Effectiveness of 'Buddy Programme' towards the Control of Prejudices in Rural-based Higher Learning Institutions: Case of University of Venda

By

Ishmael Obaeko Iwara; Beata Kilonzo; Segun Obadire; Adediran Olawumi

Abstract
Prejudice such as chauvinism, bigotry, tribalism, stereotype and illusion are deterring elements of social exclusions at the University of Venda. These are key conduits that deter mutual appreciation, intercultural competencies, social cohesion and unity in diversity amongst the students. This study examined the perception of students about 'Buddy programme' and its potentials towards the control of prejudices and the ascertainment of intercultural competences. A mixed design was used in which data was collected from 200 participants using close-ended and open-ended questionnaires. Atlas-ti version 8 through network analyses, and Microsoft Excel 2013 was used for the analyses. It was revealed that because Buddy Programme is an event that attracts students of diverse cultural background and qualification at the institution, it is the most appropriate educator. It was suggested that the programme should be organised on monthly bases instead of semesters. It should be expanded to incorporate all the students. Sociocultural activities of all the countries represented at the University should be showcased and key organizers of every event should cut across countries and diverse cultural groups for maximum variation. Against this premise, it is proposed that a framework should be designed for the anti-prejudice activities through 'Buddy Programme.'

Key words*:* higher education, intercultural competencies, mutual appreciation, prejudice, social cohesion, unity in diversity

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Introduction

Prejudice refers to unfounded beliefs and affective feeling towards a person or group of individuals based solely on their affiliations, and has been a common dilemma across cultures of the world (Stephan *et al.,* 2000; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010; Cox*et al.,* 2012). The preconceived feelings amongst a myriad of other characteristics is mostly anchored on ethnicity, gender, sex, sexuality, social class, beliefs, norms, values, age, disability, religion, race, language, looks, nationality, sport affiliation, education, occupation, and criminality (Carson, 2011; Tilcsik, 2011; Cox*et al.,* 2012; Lippman, 2017). The practice is a more grounded inclination, yet it is constantly adverse, and it generally alludes to a gathering of individuals. These are factors that support elements of biasness. A few word references characterize bias as the way toward framing assessments without taking a gander at applicable actualities, yet individuals with prejudices may analyse pertinent realities and basically decipher them to affirm their prejudices (Bethlehem, 2015). The resultants of adverse prejudices in a society is that people tend to form social groups to isolate others (Cox*et al.,* 2012; Sellers*et al.,* 2016; Iwara *et al.,* 2017), which often deter proper communication, unity, peaceful coexistence and progress.

Globally, unhealthy attitudes relating to prejudices has been confirmed practiced among commoners in the street, neighbours, business partners, colleagues in offices and even students in both high and higher learning institutions (Buthelezi, 2009; Crush & Pendleton, 2007; Muchiri, 2016). South Africa is not exempted. The country has been battling with the emerging rise of social exclusions, discrimination and xenophobia which emanates from prejudices (Jacobs & McDonald, 2005; Meier & Hartell, 2009; Odetta, 2011; Muchiri, 2016; MacGregor *et al.,* 2015). Many lives have been lost to this problems especially xenophobia (Hadland, 2009; Iwara *et al.,* 2018). Because of the fear for such prejudices, many global investors have emigrated while others find it difficult to immigrate and invest robustly in the economy. This has not only caused disrepute to the nation but contributed to economic backwardness as rightly justified by Hadland (2009) and Viljoen (2013) who notes that xenophobia is a pervasive epidemic destroying South African societies.

Unfortunately, higher learning societies are not excluded in these issues. For instance, In May 2008, not less than 135 locations across the country including higher learning institutions were attack because of issues relating to prejudices (Buthelezi, 2009; Odetta, 2011; Muchiri, 2016; Iwara *et al.,* 2018). This was also the case in 2015, 2016 and 2017 despite several critics and anti-prejudice campaigns by various institutions (Babaola, 2017). Because prejudice has been conceptualized as one huge factor, among others, that adds to issue of school provocation, harasses, and lessen, it is believed that student's progress and academic success will be negatively affected (McKown, 2005). This argument also supports Carr and Friedman (2005)

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and Suárez-Orozco *et al* (2010) who notes that students who have inspired risks of prejudice on both the individual and school levels, may experience more conspicuous academic burdens when they have a place with a social occasion normally focused by bias.

