Determinants of National Cohesion in Kenyan Universities: The Role of Co-Curricular Activities, Training Programs, and Institutional Policies

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Abstract

This study investigated the determinants of national cohesion in Kenyan universities, focusing on the influence of co-curricular activities, training programs, and institutional policies. The research was conducted in five public universities in Kenya, selected purposively based on criteria including possession of a charter, over a decade of existence, and a history of ethnic conflicts that disrupted learning. Using a cross-sectional descriptive survey research design, the study engaged a sample of 384 respondents. Students were selected through simple random sampling to complete questionnaires with multiple-choice questions, while deans, department heads, and faculty members were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews. Data collection and analysis were ongoing, with questionnaire data analysed using SPSS prior to conducting interviews. The findings revealed that co-curricular activities play a crucial role in promoting intercultural understanding, personal development, and community building, enabling students to appreciate diversity and establish meaningful relationships. Training programs were identified as essential in instilling values of tolerance and respect; however, limited awareness of these initiatives highlighted the need for more effective communication strategies to amplify their impact. Institutional policies, such as the establishment of International Students Offices, support for diverse social clubs, and initiatives like Kenyatta University's 'Nyumba Kumi,' were shown to support diversity and mutual responsibility. Nevertheless, many participants reported limited awareness or neutrality toward these policies, emphasizing the necessity of enhanced awareness campaigns. The study concludes that universities can foster national cohesion by strengthening the design and implementation of co-curricular activities, expanding and effectively communicating training programs on tolerance, and raising awareness of institutional policies. These efforts can collectively promote a shared understanding of national cohesion and contribute to a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Keywords National Cohesion, Co-Curricular Activities, Diversity, University Policies, Student Engagement

Introduction

National cohesion is a vital element for societal stability and development, particularly in multicultural contexts like Kenya, where mismanagement of ethnic diversity has historically fueled tensions and conflicts. Kenyan universities, as microcosms of society, have not been immune to these challenges. According to Gachanga et al. (2024), ethnic tensions and conflicts have frequently spilled over into university campuses, disrupting academic activities, prompting temporary closures, and in extreme cases, resulting in loss of life and property damage. These incidents underscore the deeply entrenched ethnic divisions within higher education institutions and highlight the urgent need for strategies to foster unity.

Despite universities implementing various initiatives, including co-curricular activities, training programs, and institutional policies aimed at bridging these divides, national cohesion remains elusive. Many of these efforts face challenges such as limited awareness, insufficient engagement, and competing influences of political and ethnic dynamics within campuses. For instance, ethnic-based student organizations and political patronage continue to undermine the effectiveness of such initiatives.

This study explores the determinants of national cohesion within Kenyan universities by examining how co-curricular activities, training programs, and institutional policies contribute to fostering unity, mutual respect, and inclusivity in these institutions. By addressing these constructs, the study aims to provide insights into strengthening the role of universities as drivers of national cohesion and societal harmony.

Literature Review

A review of the literature on strategies to promote national cohesion in Kenyan universities revealed a significant knowledge gap in this area. A search on frequently used databases by researchers, such as Google Scholar, Web of Science, EBSCOHost, Emerald Insight, found that very little research has been conducted in this field. To date, no comprehensive studies have investigated the effectiveness of co-curricular activities, training programs, and institutional policies in addressing ethnic divides within Kenyan universities.

Chege (2009) is one of the few researchers who have conducted research related to this study. His study highlighted how universities have historically been used as tools for political survival by the ruling elite, curtailing intellectual freedom and undermining national cohesion. While his study underscores the historical role of ethnicity in shaping university dynamics, it fails to explore functional strategies to foster unity in the present context. In contrast, this study adopts a functionalist approach, focusing on actionable mechanisms to bridge ethnic divides.

Another researcher who has conducted research related to this study is Gudo (2016). In his study, he examined the impact of diversity on education quality, emphasizing the role of university leadership in managing diversity to foster inclusivity. However, his research was limited to a single institution, restricting its generalizability. Furthermore, Gudo did not explore specific strategies for promoting national cohesion. By studying five geographically diverse public universities, the current research broadens the scope to provide a more comprehensive analysis of how universities can effectively manage diversity to achieve national unity.

