

THE PERCEPTION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN ECOWAS: ANALYSIS FOR AN ACCELERATED PROMOTION OF CULTURAL ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

In Africa, there is a certain way in which cultural diversity is perceived. Cultural diversity in Africa is a vision of man and the world. It is both an action by man on himself and on the world to transform it. It is a system of thought, a philosophy, a scientific object and a belief. The perception of cultural diversity is essentially dynamic. The idea of the perception of cultural diversity in ECOWAS is analyzed in this article. Our question is: what is the perception of cultural diversity in ECOWAS? We therefore sent out a questionnaire to people working in this organization. Our surveys revealed both positive and negative perceptions of cultural diversity in ECOWAS. To find a solution to the negative perception, we propose measures that will contribute to a better appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity within ECOWAS.

KEYWORDS

perception, cultural diversity, ECOWAS, promotion.

1. INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, there is a certain way in which cultural diversity is perceived in Africa. The Pan-African Cultural Manifesto, adopted by the Symposium of the first Pan-African Cultural Festival, organized in 1969 in Algiers under the aegis of the OAU, offers a more telling portrait of this. It is clear from this text that culture, or rather cultural diversity in Africa, is a vision of man and the world. It is both man's action on himself and on the world to transform it. It is a system of thought, a philosophy, a scientific object and a belief. In short, the perception of cultural diversity is essentially dynamic, as it is both rooted in the people and forward-looking, requiring a return to the sources of values. However, it's not a question of going back to lock oneself in, but rather of making a critical inventory, in order to eliminate elements that have become obsolete and inhibiting. In other words, foreign, aberrant and alienating elements. On this point, the term "return" should be replaced by "recourse", as the latter aims to retain from this inventory those elements that are still valid, to update them and bring them into line with the modern and the universal. From this premise, it follows that the perception of cultural diversity in the African context also implies that any African cultural policy must necessarily enable people to flourish and ensure development.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) plays an important role in the West African region. It facilitates trade and exchanges between member states. It promotes the free movement of people and goods. It coordinates economic policies and encourages cooperation in various fields such as security, health, education, the environment, culture, etc. [1]. In addition, ECOWAS brings together various member states with great cultural diversity due to their different languages, traditions, customs and cultural practices. These are : Benin, Burkina

Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Each of these countries has its own distinctive ethnic groups, local languages, dances, music, arts and crafts. This cultural diversity enriches the ECOWAS region and contributes to its cultural richness and varied heritage [2].

Nevertheless, the issue of cultural diversity in ECOWAS is not just an African luxury ; it also expresses a reality whose context is fraught with multiple challenges. In particular, the growing influence of dominant cultures is a factor likely to lead to cultural homogenization. Generally speaking, ethnic and religious conflicts within the community are a threat to cultural diversity. In addition, economic disparities and social inequalities limit equitable access to cultural resources and opportunities for cultural development. Today, the preservation of indigenous languages and traditional practices is also proving to be a major challenge. Consequently, a number of issues may come into play in determining strategies and managerial solutions adapted to the challenges of such a multicultural environment.

As far as this article is concerned, we will confine ourselves to asking the question : what is the perception of cultural diversity in ECOWAS ? In other words, what is the feeling of integration and/or the degree of acceptance and belonging in a multicultural environment ? As such, the orientation of the article aims to weigh up the question of the influence of cultural diversity on the work environment and interactions in ECOWAS. As such, it is to be understood that the perception of cultural diversity is based on how respondents apprehend diversity when interacting with a person from a different culture. Thus, it is undeniably remarkable that this work is part of the valorization of cultural diversity in an organization : ECOWAS.

By way of hypothesis, it's important to say that the problem with the perception of cultural diversity in an organization lies in the possibility of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination based on cultural differences. This can lead to interpersonal tensions, communication barriers, a lack of inclusion and a reduction in the organization's efficiency and productivity. It is therefore essential to promote a positive and inclusive perception of cultural diversity to foster a harmonious and equitable work environment.

Our study is important because it captures the perception of cultural diversity in the work environment. The workers come from different ECOWAS countries, but their understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity is put to the test. And when we draw on cultural relativism theory, we examine how individuals perceive cultures different from their own, and how they can adopt a more open and respectful perspective towards diversity. Social identity theory allows us to explore how belonging to a cultural group influences perceptions of self and others, as well as attitudes towards cultural diversity.

