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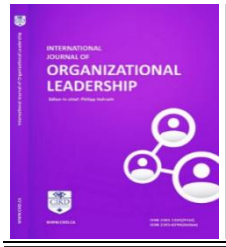

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Ethnic Bias in Leadership Selection: Evidence from Ghana's Financial Sector

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic bias in recruitment and leadership selection is a significant issue in Ghana's financial sector, where social and tribal affiliations can affect hiring and career advancement. Despite a focus on diversity and inclusion, there is limited research on how unconscious bias impacts professional paths in Ghana. This study examines the influence of ethnic bias on leadership selection and career progression in Ghana's financial sector. Using Social Identity Theory, it examines the roles of in-group favoritism, nepotism, and implicit biases in corporate decisions. A quantitative research design was utilized, gathering survey data from 104 professionals at various job levels. The research tested hypotheses with ANOVA and descriptive statistics to assess perceptions of ethnic bias among different respondent groups. The findings indicated that unconscious ethnic bias significantly influenced the selection of leaders and the advancement of careers, often prioritizing in-group individuals over qualifications based on merit. While diversity training and inclusive hiring practices have the potential to address these biases, their effectiveness can vary. These results highlighted the need for organizations to adopt merit-based recruitment, enforce strict anti-bias policies, and provided structured diversity training to ensure workplace equity. Future research should focus on the long-term effects of diversity initiatives and analyze hiring biases across various sectors and regions to create better intervention strategies. Tackling these biases is crucial for building a more inclusive and competitive corporate environment in Ghana and beyond.

Favoritism in hiring and leadership selection is a significant problem in many organizations, particularly when personal relationships precede merit. Despite improved professionalism and equitable hiring, social and cultural pressures often lead to preferential treatment. In collectivist cultures like Ghana, ethnic identity significantly influences hiring and promotion decisions. This phenomenon aligns with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which suggests that people categorize themselves into in-groups and out-groups. This leads to in-group

favoritism, nepotism, tribalism, and homophily, which can distort candidate evaluations, compromise fairness, and weaken organizational effectiveness **(**Arasli et al., 2019**;** Lewis & Bates, 2010**;** Rubin et al., 2014**).** Cognitive biases, such as confirmation and anchoring, often reinforce stereotypes and prejudices in recruitment (Dovidio et al., 2002). While in-group favoritism can improve team cohesion and communication (Çoksan & Cingöz-Ulu, 2022**;** Shepherd et al., 2015), it primarily undermines equal opportunity and merit-based leadership selection (Masuda & Fu, 2015).

Ghana's diverse context is crucial for understanding the impact of ethnic dynamics. With more than 75 ethnic groups, tribal affiliations significantly shape social interactions and professional environments. Research indicates that Ghanaians often use ethnic stereotypes in their relationships (Wendy, 2015). Traits like in-group collectivism, high power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (House et al., 2004**;** LeFebvre, 2013) foster favoritism in recruitment and leadership. A study by Okyere-Kwakye et al. (2010) highlighted that team diversity in Ghana is influenced more by nepotism and ethnic loyalty than race or language. This issue became particularly apparent during the 2019 banking crisis, where investigations found that executive appointments were frequently based on personal connections rather than qualifications. Afolabi (2017) noted that these practices contributed to a culture of favoritism, eroding public trust and compromising organizational integrity. The crisis underscored the negative effects of ethnic bias and the urgent need for reform in leadership selection.

The literature on unconscious bias and leadership selection is extensive, yet there is a notable lack of empirical research in Sub-Saharan Africa. This study fills that gap by examining how ethnic bias affects leadership appointments in Ghana’s financial sector, which is characterized by ethnic diversity, political interference, and organizational opacity. Using a quantitative approach and ANOVA for hypothesis testing, the research provides insights into the prevalence and impact of ethnic favoritism at different job levels. Additionally, the study assesses the effectiveness of diversity interventions such as structured training and inclusive hiring practices, which have been shown by global researchers (e.g., Agarwal, 2024; Knight, 2017; Paluck & Green, 2009) to reduce bias. This paper aims to contribute to academic literature while offering practical guidance for policymakers, HR professionals, and business leaders working to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in African corporate environments. This research combines organizational psychology, social identity theory, and corporate governance to create a framework for understanding ethnic bias in leadership selection. It is especially relevant for emerging markets where ethnic identity affects hiring decisions. The aim is to promote evidence-based practices that support meritocracy, minimize bias, and rebuild trust in corporate leadership.