Following the noteworthy 1994 popularity based races, when the African National Congress (ANC) came into control, all supremacist enactment was formally disassembled and a constitution in light of the standards of uniformity, regard for human rights, and resilience was embraced (Constitution SA, 1996; Spaull, 2013; Singh, 2013). With the beginning of majority rules system which opens numerous windows of economic and academic opportunities, many people across the world, especially from Africa and Asian countries have immigrated to South Africa (Landau, 2010; Song, 2013; MacGregor, 2014). The fresh debuts have comprised of both expert who contributed to shaping the country and incompetent people who pulled in as a liability but to get superior life (Harris, 2002; Hadland, 2008; Nicolson & Simelane, 2015; Pandor, 2015). Despite several reforms made by the post-apartheid administration to promote equity, just, social inclusion and unity in diversity, the inheritance of politically-sanctioned racial segregation, a racially biased practice, is as yet apparent today, particularly in higher establishments where global remote understudies are viewed as risk (Hadland, 2008; Kruger & Osman, 2010).

Issues around prejudices amongst students at the University of Venda has not been discussed in satisfactory amount although, but Iwara *et al* (2018) in a study "preventing xenophobia tendencies in higher learning institutions" confirmed that there exist social clusters, academic cabals and exclusions of minorities at the institution. This was supported by Iwara *et al* (2017) who earlier revealed that despite the university's mission to promote intercultural competences, ethnic integration, mutual appreciation, and peaceful coexistence, students find it difficult to integrate, socialize and relate with those of different cultural background. This specifically was due to inherent tribal behaviours. As a result it was difficult to achieve unity in diversity. This is an issues of concern that require attention.

The discourse of ethic segregation noted by Iwara *et al* (2017) relates to what Ura *et al* (2015) earlier identified in Southern California where ethnocentrism and sentiments are found common amongst students. Similarly, in Japan, Lee (2017) and Ikeguchi (2012) reiterated that Brazilian, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Chinese students faced dialects and language prejudice. This was also the case in Canada (Liu, 2011). Toussaint and Crowson (2010) and Scherz (2014) mentioned negative attitudes, unequal treatments and perception that foreigners are inferior to USA citizens at their higher learning institutions. Unfortunately, many are subject to psychological trauma because they are defenceless (Carr & Friedman, 2005; Toomey *et al.,* 2010; Benner & Graham, 2013; Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). Thus, it is thoughtful to believe that 'Buddy Programme' could be used as social mechanisms to prevent such dilemma to ensure simple and peaceful coexistence of students. Buddy programme is an event launched every year by the University that bring students of diverse cultures both national and international as well as staff members to engage in academic and social activities. The event is organized twice a year and limited to 200 registered students at the University (UNIVEN International Relation Office Report, 2015).

Material, results and discussions

Both quantitative and qualitative approach was employed in the study. Census of 2018 'Buddy Programme' opening event participants was used as the actual sample. Out of the 200 students who were shortlisted about 60% were South African citizens of different ethnic groups and tribes. The remaining 40% were international students cut across countries fully represented at the University. Participatory approach through focus group discussion was used to collect data which was guided by an unstructured and structured interview tools. Except for the ranked Likert-type scales which was analysed using Microsoft Excel 2013, Atlas-ti version 8 through used for the analyses of qualitative data. Results were present in three stages alongside the discussion. The first stage focused on the identification of common prejudices amongst students as presented in figure 1. The elements of prejudices were ranked in the second stage, and the third stage was concerned with suggestions on how 'Buddy Programme' could serve as a social engineer for the control of prejudices and the ascertainment of intercultural competences amongst students.

[1:15] disrespect for women by the ma..
disrespect for women by the male students

[1:6] International students disenga..
International students disengaged from South Africans to avoid conflict behaviours

Stereotype

Bigotry

[1:14] Restriction of religious affil..
Restriction of religious affiliations

COMMON PREJUDICES AMONGST STUDENTS

[1:8] Zimbabweans have formed a stro..
Zimbabweans have formed a strong community ties that deter them from relating with others

[1:18] Perceptions that the LGBTI+Q a..
Perceptions that the LGBTI+Q and students leaving with disabilities are abnormal and should not interrelate

[1:16] Strong notions that the female..
Strong notions that the females especially in Student Representative Council (SRC) should be subjected to the male

[1:17] Segregation of international s..
Segregation of international students in local residences

explains

Chauvinism

[1:2] Zulu people undermined any lan..
Zulu people undermined any language outside what they speak