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Another researcher who has conducted a study related to this topic is Ng'eno (2023). In his study, he investigated how national identity shapes citizens' sense of belonging, participation in national matters, and overall socio-political engagement. He identified significant gaps in Kenya's institutional, legal, and policy frameworks that impede efforts toward building a unified national identity. He highlighted the contradictions between past integration attempts and the realities of current social and political divisions. He argues, these gaps contribute to a fragmented sense of belonging, hence complicating efforts to foster cohesion among Kenya's diverse population.

However, the gap in Ng'eno's study is its limited focus. While it offers a valuable socio-political analysis of national identity, it does not address the role of universities in promoting national cohesion, nor does it explore the specific strategies employed by universities to foster national cohesion. The current study seeks to address this gap by focusing on the strategies that universities deploy to promote national cohesion, contributing to the broader discourse on national identity and unity in Kenya.

Mande (2021) conducted a study that aligns with the current research. In his study, he explored gender diversity within the academic workforce, specifically focusing on the representation and experiences of female academic staff in Kenyan public universities. His research highlighted significant gender imbalances, noting that in many public universities, over 70% of the academic staff are male, and that most institutions have failed to comply with the existing gender policy frameworks meant to promote inclusivity. This underrepresentation of women, particularly in leadership positions, was identified as a critical barrier to achieving gender equality in higher education.

One of the key limitations of Mande's research is its focus on gender diversity without addressing broader aspects of diversity, such as ethnicity, culture, or national cohesion, which are equally important in creating inclusive academic environments. While Mande's work provides valuable insights into gender dynamics within universities, it does not explore the strategies that universities employ to promote national cohesion among students and staff. The current study aims to address this gap by examining the specific strategies used by Kenyan universities to foster national cohesion, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how diversity and inclusion are managed within higher education institutions.

In Sindabi's (2017), it was found that values such as national unity and equity were more effectively fostered through games and student leadership. However, the study solely concentrated on values promoting national unity, neglecting mechanisms aimed at promoting national cohesion within universities. This current research endeavour aims to address this gap.

Statement of the Problem

Kenyan universities continue to grapple with persistent ethnic tensions, which undermine efforts to promote national cohesion despite the implementation of various strategies. Ethnicity remains a potent and divisive force in these institutions, exacerbated by the spillover of local political dynamics into the university sphere. According to Gachanga et al. (2024), regional political leaders often compete for influence over universities in their areas, entrenching ethnic divisions and destabilizing these spaces of learning. This has resulted in universities becoming microcosms of broader societal divisions, perpetuating an environment of mistrust and exclusion rather than fostering unity.

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Further, while universities have introduced co-curricular activities, training programs, and institutional policies to bridge ethnic divides, their effectiveness remains questionable. Evidence suggests that many students and staff are either unaware of these initiatives or perceive them as ineffective, limiting their potential to achieve the desired impact. For instance, ethnic-based student organizations, preferential treatment in leadership appointments, and political patronage continue to undermine the intended outcomes of these interventions.

The failure to achieve national cohesion in Kenyan universities not only disrupts the academic environment but also jeopardizes their role as incubators for an inclusive, democratic society. By problematizing these persistent challenges, this study seeks to examine how co-curricular activities, training programs, and institutional policies influence national cohesion, offering insights into strategies that can transform universities into spaces of unity and mutual respect.

Methodology

The study was conducted in five public universities in Kenya, selected purposively to ensure a diverse representation of institutions across different regions and socio-political contexts. The selection criteria required each university to be a public institution with a charter, to have been in existence for more than ten years, and to have a documented history of ethnic conflicts that disrupted learning. Among the 59 public universities in Kenya, only 22 met the criteria of being chartered and operating for over a decade. Based on this framework, the selected universities were Kenyatta University, the University of Nairobi (UoN), Moi University, and Multimedia University of Kenya. The universities were geographically distributed to capture diversity in ethnic composition, political dynamics, and cultural influences, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings to other public universities in Kenya.

A cross-sectional descriptive survey research design was employed to examine the challenges and determinants of fostering national cohesion within these universities. The sample comprised 384 respondents, ensuring representation from key stakeholders in the university environment. Students were selected through simple random sampling to minimize selection bias, while faculty members, deans, and department heads were purposively sampled based on their roles and insights into the study's focus areas.