In order to carry out this study, this article includes a literature review that establishes a theoretical link between diversity and culture, and formalizes the idea of the perception of cultural diversity. Consequently, the article applies a methodology which, in general terms, includes instruments, participants and data analysis leading to a specific result.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

From the outset, it would not be impossible to assert that the notion of diversity perception stems from a junction resulting from a semantic dichotomy between culture and the notion of diversity. Indeed, based on general culture, Claude Lévi-Strauss [3] defines culture as the body of knowledge, values, practices and behaviors specific to a people or society. Pierre Bourdieu [4] focuses on the artistic dimension, defining culture as the body of works of art, artistic trends and creative practices. Thomas Kuhn [5] defines scientific culture as the body of knowledge, methods

and discoveries in the sciences. In popular culture, Stuart Hall in [6] reaffirms that culture is the set of cultural practices, products and phenomena widely disseminated and appreciated by the general public. In corporate culture, Edgar Schein [7] defines culture as the set of values, norms and behaviors shared within an organization.

From these definitions, we can see three major realities. Firstly, there can be no culture without cultural values and practices. Consequently, whatever the field, culture is always methodically shared by a given group of individuals. Each cultural practice has its own specific method. So, within a single society, we can have different cultures and therefore different cultural practices. Indeed, UNESCO [8] states that cultural diversity refers to the plurality of forms of cultural expression that characterize human societies. Stuart Hall [6] goes in the same direction, emphasizing equal rights and opportunities for all cultures. In other words, diversity is not imbalance. Cultural diversity is not the legality of inequality.

Alongside this idea of diversity, which stems from the concept of culture, there's a second element that needs to be highlighted, which relates to the openness of culture through its dissemination and its appreciation by the general public as a perceptive judgment of the cohabitation between diverse cultures. It is in this context that Amartya Sen [9] sees cultural diversity as a component that represents the freedom of individuals to choose and express their cultural identity, as well as the mutual recognition and respect of different cultures. This leads to a third important aspect, that of the possible analysis of behavior in an organization.

Some of the work on cultural diversity in Africa and ECOWAS includes the promotion of local languages. With Ngugi wa Thiong'o [10] arguing for the valorization of local African languages to preserve linguistic and cultural diversity : "While there is nothing wrong with any group to promote the spread of their language, there is something entirely wrong in any group, people, community, nation, race, becoming so mesmerized by other's people's languages that they begin to look at their own languages as barriers to progress and modernity". With regard to the preservation of cultural heritage, organizations such as UNESCO and the Institute of National Museums of Africa have carried out research and action to protect and promote African cultural heritage, including historical sites, oral traditions and traditional arts [11]. As for artistic exchanges, initiatives such as the Ouagadougou Pan-African Film and Television Festival (FESPACO) and the World Festival of Negro Arts have fostered artistic exchanges between African countries, encouraging the recognition and celebration of cultural diversity [12]. However, there are certain limitations to this work, not least the lack of funding, which means that the implementation of projects related to cultural diversity can be hampered by a lack of financial resources, thus limiting their scope and impact as discussed by Akinyemi & al [13]. We note the lack of awareness, so despite efforts, there may be a lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of cultural diversity, which can limit buy-in and participation in such work. We mention language barriers, linguistic diversity in Africa can create barriers in the communication and dissemination of research results, thus limiting the scope of work on Cultural diversity [14]. And when we talk about limits at the level of political and social conflicts, we can say that they can hinder efforts to promote cultural diversity, particularly in areas affected by armed conflict or inter- ethnic tensions. We can therefore understand the importance of continuing to support and strengthen the authors' work in seeking solutions to the limitations mentioned, in order to foster a better perception and appreciation of cultural diversity in Africa and in ECOWAS.

Mamadou Diawara [15], in his study of cultural diversity in West Africa, emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing cultural diversity as a source of wealth for regional development. He stresses the need for inclusive policies that promote intercultural dialogue, citizen participation and the preservation of cultural heritage. As for Ebrima Sall [16], her study on

linguistic and cultural diversity in ECOWAS explores the challenges and opportunities associated with this diversity. He argues for linguistic and educational policies that recognize and promote diverse languages and cultures within the region, while fostering social cohesion and economic development. Souleymane Bachir Diagne [17] bases his study on the link between cultural diversity and sustainable development in Africa. He insists that cultural diversity is a driver of innovation, creativity and resilience, and must be integrated into development policies to foster balanced and inclusive growth. Alioune Sall [18] then looks at policies to promote cultural diversity in West Africa. It highlights the importance of cultural policies that recognize and support diverse cultural expressions, while promoting regional cooperation and the enhancement of common heritage. We can see that its authors share a common vision that highlights the importance of recognizing, respecting and valuing cultural diversity in Africa and ECOWAS, while promoting intercultural dialogue, social inclusion and sustainable development.

