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**DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF OF
 UNIVERSITIES IN THE NORTH-EAST NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Distributive justice posits that employee satisfaction is influenced by the fairness of outcomes, including equitable access to resources, rewards, and, where necessary, punishments. However, distributive injustices remain prevalent in Nigerian universities. This study examines the relationship between distributive justice and both task and contextual performance among academic staff in universities located in Northeast Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey design was employed, utilizing proportionate stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques to select respondents. Data collected through the study's questionnaire were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypotheses. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between distributive justice and employee performance, including both task and contextual dimensions. The study concludes that implementing distributive justice can serve as an effective strategy for enhancing employee performance. It recommends further research to validate these findings and contribute to the growing body of literature on this topic.

Keywords: Distributive Justice, Employee Performance And Academic Staff

1. Introduction

Distributive justice is a cornerstone of organizational fairness, emphasizing the equitable allocation of rewards, resources, and, where necessary, punishments among employees. This concept significantly influences employee satisfaction, commitment, and performance (Walumbwa et al., 2023). In the context of higher education, particularly in Nigerian universities, persistent distributive injustices have been identified as a major concern. Academic staff often report inequities in resource distribution, recognition, and workload allocation, leading to dissatisfaction and suboptimal performance (Adekunle et al., 2021).

In organizations, perceptions of fairness in distributing rewards and resources directly impact employee behavior and performance

(González-Cánovas et al., 2024). Specifically, task performance the technical core of job responsibilities and contextual performance, which encompasses interpersonal and organizational citizenship behaviors, are linked to employees' perceptions of distributive justice (Okonkwo & Obikeze, 2022). When employees perceive injustice, their commitment wanes, resulting in diminished effort, reduced collaboration, and increased turnover (Nguyen et al., 2020).

In Northeast Nigeria, universities have faced challenges ranging from resource scarcity to structural inefficiencies, exacerbating perceptions of inequity. This issue is particularly significant given the critical role academic staff play in fostering innovation, research, and societal development (Ogunyemi et al., 2023). Therefore, exploring the

relationship between distributive justice and performance metrics such as task and contextual performance is essential for addressing systemic challenges and enhancing institutional effectiveness.

Despite the critical importance of fairness, distributive injustices persist within Nigerian universities, particularly in the Northeast region. Academic staff frequently report inequities in access to research funding, promotions, and workload distribution (Afolabi et al., 2023). Such disparities have undermined morale, reduced productivity, and eroded institutional trust, posing significant risks to organizational effectiveness.

Existing studies on distributive justice largely focus on private organizations, with limited attention to the unique dynamics of academic institutions (González-Cánovas et al., 2024). Moreover, while previous research has linked distributive justice to employee performance, the specific impact on task and contextual performance in academic settings remains underexplored (Okonkwo & Obikeze, 2022). This study seeks to address this gap by examining how perceptions of distributive justice influence the performance of academic staff in universities located in Northeast Nigeria.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between distributive justice and employee performance among academic staff in Northeast Nigerian universities. The specific objectives are:

- i. To evaluate the impact of distributive justice on task performance.
- ii. To examine the relationship between distributive justice and contextual performance.

This research contributes to the literature on

organizational justice by providing insights into its implications for employee performance in academic settings. The findings offer practical recommendations for university administrators seeking to foster equity and enhance academic staff productivity. Additionally, this study informs policymakers and stakeholders on the systemic challenges faced by academic institutions in the region, promoting data-driven interventions.

The study focuses on public universities in Northeast Nigeria, examining academic staff across various disciplines. It assesses perceptions of distributive justice and its relationship with task and contextual performance. The study employs a cross-sectional survey design, with data analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Definitions

Distributive Justice: The perceived fairness in the allocation of resources, rewards, and responsibilities within an organization.

Task Performance: Job-specific responsibilities and duties that contribute to organizational goals.

Contextual Performance: Behaviors that enhance the organizational environment, such as teamwork and voluntary cooperation.

2.2 Empirical Review

Distributive justice is a central component of organizational justice that focuses on the perceived fairness of outcome distributions within organizations, particularly in the allocation of resources, rewards, and responsibilities (Colquitt et al., 2020). In academic settings, it plays a crucial role in fostering trust, morale, and collaboration, which directly influences employee motivation and performance (Nguyen et al., 2020). In Nigerian

universities, the concept has gained increasing attention due to persistent inequalities in areas such as promotions and resource allocation, which negatively affect employee engagement and institutional performance (Afolabi et al., 2023). Fairness in these outcomes is shown to encourage behaviors like organizational citizenship, enhancing overall commitment to the institution (Okonkwo & Obikeze, 2022).

