Workforce Diversity and Employee Performance in the Local Government of Kanchanpur, Nepal

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Abstract

Background: In today's highly competitive governance, diversity has become one of the most critical executive issues, as the local governments have increasingly become diverse concerning their workforce. Diversity emerges in a local government when its members differ from one another. The concept of diversity includes recognizing, accepting, and respecting each difference and understanding that each is unique.

Objectives: The main objective of this paper is to investigate the association between employee performance and workforce diversity in the local government of Kanchanpur district.

Methods: The study adopted a descriptive research design. Purposive and cluster sampling techniques were used, and a structured questionnaire was used to collect the data from 400 employees of different municipalities of Kanchanpur district. To analyze data correlation matrices, ANOVA tables, and coefficient tables as outputs of regression.

Results: The employees in the local governments are becoming more diverse because of the political reforms, the global practice of local government, competitiveness and change in customer preferences, and inclusive participation in the constitution. With the drastic change in politics, the formation of the progressive constitution of Nepal increasing reforms in the last two decades and changing demographics of the labour market local government has become a place for diversity inclusion.

Conclusion: The result revealed that ethnicity diversity, educational diversity, and work performance diversity have positive impacts on employees' performance. Further, physical disability has a negative impact on employees' performance. This study highlights how workforce diversity affects employees' performance in the local governments of Kanchanpur district. These results can be used to build strategies to improve the implementation of employee diversity in existing local governments.

Keywords: Employee performance, local government, workforce diversity

JEL Classification: J24, N4, M5

Introduction

In today's highly competitive governance diversity has become one of the most critical executives' issues, as the local governments have increasingly become diverse concerning their workforce. Diversity emerges in a local government when its members differ from one another. Every human being is unique along with every possible dimension. The concept of diversity includes recognizing, accepting, and respecting each difference and understanding that each is unique. It is a set of basic practices that involves accepting and appreciating the interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment.

The globalization of good governance, teamwork, and inter-governmental strategic coalitions have made the government environment very complex and complicated. Every local level is based on teams/workgroups, whose processes have been considered as a critical element for its success. Therefore, workforce diversity has become unavoidable and essential for sustainable local governments' performance. Workforce diversity is increasingly recognized and utilized as one of the most essential, local government resources for the achievement of the goal of a local government and providing excellent service, in the dynamic and competitive governance environment.

Mushtaque et al. (2021) have revealed that workforce diversity refers to a condition where individuals within a group or organization vary in terms of their age, size, color, ethnicity, immigrant status, and level of education. Jackson et al. (1995) defined diversity as the existence of differences among members of a unit. Due to the increasing diversity of people on the planet in terms of their ethnicity, gender, national origin, race, age, and other personal traits, diversity is an essential component of institutional life for companies (Shaw & Barret- power, 1998). In other words, Workplace diversity is the condition that exists when members of a group or organization differ from each other in terms of demographic factors such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, immigration, and composition than it was historically (Erasmus, 2008).

Individuals with diverse objectives, attitudes, beliefs, demands, and work habits comprise today's workforce (Deluca & McDowell, 1992). According to Kochan et al. (2003), diversity can cause a range of emotions in the workplace because some people view it as a problem that needs to be solved rather than as a tool that can be exploited to improve the company.

Many scholars agree that companies that understand diversity provide more valuable outcomes. Businesses that put diversity first will get considerably greater cost savings from reduced attrition and higher sales than those that do not (Brown & Lam, 2008). Businesses that view diversity as an essential part of their strategy, as opposed to an expense of doing business, will benefit from it considerably more than those that do not. Diversity fosters synergistic success when individuals of an organization can appreciate and understand one another as well as draw from one another's experiences, abilities, and viewpoints.

Workforce diversity (WFD) is typically defined by similarities and differences among WDF in terms of age, cultural background, color, religion, disabilities and physical abilities, and sexual orientation,

according to Kathimba and Anyieni (2018). People differ from one another not just in those ways, but also in terms of their interests and points of view. These perspectives were divided in society for a long time. For any organization, the application of enhanced WFD is necessary. Yet, managing such a WFD is spread furthermore a huge difficulty for the company.

