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Exploring equality, diversity, and inclusion in multiethnic settings: A context-sensitive approach

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Abstract

Organisations, worldwide, have introduced human resource management (HRM) and equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies to address the inherent disadvantages experienced by employees with diverse social identities in different national contexts. In this study, we draw on McCall's comparative intersectional framework and Chadwick's narrative methodologies on materiality and voice, to investigate employees' experiences of EDI policies in a multiethnic setting. Vignette and interview data were obtained from employees in two banks, in the ethnically extremely diverse country of Nigeria, and analysed. Our findings suggest that EDI policies require a universal, widely acknowledged, core alongside specificities reflecting the context in which the EDI is to be enacted. Furthermore, we integrate and build on intersectionality, materiality, and voice to nuance and challenge EDI approaches and mutually supportive HRM policies in the Global South that may, in turn, have implications for the Global North and, particularly, multinational companies.

KEYWORDS
diversity, equality, inclusion, intersectionality, materiality, multiethnicity, Nigeria, participant voice

Practitioner notes

What is currently known?

- Organisations, worldwide, have introduced human resource management (HRM) and equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies.
- The EDI policies aim to address inherent disadvantages experienced by employees from diverse ethnicities and other protected categories/identities.
- Although EDI and HRM practices have been developed in the Global North, they are also adopted by companies in the Global South, often without adequate consideration of crucial contextual differences.

What this study adds?

- The study identifies critical, context laden, concepts embedded in the Global South that challenge mainstream EDI approaches inherited from the Global North.
- A demonstration of the relevance of context in articulating and implementing EDI policies in multiethnic settings.
- The study enhances the international HRM literature on national cultural influences on HRM policies and practice implementations.

The implications for practitioners

- The findings suggest EDI policies do require an appropriate professional practice core and, in addition, a specificity that suitably reflects the locale in which the EDI is enacted, to accommodate context.
- EDI policies should be sensitive to relational imperatives (e.g., informality, collectivism, sharedness, affiliation, and reciprocity) that are linked to core ethnocultural values, meanings, and identity, in ethnically diverse settings.
- Multinational and global organisations should ensure their EDI policies and practices appropriately reflect context in the Global South.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Organisations, worldwide, routinely have core HRM practices such as: recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, tasks and role specification (Budhwar et al., 2016; Mayrhofer et al., 2018), and equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies. EDI policies are present to address the inherent disadvantages and inequalities experienced by a diverse workforce. They are designed to create an inclusive and participative workplace, improve representation across work areas and activities, reduce perceived unfair hierarchies, foster feelings of respect, and to build an environment free of discrimination and bullying (Farndale et al., 2015).

Many countries in the Global North comprise racially and ethnically diverse labour markets built on an enduring legacy of forced or economic migration (Budhwar et al., 2016) and it is this composition that has motivated much of recent EDI policies and practices. For many countries in the Global South, however, societal and workforce ethnic diversity is predominantly based on indigenous multiethnicity and not race (Budhwar & Debrah, 2013) and this is true, regardless of the size of the state's population. As examples: Indonesia recognises over 300 ethnic groups (Ananta et al., 2015), with the predominantly monoracial population of Nigeria having more than 371 listed ethnicities (Otite, 1975); the Philippines has more than 182 ethnic groups and even the less populated, predominantly monoracial countries of Sierra Leon, Senegal and Sri Lanka have an estimated 16, 7 and 10 main ethnic groups, respectively (UN Data, 1995-2018).

Many of the EDI policies originated in the Global North and were influenced by increasing Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic group representations in the workforce (Beech et al., 2017) and the socio-economic and managerial

views of difference and fairness (Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012) in developed economies. Nonetheless, many EDI policies introduced by companies from these economies are adopted by their subsidiary organisations in the Global South. Moreover, many indigenous organisations operating in the Global South who view themselves as 'forward thinking' and aspire to the West's model of good organisational practice have adopted similar EDI approaches, albeit unsuccessfully (Hennekam et al., 2017). Critics have highlighted the mismatch between EDI and HRM policies and practices designed in developed economies but applied in the Global South, resulting in different, unexpected, and even harmful workplace outcomes for specific identities across ethnicity, gender, and class, and others (Hennekam & Tahssain-Gay, 2015).

To address the mismatch, some suggest incorporating local managerial and social contexts (Bamberger, 2008) with others (e.g., Kaufman, 2015) arguing for novel theoretical and methodological approaches. Chadwick (2017) particularly advises researchers to focus on *voice*; the identities, material experiences, and viewpoints and accounts of research participants, and *materiality*; material structures, boundaries, and their intersections (e.g., interpersonal/group, political, sociocultural, organisational, historical, institutional) through which diversity and inequalities are lived in specific contexts. To address these imperatives, some critical diversity studies have focussed on intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012), defined as the interaction between multiple categories of differences and inequalities (Cho et al., 2013), as an essential lens and methodological tool (McCall, 2005; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Some argue, however, that many EDI studies consider diverse categories (race/ethnicity, gender, class, etc.) and implicit inequalities and context as independent phenomena, overlooking the role of intersectionality (see Dennissen et al., 2020).

There is a consensus regarding the need to address potentially inappropriate EDI policies developed in the Global North being implemented, without adaptation, in the Global South.

This paper provides a robust and rigorous investigation of EDI practices in a Global South setting using the material experiences and the viewpoints or 'voice' of research participants, as actors. The lived experiences of diversity for employees from two Banks in the multiethnic setting of Nigeria, were scrutinised. The 'lived experiences' refers to the intersections of occurrences and events individuals live through with their recollections, derived meanings, gained knowledge, choices, and the context in which these encounters nest (Schuler & Tarique, 2007; Van Manen, 2016). Context-sensitive methods were used, where 'context' is not imposed, predetermined, or taken 'as is' but revealed, accounted for, challenged, and addressed (Cooke, 2018; Farndale et al., 2017a). We posed the research question: *How does an intersectional approach enable a context-sensitive investigation of the lived experiences of diversity in multiethnic settings?*

To address this question, we build on McCall's (2005) intersectional analytical framework, focussing on ethnic identity and inequalities intersecting with identities, including gender, professional/organisational role, intergroup/intragroup membership, and class/status. We also draw on Chadwick's (2017) work on materiality and voice to explore accounts of experiences of diversity and inequalities in an ethnocultural and organisational setting. Imperatives of managing diversity and EDI through contextually relevant managerial and employee insights of (un)fairness at work are investigated, while drawing on an intersectional analysis to highlight the potentially counterproductive nature of (mainly Anglo-Saxon and North American) EDI and HRM policies applied, without recognition and sensitivity to context, in a multiethnic Global South setting.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | EDI and HRM: Established practices and policies

Diversity and discrimination issues related to the integration and social cohesion of ethnic minorities are complex and shaped by various historical, political, and socio-economic structures and factors (Atewologun & Sealy, 2014). The 'macro context' of socio-political factors, legal frameworks, demographics, and history, inevitably determine the

form of social identity that is salient in the workplace for a particular society (Pringle & Ryan, 2015). National structures and institutions are therefore instrumental at the macro-national level. For the meso-organisational level, rules governing race/ethnic relationships and gender equality issues are determined by organisational processes, rituals, and routinised behaviours.

At the micro-individual level, however, issues regarding gender, class, ethnicity or more general racialised phenomena are likely to be influenced by individual power, motivation, and agency to affect change (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009).