Theoretical Background

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, established by Tajfel and Turner in 1979, suggests that an individual's self-view is influenced by their membership in social groups like gender, race, and ethnicity. People categorize themselves based on shared traits, which shape their values and behaviors. This categorization is key to forming social identities but can lead to implicit biases, where stereotypes about social groups result in prejudiced views and actions. Personal identity begins with self-concept and evolves into social identity, where individuals identify themselves as part

of in-groups (those they belong to) and out-groups (those they do not belong to). The need for a positive self-image encourages comparisons within groups, strengthening social connections and intergroup dynamics. Implicit bias is unconscious attitudes or stereotypes about social groups that influence actions and judgments without awareness (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). These biases develop from socialization and cultural influences, leading to automatic associations between social categories and traits. Social Group Theory links social identity to implicit bias, showing how individuals categorize social groups based on shared perceptions and goals. This classification, which often involves race, gender, nationality, or religion, is essential to social identity and impacts attitudes, behaviors, and intergroup relations. As a result, stereotypical views can become part of personal identities, resulting in biased decisions and unfair treatment of others.

Social Identity Theory has notable limitations. Critics argue that it oversimplifies social behavior by focusing too narrowly on group categorization (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014). Abrams and Hogg (1988) highlight their focus on social identities while neglecting individual differences and situational factors. Jenkins (2004) points out that the theory fails to consider individual differences and the complexities of identity formation. Thomas et al. (2009) emphasize the neglect of power dynamics in social hierarchies, which can exacerbate biases. Critics also highlight that the focus on cognitive processes ignores emotional aspects, such as fear and perceived threats, which play a crucial role in intergroup relations (Mackie et al., 2000). The Implicit Bias Theory by Greenwald and Banaji (1995) addresses unconscious biases affecting behavior, revealing a gap between conscious and unconscious biases. However, Blanton et al. (2009) question the generalizability and predictive validity of implicit bias measures, arguing that they do not adequately capture the complexity of biases and call for more nuanced approaches to understanding human cognition. Additionally, Attribution Theory explains how individuals attribute causes to events based on available information (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). People often perceive causal relationships even where none exist (Heider, 1958). However, the theory has limitations, including oversimplification of cognitive processes (Hreha, 2023), reliance on self-reported or hypothetical data (Drew, 2023), and a failure to account for cultural influences on attribution (Zajenkowska et al., 2020). Moreover, it assumes a greater degree of rationality in human decision-making than is often present in real-world contexts. Social Dominance Theory, proposed by Pratto and Sidanius (2006), provides another framework for analyzing intergroup prejudices and social hierarchies. This theory posits that societies maintain group-based hierarchies based on race, ethnicity, religion, social class, or language, granting different levels of prestige and power. Pratto et al. (2006) highlight that these hierarchies are universal, but critics argue that the theory overly simplifies social interactions by reducing them to power struggles (Pratto & Sidanius, 2006). Social Identity Theory remains particularly influential, with broad applications in intergroup conflict, organizational behavior, and political psychology. Extensive empirical research continues to validate its significance in explaining how group dynamics shape individual behavior and intergroup relations (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Tajfel, 1981). Social identity plays a crucial role in shaping unconscious biases in the workplace, affecting hiring, promotions, and daily interactions. Employees often favor candidates with similar backgrounds, resulting in in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). This bias distorts perceptions of competence, focusing on group membership rather than actual performance (Rivera, 2011). Consequently,

it undermines equity and diversity, limiting career opportunities for those outside the favored group. While this can obstruct communication and collaboration, a strong shared identity within a team promotes cohesion and cooperation toward shared goals (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg, 2001). Leaders who effectively utilize social identity can boost team commitment and motivation, improving workplace performance (Hogg, 2001).

Implicit and Unconscious Bias

Social Identity theory is intricately linked to unconscious and implicit biases and has been extensively studied in social psychology and organizational behavior. Unconscious biases are automatic mental shortcuts employed by the brain to assess situations and individuals swiftly (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). In the framework of social identity theory, these biases may emerge from our categorization processes, where individuals unconsciously show preference toward those in their in-group instead of those in out-groups, often without deliberate awareness. Even though individuals may not be conscious of their attitudes, they can still have an impact, as attitudes can be implicit and explicit (Dovidio et al., 2002). Research shows that implicit bias is influenced by cultural norms, societal values, and stereotypes (Axt et al., 2018). Socialization and contextual influences, including cultural and societal factors, create cognitive associations that shape attitudes toward various social groups (Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001). This aspect may hinder the fair and equitable standards of the recruitment process. They function automatically and subconsciously, exerting subtle yet pervasive effects on our actions (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). Essentially, unconscious bias occurs when we make choices without being aware of the influence of our preconceived notions and prejudices (Brownstein, 2015). Despite explicit biases, such as clear discriminatory beliefs and attitudes, receiving extensive attention in research and public discussions, implicit biases can be more challenging to detect and address due to their concealed and subtle nature.

Social Identity at the Workplace

Employees' social identities significantly impact workplace outcomes, especially as professional and personal lives blend (Ozyilmaz & Koc, 2022). According to Bothma et al. (2014), professional identity is shaped by background, experiences, and social context, developing through the interaction of career paths and workplace roles. Their research shows a continuous link between professional identity and personal growth. A study by Kato and Shu (2013) in a Chinese company found that social identity influences employee competition under performance incentives. Workers often competed more with those outside their social identity group, even when incentives targeted all coworkers. This suggests that managers should consider social dynamics when designing incentive programs to enhance productivity.

