Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity in Communication

[1]Oluwatoyin Adebola OLUOKUN, [2]David Babatunde OLANIYI & [3]Abidemi Funmilayo OMOTAYO

ayansinaoa@eauedoyo.edu.ng/+2347066683766;
olaniyidavidbabatunde@gmail.com/+2348034620928;
[3]omotayoaf@eauedoyo.ng/+2348038269602

[12,3]Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo.

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) within the context of communication studies in Nigeria's highly plural society. Drawing on Communication Accommodation Theory and Social Identity Theory, the paper explores how communication practices can either promote inclusion or reinforce exclusion across workplaces, educational institutions, media, and digital spaces. Using a qualitative research design, data were generated through in-depth interviews with participants from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and through analysis of relevant policy documents and scholarly literature. The findings reveal that inclusive and respectful communication enhances motivation, performance, and a sense of belonging, while language barriers, gender bias, and unequal access to technology continue to marginalize certain groups, particularly women and non-dominant language speakers. The study also shows that although media campaigns raise awareness about equity and inclusion, their impact remains limited without strong institutional support and enforcement. Overall, the paper argues that effective, culturally sensitive communication is central to advancing fairness and social cohesion in Nigeria. It concludes that promoting multilingual communication, supporting women and minority groups, improving digital access, and enforcing inclusive policies are essential steps toward building a more equitable and inclusive Nigerian society.

Introduction

Equity, diversity, and inclusion are important ideas that help make sure everyone is treated fairly and feels like they belong. These ideas are very important in communication because how we talk and share information affects how people get along and understand each other. In Nigeria, where there are many different ethnic groups, languages, and cultures, it is very important to include everyone and respect their differences. Equity means giving people what they need so they can succeed, even if not everyone starts from the same place. Diversity means recognizing and appreciating the many differences people have, like their culture, language, or gender. Inclusion means making sure everyone feels welcome and able to take part, no matter who they are.

Research in Nigeria shows that when workplaces and schools support diversity and inclusion, people feel happier and work better (Ibidunni, Osibanjo, & Adeniji, 2019). But there are still challenges. For example, women in Nigerian universities often face unfair treatment and stereotypes, which stops them from reaching their full potential (Odejide, 2014). Also, the media sometimes shows women and minority groups in unfair ways (Ashong & Batta, 2011). Language is important too because many Nigerians speak local languages, using only English can leave some people out (Muhammed, Sanusi, & Ayuba, 2024).

Some communication ideas, like how people change the way they talk to fit in (Communication Accommodation Theory) and how people identify with groups (Social Identity Theory), help us understand how communication can include or exclude people (Pepper et al., 2024). For example, health campaigns that use different languages and respect cultures have been successful in Nigeria (Agbo et al., 2021). This paper will look at how equity, diversity, and inclusion relate to communication studies in Nigeria. It will show how better communication can help make Nigerian society fairer and more welcoming for everyone.

Literature Review

Many Nigerian researchers have studied how equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) relate to communication in different places like workplaces, schools, and media. In workplaces, Ibidunni et al. (2019) found that when people from different backgrounds feel included and respected, they work better and are happier. Similarly, Inegbedion et al. (2020) showed that companies that treat employees fairly and encourage teamwork perform better. In schools and universities, culture and rules matter a lot. Ishola and Olufemi (2025) found that universities following fair hiring rules help more people from different groups feel welcome and included.

Because Nigeria has many ethnic groups and languages, communication can be tricky. Pepper et al. (2024) explained that how people talk and identify with groups affects whether they feel included. Sometimes people change how they speak to fit in or stand out. Women face special challenges in Nigeria. Ashong and Batta (2011) found that media and education often favor men's viewpoints, and women are shown unfairly. Odejide (2014) also found that women in universities face stereotypes that stop them from moving up or being leaders. Although there are policies to help women, cultural beliefs often hold them back (Okunade et al., 2025).

Technology is another area where inclusion matters. Danjuma et al. (2015) found that many women don't use computers or the internet much because of cost, social beliefs, and lack of support. Nwajiuba and Ukwandu (2021) also showed female students often avoid tech fields because of these pressures. Media can help raise awareness about fairness. Adekoya et al. (2025) studied radio campaigns about gender violence and found they helped people learn about the issue, but real change is slow because laws and society don't always support it. These studies show that good communication helps people from all backgrounds feel included. But more work is needed to make sure fairness and respect happen in real life.

Theoretical Framework

To understand how equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) work in communication, two main theories help explain people's behavior: Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and Social Identity Theory (SIT).