Data collection was conducted using a mixed-method approach. Students responded to structured questionnaires with multiple-choice questions designed to capture their perceptions and experiences regarding national cohesion. Faculty, deans, and department heads participated in semi-structured interviews to provide in-depth insights into institutional policies and practices. Data collection and analysis were iterative, with quantitative data from questionnaires analyzed using SPSS to generate descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed to identify patterns and perspectives that complemented the quantitative findings.

To enhance the validity of the study, the sample was carefully designed to reflect the demographic and institutional diversity of public universities in Kenya. By focusing on public institutions with significant student populations and established histories, the findings are intended to provide a credible basis for understanding and addressing issues of national cohesion within the Kenyan higher education context. As Cohen et al. (2018) highlight, the use of a mixed-method approach strengthens the reliability and validity of the findings by triangulating quantitative and qualitative data.

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Results

Participants' Understanding of National Cohesion

The first aspect of inquiry in this study was participants understanding of national cohesion. The aim of this inquiry was to gauge the participants' knowledge of the concept and to identify any misconceptions they might hold. Assessing this understanding was crucial, especially for university administrators, since championing a poorly grasped or defined concept is ineffective. According to Koonce (2011), social cohesion is often misinterpreted and applied too broadly. He observes, many definitions of social cohesion can dilute its meaning, equating it merely with the experience of belonging to a tight-knit group, without adequately considering the academic understanding of the concept. He points out that this distinction is important because it clarifies the intentions of organizations that claim to pursue social cohesion, ensuring that their contributions are appropriately recognized. Koonce (2011) advocates for a narrower definition of social cohesion to maintain its analytical value and to enable effective analysis of societal dynamics.

Koonce (2011) further observes, social cohesion functions as a performance variable. It is a byproduct of various activities and conditions and is evidenced by the willingness of society's members to cooperate and adhere to social norms. Understanding these nuances allows for a more comprehensive grasp of how social cohesion operates within societies and the specific conditions that promote it. The same can be said of national cohesion in universities, hence the need to understand participants' understanding of the same. Table 1 represents a summary of respondents' perception of national cohesion.

Table 1: Participants' Understanding of National Cohesion

Response	No. Of Respondents
Tolerance of ethnic and religious differences	6
Harmonious coexistence between communities	12
Socioeconomic and political integration	3
Harmonious coexistence	13
National identity and group affiliation	8
Shared national identity and collective purpose	2
Communities coming together and agreeing to collaborate	12
Total	56

The findings above revealed that participants viewed national cohesion differently. While their descriptions differed, certain themes emerged frequently. Thirteen (13) participants considered national cohesion as harmonious coexistence while twelve (12 saw it as harmonious coexistence among diverse communities in Kenya). Six participants characterised it as the presence of ethnic and religious tolerance within society. Others (2) defined it as a sense of belonging to a group or the country as a whole. Two participants viewed it as shared national identity and collective purpose. Three key respondents looked at it as an outcome of three interdependent elements namely social cohesion, economic cohesion, and political cohesion. One respondent stated:

When addressing national cohesion, it is important to view it through the lens of three interrelated components: social cohesion, economic cohesion, and political cohesion.

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Another respondent described it this way:

National cohesion is about understanding how a group perceives its role and status within society. Are they marginalized? Do they face discrimination in resource allocation? (Lecturer, Multimedia University, August 2022)

A key respondent from the NCIC described national cohesion as a process that fosters a sense of belonging among a country's citizens, making them feel as one people, belonging to one nation, working together towards common goals, and facing similar challenges. This aligns with the NCIC motto of "one people, one nation, and one destiny." It also resonates with Fonseca *et al'*s (2018) definition of social cohesion which involves the development of a community characterized by shared values and common challenges, fostering a sense of collective identity. According to Fonseca *et al* (2018) shared values and common challenges creates a supportive environment where individuals feel connected to one another, enhancing their collective identity and encouraging collaboration to address issues that affect them all.

Participants were also asked to explain why national cohesion was important. Analysis of data revealed that majority of respondents were in agreement that national cohesion is vital for peace and security of the country. One respondent said that a country cannot thrive without national cohesion. Another respondent explained it this way:

National cohesion is important because we do not want a repeat of 2007/2008 post-election violence.

The responses above clearly indicated that most respondents understood national cohesion to some extent. They also see it as a prerequisite for peace and stability at the university and in the country at large. This is important because in a country where people with different languages, religions, races and culture, are required to co-exist an understanding and respect for each other's culture, religion must be safeguarded.