In Nepal, the diversity of work is quite remarkable. Nepal is a nation with diverse ethnic and linguistic power (Shrestha & Parajuli, 2021). People from a variety of ethnic groups live in Nepal. Similarly, people from distinct ethnic groups speak various languages and practice numerous religions (Shrestha & Parajuli, 2021). The majority portion of the population (around 81.3%) follows the Hindu religion. Likewise, Nepal had Buddhists, 4.4% Muslims, 3% Kirant, and 1.4% Christian. However, the Nepalese civilization is being more influenced by other cultures (CBS, 2012). According to Wikipedia, Nepal has 125 castes and 129 languages and ethnic groupings. All of these increase labor diversity in workplaces in Nepal. However, cross- cultural influences are increasing in Nepalese society (CBS, 2012). There are 125 castes and ethnic groups, and 129 languages (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal). In Nepalese workplaces, all of this build workforce diversity.

Diversity in the workforce can help local governments gain a competitive edge because diverse points of view can encourage original and inventive ways of problem-solving, which in turn boosts creativity and innovation and improves performance. The diversity idea is all-inclusive and founded on respecting each person's individuality and tolerance for variety. It expands on established strategies for equal opportunities and goes beyond the scope of legal protection for equality issues. It fosters an atmosphere where increased contributions from all employees will benefit the local governments, the workers themselves, and society at large.

Review of Literature

Diversity

Diversity states the variety of differences among people. It consists of all, characteristic traits that define each of us as individuals. A common misconception about diversity is that only certain persons or groups are included under its umbrella, this is not true. It includes not only how people see themselves, but also how they see others, and how these views influence their interactions with others. Diversity describes people's differences. Differences can come from individual characteristics and life experiences and can influence personal perspectives. Diversity includes the entire spectrum of differences of an individual, including race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, physical disability, and sexual orientation. Besides, it also includes communication style, work style, organizational role/level, economic status, and geographic origin. It is a simple fact that each person possesses unique qualities along each of these dimensions. Orientation, values, ethnic culture, education, language, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearance, and economic status (Wentling & PalmaRivas, 2000).

It includes cultural factors such as race, gender, physical ability, ethnicity, values belief, etc. The broader

definition of diversity may include age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, values, ethnic culture, education, language, lifestyle, beliefs, physical appearance, and economic status (Wentling & PalmaRivas, 2000).

Ethnicity Diversity

There is increasing attention in academia and the public sector about ethnic diversity and employee performance. Ethnicity can be thought of as a grouping of people who follow similar cultural traditions and customs and who also give its members a sense of national pride (Sayers, 2012). Ethnic diversity implies language, religion, race, and culture. There has been an increase in the multicultural workforce in the local government for utilizing greater participation and synergy to improve and increase both employee satisfaction and local government performance. A moderate level of ethnic diversity does not affect team performance in terms of local government outcomes i.e. effective service, transactions, and development at the local level. However, if at least the majority of team members are ethnically diverse, then more diversity has been positive impact on the performance of teams (Hoogendoom & Van Praag, 2012). Following the rise of diversity in recent times, there has been a rise in work groups with the intention of increasing participation to enhance employee and local government performance as a whole.

Physical Challenge Diversity

Persons with disability are found in organizations, some are born with disability others get disabilities as a result of accidents and other illnesses. The respondents acknowledged that a disability mainstreaming policy is in place which ensures implementation of government policy on affirmative action or persons with disabilities. Wangombe et. al. (2013) explained that The Kenyan government and human rights activists encourage the hiring of people with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities through the constitution and by making funding available to companies to employ these workers. Moreover, Invisible disabilities, such as depression, dyslexia, and fibromyalgia, require the workplace to provide reasonable accommodations, these accommodations help workers adequately perform their duties without lowering performance expectations or standards.

Stringer (2004) expressed that performance impact was the only factor related to the acceptance of a coworker who has a disability for all three diverse disabilities, which is extremely important for workplace inclusion and acceptance. To correct these misconceptions and enhance their employment experience, it is essential to recognize that people with disabilities may not be included due to (erroneous) views that they cannot perform the job.