Indeed, it's worth noting that the study or idea of the perception of cultural diversity is a result of the way an individual from a certain culture looks at interaction with another individual from a different culture in the same organization. In other words, the idea of cultural diversity perception is both a kind of questioning of preconceived and stereotyped ideas about other cultures, and a quest for constructive intercultural dialogue. Moreover, behind the expression "constructive intercultural dialogue" lie a number of factors that promote intercultural understanding, highlighting the importance of a positive perception of cultural diversity for development that fosters individual fulfillment and strengthens the social fabric of communities. What's more, we know from Richard Alba [19] that a positive perception of cultural diversity promotes social integration, strengthens social capital and encourages creativity and innovation. Whereas a negative perception of cultural diversity can lead to a decline in mutual trust and civic engagement within communities.

We opt for social identity theory and cultural relativism theory. Henri Tajfel [20] is known for his social identity theory, which explains how individuals define their identity based on their membership of social groups. He argues that social identity plays an important role in the perception of self and others, as well as in the formation of stereotypes and prejudices. Clifford Geertz [21] is a cultural anthropologist who developed the concept of cultural relativism. According to him, every culture has its own meaning and values, and it is essential to understand these cultural specificities to avoid ethnocentric judgments. Edward T. Hall [22] is an anthropologist who studied intercultural communication. He introduced the concept of cultural distance scales, which measure the closeness or distance between cultures in terms of behavior and social norms. According to him, understanding these differences in cultural distance is crucial to effective communication between cultures.

To address these concepts in the field of cultural diversity perception, it is important to recognize that each individual has a social identity formed by his or her membership of specific cultural groups. It is also necessary to adopt a relativist perspective, recognizing that each culture has its own values and practices that must be respected and understood without judgment. By fostering intercultural dialogue, diversity awareness and intercultural education, we can promote a more open and respectful perception of cultural diversity.

3. METHODS

This methodological section describes how the data was collected and the tools used to process it.

3.1. Instruments

Google Forms was our online data collection tool, enabling us to pose structured questions to participants and collect their responses in an organized and easily analyzable way. Google Forms offers features such as the creation of customized questionnaires, the choice of different question types (multiple choice, short answer, scaled, etc.), as well as the possibility of collecting responses anonymously or by identifying participants. Responses can be exported and analyzed later for information and trends. This is how we came up with our diagrams.

3.2. Participants

In addition, to test the hypothesis of our problem, we had a number of target people. Speaking of the target population, we sent out a questionnaire to people working at ECOWAS. We received responses from 180 people, including 140 men and 40 women from ECOWAS organizations in Nigeria, Togo, Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso. In order to meet the members of these institutions, due to lack of time, workers' occupations and a more precise database on the location of agents, we opted for an online questionnaire.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

In fact, in this study, we increasingly applied the quantitative method, which enabled us to demonstrate the perception of cultural diversity within ECOWAS on the basis of certain numerical data. However, in order to successfully collect empirical data, we also made use of the qualitative research method, in the sense that it enabled us to make a descriptive interpretation of the results. It should also be pointed out that this online questionnaire survey operation was carried out in November 2022. Google Forms was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, depending on the types of questions asked in the survey. The predominantly closed-ended questions allowed us structured responses (e.g. multiple choice or scaled), this led to a quantitative analysis of the data. Open-ended questions enabled participants to provide detailed, subjective answers, leading to a qualitative analysis of the data.

In keeping with the logic of structuring, the questionnaire's main aim was to find out about the type of relationship prevailing between colleagues, the influence of culture on this relationship, the preference of colleagues, the treatment reserved, the level of respect for diversity, the level of feeling of integration, as well as the actions to be taken into account.

4. RESULTS

This point will enable us to see how people working at ECOWAS perceive cultural diversity. We'll be focusing on the nature of the relationships that exist between them, since they don't come from the same country and therefore don't have the same culture. How do they see themselves in relation to others, and do they find it easy or difficult to work together ?