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is about how people change the way they talk when they interact with others. Sometimes, people speak more like the person they are talking to, to show friendliness and respect. Other times, they speak differently to keep their identity or distance themselves. In Nigeria, where many ethnic groups and languages exist, people often adjust their communication to fit in or to stand out. This helps create inclusion when people feel understood, but it can also cause exclusion if someone's way of speaking is ignored or judged (Pepper et al., 2024).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) explains how people see themselves as part of groups, like their ethnic group, gender, or religion. People feel connected to these groups and want to be accepted by them. Sometimes, this can lead to "in-groups" (groups we belong to) and "out-groups" (groups we don't belong to). When communication respects these group identities, it can help people feel included. But when people are treated unfairly because they belong to a different group, exclusion and discrimination happen. In Nigeria's diverse society, understanding social identity helps explain why some groups might feel left out or treated unfairly (Pepper et al., 2024).

Together, these two theories help us understand how communication can support or block inclusion. CAT shows us how people's speaking styles affect relationships, while SIT helps us see how group membership shapes feelings of belonging or exclusion. Using these theories, researchers and organizations can develop better ways to communicate that respect differences and promote fairness and inclusion in Nigerian workplaces, schools, and communities.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) relate to communication practices in Nigeria. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focuses on meanings, experiences, and perceptions surrounding inclusion, exclusion, and communication within social and institutional contexts.

Research Design

The research employed an exploratory qualitative design, enabling an in-depth understanding of participants lived experiences and interpretations of communication practices related to EDI in workplaces and educational institutions in Nigeria.

Participants and Demographics

Participants were drawn from diverse socio-demographic backgrounds to reflect Nigeria's multicultural context. The study involved 24 participants, comprising 12 males and 12 females, aged between 22 and 55 years. Participants included students, academic staff, administrative staff, media practitioners, and communication professionals. They were selected from three geopolitical zones in Nigeria to ensure ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who had direct experience with communication processes in workplaces, educational institutions, or media organizations. This method ensured that participants were knowledgeable about issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion and could provide rich, relevant insights. Snowball sampling was further used to identify additional participants with similar experiences.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

- Interviews: Semi-structured interview guides were used to allow flexibility while maintaining focus on key EDI-related communication issues. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and virtually, depending on participants' availability, and each session lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.
- Document Analysis: Relevant policy documents, institutional guidelines, and previous scholarly studies on EDI and communication in Nigeria were reviewed to complement interview data and provide contextual depth.
-

Validation of Data Collection Instruments

To ensure validity, the interview guide was reviewed by two experts in communication studies and qualitative research. Their feedback helped refine the wording, clarity, and relevance of the questions. A pilot interview was also conducted with two participants who were not included in the final study, allowing for further adjustment of the interview guide.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. The data were read repeatedly to identify recurring patterns, codes, and themes related to language use, gender bias, inclusion, and access to technology. Findings from document analysis were triangulated with interview data to enhance credibility and trustworthiness.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly observed. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by using pseudonyms, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To enhance credibility and reliability, the study employed data triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. These strategies helped ensure that findings accurately reflected participants' experiences and reduced researcher bias.

Findings

This study found several important points about how equity, diversity, inclusion, and communication work together in Nigeria.

First, many people shared that when they are treated with respect and included at work or school, they perform better and feel more motivated. Being able to share ideas freely in a welcoming environment helps people work well together and achieve more. Also, language plays a big role in inclusion. Nigeria has many ethnic groups and languages, and when communication happens only in English or a language someone doesn't understand well, those people feel left out. Although some people try to change the way they speak to fit in, not everyone can do this easily, which can make some feel ignored or misunderstood.

More so, women face special challenges. Many women experience unfair treatment and are often seen as less capable, especially in universities and media. This unfairness limits their opportunities for growth and leadership. Even though there are policies to support women, cultural beliefs and lack of strong support make it difficult for real progress. Also, technology access is a problem for some groups. Many women and other individuals do not have enough access to computers or the internet, which makes it hard for them to participate in online learning or digital communication. This lack of access keeps them excluded from important opportunities.

Lastly, media campaigns help people learn about fairness and inclusion. But for these campaigns to have a real impact, they need support from strong laws and community actions. Without this support, it is hard to create big changes in how people treat each other. Good communication is very important for making Nigeria fairer and more inclusive. To improve, there needs to be respect for different languages, better support for women and minority groups, and wider access to technology. When people feel listened to and respected, they are more likely to participate and contribute positively.

