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Workforce Diversity and Employee Performance in the Higher Education Sector in Kathmandu

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Abstract

Background: Workforce diversity with better management fosters employee performance. The research aims to assess the effect of workforce diversity comprising gender diversity and diversity at the academic level on employee performance. **Methods:** The research employed a descriptive and causal research design. The primary sources of data utilized in the study. This research utilized a purposive sampling technique. The population of the study was faculty members of the higher education sector in Kathmandu. Thus, a structured questionnaire of 377 was disseminated to the target respondents and received only 191 useful questionnaires. Moreover, the research utilized descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression for data analysis. **Results:** The findings of the research revealed a positive influence of gender diversity on performance ($\beta = 0.114$; $t = 1.27$), however, it was found insignificant. Moreover, a positive and statistically significant effect of diversity at the academic level was found on employee performance ($\beta = 0.774$; $t = 8.87$). **Conclusion:** The management of workforce diversity in the higher education sector fosters the performance of faculty members reflecting that academic institutions embracing inclusive steps from the recruitment process to cultivate a diverse workforce to enhance performance. **Novelty:** This research discovers the evidence boosting employee performance linking the diverse workforces especially gender diversity and diversity at the academic level deriving the evidence from the higher education sector. The findings of this research establish a benchmark for advancing the performance of employees.

Keywords: diversity in academic level, gender diversity, performance
JEL Classification: M12, M14, M51

Introduction

The performance of the workforce in the higher education sector is essential for achieving the established objectives of institutions. Several factors are responsible for deteriorating the performance and productivity of the employees. Thus, the implementation of an effective strategy to enhance employee performance is crucial for the sustainability of organizations. Moreover, integrating varied workforces is crucial for enhancing performance by harnessing fresh cognitive capacities and inventive ideas from various employee types (Inegbedion et al., 2020). Furthermore, diversity among academic institutions fosters flexibility and constructive competition leading to the desired performance. It demonstrates that adopting workforce diversity reflects a range of perspectives and experiences, facilitating productive decision-making and establishing a platform for understanding the expectations of stakeholders (Maij, 2024).

In addition, gender diversity signifies the participation of employees with varying gender identities within the higher education sector, and acknowledging these differences is essential for fostering institutional advancement through improved performance (Nadeem et al., 2020). Interestingly, gender diversity offers a clear foundation within institutional settings, encouraging a creative work environment by incorporating expanded creativity, problem-

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solving skills, and enhanced decision-making capabilities to perform given tasks. Similarly, academic institutions that embrace gender diversity among workers improve team decision-making, functionality, and performance. Moreover, educational institutions striving for optimal performance must include varied genders in their academic frameworks (Ali, 2016; Verdres & Vasarhelyi, 2022).

Moreover, embracing diversity in the higher educational sector is crucial for elevating the performance of faculty members. In addition, academic diversity is also considered similarly, as the presence of personnel with a variety of educational backgrounds and levels of education provides a solid foundation for improving institutional performance (Banks, 2012). Interestingly, a diverse workforce that includes individuals with a range of backgrounds, perspectives, and levels of education is essential for improving faculty and staff performance in the academic sector. There is an indispensable need to address and include educationally diverse faculty personnel in order to improve creative output, and problem-solving mechanisms, and adopt innovation as the major aspect for fostering success in the academic sector (Andoh et al., 2019).

In the context of Nepal, fostering performance based on the inclusion of workforce diversity in the higher educational sector is essential as merely few studies have revealed on Impact of workforce diversity on employee performance in the research conducted by (Shrestha & Parajuli, 2021), then explored the impact of workforce diversity on employee performance in banking sector (Tamang & Tamang, 2024). Similarly, the next study held in Nepal on workforce diversity and employee performance in the local government of Kanchanpur, Nepal (Saud, 2023), and another study also found on Impact of workforce diversity on the organizational performance of the banking sector of Nepal: A mediating role of managerial expertise (Pandey & Risal, 2023). However, the studies could not cover the higher educational sector in the Nepalese context and empirical evidence derived from the previous studies revealed inconsistencies depicting the gap (Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2017). Therefore, this research emphasizes the research question of whether there is a link between gender diversity, diversity in academic level, and employee performance deriving the evidence from the higher education section in Kathmandu.