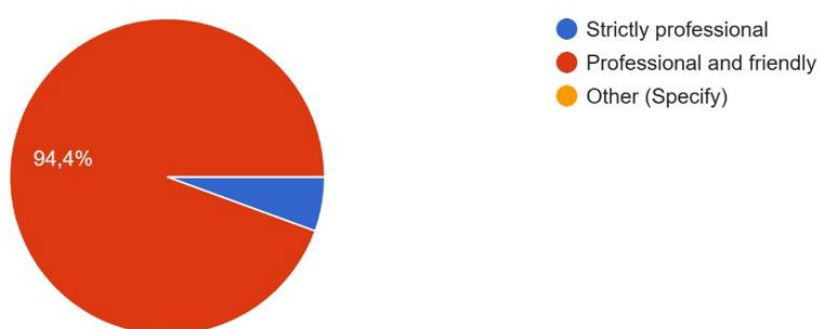


Figure 1 : Diagram showing the type of relationship between colleagues

This graph gives us an idea of the type of relationships ECOWAS employees have. We should point out that these are relationships between colleagues of different nationalities. The graph shows that 94.4% have a friendly, professional relationship and 5.6% have a strictly professional relationship. We can therefore say that the majority of our respondents feel at ease in their relations with colleagues of other nationalities. This may help them to understand each other better. This tells us something about their awareness of cultural diversity : they know they don't share the same culture or mentality, but that doesn't bother them. They unknowingly cultivate intercultural communication and cultural adaptability. By accepting to work in this way with colleagues who are different from them, they open up to other worlds and discover a capacity for acceptance of others, making it easy for them to embark on the path of conflict resolution. Others, who only have a strictly professional relationship with their colleagues, prefer to keep to their own culture, they don't want to mix with others. They prefer to stay on the sidelines to avoid problems and misunderstandings. Others feel superior because they think their culture is better than that of others, whereas those who are willing to open up want to learn from others.

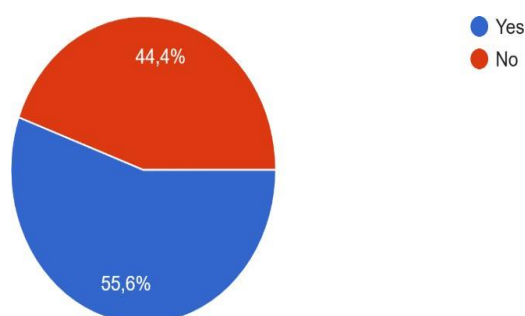


Figure 2 : Diagram showing the influence of culture

Reading this graph reveals the influence of culture on the nature of relationships within ECOWAS. We note that 55.6% say that culture does influence the relationships of people working at ECOWAS, but 44.4% say that culture has no influence on the nature of their relationships. Those who say that culture has no influence on the nature of their relationships rely on the observation that: "Everyone seems to work as a team. Professional relationships are not affected by cultural differences since, being from the same region, we are considered to be the same people with the same culture and forming the same professional family."

As for the people who say that culture influences relationships, they say that, generally speaking, it's easier to work together when you speak the same language. In other words, the cultural difference between languages helps to slow down work. From this point of view, the difference

between cultures is tantamount to a difference in the way things are done, because even if you have the same job, you don't manage in the same way. It could even be said that the feeling of cultural difference carries the seeds of superiority, to the detriment of the egalitarian vision according to which each culture is essential. From another, less egotistical point of view, cultural diversity helps to correct preconceived ideas, to open up curiosity so as to draw the essential from the other, and thus to weave good relationships. In short, the results show that culture has both a negative and a positive influence on relations between colleagues from different cultures. This can be described as the dual influence of culture.