Cultural, national, or firm-specific contexts, typically influence EDI and HRM policies and objectives, with many EDI initiatives emanating from the Global North focussing on racial and national disadvantage (with race often used interchangeably with ethnicity). For example, there has been a focus on racial categorisations for monitoring and evaluation of ethnic participation at lower to senior management organisational levels (CIPD, 2021; Parker, 2017). However, these approaches have limitations (Farndale et al., 2015) without modifications. They can be counterproductive by systemically failing to address fundamental discrimination of ethnic minorities practiced in the Global South, where many countries are racially homogenous but have a substantial number of diverse indigenous ethnic groups (George et al., 2017).

The literature shows that although organisations in the Global South consider that they 'act fairly' by adopting EDI policies, the lived experience of disadvantaged employees in these contexts often lead to feelings that the policies do not address their material experiences of discrimination and marginalisation (Wildish & Cornelius, 2002) and that they "feel unfair" (Gagnon & Cornelius, 2000; Inegbedion et al., 2020). The practice frequently fails to capture the relational interplay between structural and agentic-level concerns of equality. This further emphasises the need to adopt a more context-sensitive approach to HRM and diversity management (Farndale et al., 2017b; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009).

2.2 | Context, materiality, and voice

Contextual complexities and intersections are often experienced in varied, nuanced, situational, and even conflicting ways by individuals of different identity categories. Insights into context and materiality can be gained through agentic activities and individual subjective meanings, interpretations, and accounts of these.

Context incorporates individuals, structures, occurrences, and surroundings, associated with a phenomenon and the situational opportunities and constraints that impact and are impacted by a phenomenon (Budhwar et al., 2016; Hennekam et al., 2017). This includes the labour market, legislation, business conditions, management philosophy, workforce characteristics, and societal values. Embedded in contexts are temporal, situational, and structural complexities that overlap and intersect with clear-cut and predefined categories and boundaries, or *materiality* (Chadwick, 2017).

Materiality includes those distinct yet fluid contextual boundaries and intersections through which individuals enact their lived experiences (Johns, 2017). It captures lived realities/experiences of context such as situatedness (the political, economic, and social structures that influence how identities are assumed and positioned to produce and reinforce inequality), configuration (bounded or symbolic), and enactment (e.g. through ethnicised representations such as 'rebellious' or 'oppressed' (Chadwick, 2017)). For instance, the immediacy of experiencing discrimination in a workplace context and the meaning process are shaped through individual interpretation, re-interpretation, and communication. Materiality ***is not only an event or phenomenon*** that is experienced, but also one that creates the ability to recount this experience and an impression important to the individual linked to a unique identity and context (Frechette et al., 2020).

The narratives which embody experiences and context and through which research participants construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct their lives, are termed *voice* (Chadwick, 2017).

2.2.1 | Voice-in-context

Voice encompasses individual accounts of context, materiality, and lived experiences (Chadwick, 2017). It refers to participants' narratives about the dynamic, contested, and at times contradictory interplay between context, materiality, and lived experiences (Kaufman, 2015).

Voice facilitates focus on both individual accounts of identities and structures through which experiences are lived and enacted, as well as on individual accounts, per se. In an EDI context, voice is therefore often conceptualised differently to that in the organisational behaviour (OB) and employment relations (ER) literature. It is portrayed as a prosocial behaviour that benefits the firm, in OB research. This is based on a unitarist assumption of an alignment between the interests of workers and that of management, a view predicated on the micro-level antecedents of voice (Dundon et al., 2017). Human resource management (HRM) voice research shares some similarities with OB research, based on a common interest in management efforts to promote voice to enhance the firm's bottom line (Kaufman, 2015). Indeed, Chadwick (2017) argues that prosocial or management-led voice thrives in contexts where formal structures of employee voice are less socially embedded, individualistic employment relationships prevail, and social/collective norms are, at best, weak. In ER studies, employees are considered to have their own views and interests, independent of the firm's interests. Voice is therefore considered to be pluralistic with formal structures, such as unions, work councils, and grievance procedures, all being strong preconditions for promoting employee voice (Boxall & Mackey, 2014).

Chadwick contends that exploring materiality and voice requires a distinctive, theoretical, and methodological location. Such an approach must show 'the limitations of focussing only on individual experience and textual story-telling' and highlight 'the methodological importance of finding ways to explore and analyse the material, structural, and political realities that co-construct lives/narratives' (Chadwick, 2017, p: 14). This study adopts an *intersectional approach* to explore these aspects.

2.2.2 | Intersectionality

'Intersectionality', a term first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to define the interaction between multiple categories of difference and inequalities, is rooted in (African American) black feminism. Since Crenshaw (1989) used the term to define varied experiences of race and class oppression, intersectional studies have diversified and are now regularly reported in the literature (Cho et al., 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2016) with scholars utilising it to probe professional identities, career progression, leadership, entrepreneurship, diversity management, and organisational inequality regimes between various categories such as class, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability, and occupational status (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012).

Crenshaw's seminal work has been influential in feminist scholarship, with its theoretical connotations being increasingly explored in EDI and HRM research (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

2.2.3 | McCall's approach to intersectionality

In 2005, McCall (2005, p: 1771) investigated 'the complexity of intersectionality' and the methodological implications of intersectionality in research practice, design, and analysis. This seminal work is one of the few analytical studies of intersectionality, per se. It addresses the methodological complexity that is present due to the subject of analysis exhibiting multiple categories and levels (Dennissen et al., 2020). The resulting analytical framework addresses how researchers assume, reject, or engage categories. The three key methodological approaches are: *anticategorical, intercategorical, and intracategorical*.

The *anticategorical approach* focuses on the individual as an embodiment of group norms, a member of fixed identity categories such as ethnicity, class, or gender (McCall, 2005). By focussing on the individual, this approach circumvents the complexity associated with analysing social life through social groups (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

The *intercategorical approach* strategically engages with relations between specific fixed identity categories (e.g., ethnicity) to trace patterns of inequality (McCall, 2005). This approach accepts that inequality among various social groups exists, and consequent disparities form the analytical basis for probing implicit imbalances between these (Carastathis, 2013). 'This perspective leaves open the possibility that relations between specific social groupings become a mirror that reflects patterns of inequality' (McCall, 2005).

The *intracategorical approach* takes an intermediate position by not rejecting categories but retaining a critical stance that interrogates 'the boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself' (McCall, 2005, p: 1773), focussing on single groups 'at neglected points of intersection' (1774). The multiple positions refer to differences within categories, not between categories (Cho et al., 2013).

In deciding how these approaches can be employed to explore materiality and voice in our focal context, namely Nigeria, we draw on McCall's (2005) view using each of the individual approaches and overlapping, when appropriate.

3 | RESEARCH CONTEXT

3.1 | Nigeria, ethnoculture and EDI

Nigeria's national policy for managing EDI, and specifically ethnocultural diversity, is founded on a combination of common laws enshrined in Nigeria's constitution of independence (1979), customary (tribal) law based on indigenous norms and practices, and Sharia (Islamic) law. This tripartite arrangement is a legacy of the British/French suzerainties, where internal community affairs were subject to localised authority and control, while overall control and law were colonial (George et al., 2017). This arbitrary demarcation of the area known today as Nigeria created a postcolonial legacy that accentuated hostile ethnic resentments. Ethnic group membership in Nigeria is defined by geographical boundaries and cultural characterisations (Mustapha, 2006; Otite, 1975).