Educational Diversity

Employees can have different levels of qualification for education. Diversity in education also impacts employee efficiency. Choi and Rainy (2010) noted that a higher output level is driven by a more prominent portion of trained staff. Khan et al. (2019) explained education diversity is established by organizational leaders, and as a result of these efforts, employees are more motivated to execute their

tasks well and help the firm reach its objectives. They urged that educational background is important to employees and that employees cannot find a job and perform well without an adequate educational background. Daniel (2009) found out that various levels and types of education have different mobility rates. He argued that the occupations available to those with working experience but who do not possess a certificated tertiary paper may differ from those who possess such education level. Lewin, Massini, and Peeters (2011) faced that the absorptive capacity of the organization is likely to increase with variety in knowledge structures as reflected in diverse educational majors.

The author further stated that educational diversity can negatively affect decision-making consensus in top management teams thus resulting in poor performance. Moreover, heterogeneous educational diversity tends to increase the level of discomfort and conflict and may lead to decreased social integration and performance in terms (Jindal et al., 2013).

Work Experience Diversity

Employee diversity in experience is defined by Carr et al. (2006) as the difference in knowledge, skills, and abilities gained in a specific career line. According to Carr et.al. (2006), work experience has been defined as the length of experience in a given occupation. The work experience of the staff in most of the institutions adds value to work performance, though others like skills and knowledge add more value. McDaniel, Schmidt, and Hunter (1988) defined that the study assessed It makes sense that the association between job performance and high-complexity jobs, where knowledge of the job may be acquired through both on-the-job training and formal schooling, should be higher.

Employee Performance

Employee performance is the collection of employee behavior, outcomes, and results that follow from executing job duties while utilizing specific competencies and that are assessed using a variety of measures (Dhakal et al., 2023; Hameed & Waheed, 2011). The most value-adding possession available to any firm, business, or organization is its workforce. The performance of part of the workforce is the driving force behind the survival of any business firm. Further, these scholars are of the view that well-performing employees contribute to the efficiency and success of the organization. Therefore, employee performance is crucial for organizations and making strategies to improve organizational performance.

It is believed that organizational culture, human resource practices, nature of work, and business strategy of individual firms are different from each other, and the differences are likely to disguise variables on the employee performance in one firm from that observed in another firm.

Lewin, Massini, and Peeters, (2011) perceive performance as the achievements of public programs and organizations in terms of the outputs and outcomes that they produce. Tinofirei (2011) explained a supervisor or company may describe an employee's performance as the accomplishment of duties to predetermined acceptable criteria while effectively and efficiently utilizing resources in a changing environment. Further Iqbal, Anwar, and Halder (2015), employee performance includes executing

defined duties, meeting deadlines, employee competency, effectiveness, and efficiency in doing work.