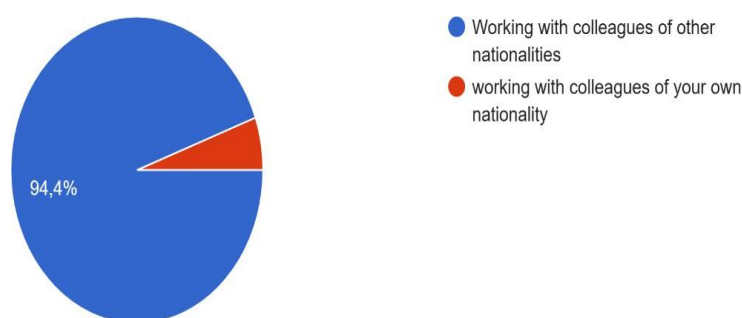


Figure 3: Colleague preference chart

This graph tells us something about the preference of people to work with. In other words, it's an indicative graph of the choice workers make between working with colleagues of other nationalities or working with colleagues of our own nationality. We have a percentage of 94.4% of people who prefer to work with colleagues of different nationalities and 5.6% who opt to work with people sharing their own nationality. We can understand that the majority of our respondents think it's better to work with people of different nationalities. This is indicative of a constant awareness of cultural diversity, which tends to affirm the permanent existence of individual ambition to promote cultural exchange, cultural tolerance and openness to the unknown. For our respondents, this preference for openness to the unknown is justified by a number of factors: the acquisition of new knowledge and skills; acceptance of the contribution and skills of others; and the elimination of all forms of barriers to the acquisition of new experiences.

Through these answers, we can understand that the other way to achieve efficient regional integration is to guarantee the free field for the effective expression of values and skills resulting from the culturally diversified workforce.

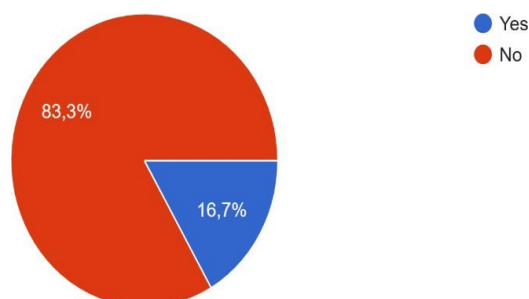


Figure 4: Chart showing nationality preference

This graph shows whether certain nationalities are preferred to others. We have 83.3% who think there is no preference between nationalities and 16.7% who think the opposite. Here, the majority think that there is no preference because they believe that all nationalities are given equal consideration. Understandably, there is no preference in recruitment. However, the fact remains that the predominance of one culture due to non-preference in recruitment is likely to lead to a feeling of inferiority for other cultures. Hence the idea of a cultural balance in representation : a balance that merges with cultural equality within the organization.

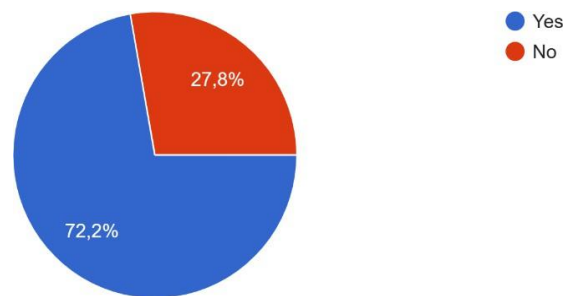


Figure 5 : Diagram showing treatment

This graph provides information on treatment within the organization. Reading this graph, we notice that 72.2% say they receive the same treatment as colleagues of other nationalities, but 27.8% say they don't receive the same treatment with other nationalities. We can say that some feel well treated, in harmony with other nationalities, they feel equal and have no feelings of inferiority or superiority. Those who feel marginalized are not so few in number, i.e. there are nationalities who feel inferior or perhaps even superior to other nationalities.

