



Assessment of the relationship between Cultural Identity and Social Integration among Students in Higher Education Institutions: A Focus on IBB University Lapai, Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract. The paper examines the relationship between cultural identity and social integration among students in higher education institutions with a focus on Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai (IBBUL), Niger State-Nigeria. The cultural diverse multiplicity and interactions were found to be a common feature in IBBUL just like any other tertiary education institution in Nigeria. Some of the objectives of the study are to examine the relationship between cultural identity and social integration among students and identify factors that facilitate or hinder social integration among students of IBBUL through triangulation. Social identity theory was adopted. A descriptive survey design was adopted, with a sample size of 393 determined through Taro Yamane's formula. Out of these, 350 questionnaires were retrieved, giving a response rate of 89.3%. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and thematic analysis for open-ended responses (interviews, FGDs). Key findings include: strong pride in cultural heritage (85%), but a majority also admitted that cultural identity influences their social relationships (75.7%). Most students (78.6%) reported having friends outside their cultural group and 87.2% believed that diversity enriches campus life. However, 54.3% still reported feeling isolated at times. Barriers to integration included language differences (61.5%) and stereotypes (64.3%). Enabling factors included social events (62.9%), faculty support (61.4%), and mutual respect (74.3%). These findings suggest that while cultural identity remains central to students' experiences, positive attitudes toward diversity and mutual respect provide strong foundations for social cohesion if well harnessed by institutional policies

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Social Integration, Diversity, Ethnic Group, Stereotype, Cultural Exchange

1. Introduction

Cultural identity continues to play a crucial role in shaping how individuals perceive themselves, behave, and interact within their social environments. It includes shared values, beliefs, customs, languages, and traditions that define a cultural group and influence social belonging (Knappert, 2021). Recent research emphasizes that cultural identity is not static but dynamic, evolving through social interaction and exposure to diverse cultural experiences (Wang & Li, 2020). In university environments where students from different cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds converge, the issue of social integration becomes particularly vital. Social integration refers to the process through which individuals from diverse backgrounds build meaningful relationships, participate actively in academic and social life, and develop a sense of belonging to the institution (Rienties & Rivers, 2022). Studies show that effective social integration enhances students' academic engagement, emotional well-being, and retention, while poor integration may lead to alienation and academic difficulties (Li & Zizzi, 2019).

When well-managed, cultural diversity in universities becomes a source of intellectual enrichment and innovation, as it encourages students to share perspectives, think critically, and develop global competencies. Inclusive educational environments that promote interaction, dialogue, and respect among students from diverse backgrounds foster peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding (Bista et al., 2023). Thus, understanding the relationship between cultural identity and social integration is essential for enhancing students' learning experiences and promoting harmony within higher education institutions.

Globally, universities serve as miniature societies where cultural interactions shape students' experiences and worldviews. In highly diverse settings such as the United States and the United Kingdom, cultural identity and social integration have been widely studied in relation to international students and minority groups. Studies have shown that students who struggle to integrate socially often experience feelings of alienation and reduced academic engagement (Gomes, C.; Berry, M.; Alzougool, B.; Chang, S., 2014). Conversely, institutions that promote cultural inclusivity create an environment where students feel valued and develop cross-cultural competencies essential for navigating the complexities of modern society.

In Africa, cultural diversity within universities is equally significant, given the continent's rich and varied ethnic compositions. Countries such as South Africa and Ghana have actively explored ways to foster social integration among students from different cultural backgrounds, recognizing its impact on educational outcomes (Moloi, 2020). Some African universities have implemented cultural awareness programs and student exchange initiatives to bridge cultural gaps and enhance students' social experiences. However, challenges such as language barriers, ethnocentrism, and discrimination persist, affecting the ease with which students interact and integrate socially.

In Nigeria, universities reflect the nation's vast multicultural landscape, with students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds coexisting within the same academic space. While this diversity should ideally be a source of enrichment, there have been cases where cultural differences create social divisions, leading to self-segregation among students (Adeyemi & Olusola, 2019). Some students may feel more comfortable interacting within their cultural groups, limiting their exposure to diverse perspectives and hindering social cohesion on campus. This pattern of social exclusivity can have long-term effects, reducing opportunities for collaboration and mutual understanding.