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel (1982) Argues that there is a relationship between social systems and personal identity based on the interpretations or definitions individuals attribute to their members in defined groups. Those groups may be created by gender, age, culture, and educational background. These social groups have a sense and definitions to them and shape the mechanisms of interaction with other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).
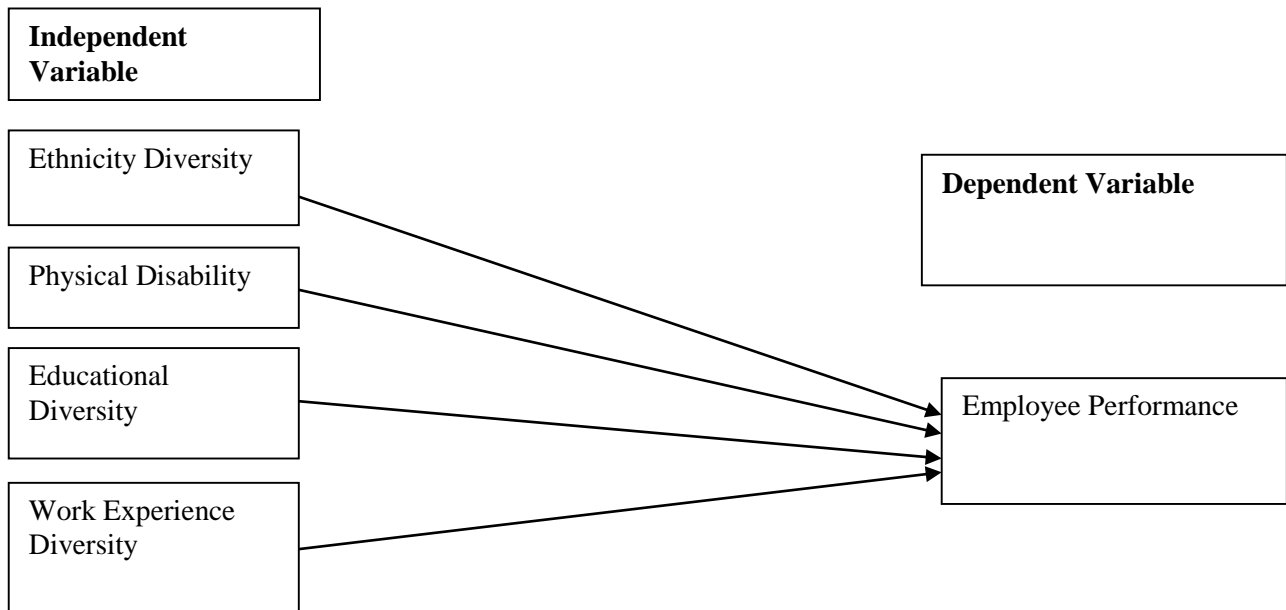
In addition, this theory contends that social identification influences actions that resemble the group communal identity that maintains organizations that express their distinctiveness (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). More clarification of the theory explains that a personal identity includes two elements namely, personal features like bodily as well as academic attributes, and a public element resulting from within the group members' commonalities which may include racial attributes, gender, and national background (Tajfel &Turner, 1986; Mael, 1989). Societal groups comprise collections like females, catholic followers, communal workforces, and sports teams including administrators. This theory argues that under different circumstances groups will raise their self-confidence through discerning as well as holding biases towards associates of other groups.

Social Categorization Theory

Workforce diversity was guided by social categorization theory as advocated by (Turner, 2007). The theory predicts that individuals sort themselves into identity groups based on salient characteristics and that they act in concert with their categories and favor contexts that a firm group identifies (Hogg & Terry, 2014). As a consequence, Homan et al. (2007) observe that dissimilar individuals are less likely to collaborate compared to similar individuals. In this way, social categorization may disrupt elaboration social categorization involves the classification of oneself and others, often unconsciously or without intention, as members of social groups based on shared attributes such as ethnicity, physical features, or even psychological traits (Stangor et al., 1992; Kunda & Spencer, 2003; Abrams, 2012). In this way, social categorization may disrupt the elaboration of task-relevant information because of possible biases toward in-group members and negative biases towards out-group members. Social categorization theory is relevant to this study because it seeks to show how the emergent, higher-order processes of group behavior can be explained in terms of a shift in self-perception from self-categorization in terms of personal identity to self-categorization in terms of social identity. The culture of employees may be viewed as a dimension of social category diversity. Hence, employees in an organization may sort themselves into social categories of a particular cultural group.

Keeping in view the above literature and discussion, the conceptual framework for this study was established to assess workforce diversity and its impact on employees' performance in the local governments of Kanchanpur.

Independent Variable

Ethnicity Diversity

Physical Disability

Educational Diversity

Work Experience Diversity

Dependent Variable

Employee Performance

Materials and Methods

In this research quantitative research method was used. It describes research objectives through empirical assessments. Cresswell (2013) explained that one can use a quantitative research method in co-relation research. This study is related to relational research objectives of the independent variables such as ethnicity diversity, gender diversity, work experience diversity, educational diversity, and the dependent variable, which is employee performance, which requires numerical data for statistical analysis. Furthermore, Yin (2013), argues that a quantitative research method is suitable for generating statistics from large-scale research using primary data collection methods like questionnaires. Thus, this makes a quantitative research method suitable for this study due to the availability of a large population of local government employees.