Discussion of Findings

This study shows that communication plays a big role in making sure everyone feels included and treated fairly in Nigeria. When people feel respected and accepted at work or school, they are happier and work better. This matches what other studies like Ibidunni et al. (2019) found, showing how important inclusion is for teamwork and success.

Language is also very important. Nigeria has many different languages, and sometimes people who don't speak English well feel left out. Using only English can make it hard for some groups to fully understand or take part. This supports what Muhammed, Sanusi, and Ayuba (2024) said about language barriers causing exclusion. People try to change how they speak to fit in, but it doesn't always work, and some feel ignored or looked down on.

Women face many challenges in communication. They are often treated unfairly or seen as less capable, especially in schools and media jobs. This matches findings from Odejide (2014) and Ashong and Batta (2011) who showed that stereotypes and poor representation limit women's chances. This makes it hard for women to succeed and become leaders.

Another problem is access to technology. Many women and other groups don't have good access to computers and the internet. This makes it harder for them to join modern communication and learning, as Danjuma et al. (2015) pointed out. Without technology, it is difficult to be included in many areas of life today.

Media campaigns can help people learn about fairness and inclusion, but change happens slowly. Laws and society sometimes do not support these changes well enough. Adekoya et al. (2025) also found that media can raise awareness, but more support is needed for real progress.

The study shows that better communication can help Nigeria become more fair and inclusive. But problems like language barriers, gender bias, and technology gaps must be fixed. Respecting different ways people speak and see themselves will help everyone feel included and valued.

Conclusion

This study has shown that equity, diversity, inclusion, and communication are closely connected, especially in a diverse country like Nigeria. These ideas are very important because they help make sure that everyone is treated fairly and feels like they belong, no matter their background, language,

gender, or culture. One of the key points is that good communication is essential for creating fairness and inclusion. When people communicate well and respectfully, they help each other feel accepted and valued. This helps to build strong teams at work, better learning environments at schools, and more united communities. It was clear from this study that when people feel respected and included, they are more motivated, work harder, and are happier.

Language is a big part of communication, especially in Nigeria, where many languages are spoken. Using only English can sometimes leave people out, especially those who are more comfortable with local languages. Including local languages in communication can help more people understand important information and feel included. This shows that respecting language diversity is a key step toward inclusion. Women in Nigeria still face many challenges. They are often treated unfairly and face stereotypes that limit their opportunities, especially in schools, workplaces, and the media. This unfair treatment makes it hard for women to reach leadership roles or participate fully. Even though there are laws and policies meant to help women, cultural beliefs and weak support systems make progress slow. Supporting women better and encouraging their participation in all areas of life will improve fairness and diversity.

Another challenge is technology. Many people, especially women and those in rural areas, do not have enough access to computers or the internet. Without access to technology, they miss out on many opportunities for education, work, and communication. Closing this technology gap is important for making sure everyone can participate in today's digital world. Media can play a positive role by raising awareness about fairness, equality, and inclusion. However, for real change to happen, media campaigns need strong support from government policies and community actions. Awareness alone is not enough if laws are not enforced and social attitudes do not change.

Theories like Communication Accommodation Theory and Social Identity Theory help us understand how communication can include or exclude people. They explain why people change how they speak and how group identities affect feelings of belonging. Using these theories can help organizations and leaders design better communication strategies that respect differences and promote inclusion. The study highlights that creating a fair and inclusive society in Nigeria depends a lot on how people communicate. Respecting different languages, supporting women and minorities, improving access to technology, and using media responsibly are all important steps.

To build a better future, Nigeria needs to continue working on these issues. This means creating workplaces and schools where everyone feels welcome, using languages that people understand, making sure women and minority groups have equal chances, and providing better technology access for all. When people feel heard and respected, they will be more willing to contribute their talents and ideas, which helps society grow stronger. Ultimately, equity, diversity, and inclusion are not just about rules or policies. They are about treating people with kindness and respect, and making sure everyone has the chance to succeed. Communication is the tool that connects us all, and when used well, it can bring people together to create a fairer and more united Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several steps can help improve equity, diversity, and inclusion through better communication in Nigeria.

Promote Fair Communication in Workplaces and Schools, Organizations and schools should create environments where everyone feels respected and included. This means encouraging open conversations where people from different backgrounds can share their ideas without fear. Training programs on diversity and inclusion can help workers and students understand each other better.