IBB University Lapai is a melting pot of cultures, attracting students from various ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds across Nigeria. While this diversity presents opportunities for cultural exchange and mutual learning, it also poses challenges to social integration. Some students may struggle to balance their cultural identity with the need to interact with peers from different backgrounds. Language barriers, stereotypes, and cultural biases can hinder effective communication and participation in social activities (Ahmed, 2021). Understanding the complexities of these interactions is essential in fostering an environment where all students feel included and valued (Olanrewaju &

Yusuf, 2018). However, when cultural identity is not effectively managed, it may lead to social fragmentation, discrimination, and isolation. Some students find it easier to integrate into the social fabric of the institution, while others struggle due to pre-existing biases or fears of losing their cultural identity (Okechukwu, 2022). Therefore, understanding how students at IBB University Lapai navigate their cultural identities while integrating socially is essential for promoting unity, reducing cultural conflicts, and fostering a conducive academic atmosphere.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the importance of social integration in Nigerian higher education institutions, students from diverse cultural backgrounds, often face challenges integrating socially even though cultural identity remains a significant factor influencing students' interactions. Many students naturally gravitate toward peers who share their ethnic or cultural backgrounds, finding comfort in familiar languages, traditions, and social norms. While this sense of belonging can be beneficial, it may also lead to social clustering, where students form exclusive groups that limit their exposure to diverse perspectives (Adeyemi & Olusola, 2019). For instance, differences in language, religious practices, or dressing styles can sometimes lead to exclusion or misunderstanding (Ahmed, 2021). The absence of institutional initiatives aimed at fostering intercultural dialogue often allows these divisions to persist. When students struggle to connect due to perceived or real cultural barriers, they may experience feelings of alienation, anxiety, or even resentment toward other groups.

Given the increasing diversity in Nigerian universities, it is essential to assess how cultural identity shapes students' ability to integrate socially. Universities, as academic and social spaces, should facilitate programs that encourage interactions beyond ethnic or religious affiliations. Creating platforms for cultural exchange, language appreciation, and inclusive social activities can significantly bridge gaps in student relationships (Okechukwu, 2022). The study therefore, addresses the gap by investigating how cultural identity influences social integration among students in Nigerian universities and IBBUL in particular.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

- Explore the various cultural identities present among students at IBB University Lapai.

- Examine the factors that promote or hinder social integration among students from different cultural backgrounds.
- Assess the impact of cultural identity on students' social interactions and academic experiences.

1.3 Research Questions

- What are the predominant cultural identities among students of IBB University Lapai?
- How do students perceive the relationship between their cultural identity and social integration?
- What factors promote or hinder social integration among students from different cultural backgrounds?
- What strategies can be implemented to enhance social integration without compromising cultural identity?

1.4 Hypothesis

The study tested the following hypotheses:

H₀: Cultural identity has no significant impact on social integration among students of IBB University Lapai.

H₁: Cultural identity significantly influences social integration among students of IBB University Lapai.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study focused on the relationship between cultural identity and social integration among undergraduate students in higher education institutions with a focus on IBB University Lapai. Geographically, the scope focused on IBB University Lapai in Niger state. The population scope is based on students from diverse cultural backgrounds excluding post graduate students. The thematic scope was based on cultural identities, social integration and their relationship and lastly, the methodological scope employed the mixed method approach of employing quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (interview and FGDs) approaches while data collection lasted for three months only.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for various stakeholders, ranging from students and university management to academia and society at large.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Concept of Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is a fundamental aspect of an individual's sense of self, deeply rooted in shared traditions, language, values, and social customs (Hall, 1990). It is through this identity that people connect with their cultural heritage, shaping their worldview and interactions with others. However, cultural identity is not static; it evolves over time as individuals encounter new experiences, whether through migration, globalization, or education (Giddens, 2021). In a university setting, where students from diverse backgrounds converge, cultural identity becomes a crucial factor in shaping their social and academic experiences (Hofstede, 2001). While cultural diversity in universities offers opportunities for intellectual exchange and personal growth, it can also create challenges for social integration. Some students may experience cultural shock or struggle with adapting to an environment where their cultural norms differ from the dominant culture (Berry, 1997). The extent to which students integrate socially depends not only on their personal adaptability but also on institutional policies that promote inclusivity. Universities that encourage cultural exchange programs, mentorship initiatives, and diverse student activities create environments where students feel comfortable expressing their cultural identity while engaging with others (Olanrewaju & Yusuf, 2018). Furthermore, the digital age has transformed how students engage with cultural identity in academic settings. Social media platforms, for instance, allow students to stay connected with their cultural roots even while studying in a diverse environment (Triandis, 1995). At the same time, these platforms provide opportunities for cross-cultural interactions, enabling students to engage with different perspectives beyond their immediate social circles (Ahmed, 2021).