The target group of this study was determined to be local government employees working in the two rural municipalities and seven municipalities located in the Kanchanpur district because the study is concerned with evaluating the effects of workforce diversity on employees' performance. 1,772 people work for the selected rural municipalities and municipalities. Purposive and cluster sampling methods were used for this study and the final sample size was 400. Data analysis was carried out with the help of SPSs version 22.0.

Result and Discussion

Table 1

Reliability Results

No.	Variables	Cronbach Alpha	No. of Items
1	Ethnicity Diversity	0.81	8
2	Physically challenged diversity	0.75	7

| 3 | Educational Diversity | 0.84 | 6 |
| 4 | Work experience Diversity | 0.87 | 5 |

Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.

The Cronbach alpha value for ethnicity diversity, physically challenged diversity, educational diversity, and Work experience diversity was measured using SPSS-22 version software. The alpha values are higher than 0.70 which means the internal consistency of the data is found to be good.

Sample Size and Sample Distribution

Following are the details of samples taken from each municipality and executive in local governments that are selected for the study.

Table 2

Sample Distribution

No	Name of the Local Governments	Sample Size
1	Bheem Datt Municipality	80
2	Dodhara Chadani Municipality	40
3	BedKot Municipality	40
4	Suklaphanta Municipality	40
5	Krishanapur Municipality	40
6	Belauri Municipality	40
7	Punarwash Municipality	40
8	Beldadi Rural Municipality	40
9	Laljhadi Rural Municipality	40
	Total	400

Source: Primary data, 2023.

As per Table 2, the sample size is 400, and data was collected from nine municipalities of Kanchanpur district.

Demographic Profiles

The demographic profiles of the respondents are tabulated in Table 3

Table 3

Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

Respondents' Profile	Frequency	Percent
Tarai	280	70.0
Hill	50	12.5
Mountain	20	5.0

Total	400	100.0

Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.

Table 3 reveals that most of the respondents are from the Tarai Region 70 % of the respondents), followed by the Hill Region (14.3% of the respondents), and Mountain Region (5.7% of the respondents).

Table 4

Physical Challenge

Respondents' Profile	Frequency	Percent
Normal	390	97.5
Specially abled	10	2.5
Total	400	100.0

Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.

Table 4 presents that 97.5% of the respondents are physically normal and 2.5% are specially abled.

Table 5

Education

Respondents' Profile	Frequency	Percent
Intermediate	50	12.5
Bachelor	250	62.5
Master	40	10.0
Others	10	2.5
Total	400	100.0

Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.

Table 5 indicates that the majority of the respondents have a bachelor's degree, followed by a master's, intermediate, and other education qualifications such as a Diploma in engineering.

Table 6

Work Experience

Respondents' Profile	Frequency	Percent
0-5	100	25.0
6-10	100	25.0
11-15	100	25.0
16-20	50	12.5
above20	50	12.5

| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.

Ethnicity is a category of people who identify with each other based on similarities such as common ancestry, history, and culture. In this study, three ethnic groups are considered in the Tarai region which represents 70% of people from Tarai which is higher than the Hill and Mountain region. The Hill region represents 12.5% of people from the Hill and 5% of people from the Mountain region. It shows that very low presentation of people from mountain regions in local governments of Kanchanpur. In terms of physical challenge, 97.5% of people are normal and only 2.5% of people are physically challenged. At the same time, 50 respondents are intermediate, 250 respondents are bachelors, 40 respondents are masters, and only 10 have another stream of education like diplomas and other equivalent courses. In terms of work experience, 25% of the respondents have work experience of 0-5 years, similarly 25% of respondents had an experience of 6-10 years and 25% of participants have experience of 11-15 years 12.5% of respondents have work experience of 16-20 years. Finally, 12.5% of participants had work experience of above 20 years.

Table 7

Correlation between Dependent and Independent variables

Variable		Summated Scale of Diversity
Ethnicity Diversity	Pearson Correlation	.462[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
Physical Challenged Diversity	Pearson Correlation	-0.17
		.732
Educational Diversity	Sig. (2-tailed)	.1888
		.000
Work Experience Diversity	Pearson Correlation	.544
		.000

Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.