Workplace discrimination happens when individuals or organizations mistreat people based on traits like race, gender, or sexual orientation instead of their job performance (Barak, 2016). This results in inequities in job opportunities, career advancement, and pay (Barak, 2016). Workforce diversity classifies employees based on shared traits, affecting employment outcomes regardless of individual skills and qualifications (Barak, 2016). While "discrimination" can have neutral meanings in other contexts, in employment, it is always negative (Patti, 2009).

Fairness and equality are key principles in many organizations, but achieving accurate equity and inclusion can be difficult. Employees often gauge acceptance and belonging through shared identities and social groups, leading to identity threats that hinder inclusive work environments (Ellemers & Gilder, 2022). To address these threats, organizations can adopt strategies like establishing clear performance standards, framing criticism as unrelated to the company, and highlighting collective strengths.

Diversity and inclusion initiatives in organizations aim to reduce biases and promote fairness. However, Kaufmann (2014) warns that an excessive focus on group identity can create fragmentation and tribalism, undermining merit-based evaluations and unity. While deemed desirable, affirmative action policies can sometimes create divisions among groups, undermining the intended goals of inclusivity and fairness to fragmentation rather than unity within organizations (Dur & Xie, 2022). Evidence of their impact on organizational performance is also inconsistent (Herring, 2009).

Hypotheses Formulation

Ethnic Bias in Hiring and Recruitment

Hardy et al. (2021) emphasize that even minimal bias can result in significant discrimination and productivity losses during hiring. Their meta-analyses indicate that contextual factors alone do not alleviate the effects of bias, reinforcing the notion that unconscious ethnic preferences can influence leadership selection—particularly in environments lacking robust diversity policies. This issue is especially pertinent to leadership appointments within Ghanaian financial institutions, where meritocratic ideals may mask underlying ethnic biases. Furthermore, Vial et al. (2019) note that decision-makers, or gatekeepers, are often influenced by third-party prejudices, leading to discriminatory outcomes even when personal biases are absent. This underscores how unconscious bias can become entrenched within organizational cultures, highlighting the necessity of assessing ethnic preferences in leadership decisions in Ghana. Likewise, Bertolero et al. (2020) demonstrate that structural biases in academia place minority groups at a disadvantage through hiring, promotion, and citation practices. These subtle yet enduring forms of discrimination echo concerns about ethnic bias in corporate leadership, further reinforcing the hypothesis that unconscious preferences significantly shape leadership selection across various sectors.

Hypothesis 1: Unconscious ethnic biases among decision-makers in Corporate Ghana impact candidate selection for leadership roles in major financial institutions.

Ethnic Bias and Career Growth Opportunities

Research shows that ethnic bias significantly obstructs career advancement in Corporate Ghana, even for equally qualified individuals. Ayentimi et al. (2021) highlight that social capital, influenced by ethnic identity, affects job access and career growth. In-group favoritism often favors those from dominant ethnic groups, sidelining others from professional networks and opportunities. Walker et al. (2023) point out a "hidden curriculum" in organizations that disadvantages ethnically minoritized employees by restricting their access to mentorship and advancement pathways. These individuals frequently lack inclusion in influential circles, stifling their career progress despite their qualifications. Fouad and Byars-Winston (2005) note

that ethnic minorities often feel unwelcome in workplace cultures, hindering their advancement, even when they possess the necessary skills. Peterson et al. (2004) add that bias leads to lower job satisfaction and a reduced sense of belonging among these employees. At the organizational level, Melugbo et al. (2021) report that systemic ethnic bias creates disparities in employment and promotions, fostering exclusion and damaging morale and retention. Gündemir et al. (2014) indicate that implicit leadership biases favor certain ethnic groups, marginalizing qualified individuals from underrepresented backgrounds and limiting their opportunities for leadership roles. Collectively, these findings confirm that ethnic bias—both overt and subtle—significantly influences career paths in Corporate Ghana, putting qualified employees from minority ethnic backgrounds at a disadvantage. Considering these identified gaps and the shortcomings of previous research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Ethnic bias affects career advancement opportunities for employees in Corporate Ghana, even when they have similar qualifications.

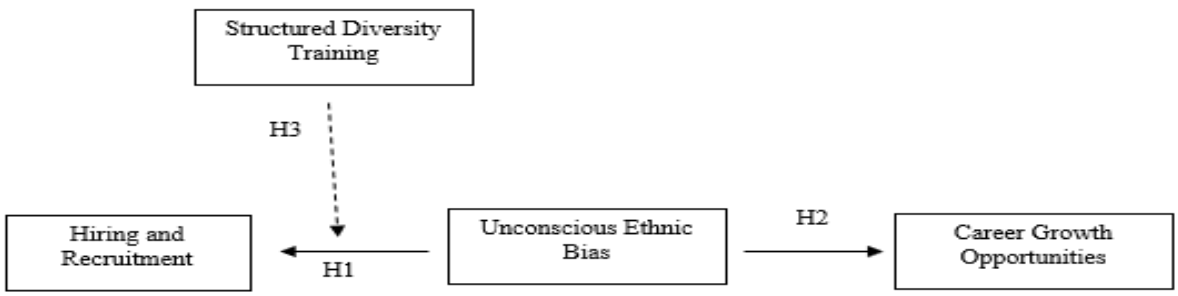
Mediating Role of Structured Diversity Training