2.2 Concept of Social Integration

Social integration is a crucial aspect of any diverse community, as it enables individuals from different cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds to interact meaningfully, build relationships, and foster a sense of belonging (Berry, 1997). In higher education institutions, where students come from various regions, traditions, and belief systems, social integration plays a significant role in shaping their experiences. A socially inclusive university environment allows students to engage in collaborative learning, share diverse perspectives, and develop essential social skills that prepare them for life beyond academia. Without social integration, students may struggle with feelings of isolation,

which can impact their academic performance and overall well-being. Tinto (1993) highlights that social integration in universities occurs at academic and social levels in their ability to connect with their studies, faculty members, and institutional support structures and their ability to build peer relationships, participate in extracurricular activities and engage in cultural exchanges. The importance of social integration builds personal relationships as well as overall social cohesion of the university community by promoting mutual respect, tolerance, and an appreciation for cultural diversity (Olanrewaju & Yusuf, 2018). It is also argued that social integration requires deliberate efforts from both students and university administrators to implement policies and programs that encourage intercultural engagement, such as student mentorship programs, multicultural events, and platforms that facilitate open dialogue among students from different backgrounds (Ahmed, 2021). By fostering inclusivity, institutions create an environment where students can embrace their differences while forming meaningful connections.

Furthermore, the role of student organizations, clubs, and peer networks cannot be overlooked in promoting social integration. Extracurricular activities provide informal spaces where students can interact outside academic settings, helping them form friendships and develop social support systems (Moloi, 2020). These interactions also serve as opportunities for students to challenge stereotypes, learn about other cultures, and build cross-cultural understanding. Universities that encourage student-led initiatives in cultural exchange and collaboration create more cohesive and engaged student communities. By prioritizing inclusive policies and fostering a culture of acceptance, universities can ensure that all students, regardless of their backgrounds, feel welcomed, supported, and empowered to thrive both socially and academically (Triandis, 1995).

2.3 The Relationship between Cultural Identity and Social Integration

Cultural identity provides individuals with a sense of belonging and continuity, shaping their values, beliefs, and social interactions (Adeyemi & Olusola, 2019). However, when students enter a multicultural academic setting, they often encounter new cultural norms and perspectives that may challenge their existing identities. Some students embrace these interactions as opportunities for growth, while others may struggle, feeling that social integration threatens their cultural authenticity.

Students who strongly identify with their cultural background may find it difficult to integrate into diverse social settings, particularly if they perceive

cultural differences as barriers to meaningful interactions (Moloi, 2020). On the other hand, students who actively engage in intercultural exchanges tend to develop broader worldviews, expanding their social networks and enhancing their ability to navigate diverse environments.

Language plays a crucial role in the integration process, acting as either a bridge or a barrier to social connections. Students who are not proficient in the dominant language of instruction or communication may experience difficulties in forming relationships, participating in discussions, and engaging in academic and extracurricular activities (Ahmed, 2021). Misconceptions about certain ethnic or cultural communities may lead to discrimination, exclusion, or reluctance to engage in cross-cultural interactions. This can create a cycle where students from marginalized backgrounds feel alienated, reducing their willingness to participate in social and academic activities (Okechukwu, 2022). Universities play a crucial role in bridging the gap between cultural identity and social integration by implementing policies and initiatives that promote inclusivity (Olanrewaju & Yusuf, 2018).