Ethnicity continues to influence views of fairness, equality, and discrimination, as some ethnic groups have historically been regarded as more favoured by colonial administrators of the UK, with this colonial ethnic status/hierarchy preference continuing, post-independence. The Federal Character Principle (FCP) is Nigeria's Constitutional provision which, since 1979, has sought to ensure that appointments to public (and private, to some degree) institutions fairly reflect the linguistic, ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity of the country. Nigeria's government emphasises that a key benefit of the FCP is national integration. However, the effectiveness of the FCP at achieving integration is questionable as Nigerians typically relate principally to their ethnic group, rather than embracing the notion of a nation-state that is considered more remote and abstract (George et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, even with at least 371 ethnic groups, some values are commonly held amongst Nigerians. Traditionalism, communalism, ethnocentrism, respect for age, wealth, influence/affluence, and kinship are core Nigerian values (Ovadje & Ankomah, 2013). Core value homogeneity is partly sustained by what Mustapha (2006, p: 5) refers to as Nigeria's tripolar ethnic structure or 'the tendency of many minority groups to cluster – politically, linguistically, and culturally–round the big three' (Hausa-Falani, Yoruba, Igbo).

In this study, 'multiethnic' does not indicate that all 371 ethnicities for our study were appraised. Focus was on typical Nigerian values across two of the three dominant groups, which together make up over 68% of the Nigerian population (Mustapha, 2006). The core ethnocultural values espoused by these three dominant ethnic groups are broadly representative of other groups and are widely used in social science research (George et al., 2017). The Hausa-Falani ethnic group was, however, omitted for safety, ethical, and strategic reasons. Large swathes of Northern Nigeria, where members of the Hausa-Falani ethnic group are dominant, were affected by the Boko Haram military

insurgents. The study was consequently confined to the more secure region of Southern Nigeria and, specifically, Lagos where Igbo and Yoruba employees are plentiful but with few Hausa-Falani employees in the two focal banks.

Shared values, behaviours, and practices, such as respect for, and loyalty to, superiors are visibly manifested in the Nigerian workplace (Ovadje & Ankomah, 2013). A good appraisal or promotion recommendation from a manager is often based on ethnic affiliation or loyalty, rather than skill or experience (Ituma et al., 2011). Often, indigenous Nigerian (African) and Global North systems occur simultaneously in employee practices. Values and practices perceived by employees as foreign may, however, lose their original meaning and purpose, sometimes resulting in a melding of or conflict between ethnocultural values and organisational HRM/EDI policies (Umeh, 2019). Moreover, local HRM professionals tasked with implementing EDI policies in Nigerian organisations remain aware of how sociocultural dynamics influence employee behaviour in ways that may be antithetical to EDI goals (George et al., 2017).

However, some studies suggest there remains a tendency for employees to respond to EDI-related queries and directives in ways they believe will advance their careers through perceived positive organisationally desirable responses or ones considered to enhancing their standing with their managers (Ituma et al., 2011). This behaviour is connected to the core ethnic values typical across ethnicities (Ovadje & Ankomah, 2013) whereby feelings of inclusion are paradoxically linked to the ethnic endorsement of inequalities based on class/status, wealth, influence, and privilege. Therefore, local HRM practitioners are often tasked with implementing EDI policies where employees' meanings of fairness and inequality are frequently not aligned with organisational EDI policy goals of equity. Given our research question, '*How does an intersectional approach enable a context-sensitive investigation of the lived experiences of diversity in multiethnic settings?*' an additional question seems appropriate. Specifically, *how do HRM and diversity management practices, underpinned by concepts of fairness and workplace diversity from developed economies in the Global North, address inequalities rooted in ethnocultural contexts in the developing economies of the Global South such as Nigeria?* This suggests the need for a more nuanced, context-sensitive approach to investigating these dynamics.

4 | METHODS

Our study draws on a qualitative dataset collected from a purposive sample of employees in two banks in Nigeria; these are given the pseudonyms of Bank Aloes and Bank Boda, hereafter, to ensure anonymity of the banks and study participants. After 6 months of complex negotiations, permission to access the banks' staff was granted.

The branch managers were interviewed first, followed by the unit/team heads, who sanctioned direct access to team members. Team members indicating a willingness to participate in the study were scheduled and interviewed in a private, designated room. We used a snowballing technique in which participants referred us to others willing to participate, based on our required ethnic criteria. In all cases, participants were made aware of the agreed University-approved ethical procedures for the study, and these were followed: participants were informed of the study, were guaranteed anonymity, signed a consent form, and were made aware they were able to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a justification.

Our sample included 14 male and 11 female bank employees, of which five were managers. Of these, 11 were ethnically Igbo and 14 were Yoruba (Table 1). As anticipated, Hausa-Falani employees were very few in the focal bank branches in Lagos, with most concentrated in the branches in Northern Nigeria.

We focussed on the context in which the reported interaction by participants occurred (Chadwick, 2017). Thus, we acknowledge Chadwick's premise of: 1. Individual experiences in social and organisational settings (experiences in context); 2. Individual experiences as personalised, distinctive, and authentic embodiment of specific settings (experiences as context), and; 3. Experiences as indicative of the embeddedness of contextual elements and their interlinkages (experiences as an embodiment of contexts).

TABLE 1 Participant profile

Bank Aloes (A)	Participants	Gender/Ethnicity	Role
	A1	Female/Igbo	Marketing
	A2	Male/Yoruba	Marketing manager
	A3; A10	Male/Igbo	Operations
	A4; A8; A11	Female/Igbo	Operations
	A5	Female/Yoruba	Operations
	A6	Female/Yoruba	Manager, operations
	A7	Male/Yoruba	Head-of-Operations
	A9; A14	Male/Yoruba	Marketing
	A12; A13	Female/Yoruba	Marketing
Bank Boda (B)	Participants	Gender/Ethnicity	Role
	B1	Male/Igbo	Manager, operations
	B2; B3	Female/Yoruba	Operations
	B4	Male/Yoruba	Marketing manager
	B5; B10; B11	Male/Yoruba	Marketing
	B6; B9	Female/Igbo	Marketing
	B7	Male/Yoruba	Operations
	B8	Male/Igbo	Operations

4.1 | Data collection – Interviews and vignettes ('vignette-elicited interviewing')

Data were collected using two methods: interviews and vignettes. The interviews engage participants in conversation to gain insights into perceptions, typicality, and context (what ought to be or what was professionally/organisationally or socially required) through first-hand accounts (Farquhar, 2012).

We also used textual vignettes (see Table 2). Vignettes are texts, images, or other forms of stimuli or stories about individuals, situations, and structures to which research participants are asked to respond (Hughes & Huby, 2012). They can refer to important perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes (Pitard, 2016) and have been used in cross-cultural research (e.g., Kristensen & Johansson, 2008; Soydan, 1995). The vignette scenarios were crafted to elucidate the banking practitioners' and the first author's experience of Nigerian banking, were structured around daily life and practices in the banking sector, and fulfilled three main purposes (Kristensen & Johansson, 2008): interpretation of actions and occurrences that allowed exploring situational context; clarification of individual judgements, often in relation to moral or value dilemmas; and, discussion of sensitive practices and experiences.