[1:1] Because the Venda speaking peo..
Because the Venda speaking people are dominant, they discriminate other students

Illusions

Tribalism

[1:10] There is tribal superiority be..
There is tribal superiority between Tsonga and Venda people

explains

[1:12] Perception that Venda people d..
Perception that Venda people disrespect other cultural groups

[1:13] Venda people only resort to fa..
Venda people only resort to favouring those from their tribe

explains

[1:4] Believes that Nigerians are av..
Believes that Nigerians are avoided because they are drug entrepreneurs

[1:11] Perception that Venda people a..
Perception that Venda people are generally lazy, stingy and self-centered

justifies

[1:5] All Nigerians are professors o..
All Nigerians are professors of witchcraft

expands

[1:7] Perceptions that Zimbabweans i..
Perceptions that Zimbabweans in Venda are poor, corrupt and goal diggers

expands

[1:3] Notion that South Africans pas..
Notion that South Africans passionately despise languages outside their ethnic groups

[1:9] A notion that Mpumalanga peopl..
A notion that Mpumalanga people should not be respected because they are easy going and cheap

Figure 1: Network diagram on common prejudices amongst students

Five major factors of prejudices namely: chauvinism, bigotry, tribalism, stereotype and illusion emerged. Majority of the students especially South Africans of different cultural background argued that because the Venda speaking people are dominant, they discriminate other students. This is in line with what one of the groups postulated that the *"Zulu people undermined any language outside what they speak."* As a result tribes struggled for recognition and superiority at any given time even at the university. This confirms Meier and Hartell (2009) and Muchiri (2016) who earlier notes that South Africa government over the years has been on a strong drive to ensure cultural equity and social inclusion. This implies that there are tribal practices that portray cultural superiority. For instance one of the participants revealed that *"the Tsonga and Venda people hated themselves because of tribal issues."* Such unhealthy behaviours are detrimental to peaceful coexistences and development of a society.

Generally, it was found out that South Africans passionately despise languages outside their ethnic groups. The implication is that the minority either isolate or are isolated by the majority within and outside the school community. This relates to what has been identified at the United States that Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans studying in the country often face stereotypical behaviours (Roy, 2013). Many are stigmatized for cultural reasons, some Isolated for language incompetence, while others neglected for racial factors. This has caused hatred and huge gaps between cultural groups in most higher learning intuitions. Such unhealthy attitudes are liable of influencing social exclusions and discrimination of students as in the case of Romania (Ruegg & Poledna, 2006). According to Fokkema and Haas (2015) and Iwara *et al* (2017), discrimination and social exclusions negatively impact upon socio-cultural integration of people – setting instances with Egyptians and Ghanaians who could not make progress because they were racially isolated in Italy, as well as Moroccans and Senegalese in Spain. This could also be the reason why some students are stuck in their studies while others succeed given equal learning opportunities at the University of Venda.

It was noted that most international students especially the Nigerians are very distant from the locals, they exonerate from many engagements to avoid behavioural attacks that might lead to conflicts. This notions confirms a perception by one of the locals that "I despise Nigerian because they have witchcrafts" – stressing that she gathered the information from the 'African Magic Television Channel' where indigenous movies are shown. Group of local students gathered that "we avoids most Nigerians because they are drug entrepreneurs." Some are of the notion that Zimbabweans in Venda are poor, corrupt and goal diggers. Their mission is to exploit economic opportunities of the South African citizens. For these reasons, people are not interested in relating well with them. As a result Zimbabweans have resorted to having a strong community ties that deter them from relating well with other nationalities.

According to Hitlan et al (2007) and Toussaint and Crowson (2010), American students' unhealthy behaviours on foreigners, having strong feelings that every other student in America is vulnerable and should be at their mercy is among the reasons why international students deter from social engagements. However, from a different thought, Iwara et al (2017:10630) postulate the notion that "Americans worry that international students pose threats to their economic, education, physical well-being, beliefs, values, and their social status." The implication is that,

the isolated will lack the anxiety to socialize and interact with peers as also noted by Toussaint and Crowson (2010) that people tend delink when they are not accepted in a society. It also support Ikeguchi (2012) and Lee (2017) who noted that Brazilian, Chinese, Filipino, and Vietnamese citizens studying in Japan lack integration due to lack of acceptability. This is also the case in Liu (2011) who expressed similar ordeals amongst students in Canada.