The above findings aligns with Fonseca *et al.* (2018) observation regarding the importance of social cohesion. He observes, social cohesion plays a vital role in building mature and resilient societies in that it enables communities to withstand and adapt to various challenges, thereby enhancing their overall stability and sustainability. It also contributes to the development of collective identity and mutual support among members, fostering a sense of belonging that is crucial for creating social networks capable of providing assistance during difficult times. In addition, social cohesion is instrumental in addressing common challenges faced by communities. He observes, when individuals unite to confront shared issues, they can collaborate more effectively, leading to better outcomes and solutions.

It can be concluded therefore that understanding national cohesion offers a framework for designing interventions aimed at promoting national cohesion in universities. By identifying the levels and factors related to cohesion, university administrators, students and stakeholders can develop strategies to strengthen social ties and community engagement. It also facilitates the acceptance of cultural diversity while promoting tolerance. This is particularly significant in multicultural societies like universities, where fostering cohesion can bridge differences and contribute to creating a more inclusive environment.

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University Organizes Co-Curricular Activities to Promote National Cohesion

The study also investigated the use of co-curricular activities as a potential strategy for promoting national cohesion. According to Huang (2017), co-curricular activities are an effective strategy for fostering national cohesion through the cultivation of intercultural competence. He observes that co-curricular activities promote interaction among students from diverse cultural backgrounds, playing a crucial role in enhancing cultural awareness and fostering tolerance. By engaging in events that celebrate a wide range of cultural traditions, students gain a deeper understanding of their peers, which in turn fosters a sense of unity and contributes to national cohesion.

This concurs with Tsang *et al* (2021) who observes that intercultural engagement can serve as effective strategies for promoting national cohesion by enhancing understanding, building networks, fostering civic responsibility, and developing essential social skills among students. Further integration of these activities into educational curricula could strengthen their impact on societal cohesion

To determine whether universities employ this approach to foster national integration, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: "University organizes co-curricular activities to promote national integration." Figure 1 presents the findings of the study.
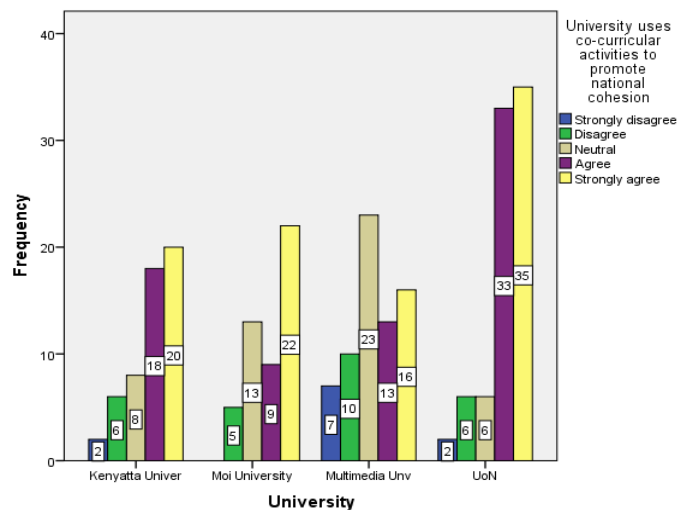

Figure 1: University Uses Co-Curricular Activities to Promote National Cohesion

From the above findings, majority of the respondents (166) were in agreement that universities are deploying extra-curricular activities as a strategy to promote national cohesion. For Kenyatta University, Moi University, and the UON, the largest segments chose strongly agree and agree. This indicated that most respondents felt the universities promote national cohesion through co-curricular activities. However, for Multimedia University, the largest segment was neutral. This suggested that a significant portion of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. This was interpreted to mean that co-curricular activities ,aimed at promoting national cohesion may not have been impactful enough for respondents to agree with the statement. To address this challenge, the university should develop a robust communication

strategy to better inform students about the purpose and importance of these activities. The university should also design activities that explicitly focus on national cohesion themes.

Several co-curricular activities were identified as having the potential to promote national cohesion. These included sports, music and drama festivals, and institutional cultural festivals. This concurs with Lim (2019) who highlights

The researcher reviewed the universities' events calendars that showed that most of the universities have allocated time for co-curricular activities such as culture week in their calendars. A review of university calendars revealed that most institutions allocate an entire week for cultural celebrations. For example, Kenyatta University held their culture week from May 13 to May 19. One of the cultural week banners explained the spirit of the culture week as promoting national cohesion. The University of Nairobi (UoN) held their cultural week on 12th to 17th February 2024. The event's theme was celebrating and appreciating the diverse cultures within our community through creative expressions of art.