Vignette responses acted as prompts and offered an elaboration of the interview data, yielding fresh participant-generated scenarios (recorded and analysed, with extracts presented *verbatim*). Using the two methods, simultaneously, in an interlinked fashion, therefore provided the basis for what we term *vignette-elicited interviewing*. The questions in the interview guide were crafted around the aim of each vignette scenario (see Table 3). They helped the discussion progress by probing employee meanings, including: what a successful career looks like; how competence is evaluated; what is a 'model' employee, and; the dynamics of relationships between subordinates and their managers.

4.1.1 | The research vignettes

The first vignette sought to reveal how employees navigate the terrain where ethnocultural values such as respect for seniority, status, positional authority, and class, conflict with EDI policy goals - such as equality. The interview

TABLE 2 Vignette scenarios

Vignette scenarios		Aims
Scenario one	Pawache works as a cashier in a bank. An older man from Pawache's village walks into the bank during banking hours and walks up to Pawache. Pawache greets him with a bow and raises his right hand as his parents taught him from childhood. The senior gives Pawache a cheque, which Pawache proceeds to encash, before giving the cash to the older man. The senior seemed pleased with Pawache's service, pushing a tip of ₦2000 towards Pawache and immediately walks away. In Pawache's village, waiting to be acknowledged after giving another person a gift is considered rude. In Pawache's village, also, it is considered taboo to refuse a gift from a senior. However, the bank frowns at tips from customers to staff, although this is an unwritten policy. • What should Pawache do? • What would you do if you were Pawache?	*To understand what employees do when faced with context-related value dilemmas (shared, organisational, ethnocultural, professional, institutional etc.) in the organisation, but to lead to discussions regarding how ethnocultural values like respect for inequalities (through age, seniority, status, positional authority, class, privilege, influence, affluence, wealth et.) may be antithetical to egalitarianism, equality, equity indicated in EDI policies and espoused by the organisation.*
Scenario two	Tseda joined the bank 6 years ago, through the help of her uncle's friend, who, incidentally, is now her manager. Tseda is a marketer. During her orientation programme, Tseda was told that she was free to call even the managing director by the first name as this was "the bank's policy." In Tseda's tribe, calling seniors, people in authority or "anyone above you" by the first name is considered disrespectful: One must always use titles. Tseda's manager is much older, and even the customers refer to him as "Sir". The inspection team is around from the Bank's head office to observe if customers and staff are happy and interacting appropriately. Tseda needs to get a document signed urgently by her manager, so she has to address him. The customer service team is watching and listening. • How should Tseda address her manager now? • How should Tseda address her manager hereafter? • What would you do if you were Tseda (now & hereafter)	*To explore if time and context influenced how various situations within organisations may produce different employee practices; to examine employee meanings and if this is consistent with organisational meanings; to explore if status feeds into, stands alone or overrules ethnicity; to explore the practicality of the removal of status distinctions through, for instance, first name address, which presumably mitigates feelings of inequality and unfairness based on EDI policies, while simultaneously retaining reporting lines and hierarchies which are HRM-related and what the outcome translates into for the employee regarding fairness.*

questions for this scenario helped focus and progress the discussion by probing how status based on ethnic values was reinforced or constrained by status based on HRM-linked organisational hierarchies, reporting lines, and titles. The second vignette was designed to investigate the practicality of EDI policies, such as the removal of status distinctions through "first-name addressing". The third vignette sought to explore how HRM practices, such as staff redeployment, job rotation or employee selection, are viewed by participants. The fourth vignette prompted investigation of whether professional identity/professionalism mitigates the tendency for ethnicity to evoke an extreme interpersonal commitment that may be antithetical to EDI goals. The associated interview questions, for example, queried whether ethnic allegiance overrides commitment to HRM/EDI requirements.

Overall, the interview further probed whether ethnic membership and leadership constrain or enable organisationally desirable outcomes, such as equality.

This combined methodological approach was designed to facilitate the participants 'voice-in-context', allowing them to relay their everyday lives and experiences of diversity given social (ethno-cultural) and organisational factors.

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Vignette scenarios		Aims
Scenario three	Dejure considers himself a professional banker and is also the chairman of his tribal association in the city. Dejure has just been redeployed to the funds transfer desk of a very busy branch. He had noticed that his boss, the operations manager, a woman (who was on her annual leave when dejure reported) had just resumed. She is much younger than dejure. Dejure has also noticed how other staffs relate with the manager: Running errands, curtseying or bowing, greeting her using "Madame" or "ma"; not questioning her directives and asking for her advice even concerning personal/family issues. Dejure has heard from the grapevine that this attitude is essential because the manager appraises all staff at the end of the year, and only "well-mannered staff" get an excellent appraisal. In Dejure's tribe, older men do not bow to younger persons and for an older man to greet a younger woman first is taboo. The bank encourages staff to call each other by their first name irrespective of position or age. Dejure needs to present himself to his manager as he has just resumed. • How should dejure relate with his manager? • What would you do if you were dejure.	*To show those transient, contingent and situational dynamics that inform employee value allegiance, specifically to uncouple considerations regarding how employees interacted and made value choices in the Nigerian banking industry. To reveal how HRM practices like staff redeployment, job rotation, employee selection, can easily require some form of diversity management through EDI policies in specific contexts.*
Scenario four	Takudo's branch is a market branch (sited within a big market). His manager has asked him to report to work on a weekend because he (the manager) wants to pick a parcel he forgot in his office the day before. Takudo is one of the key custodians of the bank, and the manager can't gain access without him. Takudo has noticed that any weekend the manager's wife wants to shop, he finds an excuse to get Takudo to come and open the door of the bank so that he can wait for his wife within the premises. Takudo has heard that the branch manager's wife owns a big shop in another part of town. The manager insists he has unfinished paperwork each time. The bank does not pay Takudo for this extra time. Within the last 3 months, Takudo has been coming every other weekend. Takudo's appraisal forms are on his manager's desk because it is appraisal week. • What should Takudo do? • What would you do if you were Takudo?	*To clarify if the employee's professionalism or sense of duty (underpinning values such as neutrality) could dilute the ethnocultural requirement of respect for status (Ovadje & Ankomah, 2013). More importantly, this scenario sought to unpack how employees determine cost and benefit, right or wrong; how commitment to organisational policies, including EDI policies, is practised; to show how ethnicity evokes an extreme form of interpersonal commitment which defines perceptions of EDI in the focal banks.*

Care was taken to not explicitly state EDI or HRM policies or themes in the vignettes to prevent professionally/organisationally desirable responses, which could subvert or alter the participant's voice. To achieve this, vignettes comprising more vernacular language, rather than formalised policy terms were employed. Participant recollection and reconstruction of events were further aided by interviews taking place at their workplace, during business hours (Farquhar, 2012).