A strong negative perceptions hold against Mpumalanga people studying at the university is that, their ladies are easy-going such that they don't deserve respect. This impression has triggered strong disrepute especially, to their females with stigma which distorted from public debates and social engagements to control unhealthy behaviours that might trigger psychological effects. According to Croft (2015), stigma causes society to develop attitudes and actions such as mistrust, violence and fear. Major (2005) further revealed that such attitudes influence discrimination and stereotype that threatens personal and social identity. It is without doubt that even the innocent once will suffer the stigma, given that fallacies applied. Hence, it is important to come up with strategies that will eliminate such preconceived judgements.

Based on folktales, a group of student gathered that "Venda people especially the men are lazy, stingy and self-centred. They disrespect people from other cultural background and resort to favouring only those from their tribe." This perception which was given by their parents urged them to hold strong negative feelings about students from the region. They rarely relate or have things in common. One would argue that such perceptions holds a strong place in disunity as also noted by Hadland (2009), Odetta (2011), Cox et al (2012), Mac Gregor et al (2015) and Muchiri, 2016. Other issues of concern which were identified include: restriction of religious affiliations, disrespect for women by the male students, strong notions that the females especially in Student Representative Council (SRC) should be subjected to the male, segregation of international students in local residences, and perceptions that the LGBTI+Q and students leaving with disabilities are abnormal and should not interrelate. Figure 2 presents the ranks of prejudices common amongst students.
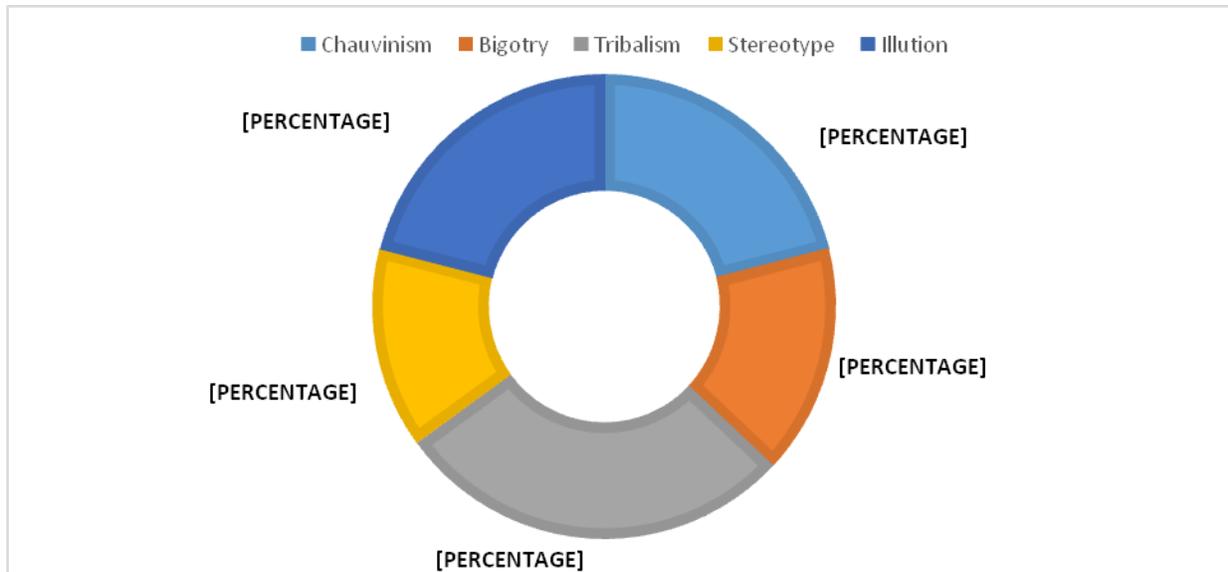
Figure 2: Ranks of prejudice elements common amongst the students