A key respondent from Kenyatta University explained the importance of culture week in the university.

Given that university students come from diverse backgrounds, cultural weeks play a crucial role in helping them understand and appreciate the cultural practices and traditions of others. These celebrations provide opportunities for individuals to share their cultural values, ideas, and perspectives in areas such as education, culture, and the environment. This fosters a greater appreciation for different people, societies, and the environment.

A key respondent from the NCIC explained that intercultural activities are a vital strategy for promoting national cohesion. He noted that the NCIC sponsors events like the Annual Kenya Schools and Colleges National Drama Festivals due to their potential to enhance national unity.

In 2012 and 2013, we sponsored the Annual Kenya Schools and Colleges National Drama Festivals as they align with our mandate to foster national cohesion. These festivals have played a significant role in promoting the integration of national cohesion principles within schools.

In his speech to first-year students during orientation, Vice Chancellor Prof. Kiamba of UoN encouraged students to join the various clubs and societies at the university. He emphasized that participating in these groups would help them discover and nurture their talents, build strong connections with others, and develop into well-rounded individuals.

During the cultural week event at Kenyatta University, artists from diverse backgrounds gathered to share their skills and talents, aiming to both educate and entertain their audiences. In an interview with one of the cultural ambassadors, it was highlighted that the cultural week unites and brings together students and non-students alike. Another student, who was appointed as a cultural ambassador by the university VC, added:

We learned many things we did not know before. Honestly, prior to the culture week, there were numerous prejudicial opinions about other cultures. However, coming together during the event allowed us to learn about different cultures, challenge our stereotypical views, and develop a deeper appreciation for others.

During Kenyatta University's cultural week, several activities took place, including traditional dances, cultural food displays, modelling competitions (Mr and Miss Culture), spoken word/poetry performances, and traditional wear displays, among others.

From the above responses, it can be concluded that universities deploy co-curricular activities as a strategy to promote national cohesion. This is because co-curricular activities promote understanding, and appreciation of diversity. They also help students nurture their talents, build strong connections with others, and become well-rounded individuals. This observation is supported by a number of scholars. According to Lim (2019) co-curricular activities are an entry point to breaking down ethnic, and racial barriers that divide societies. As people watch a game, for instance, all barriers disappear as they focus on a common passion. However, there is need for universities to develop a robust communication strategy to better inform students about the purpose and importance of these activities and also design activities that explicitly focus on national cohesion themes.

The above findings align with Tsang *et al.* (2021), who identify co-curricular activities, particularly intercultural initiatives, as a key strategy for promoting national cohesion. In their study which was conducted at a university in Hong Kong titled *"The relationships between participation in intercultural activities on campus, whole-person development, and academic achievement: a mixed-methods study,"* they emphasize that participation in co-curricular activities fosters greater cultural understanding and appreciation, which are crucial for building a cohesive society that values diversity. By providing platforms for interaction among students from various backgrounds, co-curricular activities help establish social networks that transcend cultural divides and promote a sense of belonging. Additionally, such engagement enhances civic responsibility, encouraging students to contribute positively to their communities. Furthermore, these activities develop leadership and collaboration skills while promoting open-mindedness and critical thinking, essential for fostering dialogue in a multicultural society.

While intercultural activities hold significant promise for promoting national cohesion, Tsang *et al*. (2021), urge caution regarding their implementation and effectiveness. They advocate for a thoughtful approach that includes structured integration, genuine engagement, and ongoing evaluation to maximize the potential benefits of these initiatives. In regard to the level of engagement they argue that there is a risk that participation may be shallow if students engage merely for the sake of participation, without genuine interest or reflection. Such superficial involvement can hinder the realization of the intended benefits of fostering deeper intercultural understanding.

Tsang *et al*. (2021) further notes that students have diverse motivations for participating in intercultural activities, which can significantly influence the depth of their engagement. Some students may prioritize academic success over intercultural experiences, leading to a lack of meaningful interaction with peers from different backgrounds. This variability in engagement levels can dilute the effectiveness of these activities in promoting national cohesion.