TABLE 3 Linking vignette scenarios to interviews

Vignette scenario	Aim of vignette scenario	Sample questions in interview guide (Linked to vignette scenario)
Vignette scenario one	To understand what employees do when faced with context-related value dilemmas (shared, organisational, ethnocultural, professional, institutional, etc.) in the organisation. To lead to discussions regarding how ethnocultural values like respect for inequalities (through age, seniority, status, positional authority, class, privilege, influence, affluence, wealth etc.) may be antithetical to egalitarianism, or equality, indicated in EDI policies and espoused by the organisation.	• Describe how you will exchange greetings when you meet a colleague at any time of the day. • Would the approach be different if this was a senior colleague from your ethnic group? • Is there any arrangement through which your ethnic group or other ethnic groups in your organisation meet?
Vignette scenario two	To explore if time and context influenced how various situations within organisations may produce different employee practices; to explore employee meanings and if this is consistent with organisational meanings; to explore if status feeds into, stands alone or overrules ethnicity; to explore the practicality of the removal of status distinctions through, for instance, first name address, which presumably mitigates feelings of inequality and unfairness based on EDI policies; to explore what simultaneously retaining reporting lines and hierarchies which are HRM-related and the outcome translates into for the employee regarding fairness.	• State an opening sentence in an official mail from you to your manager. Please explain other choices of expression open to you (if any). (Ethnic or EDI related values in strictly formal expressions between superior and subordinates) • Is there any leadership for members of your/other ethnic group(s) here in the workplace? • Does the organisation recognise this leadership/group? • Are other ethnic groups welcome to join? • How has being a member of your ethnic group helped you as an employee in your organisation?
Vignette scenario three	To show those transient, contingent, and situational dynamics that underpin employee value allegiance and specifically to examine how employees interact and make value choices. To reveal how HRM practices like staff redeployment, job rotation, employee selection can easily require some form of diversity management through EDI policies in specific contexts.	• What kind of people are most likely to make a fast career here? • Whom do you consider a particularly important person in this organisation, and why is this? • Describe the symbols/gestures that people use when communicating or interacting in your workplace (Possible replication of ethnic values in the workplace). • Describe the symbols/gestures that people use when communicating or interacting in your village/community (Possible replication of workplace/ EDI based values in nonwork/cultural setting).

4.2 | Data analysis

We drew on information from websites, brochures, annual reports, and participant affirmations to scrutinise the official HRM and EDI policies of both banks. A transcript was also prepared that organised the information collected

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TABLE 3 (Continued)

Vignette scenario	Aim of vignette scenario	Sample questions in interview guide (Linked to vignette scenario)
Vignette scenario four	To clarify if the employees' professionalism or sense of duty (underpinning values such as neutrality) could dilute the ethnocultural requirement of respect for status; To unpack how employees determine cost and benefit, right or wrong, and how commitment to organisational policies, including EDI policies, is practised; to show how ethnicity evokes an extreme form of interpersonal commitment which defines perceptions of EDI in the focal banks.	• Have there been instances where staff resorted to the ethnic group to resolve a conflict between colleagues or between managers and reports? • What happens if, in such a case, colleagues or the manager and the report are from different ethnic groups? • Do staff trust their colleagues and line managers, irrespective of ethnic group membership?

from the participants. Detailed descriptions of the company's norms, work processes, and employment systems were omitted to help preserve confidentiality and participants were made aware of this arrangement to increase the likelihood of creating an authentic participant-led, context-sensitive, crafted story (Chadwick, 2017) relayed through the participant's voice (Kaufman, 2015).

Our intersectional data analysis progressed in two phases. First, consistent with scholars who adopt an intersectional analytical framing to explore participants' voices through narratives (e.g., Atewologun & Sealy, 2014; Chadwick, 2017; Dennissen et al., 2020; Kaufman, 2015), we used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying themes, common topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that emerge, repeatedly, across the vignette-elicited interview data (Farquhar, 2012). Following McCall's intersectional approach, we proceeded with the second stage of data analysis by engaging the themes to explore participants' experiences of diversity rooted in ethnic identity intersecting with identities such as personal/interpersonal, gender, professional/organisational, intergroup/intragroup, and class/status, and the experiential context.

5 | FINDINGS

Equality, diversity, and inclusion activities and policies in Bank Aloes and Bank Boda aimed to create an environment that is fair, inclusive, ethnically diverse, non-hierarchical, respectful of individuals, supportive, and intolerant of discriminatory, bullying, and abusive behaviour (Farndale et al., 2015). Both banks used 'international standards', that is, Global North derived HRM/EDI practices to improve outcomes through training that was 'tailor-made' (Mayrhofer et al., 2018). A consequence of 'tailor-made', however, was to either exclude identities or privileging some identities as more relevant than, or unlinked to, others. In both banks, ethnicity and, to a lesser degree, gender were the main targets of EDI policies.

Managers were 'trusted to support' employees because they had received the required training to manage diverse teams. There were initiatives in both banks aimed at equality by abolishing status distinctions, titles, and prefixes and encouraging first name addresses, all of which were reinforced through training.

While employee awareness and even positive assessment of organisational EDI policies reinforced professional or organisational identities, this did not, however, always guarantee successful EDI outcomes. Employees frequently viewed organisational EDI structures as being imposed by management, or inconsiderate of ethnic value requirements and meanings, with the consequence of reinforced inequalities. There were also tensions within the organisational structures. Equality, diversity, and inclusion policies seemed subordinate to HRM structures and practices. These dynamics reinforced inequalities.

The findings highlighted core themes: (i) shared versus imposed EDI policies (ii) policy favourableness at odds with ethnocultural appropriateness (iii) centralised 'transparent and feels fair' HRM policy contradicted by 'feels unfair' line HRM practice.

5.1 | Shared versus imposed EDI policies

When discussing vignette scenario two, participants seemed aware of organisational EDI policies and management requirements in both banks. For instance, mandating of first name usage to reduce reverence for hierarchy, rank, and status perceived to engender unequal, unfair, negative, and discriminatory relations. The organisations viewed this seriously, with punishment for non-adherence, including sacking. Responses include: *'we are on the first name basis in the bank'*; *'organisation policy requires the first name'*; *'one can be sacked for it [not using the first name]'*, and in one instance, *'somebody got sacked for not calling [someone] by their first name'*.

However, based on discussions for vignette scenario 1, attempts to engender equality and respect in the organisation felt imposed rather than shared by employees (Farndale et al., 2015). In practice, they sought alternatives. One employee from each bank succinctly captured these insights:

> *When in Rome, you do as Romans do. If you are interested in being promoted, you should do what others do. If you do not, then you remain stagnant. You will have issues.' (B7)*

> *We conform to the banks' standards but still find an alternative way [ethnically acceptable means] to show respect (A14).*

Despite the management's seemingly 'good intentions' regarding EDI policies, practices evoking a sense of ethnic group value compliance remain viewed by employees as necessary for career advancement.

Even where EDI processes, structure, and outcomes such as first-name addressing in both banks were mediated by broader HRM policies, resulting in flatter structures and less fragmented reporting lines (Hennekam et al., 2017), participants suggested that ethnic value allegiance to the branch manager was still necessary.