Research Objective

The general objective of this research is to investigate the effect of workforce diversity on employee performance in the higher education sector in Kathmandu. Further, the specific objectives are presented below:

- To assess the relationship between gender diversity and employee performance
- To examine the association between diversity at the academic level and employee performance

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Review of Literature

The analysis of workforce diversity examines its impact on enhancing employee performance. Equity and Inclusion Theory indicates that workforce diversity alone is inadequate for enhancing organizational performance; it must be complemented by structural equity and inclusivity to create an environment where employees feel valued, appreciated, and empowered (Roberson, 2019). This philosophy promotes more focus on transparent access to equitable opportunities, resources, and decision-making, particularly for marginalized groups (Ferdman, 2014). It illustrates that inclusive mechanisms enhance employee engagement, foster creativity, and improve retention by mitigating disparities and ensuring psychological safety (Nishii, 2013; Mor Barak, 2015).

Gender Diversity and Employee Performance

Gender diversity signifies the equal inclusion of personnel with different gender identities, both male and female, inside a business (Koller, 2021). Consequently, the incorporation of gender diversity presents possibilities and fosters an appreciating atmosphere that balances male and female representation (Ng & Sears, 2020). Empirical evidence indicates that the incorporation of gender diversity is fundamental to establishing a robust organizational environment, which subsequently improves employee performance, as effective collaboration and innovative ideas arise from the involvement of diverse genders within the organization (Dezso & Ross, 2012). The distinct personality traits linked to different genders, particularly the rationally aggressive disposition of male employees and the accommodating tendencies of female employees within the organization, can foster a synergistic environment that propels the overall performance of employees (Kaley et al., 2006). Furthermore, enhanced teamwork may be achieved via a diverse workforce, since teams require complementary abilities to fulfill their objectives. Consequently, the integration of diverse genders within an organizational team may enhance overall team performance by using gender diversity (Hoogendoorn et al., 2013). Next, the diversity of employees regarding gender inclusion enhances employee engagement in the decision-making process, resulting in exceptional performance within the organization and reducing employee turnover due to improved collaboration within diverse teams (Ali et al., 2011). Following a study of empirical investigations, the following research hypothesis has been formulated:

H_1: Gender diversity influences the performance.

Diversity in Academic Level and Employee Performance

Diversity at an academic level pertains to the variations in the educational qualifications of personnel within an organizational context. Consequently, deliberate measures for the inclusion of a diverse workforce are executed with the anticipation of improving performance levels. The incorporation of varied educational backgrounds, academic qualifications, and separate disciplines within an organizational environment is considered diversity at the academic level (Milliken & Martins, 1996; Van-Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Empirical

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evidence indicates that academic variety within teams fosters more creativity, enabling the development of creative solutions to organizational issues, which ultimately enhances performance (Østergaard et al., 2011). Similarly, an educationally varied group may investigate viable solutions to current problems, since such teams use complementary cognitive strategies (Hong & Page, 2004). Furthermore, companies that include personnel with varied academic backgrounds get superior results due to the synergistic impact of an enhanced knowledge amalgamation (Dahlin et al., 2005). Based on the review of earlier evidence, the following research hypothesis has been formulated:

H_2: Diversity in academic level influences the performance

Employee Performance

Employee performance is a reflection of the measurable consequences, patterns of behavior, and endeavors of employees within an organization. It is a reflection of the ability of personnel to carry out the responsibilities that have been assigned to them and to drive toward the accomplishment of the organization's goals (Camphell, 1990; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). It is possible to notice a number of components that contribute to employee performance, such as task performance, which reflects the primary responsibilities and functions that workers are required to do (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994). Another part of employee performance is regarded to be the voluntary inclinations that provide support to an environment of organization that includes team process, initiation, and the development of the capacity to adapt. Therefore, the addition of various workforces may, to a certain extent, contribute to the performance of workers inside the firm, which can ultimately result in remarkable performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework used in the research provides a basis for the investigation, illustrating a systematic depiction of key research concepts, research variables, and the connections of hypotheses derived from existing theory (Ridder, 2014). Consequently, a research framework directs the formation of hypotheses, establishes a methodological pathway, and elucidates the essential approach for data analysis that illustrates the relationship between constructs (Smith, 2017). This study methodology used gender diversity and academic level diversity as predictors, with performance as the dependent variable. A framework of the research is described below:

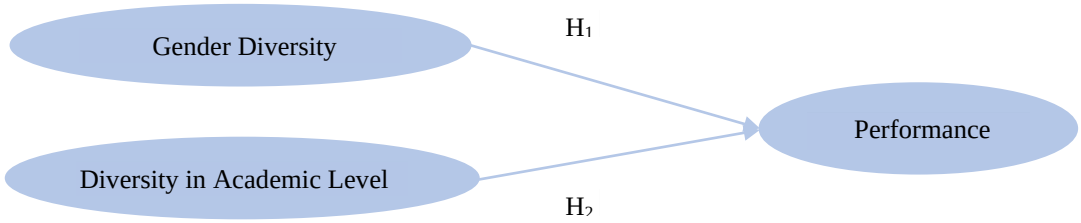

Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Source: Ali et al. (2011); Odhiambo et al. (2018); Khan et al. (2019)

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Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual framework designed for the research. It comprises two independent variables: the first is gender diversity, and the second is diversity at academic level. The dependent variable in the research is performance. Consequently, this research framework delineates a method for evaluating the influence of workforce diversity on performance. Furthermore, the two assumptions have been substantiated, establishing a connection between gender diversity and performance. The second hypothesis has shown a connection between academic diversity and performance.

Methods

The study examines the impact of workforce diversity on performance among faculty members in the higher education sector in Kathmandu, Nepal. This research designates performance as the dependent variable. Furthermore, gender diversity and academic level diversity serve as independent factors. Moreover, the study tests the research hypothesis formulated for the study. In addition, this study has used a descriptive and causal research design. The descriptive research strategy has been used since it methodically elucidates the features and phenomena of the study, providing a foundation for comprehending the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study used a casual research design to identify causal relationships between the independent and dependent variables, examining their impact on the result variable (Anderson-Cook, 2005). Subsequently, evaluating research hypotheses is crucial, and causal research design provides the necessary framework for hypothesis testing (Bollen, 1989). The study population included faculty members from the higher education sector in Kathmandu, namely those associated with the affiliated and constituent campuses of Tribhuvan University. A total of 377 structured questionnaires were delivered to the target respondents, yielding 191 (50.66 percent) completed questionnaires deemed usable. This study used three constructs: gender diversity, diversity in academic level, and employee performance. The minimum required sample size for each construct must have at least fifteen respondents, whereas the gathered sample for the study surpasses the threshold of 45, indicating that the sample size is adequate for the research (Stevens & Edwards, 1996). Next, the research used cross-sectional data reflecting the information collected from individuals at a single point of time Wooldridge (2016) using purposive sampling to get expert perspectives by choosing respondents based on predetermined criteria (Etikan et al., 2016; Patton, 2002).

The first portion of the questionnaire consisted of the basic information section, which asked respondents to provide their gender, marital status, age, educational background, job title, years of experience, and monthly income. Part second of the survey asked respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with a set of predetermined statements: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, and 5 = very agree. Gender diversity, academic level diversity, and performance were the three characteristics used in this study. The researcher used the construct of gender diversity adopted from previous studies (Ali et al. 2011). There are five item statements in this construct. The sample item statements consist of “the most effective solutions are those that combine men's aggressive inclination with women's

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ability to listen attentively" and "Diversity in gender on the job improved team communication and relationships, which led to success". Furthermore, the concept of variety at the academic level was derived from the prior work of Khan et al. (2019). This construct has five item statements. The provided statement illustrates "The educational background of the employee is considered under the recruitment plan of the organization" and "Employees with different education levels participate in decision-making and problem-solving". In addition, the concept pertaining to performance was ultimately derived from the prior work Odhiambo et al. (2018). It comprises five item assertions. The example item statement comprises "The future development of the organization relies on effective staff performance" and "I am dedicated to fostering effective collaboration among colleagues".

In addition, this research utilized Excel, JASP 0.19.30, JAMOVI 2.6.13, and the STATA 14 version of the software for data analysis. Additionally, descriptive data were produced, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. A correlation analysis was then performed to assess the strength and direction of the link (Field, 2018). Additionally, regression analysis was used in the research as a statistical method to assess the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable and to evaluate the hypothesis (Angrist & Pischke, 2014).

