitate ethnicity in less collectivist context, the results may be different. A surprising result was reported for the relationship between ethnic self-identification and organisational identification. However, this result should be taken with caution because of the presence of an interaction. Nevertheless, this is an interesting dimension that merits further work.

In conclusion, the results of this study show that when perceived environment of ethnic diversity is positive, employees positively identify with an organisation. The results further explained PEED-OID relationship by the mediating role of co-worker social support. These finding advances to the literature of organisational identification by introducing perceived environment of ethnic diversity as a predictor. It also emphasises the importance of individual level social interactions and relationships in the way employees identify with their organisation. Additionally, this study showed how ethnic self-identification can influence the extent to which co-worker social support mediates the way an employee's perceived environment of ethnic diversity influence organisational identification. This is a further contribution to ethnic diversity literature as it has shown that it is worthwhile to examine how the strength of ethnic self-identification influences employees' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. As the call for representation of various ethnic groups at work continues to grow, scholars and practitioners are encouraged to investigate several ways of influencing employees' identification with their organisation and ensure that discriminations associated with multi ethnic settings are mitigated.

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*Table 1: Construct validity*

Items	Cronbach alpha	AVE	CRI
Organisational identification	0.8	0.7	0.87
Perceived environment of ethnic diversity	0.81	0.62	0.81
Co-worker social support	0.75	0.55	0.83
Ethnic self-identification	0.84	0.63	0.87

AVE-Average variance extracted, CRI- Critical reliability index

*Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlation of model variables*

Model Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach alpha ( $\alpha$ )	No of items	OID	PEED	CWSS	ESI
OID	3.94	0.75	0.79	5	1	.42**	.41**	.44**
PEED	3.78	0.62	0.81	13		1	.56**	.54**
CWSS	3.81	0.74	0.75	5			1	.54**
ESI	3.88	0.73	0.84	7				1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N=908

*Table 3: Regression output*

	$\beta$	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
<u>Outcome: Co-worker social support</u>						
Constant	1.24	0.09	12.74	0	1.05	1.43
PEED	0.64	0.03	24.96	0	0.59	0.69
<u>Outcome: Organisational identification</u>						
Constant	0.63	0.4	1.54	0.12	-0.17	1.41
PEED	0.23	0.03	6.56	0	0.16	0.29
CWSS	0.41	0.11	3.6	0	0.18	0.63
ESI	0.46	0.11	4.24	0	0.25	0.68
Interaction (CWSS X ESI)	-0.06	0.04	-2.08	0.03	-0.12	-0.003
Ethnic groups (Ikwerre, Ijaw, Ogoni and non-indigenes)	0.03	0.04	0.53	0.61	-0.05	0.07
Gender	-0.03	0.03	-0.8	0.42	-0.09	0.04
Tenure in organisation	0.02	0.02	-2.39	0.2	-0.12	-0.01

Figure 1

Path model for hypothesis relationship linking perceived environment of ethnic diversity to organisational identification

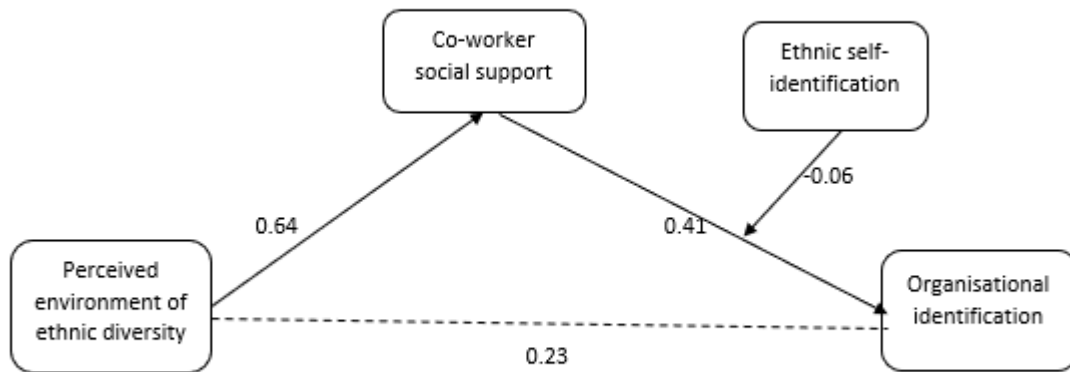


Figure 2

Moderating effect of ethnic self-identification