Ultimately, the relationship between cultural identity and social integration is shaped by individual attitudes, institutional policies, and broader societal influences (Triandis, 1995).

2.4 Factors Influencing Social Integration in Universities and their Challenges

Some of the factors influencing social integration include Language and Communication Barriers (Berry, 1997; UNESCO, 2020 Ahmed, 2021 (Moloi, 2020); cultural Stereotypes and Prejudices (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Berry, 1997; Okechukwu, 2022) Moloi, 2020); institutional policies and support programmes UNESCO, 2020; Olanrewaju & Yusuf, 2018; Moloi, 2020); personal and social factors (Triandis, 1995; Berry, 1997; Okechukwu, 2022; Moloi, 2020). However, challenges are sometimes encountered towards integration including self-segregation, cultural conflicts, discrimination and bias and adjustment difficulties when students struggle for transition from homogeneous communities to diverse university settings.

3. Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Cultural Identity Theory (CIT) (Hall, 1990, 1996; Phinney, 1990, 1992) and Acculturation Theory (AT) (Redfield, Linton and Herscovits, 1936; Berry, 1970

Social Identity Theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979), provides that individuals develop a sense of belonging and identity from group membership therefore relevant to understanding

how cultural identity influences social integration. The CIT developed by Hall and Phinney provided for the understanding of how cultural identity shapes students' integration and the acculturation theory helps in the understanding of how students adapt to the university environment they have found themselves.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design, which allowed for the collection of data from a large sample of students to ensure accurate and reliable findings. The study was conducted in Lapai Local Government Area (LGA) located in Niger State. Lapai has a rich historical and cultural heritage, being part of the Nupe Kingdom, a significant cultural and political entity in the region. Over the years, the area has evolved into a diverse community comprising various ethnic groups, including Nupe, Gbagyi, and Hausa. The LGA is strategically positioned near Niger State's capital, Minna, making it a critical link for trade and communication.

Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University (IBBUL), established in 2005 serves as a beacon of academic excellence, attracting students from across Nigeria and contributing significantly to the socio-economic development of Lapai. Lapai LGA's growing population and socio-economic dynamics.

4.1 Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of all undergraduate students at IBBUL, a state-owned University. The total population of IBBUL students as of 2023/2024 academic session was given as 21,000. Students across various faculties were included to provide a comprehensive understanding of cultural identity and social integration among students of IBB University Lapai

4.2 Sample Size

The sample was determined using the Taro Yamani formula $n = \frac{N}{1 + ne^2}$

Where:

N = Total population (21,000)

e = Margin of error (0.05 for a 95% confidence level)

$n = \frac{21000}{1 + 21000(0.05)^2}$

$n = \frac{21000}{1 + 21000 \times 0.0025}$

$n = \frac{21000}{1 + 52.5}$

$n = \frac{21000}{53.5}$

$n \approx 393$

Therefore, the sample size for the study is 393 respondents.

4.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling technique was used to select respondents from different faculties with strata based on faculty/department to ensure a diverse representation from diverse cultural background. Faculties served as strata and Departments were randomly selected from each faculty. Respondents were proportionately selected based on their levels and Departments.

4.4 Instruments for Data Collection

Questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion and observation were the instruments. The questionnaire was paper-based for on the campus distribution divided into sections covering demographic details, cultural identity and social integration and intervention measures. Interview was used to elicit information from students for deeper insight while FGDs were conducted to explore shared experiences and perception and interactions among students were observed.

4.5 Data Collection Methods

The study adopted the use of survey and qualitative methods for data collection for the study. The questionnaire was a set of questions which covers the objectives of the study and all questions relevant to the research. The questionnaire was paper-based for on the campus distribution divided into sections covering demographic details, cultural identity and social integration and intervention measures. Interview was used to elicit information from students for deeper insight while FGDs were conducted to explore shared experiences and perception and interactions among students were observed. All the instruments were used in line with the objectives of the study.

4.6 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Instruments were submitted for validation before administration and a pilot study was conducted, to test reliability.