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 delineates the characteristics of the respondents who participated in the survey. A total of 191 data points were collected from faculty members in the higher education sector, including 155 males (81.15 percent) and 36 females (18.85 percent). The married participants are the majority category, including 171 individuals (89.53 percent), while the single respondents represent the smallest group, totaling 20 individuals (10.47 percent). Additionally, responders under 25 years numbered 13 persons (6.81 percent), those aged 26 to 40 totaled 53 (27.75 percent), while the 41 to 55 age group constituted the majority with 94 participation (49.21 percent). The demographic aged over 55 years included 31 responders (16.23 percent).

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Variables	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	155	81.15
	Female	36	18.85
Marital Status	Single	20	10.47
	Married	171	89.53
Age	Below 25 Years	13	06.81
	26 to 40 Years	53	27.75
	41 to 55 Years	94	49.21
	55 and above	31	16.23
Educational Background	Master's Degree	169	88.48
	M. Phil	17	08.90
	PhD	05	02.62
Total		191	100.00

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Subsequently, as shown in Table 1, the educational attainment of possessing a master's degree comprises 169 individuals (88.48 percent), representing the predominant group. Seventeen respondents (8.90 percent) had an M. Phil degree, while five respondents (2.62 percent) possessed a PhD, representing the smallest number of participants.

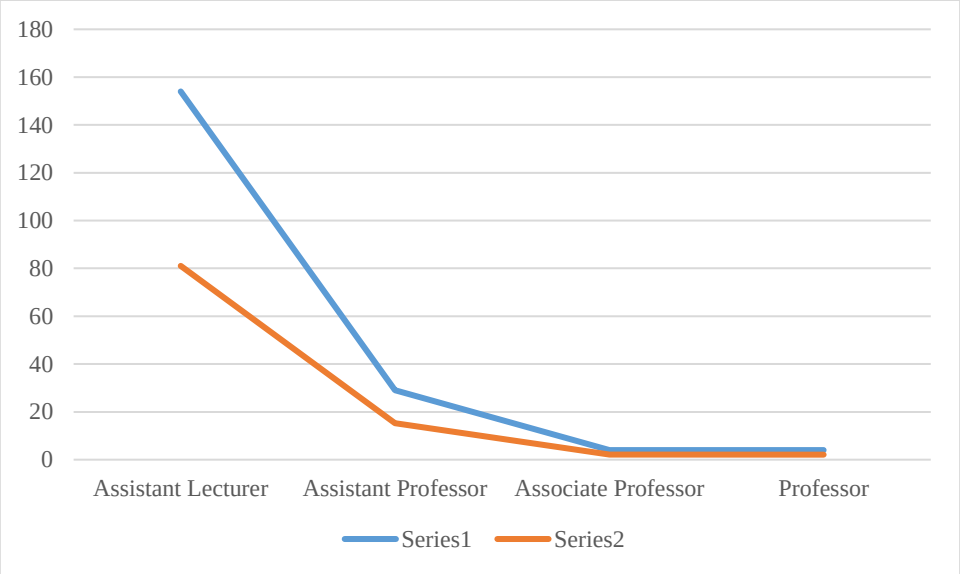

Figure 2. Designation of respondents

Figure 2 illustrates the designation of the faculty members who are affiliated with higher educational institutions. The huge group of assistant lecturers including 154 individuals, which accounts for 81.64 percent of the total, was identified as the main group of participation. The teaching faculty working in the higher education sector represented associate professors in a total of 4 (2.09 percent) positions, while the number of faculty members holding the rank of assistant professor remained at 29 (15.18 percent). The final designation, which represented the professor group, showed a total of four (2.09 percent).

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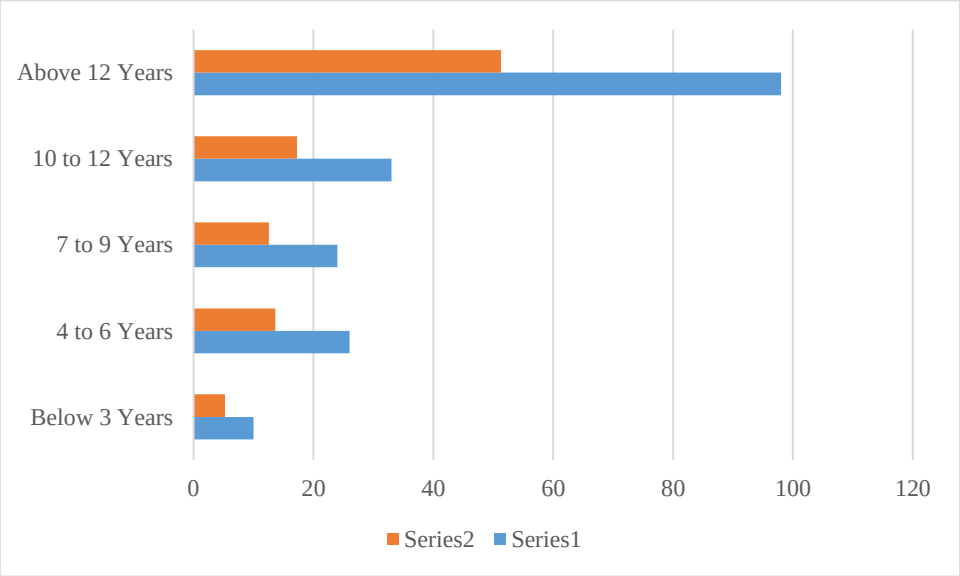