Responses from Bank Boda suggest that de-emphasising status distinctions may not erase real and perceived positioning of power/status, grounded in ethnic differences (Ituma et al., 2011). For instance, a female Igbo employee shared her experience of Yoruba managers:

> *'The head of the marketing team is a Yoruba man. Whatever the errors I make, he tries to tribalise it. He will say "if it were Tunde [another Yoruba colleague], Tunde respects elders" After that, I moved to another branch. It was terrible. My manager will tell me, "I am a Yoruba woman, and I will deal with you."'* **(B6)**

However, while employees sometimes condemned managerial bullying behaviour based on organisational policies, their judgement of the ideal, right, or wrong was still founded on ethnic value requirements (the 'Yorubaness' or 'Igboness' of actions). The findings highlighted the disconnect between the values underpinning organisational EDI policies and those of managers and employees in Bank Boda. An employee seemed more likely to feel bullied because of their ethnicity, after having been legitimately rebuked by a manager of a different ethnicity, but this is not always linked to ethnic otherness. Frequently, this arose because of the tension between EDI policies seeking to reduce ethnic inequalities and HRM practices that simultaneously seemed to reinforce inequalities. For instance, while discussing vignette scenarios 2 and 3, the responses suggest that Bank Aloes EDI policies regarding using first names were largely ineffective in the face of HRM reporting lines and task allocation, which reinforced subordinate-manager status.

> *'Your manager is your senior, mind you, and will write your appraisal. If you do not do 'it' the way 'it' should be done [ethnic value compliant], your career will not progress.'* **(A1)**

> *'Senior employees will not take that from you [first name address]. 'Sir' connotes respect. It's just decorum. I call my manager, 'Sir'.'* **(A2)**

Thus, some status-levelling EDI policies did not necessarily achieve their objective of facilitating the levelling of relationships. Instead, they were felt by some to increase the consciousness of inequalities.

5.2 | Policy favourableness at odds with ethnocultural appropriateness

Similarly, the banks' prohibited ethnoculturally appropriate gestures such as bowing and prostrating to elders or senior colleagues (symbolic of core ethnic values of respect; Ovadje & Ankomah, 2013). The responses show that employees experienced anxieties about these practices while accepting and complying with them because they were considered '*appropriate*'. As one participant explained:

> *'Well, I know Yoruba prostrate, but we Igbo do not; we sometimes bow when we meet a superior. Some managers will not even listen to you if you do not prostrate or act accordingly. Irrespective of the organisation's policies, you must show them respect'.* **(A9)**

In Bank Boda's case, participants indicated that employees view their organisation's EDI policies positively. However, when applying the same policies in practice, they seemed cautious. One female Igbo respondent gave the following example:

> *'A [female Yoruba] manager said, "good morning" to me. I replied, "Hi, good morning" She responded, "When someone [of higher status] says good morning to you, you do not say hi" Based on the system [bank's policies], I don't see anything wrong in saying "hi"…but you still can't just say "hi" or "how are you" to an older, senior person, because it's [ethnoculturally] disrespectful.'* **(B9)**

Here, the manager's seniority, manifested through organisationally instituted hierarchy and status distinctions, seemed to subtly intersect with and sustain ethnically induced inequality. Employees seemed aware of the bank's EDI goals of equality but were equally aware of ethnic status distinctions that undermine these goals.

According to one manager,

> *'So, you try to manage your supervisor even when you dislike all that is happening [inequality] because you might not be keeping all the rules [abiding by EDI policies], but you will progress career-wise once loyal to them'* **(B4)**

Thus, attempts to value diversity, in principle, were diluted in practice due to employee quest for managerial approval and ethnic group endorsement, symbolic benefits, legitimation, and, most importantly, co-option (Inegbedion et al., 2020).

5.3 | Centralised 'transparent and feels fair' HRM policy contradicted by 'feels unfair' line HRM practice

Participants seemed to regard HRM practices as fair. Even in Bank Boda, where the HRM department was not diverse and comprised mostly of Yoruba, Igbo employees trusted the process not because it fulfiled diversity quotas (George et al., 2017) but because it was centralised and considered 'transparent', as reflected in the following response:

> *'During my job interview, I met a Yoruba friend who finished her master's from London. I was surprised that she was not selected because 90% of the people in the HR department at the Head Office were Yoruba. At that point, I realised that the bank is not interested in your surname'* **(B1)**

Employee perceptions of the fairness of internal centrally controlled HRM policies were viewed positively, and evoked feelings of equality, impartiality, belonging, and inclusion, in both banks. However, this was not the case with local line managers interpretation of policy and the resultant HRM practice. Again, materiality seemed to predominate in both banks, viz. the intersections of, and tensions between, structures that support centralised and line management delivered HR processes. Employees abhorred the appraisal process because it reinforced negative experiences of diversity while relying on the same process for career progression.

In Bank Aloes, a good appraisal was contingent upon compliance with managers' ethnocultural practices and values of respect and loyalty. Wariness of deviation was evidenced by the fear of being fired. Discussing vignette scenario 4, one employee argued:

> *'As long as your appraisal is at stake, they [you] should continue doing what the manager says...or they [you] could be fired.'* **(A7)**

Another Bank Aloes employee articulated the importance of ethnic affiliation for career progression as,

> *'...well, you still see people here and there congregating based on ethnic affiliation. People go, "ah, an Igbo guy is now the head of that unit [the manager]", then "ah, the manager now is Yoruba, at least now I can get a promotion."'* **(A3)**

These concerns were also shared at more senior levels, as one manager in Bank Aloes explained:

> *'Even when you are good, it takes heaven for somebody to appraise you properly and promote you. Most people get to the top because they have someone to talk to. Everything lies with the opinion that managers have about you.'* **(A6)**

Unlike what was stipulated in HRM policy, reporting lines and procedures, were in practice regarded as only part of the managers' job: ethnocultural obligation irrespective of tasks or roles was expected also. Participant voice captures this tension. In response to vignette scenario 4, a participant, like several others from both banks, explained how '*You must manage your manager.'* **(A13)**.

We further analyse our findings regarding employee experiences of diversity in the context of our Nigerian case through an intersectional lens drawing on McCall's (2005) multi-method—intercategorical, anticategorical, and intracategorical—analytical framework.

6 | AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

6.1 | Employee experiences in context (intercategorical)

Drawing on the intercategorical lens (engaging with relations between specific fixed identity categories to trace patterns of inequality; McCall, 2005), ethnic 'affiliation' produced shifting loyalties—where employees remained ethnic group members but could still become associates of other ethnic groups. This was more pronounced than ethnic 'membership', which bounded one to a specific ethnicity, the focus of national EDI policies like the FCP, and

the EDI practices in the two focal banks in this study (George et al., 2017). For instance, members of one ethnicity were 'accepted' into other ethnicities based on the dominant power of managerial status.

Equality, diversity, and inclusion policies in the banks focussed on ethnic differences, conflict, and inequalities based on geographical boundaries or ethnic heterogeneity. Relationships within both organisations were frequently driven by shared core ethnic values that are typical across ethnicities and congruence or value homogeneity (Ovadje & Ankomah, 2013). An intercategorical lens reveals materiality and how the bases and boundaries of some diversity relationships overlap or are altered, and how organisational HRM hierarchies (managerial status) mediate ethnic group boundaries by enabling ethnic affiliation and inducing inequalities (Chadwick, 2017). This ultimately undermines EDI goals.

While the organisational EDI initiatives introduced in both focal banks were intended to address equality, fairness, and respect and were focussed on employees' tangible practices (Farndale et al., 2015), inequality and subservience were, nonetheless, manifested through subtle and nuanced means. The evocation of inequalities across ethnicities seemed, however, a requirement – a symbol for career development and progress. Here too, an intercategorical approach highlights participants' *voices*, which underlines the differences between the meanings and values of what was imposed by the organisation and the shared values and sense of community of those who were enacting them. An intercategorical lens, therefore, reveals the relevance of shared ethnocultural values between ethnic groups for crafting meaningful EDI policies (George et al., 2017).