Tsang *et al*. (2021) emphasizes the necessity of structured integration of intercultural activities into the formal curriculum. They advocate for systematic planning and comprehensive training for educators to ensure that these initiatives foster genuine intercultural dialogue and understanding. This approach prevents these activities from being perceived as isolated events. Additionally, they underscore the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of these activities to assess their impact on national cohesion. Without

effective evaluation mechanisms, it becomes difficult to determine whether these initiatives achieve their intended outcomes or require adjustments to enhance their effectiveness.

Students Are Trained on How to Promote National Cohesion

The study also explored whether training is employed as a strategy to promote national cohesion. According to Maende (2016), training programs on national cohesion within universities are essential for cultivating an inclusive environment where students from diverse backgrounds engage constructively with one another. He notes that such initiatives help reduce ethnic biases and discrimination, which are prevalent in a multicultural society like Kenya. Additionally, these programs can instil shared values, such as tolerance, respect, and dialogue, which are fundamental for building a cohesive national identity that transcends ethnic affiliations.

According to Maende (2016), universities have a responsibility to equip students with the skills necessary to address national challenges related to cohesion and integration. He argues that training in conflict resolution and constructive dialogue becomes particularly important in preparing students for leadership roles in maintaining peace and stability. He reiterates that creating a cohesive academic community where students feel valued and connected will not only enhance the educational experience but also contribute to better academic outcomes, making higher education a pivotal player in fostering national cohesion (Maende, 2016).

To assess this, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement: "Students are trained on how to promote national cohesion." The findings are presented in figure 2 below.
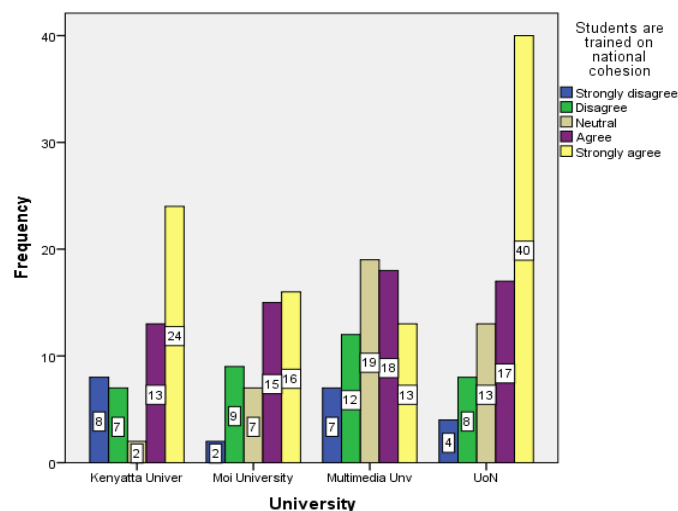

Figure 2: Students Are Trained on National Cohesion

From the findings, the majority of respondents (156) agreed that training is strategy universities use to promote national cohesion. At Kenyatta University, Moi University, the University of Nairobi (UoN), the largest segments were in agreement with the statement. This indicates a strong consensus among students that they receive training on national cohesion. However, at Multimedia University the largest segment was

neutral (19). A similar number of respondents (19) disagreed/strongly disagreed with the statement. This was interpreted to mean that though the university offers training on national cohesion, these training may not be impactful enough for respondents to agree with the statement. To address this challenge, the university should evaluate their content, delivery methods, and perceived relevance to students.

The researcher established that Kenyatta University has designated a specific week to the promotion of national cohesion. Various events are organized to celebrate and reinforce the importance of national cohesion. This year's event took place on 27th March and centred on the theme of the role of national values in promoting trade. During the event, the university Vice Chancellor outlined proactive and comprehensive measures the university has taken to promote national cohesion and integration within the institution.

Among the significant steps that the university has taken to promote national cohesion is the establishment of a dedicated Directorate on National Cohesion and Integration. According to the Vice Chancellor, the directorate has been instrumental in spearheading various programs aimed at creating awareness and fostering a culture of inclusivity and understanding among students, faculty, and staff.

One of the primary activities undertaken by the directorate has been the implementation of civic education programs. These programs are designed to raise awareness about national cohesion, educating and sensitizing the university community on the importance of embracing diversity and promoting unity.

In addition to these educational efforts, the university has developed a University Value Index. This index serves as a comprehensive framework for institutionalizing the values of national cohesion and integration within the university's operations and activities. By embedding these values into the institution's policies, practices, and decision-making processes, the university ensures that national cohesion remains a central focus in all aspects of its functioning.