Figure 3. Experience of respondents

Figure 3 illustrates the experience profile of the individuals who participated in the survey. In terms of experience length, those with less than 3 years of experience accounted for 10 (2.24 percent), those with between 4 and 6 years of experience accounted for 26 (13.61 percent), and those with 7 to 9 years of experience accounted for 24 (12.57 percent). Finally, the experience held by faculty members who had more than 12 years of experience was 98, which is (51.31 percent) of the total respondents.

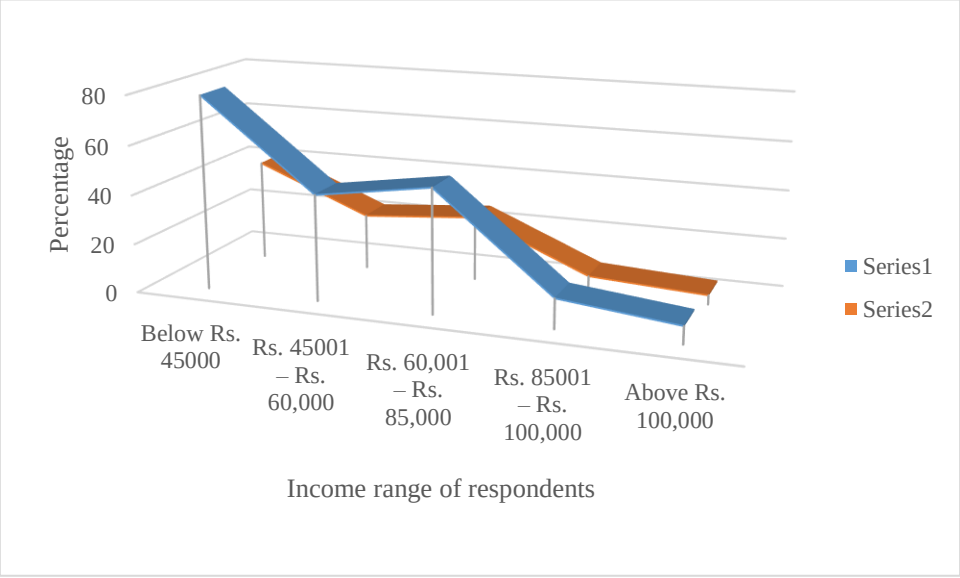

Figure 4. Income status of respondents

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Figure 4 displays the earning status of survey respondents, with 79 (41.36 percent) faculty members having an income status below Rs 45000. Similarly, 43 faculty members (22.51 percent) made between Rs 450,000 and Rs 600,000, while 50 members (26.18 percent) made between Rs 600,000 and Rs 85,000. Additionally, teaching staff with earning status between 85001 and 100,000 stayed at 12 (6.28 percent), while those with income status exceeding 100,000 were shown at 7 (3.67 percent).

Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis describes a foundation that can be used to determine the direction and intensity of the relationship between the predictors and outcome variables. This makes it easier to evaluate the pattern of the data. As a result, Pearson's correlation, which investigates the relationship between the variables, was used in this research (Pallant, 2020). As a result, the purpose of this research is to evaluate the connection between gender diversity, levels of academic diversity, and performance. A further illustration of the correlation results has been presented below:

Table 2. *Correlation Matrix*

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation		(1)	(2)	(3)
Gender Diversity	3.896	0.587	Pearson's r	1.000		
			p-value	—		
Diversity in Academic Level	3.748	0.677	Pearson's r	0.202**	1.000	
			p-value	0.005	—	
Performance	4.363	0.474	Pearson's r	0.092	0.542***	1.000
			p-value	0.206	< .001	—

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

A Pearson's correlation matrix is shown in Table 2, which reveals the findings that evaluate the strength and direction of the link that exists between the variables. It depicts that gender diversity and performance were shown to have a positive association (r = 0.092), as demonstrated by the findings. It illustrates that when the number of people of different genders who are enrolled in academic institutions rises, it helps to improve the cooperation and creative decision-making that occur within the academic sector, which ultimately leads to higher performance. Moreover, the mean and standard deviation of gender diversity are revealed as (M = 3.896 and SD = 0.587). There was also a favorable correlation between the variety of academic levels and performance, as shown by the data (r = 0.542). It shows that the performance of faculty members is improved when the proportion of educational diversity in the academic institution increases. Further findings showed that the mean and standard deviation values for variety in academic level were as follows: (M = 3.748 and SD = 0.677). In addition, the mean value and standard value for performance indicate that the mean value is 4.363, while the standard deviation is 0.474.

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Regression Analysis

The purpose of the regression analysis that was carried out in this study was to evaluate the causal link that exists between the independent factors and the dependent variable. This analysis contributes to the prediction of outcomes and the examination of the research hypothesis (Gelman & Hill, 2006). Therefore, this study based on regression analysis evaluates the impact that gender diversity and level of diversity in academics have on performance. Additionally, the following is a presentation of the conclusions of the regression result:

Table 3. Regression Coefficient

Model	Intercept	(1)	(2)	Adj. R_Square	F Value	SEE	VIF	Tolerance
1	3.399*** (8.65)	0.114 (1.27)		0.003	1.61	.58556	1.04	0.959
2	0.372 (0.97)		0.774*** (8.87)	0.290	78.68	.57036	1.04	0.959

t statistics in parentheses, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001, Dependent Variable = Performance (Note: GND = Gender Diversity, DIAL = Diversity in Academic Level, and PF = Performance, F Value = F Statistics, VIF = Variance Inflation Factor)

Table 3 presents the regression coefficient, which reveals the outcomes of the analysis. The coefficient of beta for gender diversity indicates that there is a beneficial impact on the performance of faculty members, however, this effect was determined to be minor ($\beta = 0.114$; $t = 1.27$). It indicates that the performance of the faculty members is improved in a good direction at the same time as the degree of diversity in the higher educational institution improves in terms of the inclusion of gender. It is also important to note that a change of one percentage point in gender diversity may bring about a change in performance of 0.114 percent. Furthermore, the beta coefficient for diversity at the academic level demonstrates a favorable and statistically significant impact on the performance of the teaching staff in the higher education sector ($\beta = 0.774$; $t = 8.87$). The results demonstrate that the performance level of faculty members is improved when there is a greater integration of various workforces in the academic sector. It follows that a change of one percent in academic diversity will bring about a change in performance that is 0.774 percent more than the original change. Following that, the Adjusted R square for gender diversity and academic diversity showed values of 0.003 and 0.290 based on the results. Furthermore, the variance inflation factor is a statistical measure that is used to identify the multicollinearity that exists inside the regression analysis (James et al., 2021; David Fox, 2020). In addition to this, the VIF investigates the connection between variables that are not understood. Finally, the VIF score for gender diversity is 1.04, while the VIF score for academic level diversity is 1.04. All of the variables in the study had a VIF score that was lower than 5, indicating that there was no instance of multicollinearity (Kutner et al., 2005).

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Summary of Hypothesis

The hypotheses that were formed are reflected in the summary of the hypothesis, which indicates the hypothesized relationship between the study variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The theoretical contribution that guided the study of the research was described in this overview (Rogers & Revesz, 2019). The following table presents the summary of hypotheses:

Table 4. Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Results
H_1: Gender diversity influences the performance.	Not supported
H_2: Diversity in academic level influences the performance	Supported

Table 4 shows the summary of the research hypothesis formulated in the study. The first hypothesis: H_1: Gender diversity influences performance was found positive causal relation but remains insignificant revealing not being compatible with the theoretical foundation. Moreover, the second hypothesis: H_2: Diversity in academic level influences performance was supported with theory as its results depicted positive and significant findings.