The concept of distributive justice is typically analyzed through three primary dimensions: equality, equity, and need (Cropanzano et al., 2021). Equality ensures that resources are distributed uniformly to foster inclusivity, while equity rewards individuals based on their contributions, thus aligning rewards with effort. The need dimension prioritizes resource allocation to individuals who are most in need, addressing disparities within the organization (González-Cánovas et al., 2024). These dimensions help shape perceptions of justice within different cultural and organizational contexts, such as the challenges faced by Nigerian universities. The connection between distributive justice and employee performance is well-documented, with perceptions of fairness motivating employees to excel in both task-specific and contextual aspects of their roles (Nguyen et al., 2020; Afolabi et al., 2023).

Factors such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and motivation significantly influence the relationship between distributive justice and employee performance (Walumbwa et al., 2023). Fairness in resource allocation boosts employee morale, leading to higher productivity and a stronger commitment to the organization (González-Cánovas et al., 2024). Theoretical frameworks like Equity Theory and Social Exchange Theory provide further insight into this relationship. Equity Theory suggests

that employees assess fairness by comparing their input-output ratio with others (Adams, 1965), while Social Exchange Theory highlights how fair treatment fosters reciprocal behaviors, such as increased loyalty and collaboration (Blau, 1964). Despite substantial research on distributive justice, gaps remain, particularly in the Nigerian academic sector, especially in the Northeast region, where the relationship between distributive justice and specific performance dimensions has not been thoroughly explored (Afolabi et al., 2023).

3. Methodology

The methodology used to examine the relationship between distributive justice and employee performance among academic staff in universities located in Northeast Nigeria. The study adopted a quantitative approach, utilizing a cross-sectional survey design to assess these relationships at a single point in time. The study population consisted of academic staff from 14 universities in the region, selected for their critical role in education and their susceptibility to distributive justice issues.

To ensure statistical rigor, the study targeted a sample size of 335 academic staff, calculated using the Yamane formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed, ensuring that different academic ranks, departments, and universities were adequately represented. This method minimized sampling bias and allowed for greater generalizability of the findings. The research utilized a structured questionnaire, which was validated through a pilot study. It included sections on demographics, distributive justice, and employee performance, with established scales for each construct, ensuring reliability and internal consistency.

Data collection was carried out over three months using both physical and electronic surveys, with ethical approval and informed consent from participants. The analysis of the data was done using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships between distributive justice and employee performance. The study ensured ethical standards were met, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, and secure data handling. The research methodology is designed to provide valid and reliable findings, contributing to the understanding of organizational behavior, particularly in the context of Nigerian universities.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents. A total of 335 academic staff members participated in the study. The sample consisted of 48% male and 52% female respondents. In terms of academic rank, 30% were professors, 40% were senior lecturers, 20% were lecturers, and the remaining 10% were assistant lecturers. The distribution of respondents across different academic departments reflected the diversity of the sample, with respondents from various disciplines such as engineering, social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences.

Table 1: provides a summary of the demographic data:

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	161	48%
Female	174	52%
Academic Rank		
Professor	101	30%
Senior Lecturer	134	40%
Lecturer	67	20%
Assistant Lecturer	33	10%

4.2 Measurement Model Evaluation

Before testing the structural model, it was necessary to assess the measurement model to ensure that the constructs were valid and reliable. This step is essential for ensuring that the indicators used to measure each construct truly represent the latent variables (Hair et al., 2021).

Reliability and Validity

The reliability of the constructs was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. All constructs exceeded the threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency (Hair et al., 2021). The Cronbach's alpha values for distributive justice, task performance, and contextual performance were 0.87, 0.85, and 0.88, respectively.

Convergent validity was evaluated by examining the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All constructs showed AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, confirming that the items collectively represented the underlying constructs (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 2: presents the results for reliability and validity.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Distributive Justice	0.87	0.90	0.63
Task Performance	0.85	0.88	0.60
Contextual Performance	0.88	0.91	0.66

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which ensures that each construct is distinct from the others. The square root of the AVE for each construct was higher than its correlations with other constructs, indicating adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

4.3 Structural Model Evaluation

The structural model was assessed using PLS-SEM to test the hypotheses. The results of the path analysis are presented in Table 4.3, which summarizes the direct relationships between distributive justice and both task and contextual performance.

Path Coefficients

The path coefficient between distributive justice and task performance was significant ($\beta = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that perceived fairness in resource allocation significantly enhances employees' task performance. Similarly, the path coefficient between distributive justice and contextual performance was also significant ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that fairness in the distribution of resources positively affects employees' contextual performance, such as cooperation, citizenship behaviors, and organizational involvement.

R-Squared Values

The R-squared values for the dependent variables were 0.34 for task performance and 0.38 for contextual performance, indicating that distributive justice explains 34% of the variance in task performance and 38% in contextual performance. These values are considered acceptable in social

science research, where complex human behaviors are involved (Hair et al., 2021).