Nguta and Omuya (2024) address the impact of ethnic diversity on employee performance but do not investigate how diversity training and inclusive hiring influence leadership selection in Ghana's financial sector. This gap indicates a need for focused research. Effective diversity training can reduce bias and improve intergroup relations, as shown in a meta-analysis by Kalinoski et al. (2013), highlighting that it enhances understanding and promotes fair decision-making. Bezrukova et al. (2012) also found that such training fosters positive attitudes toward inclusion. Paluck (2006) adds that intergroup contact from training can significantly lower prejudice. Inclusive hiring practices reinforce diversity training by ensuring fairness in recruitment and promotion. Ely and Thomas (2001) promote an integration-and-learning approach, using diversity as a catalyst for innovation and performance, emphasizing qualifications and potential to open leadership opportunities across ethnic lines. Despite the global trend toward inclusivity, there is limited evidence of the effectiveness of these practices in Ghana's financial institutions. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Diversity training and inclusive hiring reduce ethnic bias in leadership selection in Ghana's financial sector.

Based on the relationships outlined above, the following research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Operationalizing and Measuring

Operationalizing variables in psychology means defining and measuring abstract concepts in clear, observable terms for quantitative research (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). This approach helps minimize bias in research hypotheses (Sharp, 2020). Subjectivity arises from social factors like class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, which shape individuals' worldviews and understanding (Sharp, 2020). Acknowledging these factors is crucial, as experiences and backgrounds can significantly influence perceptions (Sharp, 2020). Behavioral anchors are specific statements tied to each point on a Likert scale, helping respondents understand their options (Chapman & Johnson, 1999; Furnham & Boo, 2011). A Likert scale might say *"1: Strongly Disagree - I believe ethnic identity affects recruitment biases" and "7: Strongly Agree* - I believe ethnic identity does not affect recruitment biases." This clarity reduces ambiguity and misinterpretation.

A sample size greater than 100 was determined to provide adequate statistical power for ANOVA analysis, allowing the study to detect any significant effects if present. Given Ghana's cultural diversity, especially in the financial sector, with various ethnic groups, a sample size greater than 100 better represents these groups. This diversity is essential for analyzing ethnic bias in leadership selection. Moreover, logistical, time and financial constraints affect sample size selection. Aiming for data from 100 professionals in financial institutions is a realistic target that balances ideal conditions with practical research limits.

Aschbrenner et al. (2022) propose a multi-step approach for validating measurement instruments, which includes initial qualitative research, pilot testing, and statistical analysis to ensure reliability and validity across various populations and settings. Construct validity checks whether measurement tools accurately capture the intended theoretical construct (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). Content validity ensures the measurement encompasses all aspects of the concept (Haynes et al., 1995), while face validity assesses whether a test appears to measure what it aims to (Nevo, 1985). Face validity was evaluated by gathering feedback about the questionnaire from 17 doctoral students. Their input was instrumental in confirming that the questions effectively measured unconscious bias and aligned with our intended focus. Content validity was assessed by providing the questionnaire to three individuals, including university professors, to ensure its alignment with relevant theories.

To improve survey accuracy and reliability, we followed best practices from Gehlbach and Artino Jr. (2018): (1) place key questions at the beginning, (2) ensure questions are relevant and worded, (3) use scales for better precision instead of single items, and (4) position demographic questions at the end to enhance respondent comfort. This study utilized a 7-point Likert scale to evaluate various variables. The online survey was distributed in batches through Google Forms, chosen for its ease of use, response tracking, and data export features. Google Forms allows unlimited submissions, is user-friendly, and is free of charge. The introduction email assured participants of confidentiality and data security, which was reiterated on the following page. The questionnaire included 30 multiple-choice items across four sections related to the research hypothesis, with each item rated from 1 *("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree")*. This scale was preferred to enhance response accuracy by encouraging decisive choices rather than opting for the midpoint.

The Cronbach Alpha coefficient is a commonly used measure of reliability for Likert scales (Kite & Whitley, 2018). An initial assessment revealed a moderate internal consistency among

the questionnaire items, with Cronbach's Alpha below the ideal threshold of .70. This indicates some reliability but also highlights the need for improvement. To enhance item alignment and coherence, a review and revision process was conducted to strengthen the questionnaire's reliability and ensure more dependable measurement results.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The questionnaire received 104 responses, including one invalid entry, ensuring a solid sample while accounting for practical limitations. The findings included demographic data supported by the accompanying tables and figures. Table 1 provides a demographic overview of participants based on gender, age, education, ethnicity, and religion. Most participants are male (66, 63.46%), while females comprise 34 (32.69%). Four participants (3.85%) did not disclose their gender. The largest age group is 25-40 years (40 participants, 38.46%), followed by 41-56 years (34 participants, 32.69%), 57 and older (16 participants, 15.38%), and 18-24 years (14 participants, 13.46%). In terms of education, the majority hold a bachelor's degree (66, 63.46%), with 16 participants (15.38%) having a Master's, 12 (11.54%) having only a High School diploma, and 10 (9.62%) holding a PhD/Doctorate.