Tribalism which accounted for 28% ranks the highest. This implies that prejudices relating to tribalism are prominent amongst students. This could be due to the diverse nature of the institution. The University of Venda has about 15,000 students cut across provinces of the nation and countries of the world. Out of which majority are from Limpopo and Mpumalanga. In terms of international students who constituted about 10% of the total population, Zimbabweans are the majority, seconded by Nigeria (UNIVEN Annual Report 2015). Considering the variation, there must be tendencies of tribalism if proper structures are not in place to regulate and control such practices as revealed by Meier and Hartell (2009) that South African education has been characterised by desegregation for decades now, in an effort to accommodate the diverse nature of society. This did not only reveal diversity in the country but elements of segregation in time past, which are still spilling. 'Chauvinism,' literally situation where certain people undermined others for superiority purposes, recorded 21%. This is also the case of 'illusions' where people portray and despise others over wrong perceptions. Fortunately, 'bigotry' and 'stereotype' which accounted for 16% and 14%, respectively took the least in ranking. However, suggestion on the control, prevention of prejudices and the ascertainment of intercultural competencies through 'Buddy Programme' is depicted in figure 3.
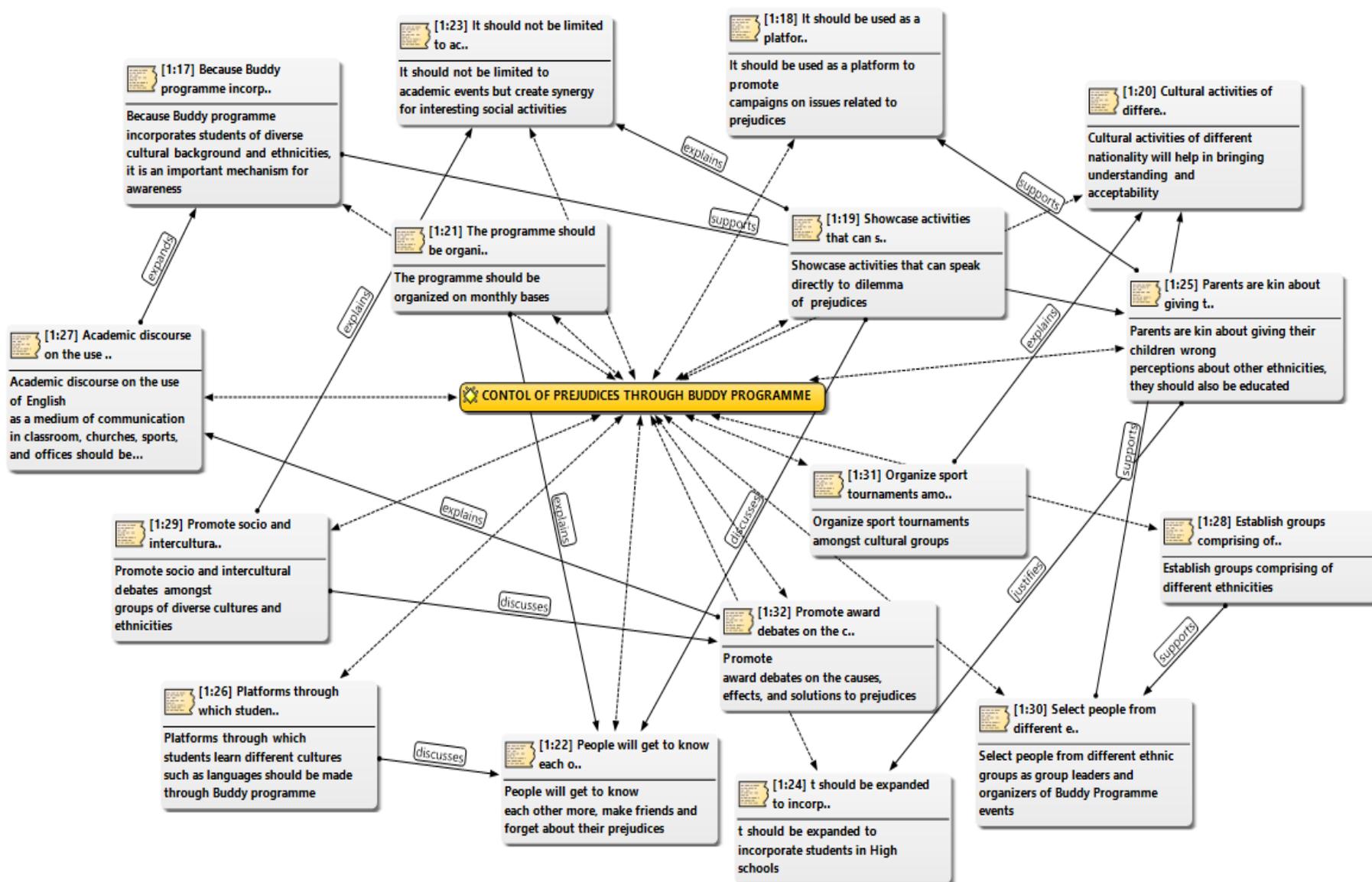
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Figure 3: Network diagram on the control of prejudice using Buddy Programme It was noted that "because 'Buddy Programme' incorporates students of diverse cultural background and ethnicities, it is an important mechanism for awareness on prejudices." The focus group further suggests that such programme should be used as a platform to promote campaigns on issues related to chauvinism, tribalism, bigotry, and stereotype which were earlier identified. Another group submits that "the programme should showcase activities that can speak directly to dilemma of prejudices." This is in line with what another group suggested that "cultural activities of different nationality will help in bringing understanding and acceptability amongst students." Majority support the notion that the programme should be organized on monthly bases rather than annually to increase its impact. This approach will enhance students to integrate on regular bases, know each other better, make friends and forget about their prejudices. It should not be limited to academic events but create synergy for interesting social and cultural activities. This finding supports Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) and Denson (2009) who relate that interventions that purposefully encourage intergroup collaborations inside the setting of an organized program tend to yield the most grounded impacts. It also support Meier and Hartell (2009: 1) who relates that "because handling diversity in education is so complex" there is a need to adopt measures of recognising the validity of differences. It is important to introduce mechanism for facilitating and managing diversity through educators. It could be suggested that 'Buddy Programme' will play an active educator role.