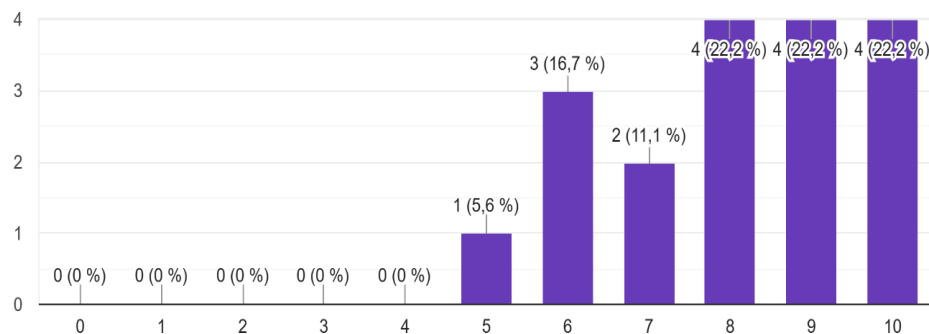


Figure 6: Scale representing respect for diversity

This diagram represents the scale of respect for cultural diversity at ECOWAS level. From the least good, i.e. zero, to the very good, i.e. ten. We note 5.6% giving a score of five, 16.7% giving six, 11.1% giving seven, 22.2% giving eight, 22.2% giving nine, 22.2% giving ten. In other words, they think that cultural diversity has been respected to such an extent that they give a mark of ten, which means very good. We can conclude that nationalities feel somewhat at home working in the organization, even if they have difficulties, they can overcome them. They feel respected, because normally the scale from 0 to 5 reflects a lack of respect for cultural diversity. But the responses show that there is respect, which tells us that intercultural management will be appropriate for successful integration within ECOWAS.

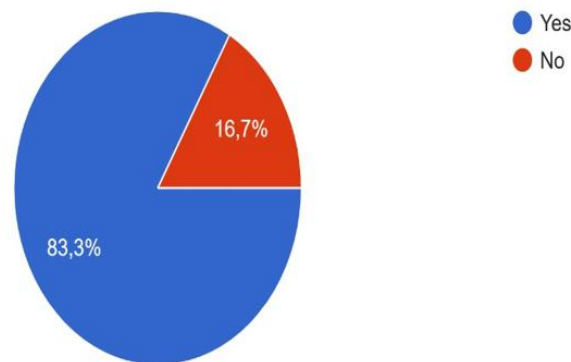


Figure 7: Diagram showing the feeling of integration

This graph allows us to talk about the feeling of integration. 83.3% feel well integrated into ECOWAS and 16.7% do not. The majority fit in well, while for some it's the opposite. When we talk about the feeling of integration, we're talking about a degree of acceptance, of belonging. We can say that those who don't feel integrated don't develop a strong sense of belonging to ECOWAS. They either feel inferior or superior to others, because they are not treated in the same way. Whether in terms of the position they hold or their nationality, these people feel misunderstood, not considered. By developing this feeling of not belonging, they will no longer be able to put themselves fully at the service of the organization. They may agree with others, but on certain issues they may withdraw and not attach any importance to what's being done ; they no longer feel concerned because they feel they don't belong. Those who feel well integrated will have a sense of belonging to the organization. They will fight to keep the organization moving forward. They see the organization as their family, and all those who feel they belong to this big family will do everything in their power to ensure that family members stay together and grow well no matter what situations they go through.

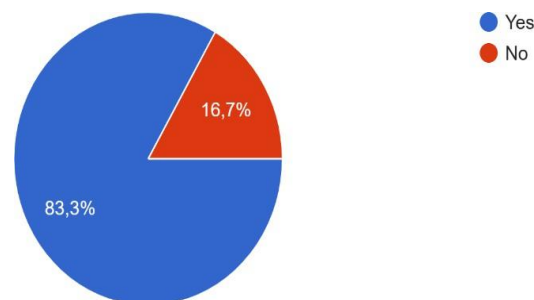


Figure 8: Diagram showing actions to be taken into account

On reading this graph, we note that 83.3% give their opinion on the actions to be taken to ensure that all ECOWAS staff feel fully integrated, but 16.7% think that there are no actions to be taken into account. For them, everyone is fully integrated. If the majority think that certain things need to be changed, it's to show that efforts have been made, but improvements are needed.

Here are the areas for improvement proposed by the respondents: 1) Respect for linguistic and gender diversity, 2) Improving the provisions of the personnel statutes relating to cultural integration and working within a multicultural team, 3) Improving the provisions of the personnel statutes relating to cultural integration and working within a multicultural team, 4) Taking account of merit among staff when recruiting and promoting rather than nepotism, 5) Improve language skills to enable people to work in teams without language barriers, 6) Promote

equity and recruitment on the basis of merit and in a spirit of competition, 7) The problem is not cultural, but consultants are not taken into account by other ECOWAS commissions, 8) Take into consideration the referral mechanism, 9) Organize cultural diversity days focusing on culinary tastes, cultures (dances, fashions, etc.) and cultural diversity, 10) Plan an ECOWAS day to strengthen regional integration and achieve the abolition of residence permits between ECOWAS member states, 11) Consider everyone at the same level and integrate support staff as staff as well, 12) Equal number of jobs between member states, 12) Treat every employee equally.

The respondents believe that some people are not well integrated because they are marginalized. Nevertheless, they also believe that strategies need to be implemented to strengthen integration.