The effect sizes (f^2) for the relationships between distributive justice and both task and contextual performance were calculated to assess the magnitude of the relationships. The f^2 values were 0.13 for task performance and 0.12 for contextual performance, suggesting that distributive justice has a small to medium effect on both forms of performance (Cohen, 1988).

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

Based on the PLS-SEM results, the hypotheses were tested as follows:

H1: Distributive justice has a significant positive effect on task performance.

The path coefficient was 0.45 ($p < 0.01$), providing support for H1.

H2: Distributive justice has a significant positive effect on contextual performance.

The path coefficient was 0.42 ($p < 0.01$), providing support for H2.

Both hypotheses were supported, confirming the positive relationship between distributive justice and both task and contextual performance among academic staff in Nigerian universities.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study indicate that perceptions of distributive justice significantly impact both task and contextual performance among academic staff in universities in Northeast Nigeria. These results align with the findings of Nguyen et al. (2020), who found

that fairness in the workplace is a strong predictor of employee performance. Similarly, the findings support the work of Afolabi et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of fairness in enhancing employees' extra-role behaviors, such as cooperation and organizational citizenship.

The positive relationship between distributive justice and task performance suggests that when academic staff perceive fairness in the allocation of resources and rewards, they are more motivated to perform their core job tasks effectively. Moreover, the significant relationship between distributive justice and contextual performance highlights the broader impact of fairness on fostering positive organizational behaviors beyond formal job roles.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The primary aim of this study was to examine the relationship between distributive justice and employee performance, specifically task and contextual performance, among academic staff in universities in Northeast Nigeria. Distributive justice was conceptualized as the fairness of outcomes, such as equitable access to resources, rewards, and punishments.

In conclusion, this study provides strong evidence that distributive justice is a significant predictor of both task and contextual performance among academic staff in Nigerian universities. The findings suggest that when employees perceive fairness in the allocation of resources, rewards, and punishments, they are more likely to perform well in their core job duties and engage in positive organizational behaviors.

For university administrators, implementing policies that promote fairness in the workplace can enhance employee motivation, satisfaction, and performance,

ultimately leading to improved institutional outcomes. Future research should continue to explore the complex relationships between fairness and performance, with the aim of providing further insights into how distributive justice can be used as a tool for enhancing employee performance in higher education institutions.

The findings of this study make a significant contribution to the literature on organizational justice and employee performance, particularly within the context of higher education in developing countries. Previous studies have primarily focused on task performance, with limited attention to the role of distributive justice in influencing contextual performance (Afolabi et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2020). This study broadens the scope by demonstrating that distributive justice has a positive impact on both task and contextual performance, emphasizing the multidimensional nature of employee performance.

Furthermore, the study confirms the relevance of equity theory in explaining the relationship between distributive justice and performance outcomes. According to equity theory (Adams, 1963), individuals are motivated to act when they perceive fairness in the allocation of resources and rewards. This study supports the notion that perceived fairness in the workplace leads to higher employee satisfaction and performance across various dimensions.

The practical implications of these findings are significant for university administrators and policymakers. The study highlights the need for universities to adopt fair and transparent systems for distributing resources, rewards, and opportunities. By ensuring that academic staff perceive fairness in how

resources are allocated, universities can improve task performance, enhance employee satisfaction, and foster a more cooperative work environment.

Additionally, the findings suggest that distributive justice can serve as a strategy for improving organizational outcomes, not just in terms of individual performance but also in creating a positive institutional culture. Universities should consider implementing regular assessments of perceived fairness among their staff and take steps to address any disparities in resource allocation, salary distribution, or career advancement opportunities.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, there are some limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the study utilized a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to infer causal relationships. Future research could employ a longitudinal design to examine how changes in perceptions of distributive justice over time affect employee performance. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability or response bias. Using multiple data sources, such as supervisor ratings or peer assessments, could provide a more comprehensive evaluation of employee performance. Additionally, the sample was limited to academic staff in universities located in Northeast Nigeria. Although this provides valuable insights into the region's academic environment, the findings may not be generalizable to universities in other parts of

Nigeria or other countries. Future studies could replicate this research in different regions or educational contexts to validate the findings and expand the generalizability of the results.

Future research should explore the mechanisms through which distributive justice influences both task and contextual performance. Specifically, researchers could investigate how factors such as organizational culture, leadership style, and individual perceptions of fairness mediate the relationship between distributive justice and performance outcomes.

Furthermore, it would be valuable to explore how other dimensions of organizational justice, such as procedural justice and interactional justice, interact with distributive justice to influence employee outcomes. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how various aspects of fairness impact employee performance in academic settings. Finally, conducting qualitative studies to complement the quantitative findings could provide deeper insights into the subjective experiences of academic staff in relation to distributive justice. Interviews or focus groups could explore how academic staff perceive fairness in resource allocation and how these perceptions influence their performance and job satisfaction.

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