Some of the groups stressed: "the programme should be expanded such that High school students are incorporated." This idea was because prejudices, especially ill perceptions about cultures comes from their families. Pupils are given unhealthy orientation at tender age which lives with them till they are enrolled and graduate their studies at the higher learning institutions. Another group reiterated: "the dilemma of prejudices can only be addressed from its root, parents should be involved." While some of the participants promote the notion –"the programme should be used as a platform through which students learn different cultures such as languages, dresses, art and food," another group stressed the need to "project academic and strengthen discourse on the use of English as a medium of communication in classroom, churches, sports, and offices – stressing that the University is too diverse to be monopolized with languages that are not universal as in the case of tshiVenda. This discourse was earlier expanded by Smith and Oosthuizen (2006) and Meier and Hartell (2009) who submits that the interpretation of the SA Constitutional phrase "unity in our diversity" defines the principle that the educational policy in the country should understand cultural dynamics and avoid creating a single overriding culture. Programmes that supports multiculturalism should be projected to establish a synergy for mutual appreciation and unity in diversity. For instance, following the cultural superiority and social exclusions in countries such as Australia, Canada, and Sweden, Shara (1997), Jackson (2010), Dosanjh (2016) and McShane (2017) reiterated that the government has adopted policy of multiculturalism through which official programmes are also fronted to enhance mutual understanding, cultural diversity and peaceful coexistences of the masses especially the students, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity or cultural background.

To promote cultural equity amongst students, a group suggested: "clusters of different ethnicities should be formed and students of different ethnic groups should be selected as leaders and organizers of the Buddy programme events." They believed such approach will bring sense of belonging, acceptability, equality, enhance mutual appreciation and harmony. It will offer subordinates to flourish their abilities and skill, and be more dedicated. According to Independent Commission Against Corruption (ACAC) (2007), such approach relates to delegation of authority whichis an important criterion to bring stability and soundness in relationships between people. It breaks monotony and cultural barriers, and encourage people to be more creative and efficient. Among others, promotion of socio and intercultural debates on the causes, effects, and solutions to prejudices, and sport tournaments amongst cultural groups were also mentioned as vital approach through which 'Buddy Programme' can adopt to control and prevent prejudices as well as ascertain intercultural competences amongst students at the university.

Conclusion

The post-apartheid administration in South Africa has embarrassed multiculturalism, internationalization, social cohesion and Ubuntu in all higher learning institutions across the country. Prejudices such as chauvinism, bigotry, tribalism, stereotype and illusion have been a deterring mechanism towards the ascertainment of these concepts amongst students. Therefore it will go a long way to adopt approaches that can make the concept a reality. It was suggested that because Buddy Programme is an interesting event every student wish to participate, it can be used as an educator. The programme which is organized twice a year should be a monthly event opened to all students irrespective of cultural background, ethnicity, level of study and nationality. It should not be limited to education but incorporate social and cultural activities that can showcase diverse cultures. High school students and their parents should as well be involved to ensure that the dilemma is dealt with from the base. Given these responses, it is evident that the programme is a viable conduit of addressing students' prejudice uprising and as such, a framework should be designed for the implementation of the programme at the University of Venda and beyond.

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