To further reinforce its commitment to these ideals, the university has appointed a National Values Committee. This committee is tasked with overseeing and guiding the implementation of initiatives related to national cohesion and integration. As part of its responsibilities, the committee has provided training to all its focal points, equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively promote and uphold these values throughout the institution.

The university has also taken a significant step of incorporating national cohesion and integration into its performance contracting system. This strategic move ensures that these objectives are not only part of the university's broader goals but are also integrated into its performance evaluation processes. By doing so, the university has created a system where progress towards national cohesion and integration can be measured and incentivized, further emphasizing the importance of these values in the institution's overall mission and vision.

In recognition of its efforts and achievements in this area, Kenyatta University received a prestigious certificate from the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) in 2022, acknowledging its outstanding contributions to fostering national cohesion and integration.

An official from NCIC official interviewed confirmed the commission's close collaboration with universities in developing training and monitoring tools for national cohesion. The official revealed an existing agreement between the Directorate of National Cohesion and Values and Kenyan universities. This

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agreement involves training university focal points on National Values and Principles of Governance, developing strategies to promote cohesion, and guiding universities in creating performance contracting guidelines that align with these values and principles. The Commission also acknowledges universities that show commitment in implementing the National Values Agenda. Several universities have been awarded certificates of compliance in recognition of their commitment.

From the above findings, it can be concluded that universities have made commendable efforts to promote national cohesion through various training programs. These initiatives are valuable and should be emulated by other institutions of higher learning. However, with a significant number of respondents choosing neutral or disagreeing with the statement, universities need to do more to enhance their approach. A key area for improvement lies in raising awareness about these training programs and clearly communicating their intended role in fostering national unity.

Universities Have Policies Aimed at Promoting National Cohesion

Another integration strategy which was examined was the national cohesion and integration policies at the universities. This was important because policies determine the course of action. Callander *et al*. (2023) argue that policies primarily serve to establish the rules of engagement and provide a framework for action, but they do not directly determine behaviour. Instead, the effectiveness of any given policy is shaped by how individuals and firms respond to the guidelines set forth. In this study, policies function as a structured environment within which universities make decisions and navigate their activities.

Going by Callander *et al*. (2023) argument, the outcomes of policies aimed at promoting national cohesion in Kenyan universities are similarly not predetermined but are dependent upon the reactions and adaptations of students, faculty, and administration. These stakeholders' responses to the policies, such as those promoting inclusivity and ethnic integration, can lead to varying results over time. For instance, while policies may establish frameworks for reducing ethnic biases and fostering a sense of unity, the extent of their success depends on how these guidelines are embraced and implemented by the university community. As a result, the impact of these policies on national cohesion within higher education institutions is dynamic and may evolve as actors within the universities engage with, adapt to, or resist the initiatives.

To examine whether there are policies on national cohesion in universities, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they disagreed or agreed with the statement that "University has enacted policies aimed at promoting national cohesion and integration" The findings are presented in figure 3 below.
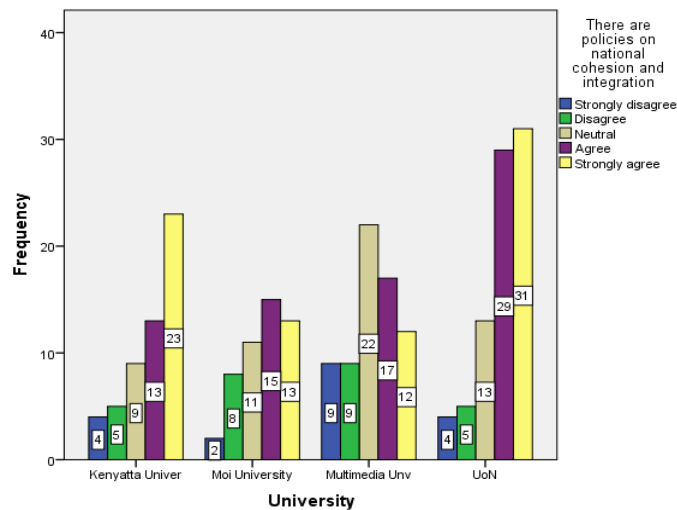
Figure 3: Universities Have Enacted Policies on National Cohesion

From the above findings, the majority of the respondents (153) were in agreement that universities have enacted policies to help in fostering national cohesion. When data was analysed on campus bases, it showed that at Kenyatta University, and the University of Nairobi (UoN), the largest segment was strongly agree followed by agree. This suggests that a significant portion of respondents felt there are policies on national cohesion and integration at their institution. However, at Multimedia University, the largest segment was neutral indicating a lack of strong consensus or awareness among respondents regarding the existence of such policies.