[**]Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7 shows the correlation between ethnicity diversity, educational diversity, work experience diversity, and employee performance. Pearson's correlation coefficient is 0.462, 0.1888, and 0.544. In this case, the p-value is 0.000 which is less than the alpha value of 0.05. It means there is a definite negative and significant relationship between ethnicity diversity, educational diversity, work experience diversity, and employee performance. Hence, the null hypothesis (H0) is not accepted but the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted. So, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between ethnicity, education, work experience diversity, and employees' performance. Similarly, Pearson's correlation coefficient is -0.17, in this case p-value is 0.732 which is greater than the alpha value 0.05. It means there is a definite positive and insignificant relationship between physically challenged diversity

and employees' performance. Hence, the null hypothesis (H0) is accepted but the alternative hypothesis (H1) is rejected).

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 7 reflects the correlation analysis. It shows that ethnicity diversity, educational diversity, and Work experience diversity have a positive impact on employees' performance. However, physically challenged diversity has a negative impact on employees' performance.

Table 8

Regression Analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.633[a]	.400	.394	5.59499

Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.

a. Predictors: (constant), work experience and educational diversity

Table 8 shows the value of R square (0.40) and R (0.633) hence a strong relationship was found between independent and dependent variables having a standard error of 5.59499 (Table 8). Moreover, table 8 further presents that employees' performance at local government is about 40% dependent on ethnicity, physical challenge, education, and work experience diversity.

Table 9

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8248.613	4	2062.153	65.875	.000[b]
	Residual	12365.027	395	31.304		
	Total	20613.640	399			

Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.

a. Dependent Variable: Employee performance diversity.

b. Predictors: (Constant), work experience, educational diversity, physical challenge, ethnicity diversity.

Table 9 presents that the p-value is 0.000 which is less than the alpha value 0.05; hence it says that there is a significant relationship between independent variables and dependent variables. In addition, Table 9 shows a model that is fit for predicting the influence of the independent variables on the performance of employees in local governments.

Table 10

Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	34.681	4.186		8.284	.000
The summated scale of Ethnicity diversity	.241	.102	-.180	2.356	.019
The summated scale of physical challenged	-.277	-.078	.151	-3.542	.000
The summated scale of educational diversity	.5245	.0484	.962	.10826	.000
Summated scale of work experience	.864	.98	.428	8.858	.000

Source: Based on authors' calculation and field survey, 2023.

a. Dependent Variable: The summated scale of employee performance diversity.

Table 10 shows regression coefficients that to what extent the dependent variable varies independent variable, in case, all other variables are considered constant. Moreover, the beta coefficient intimated that ethnicity diversity (beta= .241, t=.2356, P=.019) positive impact on employees' performance. Likewise, physically challenged diversity (beta= -.277, t=-.2356, P=.000) has a negative impact on employees' performance and educational diversity (beta= .5245, t=.0484, P=.000) and work experience diversity (beta= .864, t=.8858, P=.000) have also positive impact on employees' performance at local governments in Kanchanpur.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Power decentralization from the center to the local level has been widely implemented since the dissemination of the constitution in 2015. This process reinforced the shift from a hierarchical to a more networked structure. The devolved authorities, according to the constitution, have the potential to reform the local governing system through principles of coexistence, cooperation, and coordination.

In the present scenario, the local government in Nepal has undergone drastic changes due to the influence of global practice, political reforms, and good governance. These changes have thrown a lot of challenges and opportunities for the local government to grow and diversify its functions. The employees in the local governments are also becoming more diverse because of the political reforms, the global practice of local government, competitiveness and change in customer preferences, and inclusive participation in the

constitution. With the drastic change in politics, the formation of the progressive constitution of Nepal increasing reforms in the last two decades and changing demographics of the labour market local government has become a place for diversity inclusion. It is observed in the study there is a need for designing different programs and politics to address the workforce diversity issues prevailing in the local government which has an impact on employees' performance.

This study explored different aspects of diversity that have different relationships with performance like ethnicity, education, and work experience have a positive impact on the employees' performance while physical challenges have a negative impact on employees' performance. This study has considered only the local governments of Kanchanpur of Nepal, but further study can be done in other sectors like hotel, hospitality, manufacturing, and other government and non-government institutions.

Acknowledgements

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