The participant group exhibits significant ethnic diversity. The Akan ethnic group is the most prominent, with 49 individuals (47.12%). The Mole-Dagbani group has 22 participants (21.15%), followed by the Ewe group with 15 individuals (14.42%). The Ga-Dangme community consists of 11 participants (10.58%). Several other ethnic groups, including Moshie, Frafra, Mixed, Hausa, and those who did not identify their ethnicity, each have one participant (0.96%). Additionally, one individual identified with an unlisted ethnic group. In terms of religion, Christianity is the largest faith, represented by 51 participants (49.04%). Traditional African religions followed with 34 participants (32.69%), and Islam had 18 individuals (17.31%). One participant (0.96%) reported no religious affiliation. This breakdown reflects the diversity in gender, age, education, ethnicity, and religious beliefs among the participants surveyed population.

Table 1

Demography of Participant

Category	*Frequency*	*%*	*Category*	*Frequency*	*%*
Gender			Ethnicity		
Male	66	63.46	Akan	49	47.12
Female	34	32.69	Mole-Dagbani	22	21.15
Prefer not to say	4	3.85	Ewe	15	14.42
Age Group			Ga-Dangme	11	10.58
25-40	40	38.46	Moshie	1	0.96
41-56	34	32.69	Frafra	1	0.96
57 or older	16	15.38	Mixed	1	0.96
18-24	14	13.46	Not on your list	1	0.96
Education Level			I can't tell	1	0.96
Bachelor's Degree	66	63.46	Hausa	1	0.96
Master's Degree	16	15.38	Employees of Financial Institutions		
High School	12	11.54	Middle Management	47	45.19
PhD/Doctorate	10	9.62	Senior Management	30	28.85
Religion			Entry-Level Positions	15	14.42
Christianity	51	49.04	Executive Leadership	9	8.65
Trad. African religions	34	32.69	Searching for job	1	0.96
Islam	18	17.31	Board Member	1	0.96
no affiliation	1	0.96	Not working at moment	1	0

Table 1 shows the distribution of employees in financial institutions by job level. Middle management makes up 45.19%, followed by senior management at 28.85%. Entry-level positions account for 14.42%, and executive leadership is 8.65%. Job seekers and board members represent .96%, while only one person (.009%) is unemployed. Most respondents hold management positions, with fewer in executive or board roles.

ANOVA Testing (Level of significance = 0.05)

Inferential statistical methods, such as null hypothesis testing and sampling distributions, help researchers draw meaningful conclusions. Krefeld-Schwalb et al. (2018) and Morling (2021) highlight the value of these techniques. They enabled the comparison of the null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis. The researcher used ANOVA to test hypotheses and assess significant differences between groups, with a significance level .05. ANOVA effectively compares multiple groups to determine if mean differences are statistically significant (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Before the analysis, the assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance, and independence for one-way ANOVA were checked. Data was imported, and ANOVA was conducted for each variable, followed by post-hoc tests where significant differences arose.

Hypothesis 1

Table 2 displays descriptive statistics for Hypothesis 1, which investigates the impact of unconscious ethnic biases on candidate selection for leadership roles in financial institutions in Corporate Ghana. In this analysis, the categorical variable under consideration was the respondents' level of agreement with the statement regarding unconscious ethnic bias, which was measured using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The dependent variable was the mean perception score reflecting the impact of unconscious ethnic bias on leadership selection. The average score (42.00, *SD* = 9.42) indicates general agreement with the hypothesis. However, responses vary significantly, reflecting differing perceptions of ethnic bias in the selection process.