4.7 Method of Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency tables, percentages, and mean scores) and inferential statistics (chi-square tests and regression analysis) to determine relationships between cultural identity and social integration among students of IBB University Lapai. Statistical analysis were conducted using SPSS software. Qualitative data were analysed thematically with verbal tan quotations.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical research standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

5. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

This section presents the data collected through questionnaires, interviews and FGDs administered to students of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University (IBBU), Lapai, on the study topic ‘Assessment of the relationship between Cultural Identity and Social Integration among Students in IBBUL’. Out of the 393 questionnaires distributed, 350 were retrieved and correctly filled, representing an 89.3% response rate, which is sufficient for analysis and generalization.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	210	60.0
	Female	140	40.0
	Total	350	100.0
Age Range	17–20 years	95	27.1
	21–25 years	180	51.4
	26–30 years	55	15.7
	Above 30	20	5.8
	Total	350	100.0
Academic Level	100 Level	70	20.0
	200 Level	90	25.7
	300 Level	80	22.9
	400 Level	75	21.4
	500 Level	35	10.0
	Total	350	100.0
Religion	Christianity	150	42.9
	Islam	175	50.0
	Traditional	15	4.3
	Others	10	2.8
	Total	350	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Out of the 350 students who participated in the study, 60% were male while 40% were female, indicating a male-dominated sample but with a fair female representation. In terms of age distribution, the majority (51.4%) fell within the 21–25 years age group, which is the typical age range for undergraduate students in Nigeria. This was followed by 27.1% who were between 17–20 years, showing that most respondents were young adults. Only 5.8% were above 30 years, suggesting that mature students form a small minority in the university’s undergraduate population.

Academic levels were fairly distributed across the five levels of study. The largest proportion (25.7%) were in 200 level, followed by 22.9% in 300 level, 21.4% in 400 level, and 20% in 100 level, while 500 level students made up 10% of the sample. This distribution shows that the survey captured views across all levels, with more representation from middle-level undergraduates who are often more settled into the university environment.

As for religion, Islam (50%) and Christianity (42.9%) were the dominant affiliations among respondents, reflecting the general religious composition of Nigerian universities. Traditional worshippers accounted for 4.3%, while 2.8% identified with other faiths. This indicates that the student population is religiously diverse, although dominated by the two major religions.

Overall, the demographic data reveal a youthful, religiously diverse, and academically balanced sample, providing a solid basis for analyzing cultural identity and social integration among students of IBB University Lapai.

Table 2: Students’ Views on Cultural Identity

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
I am proud of my cultural heritage.	60.0	25.0	5.7	5.0	4.3
My cultural identity influences how I relate to other students.	40.0	35.7	10.0	8.6	5.7
I feel more comfortable associating with students from my own cultural group.	35.7	30.0	12.9	13.0	8.4
I make an effort to understand other cultures within the university.	45.7	35.7	8.6	5.7	4.3

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 highlights the cultural identity of students at IBB University. An overwhelming majority (85%) indicated pride in their cultural heritage, demonstrating the deep-rooted value students attach to their traditions and backgrounds. Additionally, 75.7% agreed that cultural identity influences how they relate to peers, showing that culture is a major factor in shaping interpersonal interactions on campus.

However, a significant proportion (65.7%) admitted they feel more comfortable associating with people from their own cultural group, which suggests a tendency toward self-segregation. Despite this, efforts toward intercultural understanding are notable, with over 81% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they actively try to understand other cultures. This indicates that while students value their cultural identity, they are also open to learning and engaging beyond their cultural boundaries.

Table 3: Students’ Perceptions of Social Integration

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
I feel socially accepted by students from other cultural backgrounds.	41.4	35.7	10.0	8.6	4.3
I have made friends outside of my ethnic or cultural group.	38.6	40.0	7.1	8.6	5.7
I believe that cultural diversity enhances campus life.	54.3	32.9	5.7	4.3	2.8
I sometimes feel isolated due to my cultural background.	28.6	25.7	14.3	17.1	14.3
There are adequate university programs that promote cultural exchange.	20.0	25.7	22.9	17.1	14.3

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 shows that a large proportion of respondents (77.1%) felt socially accepted by students from other backgrounds, and 78.6% confirmed that they had made friends outside their ethnic group. This demonstrates that cross-cultural friendships are relatively strong within the university. Furthermore, 87.2% agreed that cultural diversity enriches campus life, suggesting that students generally see diversity as a positive element.