Discussion

The study aimed to examine the impact of gender diversity and academic level diversity on performance, using data from research conducted in Kathmandu including faculty members from Nepal's higher education system. This research used gender diversity and academic level as independent factors, with performance as the dependent variable. The study's results indicated a beneficial impact of gender diversity on performance, however it was deemed inconsequential. Inclusion in gender diversity boosts performance levels among faculty members in the educational sector. Furthermore, the insignificant findings regarding the relationship between gender diversity and employee performance may stem from the notion that gender diversity is merely a general diversity factor and may exert a weaker influence compared to other variables (Lauring & Selmer, 2010). This finding is in line with the findings of the previous studies stating that gender diversity creates a strong organizational environment, which improves employee performance by encouraging collaboration and innovation (Dezso & Ross, 2012). Moreover, the rationally aggressive nature of male employees and the accommodating nature of female employees can create a synergistic environment that boosts employee performance (Kaley et al., 2006). Since teams need complementary skills to succeed, a diverse staff may improve collaboration. Thus, gender diversity in an organizational team may improve performance (Hoogendoorn et al., 2013). Next, gender diversity in personnel improves decision-making, which boosts performance and reduces turnover owing to better teamwork (Ali et al., 2011). However, this finding remained consistent with the empirical evidence of the earlier research depicting that gender diversity also leads to increased employee disputes inside the firm, eventually impeding performance and resulting in low productivity due to poor communication (Jehn et al., 1999). Moreover, the

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study's results indicated a beneficial and statistically significant impact of academic diversity on teacher performance. The inclusion of a diverse workforce and the engagement of academically unique personnel in educational institutions enhances the performance levels of academics in the higher education sector. This finding is in the same direction showing that the earlier research revealing that academic diversity in teams increases creativity, leading to innovative solutions to organizational difficulties and improved performance (Østergaard et al., 2011). Educationally diverse teams may employ complementary cognitive techniques to find answers to contemporary difficulties (Hong & Page, 2004). Due to the synergy of knowledge amalgamation, firms with diverse academic backgrounds perform better (Dahlin et al., 2005). However, this finding contradicts the findings of the previous research revealing that individuals with very varied educational backgrounds, when engaged in sophisticated problem-solving, impair the decision-making process by prolonging the time required to reach effective conclusions, hence diminishing employee performance (Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study examined the effect of workforce diversity on performance, using gender diversity and academic level diversity as predictors, with performance as the outcome variable. This study produced descriptive statistics to provide broad background information on the respondents. Likewise, correlation and regression analyses were undertaken to explore the connection and to evaluate the study aims and hypotheses. The survey results indicated a beneficial impact of gender diversity on performance. It revealed that inclusive measures inside academic institutions for faculty members boost performance. Consequently, it may be inferred that academic institutions must cultivate an inclusive workforce that embraces gender diversity to promote new ideas, cooperation, and the introduction of novelty in the workplace, ultimately resulting in improved performance. It also indicates that gender diversity is a compulsory system in Nepalese organizations, and state legislation underscores the need for an inclusion mechanism. Consequently, the inclusion of diverse genders is not only a supporting measure aligned with current government policy but also fosters synergy in performance, as a varied workforce enhances overall productivity by serving as a stimulus among faculty members. The results indicated a beneficial and statistically significant impact of academic-level diversity on performance. The increased involvement of academically diverse workforces in the higher education sector leads to improved performance among faculty members in Kathmandu, Nepal. It may be inferred that educational institutions focused on superior performance must have a diverse academic faculty. The presence of diverse faculty members facilitates enhanced cooperation, fostering the interchange of problem-solving abilities and creating synergy in teamwork among educators with varying levels of expertise. Consequently, higher education institutions must have a diversity strategy and planning that prioritizes the recruitment of academically diverse faculty members for optimal and successful performance.

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The results of this study may enhance current theory and have practical implications for academic institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Consequently, these results provide supporting data upon which the higher education sector may formulate and establish suitable working policies, guidelines, and necessary mechanisms inside organizations. This study has various limitations since it encompasses just two variables and utilizes a tiny sample size. This study used just a quantitative approach, which limited the exploration of respondents' subjective knowledge, resulting in conclusions based exclusively on quantitative data. This research was mostly undertaken inside the higher education sector and might include a broader variety of organizations. Consequently, future research may use larger datasets, including more key variables related to employee performance, and may even adopt a qualitative viewpoint.

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