The EDI policies in the two banks emphasised conflict and heterogeneity rather than congruence and sharedness through interethnic interactions This undermined EDI goals and made the policies and resulting practices, ineffective.

6.2 | Employee experiences as context (anticategorical)

Based on an anticategorical approach, focussed on the individual as an embodiment of group norms, our findings reveal how employees remain actors whose actions are, at times, defined by interpersonal and relational imperatives such as the manager-subordinate relationship (Farndale et al., 2017a). Regardless of the presence of EDI and HRM policies, a vacuum can still remain irrespective of the branch manager's value allegiance (Ovadje & Ankomah, 2013). An anticategorical approach highlights materiality as evidenced by how the contextual boundaries between ethnicity, the office of the manager, and the individual occupying the office are deconstructed and reconstructed by employees.

Contrary to the literature (George et al., 2017; Ituma et al., 2011), status was not perceived by employees as attached to management position per se, but to the individual (manager) who occupied management position, irrespective of ethnicity. This *de-ethnicisation* and *personalisation* of status reinforces the belief of a more personal/interpersonal rather than group-based engagement with ethnicity and group affiliation. Ethnic loyalty and value allegiance, in both focal banks, were therefore considered personal and individualised. The manager-subordinate relationship was not only a manifestation of social distance between individuals within the organisation (Budhwar & Debrah, 2013), but also an outcome of employees' personal appraisal of the structural (organisational and ethnocultural) boundaries and intersections that defined these relationships.

6.3 | Employee experiences as an embodiment of contexts (intracaticategorical)

Drawing on an intracategorical approach that focussed on differences within single groups (McCall, 2005), our study revealed the desire by employees, irrespective of their ethnic group, to remain in their superior's 'good favour' (Ituma et al., 2011). Both within-group and between-group differences were de-emphasised as each employee was co-opted into and made subservient through the manager's ethnicity, by affiliation and commonly shared core ethnic values. The notion that a more participative workplace climate would engender an egalitarian culture (Farndale et al., 2015) was also perceived as a challenge to a superior's authority. The influence of status and hierarchy within organisations

may, therefore, be universal and reflect broader sociocultural hierarchies (Atewologun & Sealy, 2014). In ethnoculturally diverse settings, they may even be antithetical to EDI initiatives. This might be particularly the case, when they translate into an endorsement, imputing subservience into organisational relationships, provoking fear/respect/reverence in subordinates while reassuring superiors. To succeed, EDI initiatives must therefore adapt and respond to the broader multidimensional contextual dynamics that reflect employee experiences (Hennekam et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the Anglo-Saxon concept of performance management, including setting goals and objectives, providing face-to-face feedback, and even peer or subordinate evaluation (Farndale et al., 2017a), may be particularly problematic in ethnically diverse contexts as such practices are at variance to some core ethnocultural values. In our study, appraisal information was unduly influenced by ethnocultural imperatives (Ituma et al., 2011), legitimating inequality and compromising EDI initiatives and outcomes. Materiality was evidenced by how organisational, institutional, social, and ethnocultural contexts had interlinkages that ultimately were at odds with EDI structures/policy objectives.

While EDI policies and HR practices in our study were conflicting and antithetical to the lived experiences of employees from the two banks, the practices that nevertheless were perceived to be successful were those that were delivered by centralised organisational structures (Inegbedion et al., 2020; Wildish & Cornelius, 2002). These included training, recruitment, and selection initiatives.

Drawing on the intracategorical lens, this study demonstrated a material disconnect between HRM/EDI theory, social reality, and context. It was shown that knowledge about the nature of current relationships between ethnic groups (George et al., 2017) may be less important than how these relationships may change within and between ethnic groups and the implications of these changes for meeting EDI objectives. Overall, it questioned whether EDI goals can be realised if they focus solely on differences, inequalities, and discrimination in the multiethnic settings typically present in Global South countries.

7 | DISCUSSION

Corporate efforts to engender an inclusive workplace through egalitarian EDI policies originating in the Global North and centralised HRM practices (Farndale et al., 2015) were evident in both focal banks. Given the broader social, historical (post-colonial), and institutional context within which employees' experiences are nested, our findings suggest that expediting these practices without sensitivity to employee meanings and line manager interpretations can be counterproductive and compromise EDI and HRM outcomes (Hennekam et al., 2017).

Analysis of our data for participants' voice revealed three main themes, namely: shared or imposed EDI policies; policy favourableness at odds with ethnocultural appropriateness, and; 'transparent and feels fair' HRM policy at odds with 'feels unfair' line HRM. These themes suggest how intersections of context, identity, EDI, and HRM policies and practices manifest in employees' lived experiences of diversity (Cho et al., 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Intersections of ethnic, class, organisational, interpersonal, intergroup, intragroup and gender identities in workplace settings were seen, nonetheless, to overlap with employees' ethnocultural and sociohistorical (specifically, post-colonial) contexts.

Ethnic sentiments and respect for societal seniority (ethnocultural appropriateness) seemed to override desirable EDI goals (policy favourableness) when these goals were not perceived as being consistent with ethnocultural norms, aiding career advancement, and managerial (line management) endorsement (Ovadje & Ankomah, 2013). Employees did seem more positive towards 'transparent' centralised HRM policies but anxious when administered by line managers as this was frequently perceived to be partial and unfair (Ituma et al., 2011). This suggests that specific contexts require both professional HRM practices (Budhwar et al., 2016) together with a nuanced understanding of line HRM (Farndale et al., 2015).

Concentration on a narrow singular bounded identity, such as the focal banks' focus on ethnicity, to form the basis for EDI and HRM policies may be counterproductive if other mediating and intervening imperatives such as social and power structures (Chadwick, 2017) and intersecting identities are ignored (Collins & Bilge, 2020). From

consideration of materiality, identities such as class/status and profession can enhance or constrain salient identities such as ethnicity. However, a simple engagement with identity dynamics through HRM and EDI practices focussed on ethnic identity rather than intersections across multiple identities (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009) may omit the complexities at play, sustaining rather than constraining inequalities (Hennekam & Tahssain-Gay, 2015).

Our study showed that participants recognised that 'ethnoculturally appropriate' employee behaviours could yield immediate potential benefits (managerial approval, ethnic group endorsement). Moreover, the immediate 'costs' to employees, namely, subservience, supporting managerial control, maintaining a system of inequality in the workplace, were investments that could yield future career benefits (career advancement, good appraisal, job security; Inegbedion et al., 2020). Again, materiality reveals the tensions between structures and policies that are assumed by management to favour employees equally (grounded in EDI goals developed in a Global North-context), and how social norms and structures are used to project ethnocultural appropriateness, that is preferred by employees, but which sustains the inequalities the organisation sought to address.

HRM and EDI practices based on universalist knowledge were 'watered down' to accommodate localised realities and dynamics, rooted in the wider Nigerian ethnocultural context (Bamberger, 2008). The themes of *shared or imposed EDI policies* and *'transparent and feels fair' corporate HRM policies overlapping with 'feels unfair' line HRM* illustrate that employees were more likely to report negative experiences in positive, organisationally desirable, manager-approved, and *respectful* ways (Ituma et al., 2011) – which satisfied EDI goals but sustained partial and unfair line HRM.