5. DISCUSSION

At the outset, it should be remembered that this study made increasing use of the quantitative method, which enabled us to demonstrate the perception of cultural diversity within ECOWAS on the basis of certain numerical data. However, in order to collect empirical data, we also made use of the qualitative research method, in the sense that it enabled us to make a descriptive interpretation of the results.

Indeed, it should be noted that our surveys revealed a positive perception of cultural diversity in ECOWAS. This finding reflects the fact that the issue of cultural diversity in ECOWAS is not simply a value received by attribution, but rather a fact rooted in the ambitions of states and in the consciousness of individual peoples. This positive perception is reflected in the following elements: a conscientious acceptance of interaction with agents from different cultures, whether of the same or foreign nationality; an affirmation of the dual real influence (positive and negative) of cultural diversity on relations within the organization, the positive influence of which helps to correct preconceived ideas, to open up curiosity in order to draw the essential from the other, and thereby to weave good relations; then, a non-preferential treatment of nationality, although this may raise doubts about a possible loss of balance or equality.

The other important point that reflects the positive perception of cultural diversity in ECOWAS stems from what we have termed the "preference for openness to the unknown", which is justified by a number of factors, notably: the acquisition of new knowledge and skills; the acceptance of the contribution and skills of others, through the elimination of all forms of barriers to the acquisition of new experiences. Alongside this element, there is also the erasure of the preference of one nationality over another in favor of the integration of colleagues from another culture. This is a useful aspect, as it better reflects the feeling of integration and of taking advantage of different cultures. And finally, the positive nature of the perception of cultural diversity is based on the ambition to continually improve the implementation of cultural aspects through intercultural management, in order to ensure full integration.

With cultural relativism, we have been able to understand that individuals are aware of cultural diversity, some are more open to this diversity by opting for respect and the particularity of each culture, but others prefer to close themselves off. Social identity theory has enabled us to understand that belonging to ECOWAS has awakened in some the desire to work for the betterment of the organization, and so develop a sense of belonging to this institution, while others are just there for their own vision.

6. LIMITS AND SUGGESTIONS

This approach has certain limitations. The first is methodological, while the second relates to the dynamic nature of the notion of cultural diversity itself.

From a methodological point of view, we only received responses from 180 people from institutions in Nigeria, Togo, Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso. This limitation in terms of the number of countries and members surveyed is linked to the imperatives of time, workers' occupations and the fact that a more precise database on the location of agents is virtually non-existent. For these very reasons, we opted for an on-line questionnaire.

From a theoretical point of view, it must also be said that there is a limitation linked to the dynamic nature of culture. Indeed, given that culture varies and evolves, and is never identical everywhere, we found that some respondents were categorically opposed to addressing any questions related to culture. This is an affirmation of the principle that "you can't force people to accept a culture". . On the other hand, there is a certain relativism in the approach to the study question, which tends to consider that organizational culture can also be based on interdisciplinarity and not on "interculturality", which is never perfect because it always implies a certain discrimination in the name of belonging to a certain group with certain practices and values. However, despite the limitations, there are some suggestions. Indeed, to improve the perception of cultural diversity in ECOWAS, it is possible to put in place measures that will contribute to a better appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity within ECOWAS. Promote intercultural education and awareness of cultural diversity from an early age. Encourage cultural and artistic exchanges between ECOWAS member countries. Support initiatives to preserve and promote indigenous languages, traditions and cultural practices. Facilitate equitable access to cultural resources and cultural development opportunities for all ethnic groups. Foster cooperation between governments, civil society and cultural players to develop inclusive policies and programs. Encourage the creation of festivals, events and exhibitions showcasing the region's cultural diversity. Use the media and digital platforms to disseminate and promote the diverse cultural expressions of ECOWAS. Strengthen the protection of the cultural rights of local communities and their active participation in the decision-making process relating to cultural diversity.

7. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

In addition to contributions, limitations and suggestions, the pedagogical implication of the theme is of paramount importance. Indeed, our intention here is to emphasize the need - indeed, the usefulness - of focusing on the management of cultural diversity when it comes to an aspect that is on everyone's mind. From now on, cultural diversity must be seen as an asset, not just a challenge. Moreover, since the survey data indicate a positive perception of cultural diversity, it is imperative to integrate cultural teachings into the education system because, as the saying goes, "education is the guarantor of a better future".

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