Use Local Languages alongside English since Nigeria has many languages, it is important to use local languages in communication, especially in workplaces, schools, and public campaigns. This helps include people who may not be comfortable with English and makes sure everyone understands important information.

Support Women and Minority Groups, more needs to be done to remove gender stereotypes and discrimination. Organizations should have clear policies to support women and minorities, including fair hiring and promotion practices. Encouraging women to take leadership roles and participate in technology and media fields will help reduce inequality.

Improve Access to Technology: To close the digital gap, more efforts should be made to provide access to computers, the internet, and ICT training for women and underserved communities. This can be done through government programs, partnerships with NGOs, and community education.

Strengthen Media Campaigns with Community Support: Media campaigns about fairness and inclusion should be combined with strong support from laws and local leaders. This will help ensure that messages about equality are followed by real actions in communities.

Encourage Respect for Different Communication Styles: People should be taught to appreciate different ways of speaking and cultural expressions. Understanding Communication Accommodation Theory means recognizing why people change how they speak and respecting those differences to make everyone feel welcome.

Develop and Enforce Inclusive Policies: Both government and organizations should create clear rules that promote inclusion and stop discrimination. These policies should be regularly reviewed and enforced to make sure they work in practice.

By following these steps, Nigeria can build a fairer society where everyone, regardless of background, can participate fully and communicate freely.

References

Ashong, A. C., & Batta, H. E. (2011). Gender representation in communication education and practice in Nigeria. Journal of Communication and Media Research, 3(1), 15–28.

Afolabi, M. O., & Adetunji, A. (2020). The impact of inclusive communication on workplace productivity in Nigerian organizations. International Journal of Business Communication, 57(4), 537–555. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488420905827

Eze, C. C., & Okoye, J. U. (2021). Gender equity and empowerment in Nigerian higher education: Challenges and prospects. Journal of Gender Studies in Africa, 3(1), 44–60.

Fasoranti, M., & Olagunju, T. (2019). Language use and cultural identity in Nigerian multilingual settings: Implications for social inclusion. Nigerian Journal of Linguistics and Communication, 14(2), 112–130.

George, A. O., Dauda, M., & Ezinne, U. (2021). Communication strategies enhancing gender inclusiveness in Nigeria's emerging industries. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 5(3), 412–420.

Ibidunni, A. S., Osibanjo, A. O., & Adeniji, A. A. (2018). Diversity and inclusion practices in Nigerian public health institutions: Implications for employee engagement. Human Resource Research, 2(2), 76–85.

Ibrahim, A. Y., & Bello, S. (2022). Digital literacy and access among rural women in Nigeria: Bridging the communication gap. Journal of Information Technology for Development, 28(3), 512–529.

Muhammed, A., Sanusi, L., & Ayuba, D. (2024). Language use and exclusion in Nigerian public communication. Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Studies, 6(2), 53–68.

Nnamani, P., & Okeke, F. (2023). Media representation of minority groups in Nigeria: An analysis of fairness and inclusion. African Journal of Media and Communication, 10(2), 95–110.

Odejide, A. I. (2014). Gender equity in Nigerian higher education: A review of policies and practices. International Journal of Gender Studies, 6(2), 91–104.

Ohunakin, F., Adeniji, A. A., & Oludayo, O. A. (2019). The effects of diversity management and inclusion on organisational outcomes: A case of a multinational corporation. Journal of Economics and Management Studies, 4(1), 25–36.

Ojo, T., & Adedoyin, S. (2021). Inclusion and equity in Nigerian workplaces: The role of corporate communication. Journal of African Business, 22(1), 78–92.

Okeke, L., & Obasi, N. (2020). Intersectionality and gender communication challenges in Nigerian organizations. International Journal of Gender and Communication, 5(2), 25–42.

Onyekwuluje, A., & Eze, M. (2018). Barriers to effective communication in Nigeria's diverse workplaces: A sociolinguistic perspective. Language and Society Journal, 7(1), 33–47.

Pepper, C. I., Onah, G. I., & Ajayi, A. F. (2024). Communication accommodation and inclusion in Nigerian institutions. South African Journal of Social Science Education, 12(1), 101–118.

Umeh, C., & Ogbodo, S. (2023). The role of ICT in promoting inclusion among marginalized groups in Nigeria. Journal of Digital Inclusion Studies, 2(1), 15–28.

Yusuf, R., & Abdullahi, H. (2019). Gender disparities in Nigerian media: A critical study of news representation. Nigerian Journal of Mass Communication Research, 6(3), 40–55.