The researcher confirmed this through a desktop review of universities websites. The review revealed that most universities had policies in place to guard against discriminatory treatment of any group of people – whether based on gender, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or any other form. It further revealed that most universities had an Office for the Directorate of Student Affairs, which provided a first point of call for staff or students who had any concerns about this or wanted to help promote equal opportunities and treatment within the university.

The review also established that all the universities had set up an International Students Office dedicated to providing international students with all the information they required to assist them in settling in as soon as possible. Additionally, most universities had social clubs that sought to address various aspects of diversity. For example, at Kenyatta University, some of the clubs and societies included Seventh Day Adventist, Muslim Club, and a club for students with disabilities, Christian Union, among others. The university also had a program that encouraged students to participate in the University *"Nyumba Kumi"* initiative. The initiative encourages students to be their brother's/sister's keeper.

The above findings concur with Kuzu's (2021) observation regarding student clubs at universities. He observes that universities have become students centred due to students' involvement in governance and management practices. The increased participation of students in decision-making processes has shifted universities towards a more student-centered model, giving students a greater voice in shaping policies and

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practices that directly impact their educational experiences. This active engagement not only influences institutional governance but also brings significant socio-psychological benefits.

According to Kuzu (2021), participation in student clubs fosters a sense of belonging, community, and social participation, all of which contribute to students' cognitive advancement and overall educational engagement. He further notes that student involvement in governance through clubs and organizations serves to empower students, allowing them to represent their diverse interests and needs, which is crucial for creating an inclusive environment where all voices are considered in policymaking.

Kuzu further notes that the establishment of structures such as social clubs fosters a collaborative culture of governance, wherein students work alongside university administration. This participatory approach strengthens the relationship between students and institutions, reinforcing democratic values within the university setting. He points out that recognizing students as key stakeholders has also led universities to focus more on addressing their needs and expectations, which is reflected in the development of programs and services that prioritize student well-being, academic success, and overall satisfaction with the university experience.

From the above findings, it can be concluded that universities have adopted several strategies to promote diversity and integration. This includes the establishment of International Students Offices to support international students' transition to university life. They also encourage the formation of diverse social clubs and societies. For example, Kenyatta University hosts organizations for various religious groups and supports a club for students with disabilities. Additionally, Kenyatta University has implemented the 'Nyumba Kumi' initiative, which encourages students to look out for one another, fostering a sense of community and mutual responsibility. These efforts highlight universities' commitment to creating inclusive environments that celebrate diversity and promote integration and understanding among students. However, with a significant number of respondents choosing neutral or disagreeing with the statement, universities need to create more awareness about these policies.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights the pivotal role of co-curricular activities, training programs, and institutional policies in fostering national cohesion within Kenyan universities. While participants displayed a varied understanding of national cohesion, their responses underline the importance of universities clarifying and effectively communicating its essence.

The findings emphasize that co-curricular activities, such as cultural weeks and intercultural events, promote unity by enhancing cultural awareness and building relationships among diverse student populations. Similarly, training programs on tolerance and respect instill inclusive values essential for national cohesion, though their effectiveness varies based on implementation and student engagement. Institutional policies provide a necessary framework for fostering diversity, but their impact hinges on comprehensive communication and active participation from all stakeholders.

Recommendations

▪ Universities should integrate co-curricular activities into their broader educational framework and ensure these events explicitly focus on themes of national cohesion. Increased student engagement through improved communication strategies and program visibility is crucial.

▪ Institutions need to evaluate the relevance and delivery methods of training programs, ensuring they resonate with students' experiences. This includes incorporating practical, scenario-based learning to reinforce the importance of national cohesion.

▪ Universities must increase awareness of their diversity and cohesion policies through targeted campaigns, ensuring students and staff understand their role in fostering inclusivity. This could involve workshops, policy-focused seminars, and visible institutional commitments.

By addressing these areas, universities can transform into hubs of unity and inclusivity, ultimately contributing to a more harmonious society.

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