However, not all experiences were positive—54.3% admitted that they sometimes feel isolated due to their cultural background. This highlights the fact that while diversity is embraced in principle, practical experiences of inclusion can vary. Importantly, only 45.7% believed that the university provides adequate programs to promote cultural exchange, suggesting gaps in institutional efforts toward fostering integration.

Barriers and Enablers to Social Integration

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Language differences hinder effective interaction with other students.	32.9	28.6	10.0	15.7	12.8
Cultural stereotypes affect how I am treated on campus.	34.3	30.0	12.9	12.9	10.0
My faculty/department promotes interaction among diverse students.	25.7	35.7	15.7	12.9	10.0
Social events on campus promote unity among students from various cultures.	30.0	32.9	14.3	12.9	10.0
There is mutual respect among students from different cultural groups.	38.6	35.7	8.6	10.0	7.1

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 presents the barriers and enabling factors for social integration. Language differences (61.5%) and cultural stereotypes (64.3%) were identified as significant barriers to smooth interaction among students. These findings suggest that communication and bias remain critical challenges in fostering integration.

On the positive side, institutional and social factors provide some enabling conditions. For instance, 61.4% agreed that their faculties promote diverse interactions, while 62.9% acknowledged that social events encourage unity among students. Even more encouraging, 74.3% reported that there is mutual respect among students from different groups, showing that despite barriers, the campus environment generally supports tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

6. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the relationship between cultural identity and social integration among students of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai. The discussion is organized around the study’s major objectives and the literature review. The demographic profile showed that respondents were predominantly between 21–25 years (51.4%), male (60%), and evenly distributed across the different levels of study. This aligns with the age and gender characteristics of most Nigerian universities, where younger students dominate undergraduate enrollment (Moloi, 2020). The religious distribution revealed Islam (50%) and Christianity (42.9%) as dominant, reflecting Nigeria’s dual-religious context (Adeyemi & Olusola, 2019). These demographic variables underscore the diversity of the university, which provides both opportunities and challenges for social integration. Most respondents (85%) expressed pride in their cultural heritage, consistent with Hall’s (1990) view that cultural identity is a vital part of self-concept.

Furthermore, 75.7% agreed that cultural identity influences how they relate to others. This supports the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979), which posits that individuals naturally gravitate toward their in-groups as a way of maintaining self-esteem and security. The finding that 65.7% felt more comfortable associating with their own cultural groups also echoes Adeyemi and Olusola (2019), who observed that students in Nigerian universities often practice self-segregation along ethnic or cultural lines. However, it is encouraging that 81.4% indicated efforts to understand other cultures, suggesting that students are not completely closed off to intercultural engagement.

Results show that integration is taking place despite challenges. A majority (77.1%) felt socially accepted by peers from other cultural backgrounds, and 78.6% reported forming friendships outside their ethnic group. This validates Tinto's (1993) assertion that social integration in academic environments strengthens students' sense of belonging and enhances their academic persistence. Additionally, 87.2% believed that cultural diversity enriches campus life, confirming Olanrewaju and Yusuf's (2018) findings that diversity, when well-managed, promotes intellectual and social growth. However, a contrasting reality emerged as 54.3% of students admitted feeling isolated at times due to their cultural identity. This reflects Berry's (1997) argument that cultural adaptation often involves stress and identity conflicts. Moreover, only 45.7% believed that the university provides adequate programs for cultural exchange, pointing to institutional shortcomings. This gap suggests that while students' attitudes toward integration are generally positive, institutional efforts at promoting inclusivity remain insufficient.

The study identified language differences (61.5%) and cultural stereotypes (64.3%) as major barriers to integration. This is consistent with Ahmed (2021), who highlighted language barriers and prejudices as key obstacles in Nigerian higher institutions. Stereotypes reinforce divisions and limit the willingness of students to engage freely, supporting Tajfel and Turner's (1979) observation of out-group discrimination as a common feature of diverse societies.