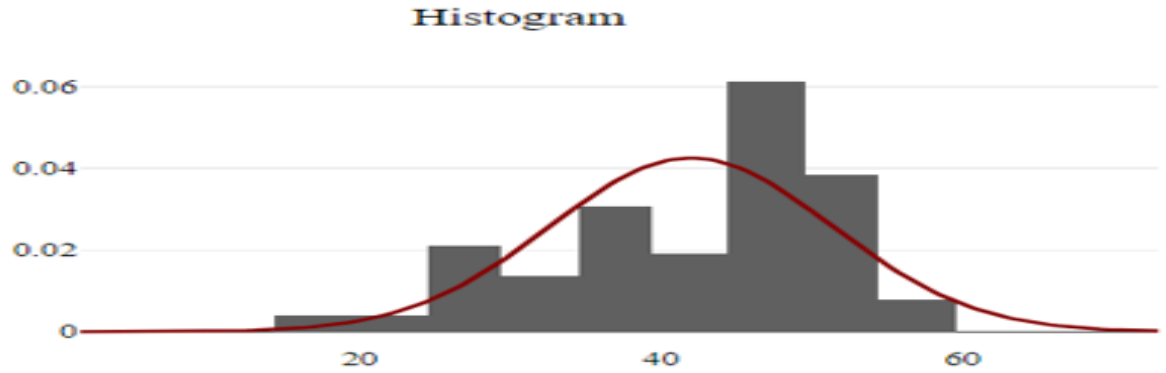
Table 2

Descriptive of H1

Groups	n	*M*	*SD*
Somewhat Agree	41	41.95	8.74
Strongly Agree	3	40.67	14.57
Somewhat Disagree	9	44	8.26
Neither	37	43.62	7.68
Agree	7	46.43	9.31
Strongly Disagree	2	26	4.24
Disagree	5	27.8	12.79
Total	104	42	9.42

A histogram was used to perform a normality test (skewness and kurtosis). As presented in Figure 2, the histogram showed a distribution resembling normality, with slight skewness acceptable for one-way ANOVA.

Figure 2
Normality Test (H1)



A Levene's Test was carried out to assess variance homogeneity across groups. As shown in Table 3, the result showed an F statistic of 1.2 and a p-value of .31, indicating that the variances are equal and suitable for ANOVA analysis.

Table 3
Levene's Test (H1)

	Sum of Squares	*df*	*M*	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	1796.21	6	299.37	3.95	.001
Within Group	7345.79	97	75.73		
Total	9142	103			

A one-way variance analysis revealed a significant difference between the categorical and dependent variables (F = 3.95, p = .001), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The ANOVA showed significant variance among the groups. A closer examination of the group means highlighting the direction and nature of these differences. The significant variance observed among the groups indicates that participants who disagreed or strongly disagreed perceived ethnic bias differently than those who agreed or remained neutral. Notably, the mean scores for those who disagreed were significantly lower (Strongly Disagree: M = 26.00; Disagree: M = 27.80), whereas those who agreed or felt neutral reported higher means (e.g., Agree: M = 46.43; Neither: M = 43.62).

The findings reveal a significant gap in perceptions of ethnic bias, likely shaped by individual experiences, organizational settings, or ethnic backgrounds. The posthoc Bonferroni test confirmed notable differences between groups, showing evident perspective variations. These findings indicate that perceptions of ethnic bias differ among organization members. They are influenced by prior beliefs, professional roles, and possibly ethnic backgrounds.

Hypothesis 2

Table 4 summarizes responses to Hypothesis 2, which examines whether ethnic bias impacts career advancement in Corporate Ghana despite similar qualifications. The Categorical (Independent) Variable is Ethnic Bias, defined as discrimination or favoritism based on ethnic identity. The Dependent Variable is Career Advancement Opportunities, which include promotions, leadership roles, mentoring, professional development, and internal mobility. The overall mean score is 30.63 (*SD* = 4.08), indicating a general agreement with the hypothesis. The minor standard deviations indicate relatively consistent responses across groups.

Table 4

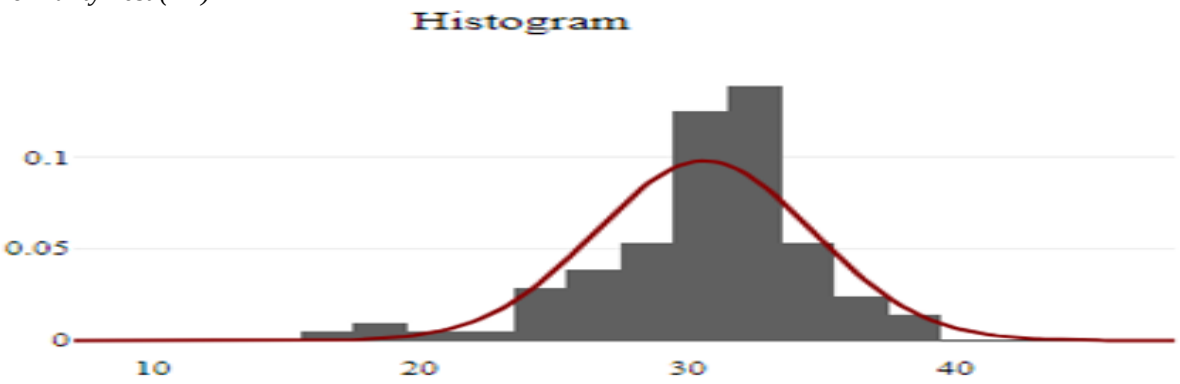
Descriptive of H2

Groups	n	Mean	Std. Deviation
Somewhat Agree	37	30.27	4.78
Somewhat Disagree	13	30.15	2.91
Neither	42	30.79	3.75
Agree	7	30.29	4.35
Disagree	5	33.6	3.65
Total	104	30.63	4.08

A histogram for the Test of Normality (Skewness and Kurtosis) shows that the data is approximately normally distributed and has a shape that closely resembles the standard curve (See Figure 3). There are no extreme outliers, reinforcing the normality assumption.