The findings also revealed conflict between required employee organisational identity and ethnic identity, mediated by managerial status. This suggests that 'one-point-in-time' and 'one-size-fits-all' or customised approaches to HRM and EDI policies may be incapable of grappling with these dynamics in settings such as ethnoculturally diverse contexts (Mayrhofer et al., 2018). In some instances, these practices seemed to engender rather than mitigate perceptions of unfairness in the two banks. Materiality was evidenced here and highlights how the structural boundaries that define lived experiences keep shifting and intersecting (Chadwick, 2017). These insights have implications for how HR professionals advance EDI objectives in a context-sensitive manner. Local HR professionals may adopt Western-rooted concepts of fairness and workplace diversity, but whether these can address inequalities rooted in historicity in ethnoculturally diverse, post-colonial contexts like Nigeria remains, unanswered.

Finally, the multi-method approach (vignette-elicited interviewing) that facilitated the intersectional analytical framing used in this study, responds to the need to articulate these multidimensional dynamics, thereby accounting for employees lived experiences of diversity in context through materiality and voice.

8 | RESEARCH AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Our findings accord with Schuler and Tarique's (2007) view that HRM should be about 'understanding, researching, applying, and revising all HR activities in their internal and external contexts as they impact the processes of managing people in organisations throughout the global environment to enhance the experience of multiple stakeholders' (p. 718).

Our study explores EDI in an international context and contributes to the broader international HRM field.

8.1 | Implications for research

Our study revealed imposed rather than shared EDI policies (policies based on collective employee meanings of benefits and costs) may result in HRM practices that unwittingly hide whilst reinforce inequalities and differences, and encourage the persistence of ethnic affiliations. By better understanding broader social structures and contexts through which employee material experiences are lived, EDI policies can support key HRM initiatives more effectively

(Hennekam & Tahssain-Gay, 2015). Focussing on participant voice-in-context, we add more depth and nuance to the extant research that has often emphasised positive employee perceptions of EDI to evaluate successful outcomes (George et al., 2017; Inegbedion et al., 2020; Pringle & Ryan, 2015).

By confirming research methods insensitive to context can produce misleading results unless they build on participant voice (Kaufman, 2015), we also contribute to the methodology of intersectionality research. Adopting a multi-method approach based on vignette-elicited interviews, we engage with different aspects of the lived experiences of diversity. This is fundamental, as extant EDI studies tend to blur, blend, and bridge contextual dynamics at different levels of analysis (micro, macro, meso). Drawing from the view that more contextualisation of HRM research may require stakeholders to question methodological choices and explore innovative and alternative solutions (Bamberger, 2008), we further demonstrate how researchers can capture the richness of context. This is achieved through materiality and voice by exploring elements within intersecting structural and analytical boundaries (Budhwar et al., 2016), investigating interlinkages, nuances, and paradoxes embedded in employees' EDI experiences, appropriately.

Overall, we demonstrate that using an appropriate research method (Farndale et al., 2017b), such as vignette-elicited interviewing, facilitated a distinctive voice to participants (Cho et al., 2013; Kaufman, 2015), was an adaptive method for context-sensitive research, and a way to understand how to improve HRM and EDI outcomes.

8.2 | Practical implications

Current EDI policies and outcomes based on quotas, targets, managerial reports, surveys, etc. (Inegbedion et al., 2020; Ituma et al., 2011), can be ineffective, inconsequential or counter-productive as meanings will appear 'imposed' by the organisation in some contexts. To be 'meaningful', EDI policies need to be based on employees' shared values, especially in international HRM where the national contexts and norms of international companies may differ, substantially, from their parent company's (Pringle & Ryan, 2015). While some HRM practices exaggerate the tendency for conflict (Hennekam & Tahssain-Gay, 2015), organisational and ethnic meanings can align when EDI policies target desirable and yet organisationally realisable HRM outcomes (e.g., career progress and development). Otherwise, HRM practices can inadvertently reinforce ethnically based inequalities (Farndale et al., 2015). This study found 'sharedness' to be key for successful HRM and EDI outcomes. To avoid the situation of conflict in ethnoculturally diverse and developing contexts like Nigeria, we therefore suggest EDI policies and HRM practices be driven by an intersectional approach (Dennissen et al., 2020) that incorporates translatability, adaptability, and employee meanings or 'sharedness' to achieve policy goals.

This study identified two areas for consideration for international organisations wanting to operate in Africa, and African/Nigerian organisations seeking to internationalise their practices. One is that relevant HRM practices linked to EDI outcomes, (e.g. professionalisation through recruitment and selection in Bank Boda), implemented independent of line management involvement, may drive desirable EDI outcomes as employees trusted centralised 'transparent' HRM tools as these were perceived as fair, but were mistrustful of line manager's impartiality. The second was that in some situations, however, centralised control of HRM practices may not always be appropriate to drive EDI goals. It is also suggested that an intersectional approach to instituting and executing HRM and EDI policies is germane (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

Mayrhofer et al. (2018) argue that positive measures across HRM and EDI metrics in a specific context, by HR practitioners, might reinforce the rhetoric, but not the realisation of EDI goals. Based on our findings, local HRM practitioners may need to reappraise and reconstruct how they view HRM and EDI policies and to adapt them to specific contexts, through materiality and voice. They must be aware that in specific settings, inequalities, unfairness, and power can also be embedded, evoked, positioned, and instrumentalised through EDI and HRM policies and practices, but in a manner that is distinct and shaped by national cultural norms.

This study also found that EDI and HRM policies were not always apolitical or neutral; they remain open to contestation in ethnically diverse contexts. Regardless of efforts by the two banks to engender equality through flatter structures and first-name addressing, managers utilised hierarchies and reporting lines to impose status and control, engendering subservience and inequality within structures that, in principle, mitigated inequalities. This suggests a need for the continuous revaluation of policies based on employees' material experiences. Regarding voice (Kaufman, 2015), greater contextualisation of HRM and EDI policies and practices may require practitioners to question mainstream/conventional assumptions and explore innovative alternative solutions that account for, rather than justify, context (Johns, 2017). Employee accounts of their lived experiences and contexts, consequently, remain germane.

Overall, for HRM researchers and practitioners, the reality of what diversity, equality, and fairness mean and how they manifest differs between the Global North and Global South. Equality, diversity, and inclusion policies must have a universal core yet specificity that reflects the context where they are enacted (Hennekam et al., 2017). Rather than decontextualised ideas of diversity, equality, and fairness, contextualising EDI and HRM policies and practices is required. This can be accomplished by focussing on relational imperatives (e.g., informality, collectivism, sharedness, affiliation, and reciprocity) linked firmly to core values, meanings, and identity, specifically in ethnically diverse settings.

9 | LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The absence of the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group is a limitation in any research within the national context of Nigeria, as accounts of the lived experiences of members of this group would undoubtedly provide additional valuable insights. Anonymising the banks was also a limitation, as we could not openly link bank-specific documentation to HRM strategies. The sample sizes are also small, although consensus amongst the cohort was present for many of the aspects investigated.

The study does, however, provide an enriched understanding of the impact of EDI policies and HRM practices for international and global organisations seeking to address indigenous multiethnic diversity in Global South countries using the novel vignette-interview data collection instrument. Opportunities for future research include applying a context-based investigation in other post-colonial, super-diverse states of the Global South.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
We have no conflict of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Interview transcripts are available, if required for scrutiny.

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