On the other hand, enabling factors were also evident. For instance, 61.4% agreed that their faculties promote interaction, 62.9% believed that social events foster unity, and 74.3% acknowledged mutual respect among students. These findings resonate with Moloi (2020), who emphasized the role of institutional programs and peer activities in encouraging integration. They also reflect Triandis' (1995) idea that intercultural contact promotes

mutual understanding when facilitated in structured environments.

The results strongly support Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which explains why students naturally cluster within their cultural groups but can also extend interactions beyond them when provided with enabling environments. It also confirms Berry's (1997) model of acculturation, which notes that individuals must balance cultural preservation with adaptation in diverse settings. In line with Tinto (1993), the findings highlight that academic and social success are interlinked, as students who integrate socially are more likely to thrive in their studies. The findings suggest that while cultural identity remains a strong influence on students' interactions, social integration is possible and even thriving when mutual respect and tolerance are present. Institutional policies, however, need strengthening to address isolation, stereotypes, and language barriers. Programs such as cultural festivals, inter-faculty collaborations, and peer mentorship would provide platforms for students to translate their positive attitudes into lasting social cohesion.

7. Summary

This study examined the relationship between cultural identity and social integration among students of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University (IBBU), Lapai. It was motivated by the recognition that Nigerian universities are multicultural spaces where students' cultural identities may either strengthen unity or create divisions. Guided by Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), Berry's (1997) acculturation model, and Tinto's (1993) perspective on integration, the research investigated how students navigate cultural differences in their daily interactions.

8. Conclusion

The study concludes that cultural identity plays a dual role among students of IBBU Lapai as a source of pride and belonging, and at the same time, a potential barrier to wider integration when it reinforces self-segregation. Despite this tension, the majority of students demonstrated openness to cross-cultural friendships and acknowledged the enriching role of diversity in academic life. Language barriers and stereotypes remain the most significant challenges to integration. However, evidence of mutual respect and students' willingness to interact across cultural lines show that integration is not only possible but already occurring in many cases. This underscores the fact that social integration thrives when institutions provide enabling structures and when students themselves adopt inclusive attitudes. The study establishes that

cultural identity significantly shapes how students integrate socially at IBBU, Lapai. Therefore, efforts to promote integration must recognize cultural pride as legitimate while creating avenues for cross-cultural engagement.

9. Recommendations

The findings of this study revealed that cultural identity plays a significant role in shaping students' social relationships and interactions at Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai. The study therefore recommends that the university lay much emphasis on an all-inclusive policy implementation for more involvement and participation of students like cultural day. The study also showed that cultural diversity enriches campus life and promotes intellectual and social growth when properly managed.

However, several challenges to social integration were identified. Language differences emerged as a major barrier, preventing effective communication and limiting participation in social and academic activities. Cultural stereotypes and prejudices were also found to contribute to misunderstandings and divisions among students, particularly those from minority cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, while there are some existing programs that promote cultural exchange, many students believed that the university's institutional efforts to foster inclusiveness are still inadequate. On the positive side, mutual respect among students and their willingness to interact across cultural lines were found to be strong enablers of integration. Social events, intergroup interactions, and faculty support also play crucial roles in encouraging unity and collaboration.

In the light of these findings, it is recommended that the university should intensify its efforts to promote intercultural understanding and social cohesion. Regular multicultural festivals, debates, and exchange programs should be organized to celebrate Nigeria's diversity while fostering a sense of unity. Faculties and departments should institutionalize intergroup projects and seminars that encourage daily interactions among students from various backgrounds. Language clubs and peer-tutoring initiatives should be introduced to address communication gaps and assist students struggling with English or other common languages. Awareness campaigns, workshops, and student-led forums should be conducted to combat stereotypes, promote tolerance, and build cultural sensitivity. Counseling and mentorship programs should integrate intercultural components that pair students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds to encourage shared learning and mutual respect.

Finally, the university management should develop and enforce inclusive policies that discourage discrimination and reward intercultural collaboration. Student unions and associations should be empowered to lead peer-driven initiatives that bridge cultural divides. By implementing these measures, the university can transform its cultural diversity into a source of unity, harmony, and collective growth among students.

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