Figure 3

Normality Test (H2)



A Levene's Test was conducted to check for homogeneity of variances across groups. As demonstrated in Table 5, the test statistic *(F)* was 1.05 with degrees of freedom 4 and 99, resulting in a p-value of .385. Since this p-value is more significant than the .05 threshold, the null hypothesis of equal variances was not rejected. Therefore, it was assumed that the variances were equal for further ANOVA analysis.

Table 5
Levene's Test (H2)

	Sum of Squares	*df*	*M*	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	53.69	4	13.42	0.8	.529
Within Group	1664.69	99	16.82		
Total	1718.37	103			

The statistical analysis shows no significant difference between the categorical and dependent variables (F = .8, p = .529), so the null hypothesis stands.

The findings indicate that career progression varies significantly with ethnic group affiliation, highlighting the impact of ethnic bias on career outcomes. Since the ANOVA revealed no significant difference, a post hoc test was deemed unnecessary.

Hypothesis 3

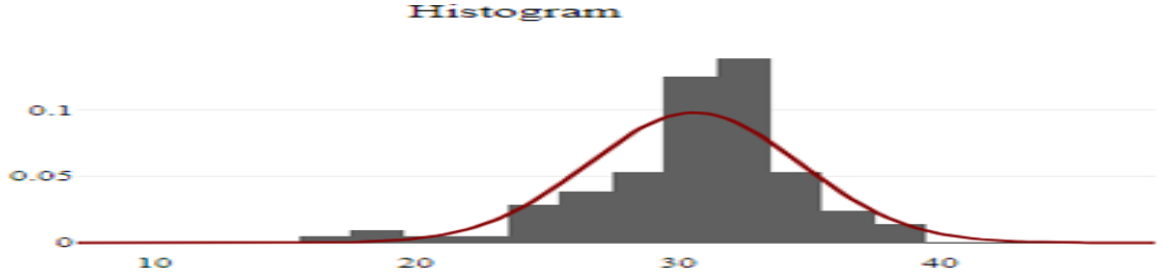
Table 6 shows the responses to Hypothesis 3, which looks at the impact of diversity training and inclusive hiring on reducing ethnic bias in Ghana's financial sector. The analysis focuses on the categorical variable of agreement with the effectiveness of diversity training and inclusive hiring practices in reducing ethnic bias. The groups are: "Neither," "Strongly Disagree," "Somewhat Disagree," "Somewhat Agree," "Disagree," and "Agree." The dependent variable measures the perception score of ethnic bias reduction on a continuous scale, with a mean of 30.63 and a standard deviation of 4.08.

Table 6
Descriptive of H3

Groups	n	M	SD
Neither	35	29.57	4.36
Strongly Disagree	3	29	3.61
Somewhat Disagree	18	30.61	3.84
Somewhat Agree	40	31.98	3.17
Disagree	5	31.6	4.67
Agree	3	25	7
Total	104	30.63	4.08

As shown in Figure 4, the histogram indicated that the data followed a normal distribution, essential for the ANOVA test.

Figure 4
Normality Test (H3)



A Levene's Test statistic *(F)* is .57 with 5 and 98 degrees of freedom, and the p-value is .72 (See Table 7). This suggests that no significant evidence exists to reject the null hypothesis of equal variances, allowing us to assume equal variances for further analysis, such as ANOVA.

Table 7
Levene's Test (H3)

	Sum of Squares	*df*	*M*	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	219.35	5	43.87	2.87	.018
Within Group	1499.02	98	15.3		
Total	1718.38	103			

A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference between the categorical and dependent variables (F = 2.87, p = .018), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Respondents' views on the effectiveness of diversity training and inclusive hiring in reducing ethnic bias vary significantly based on their level of agreement. Moderate supporters ("Somewhat Agree") tend to have higher scores, while other categories show more mixed or neutral opinions. This indicates that, although there is some backing for diversity initiatives, perceptions in the financial sector remain divided. The "Somewhat Agree" group had the highest mean score (M = 31.98, SD = 3.17), indicating positive views on diversity initiatives. The "Agree" group had a lower mean (M = 25.00, SD = 7.00), but this finding should be viewed with caution due to a small sample size (n = 3) and high variability. The "Neither" and "Strongly Disagree" groups reported more neutral or negative perceptions, with means of 29.57 and 29.00, respectively.
A Bonferroni posthoc test showed no significant pairwise comparisons; all p-values were above 0.05.

Reliability refers to the consistency of measurements over time (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). The Cronbach Alpha coefficient is a standard reliability measure, especially for Likert scales (Kite & Whitley, 2018). For the 30-item statements used in the factor analysis, Cronbach's Alpha is .91. Generally, a Cronbach's Alpha above .7 is acceptable, above 0.8 is good, and above 0.9 is excellent. Therefore, a value of 0.91 indicates excellent consistency in measuring the underlying construct.

Discussions and Implications

The study shows that diversity training and inclusive hiring practices can decrease ethnic bias in leadership selection, although reactions differ. It highlights the strong impact of ethnic bias on leadership choices within Ghana's financial sector. The findings reveal that ethnic identity significantly influences hiring and promotion decisions, supporting Social Identity Theory, which posits that people prefer members of their group, often prioritizing this preference over merit or competence. This phenomenon is not unique to Ghana; similar trends have been observed globally. For example, Knight (2017) highlights that unconscious bias in recruitment persists, even in the presence of structured hiring practices, particularly when cultural familiarity is prioritized over competency. Additionally, Agarwal (2024) emphasizes the urgent need to reform interview processes to address the deep-rooted biases in organizational recruitment systems. Support for the findings in Ghana is further reinforced by Nguta and Omuya (2024), who discovered that while ethnic diversity can enhance employee performance,

many African institutions lack effective diversity training programs. This study addresses that gap by demonstrating how such training could mitigate bias in leadership selection. Moreover, research by Walker et al. (2023) has shown that ethnically minoritized employees often face exclusion from leadership opportunities due to reliance on informal networks. This observation resonates with our findings, indicating that many qualified professionals in Ghana are overlooked simply because they do not belong to dominant ethnic groups. From a cultural standpoint, The Economist (2023) has noted the growing rationalization of nepotism as a "natural human tendency," a perspective that undermines the principles of meritocracy and objectivity in leadership hiring. Participants from underrepresented ethnic groups in our study echoed these sentiments, frequently reporting fewer career advancement opportunities. These insights underscore the critical need for inclusive hiring policies as part of broader institutional reforms. Although diversity training was acknowledged as beneficial, our results align with the conclusions of Bezrukova et al. (2012) and Paluck (2006), indicating that training alone is insufficient without accompanying systemic changes in hiring and evaluation practices.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. It uses a correlational design, meaning it cannot determine causality between ethnic bias and leadership selection outcomes. While significant correlations exist, they do not prove that one causes the other. Moreover, the sample is taken from professionals in Ghana's financial sector, which may not represent other sectors in Ghana or financial sectors in different cultures, limiting the applicability of the findings. The study relies heavily on self-report measures, which can introduce biases like social desirability and recall inaccuracies. Respondents may downplay their biases or lack awareness of them, impacting data accuracy. Lastly, the data collection was cross-sectional, offering a snapshot at a single point in time. This method does not capture changes in attitudes or practices that may occur due to evolving social norms or legislative changes.

Future studies should involve a broader range of participants from various sectors beyond finance and diverse regions within Ghana and other countries. This will improve the generalizability of findings and enable cross-cultural comparisons. Longitudinal studies are essential to understanding how ethnic bias in leadership selection evolves. These studies can also determine whether interventions to reduce bias are effective and sustainable in the long run. Randomized controlled trials can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions like blind recruitment processes and diversity training. This approach would provide clear evidence of the best strategies to reduce ethnic bias. Research should examine how changes in legal frameworks and organizational policies affect ethnic bias in hiring and promotion. This will help assess the effectiveness of legislative and policy interventions in practice.

Conclusion

This study examines the effects of ethnic bias on hiring, career progression, and leadership choices in Ghana's financial sector. It uses Social Identity Theory to show how in-group favoritism, nepotism, and unconscious biases often undermine meritocracy in decision-making. The research confirms that ethnic bias plays a significant role in candidate selection and career development, perpetuating structural inequalities in leadership roles. The study also suggests

that diversity training and inclusive hiring practices could help reduce these biases, although their effectiveness is still debated.

This study contributes significantly to existing knowledge in three ways. First, it broadens the discussion on ethnic bias by including evidence from Ghana, which has strong ethnic and tribal ties. Second, it analyzes how cultural and social dynamics influence corporate decision-making and favoritism in leadership selection. Finally, the findings highlight the ethical and economic consequences of biased hiring, urging organizations to focus on merit-based recruitment to improve performance and credibility. This research uniquely investigates ethnic bias in Ghana's financial institutions, an area often overlooked in academia. It quantifies how bias affects leadership selection and career progression, moving beyond general studies on discrimination. Combining insights from psychology, organizational behavior, and corporate governance provides a comprehensive view of workplace biases in Ghana.

Future research should examine the long-term impact of diversity initiatives on reducing ethnic bias in corporate Ghana. Comparing different industries and African economies can shed light on favoritism and nepotism in hiring. Investigating implicit bias training and leadership development programs may offer practical solutions for creating more inclusive and merit-based workplaces. The effect of diversity policies on long-term employee retention and organizational performance should also be studied in the future. Qualitative research could offer valuable insights into employee experiences with ethnic bias and inclusion efforts in Corporate Ghana. By addressing these biases, Ghana’s financial sector can enhance transparency, equity, and competitive growth, fostering a more inclusive and sustainable corporate environment.

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