



## Organizational Justice and Employee Trust: Investigating Perceptions of Fairness in HR Practices Among Minority Work Groups in Southwest Nigerian Workplaces

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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigates the influence of organizational justice on employee trust in human resource (HR) practices, with a focus on minority and majority workgroups in Southwest Nigerian workplaces. Guided by distributive, procedural, and interactional justice frameworks, the research employed a quantitative survey design with responses from 350 employees across the banking, healthcare, and education sectors. Data were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Results reveal that distributive justice significantly enhances trust among minority employees, who place greater emphasis on fair allocation of rewards and opportunities. Conversely, procedural justice was found to be more influential for majority groups, indicating the importance of transparent and consistent processes in shaping trust. Interactional justice emerged as a strong predictor across both groups, underscoring the universal role of respectful communication and dignified treatment in HR interactions. Demographic characteristics, including age, education, and tenure, further moderated fairness perceptions and trust levels. The findings highlight the necessity for HR managers to adopt inclusive, equity-driven practices that bridge gaps between diverse employee groups. Recommendations stress transparent policies, participatory decision-making, and culturally sensitive communication strategies to foster trust, engagement, and long-term organizational commitment.

**KEYWORDS:** organizational justice, employee trust, minority groups, HR practices, Nigeria

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Organizational justice has emerged as a central construct in organizational behaviour and human resource management research. It refers to the extent to which employees perceive workplace decisions, procedures, and interactions as fair (Greenberg, 1987; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Fair treatment is critical not only for employee satisfaction but also for fostering organizational trust, which serves as the foundation of cooperative workplace relationships (Cropanzano, Bowen, & Gilliland, 2007). In contexts marked by diversity and inequality, such as Nigeria, perceptions of fairness in human resource (HR) practices carry heightened significance (Okpara & Wynn, 2008).

Employee trust is defined as the willingness of individuals to be vulnerable to the actions of others based on the expectation of fair treatment and integrity (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Trust in organizations promotes cooperation, reduces turnover, and enhances engagement (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). However, trust is not granted automatically; it must be earned through consistent demonstration of fairness in decision-making, resource allocation, and interpersonal treatment (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002). This makes the study of organizational justice and trust particularly important in diverse cultural and socio-political environments (Farh, Hackett, & Liang, 2007).

The Nigerian workplace presents a unique setting for studying these constructs. With over 250 ethnic groups, significant religious pluralism, and widening socio-economic inequalities, the country's organizational landscape is marked by cultural complexity (Adebayo, 2011). Southwest Nigeria, in particular, is home to both majority and minority groups, creating dynamics where perceptions of fairness in HR practices are often shaped by cultural identity and social belonging (Ojo, 2014).

Research in organizational justice identifies three core dimensions: distributive justice (fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (fairness of decision-making processes), and interactional justice (fairness in interpersonal treatment). Each dimension influences employee trust differently. For example, distributive justice reassures employees that rewards are allocated equitably, while procedural justice enhances trust in management's impartiality. Interactional justice, on the other hand, reinforces respect and dignity in everyday workplace interactions (Onyegbula, Ade, & Can, 2024).

Empirical studies in Nigeria have shown that perceptions of justice are strongly related to employee outcomes such as commitment, performance, and engagement. For instance, research in the Nigerian banking sector revealed that distributive and procedural justice

significantly improved employee commitment and loyalty (Ogunkoya, Ogunkoya, Hassan, & Fadeyi, 2024). Similarly, a comparative study of Nigerian public and private institutions found that organizational justice strongly predicted employee engagement across sectors (Ugwu & Ojeaga, 2017).

However, minority workgroups often perceive organizational justice differently from majority employees due to their experiences of exclusion or marginalization. Studies suggest that employees from minority backgrounds may interpret unfair HR practices as not only organizational shortcomings but also as reflections of systemic discrimination. This may exacerbate trust deficits and lead to higher turnover intentions (Abubakar, Chauhan, & Kura, 2014).

The intersection between HR practices and minority status is particularly salient in Nigeria, where organizational policies often intersect with cultural and ethnic identities. HR practices such as recruitment, promotion, and performance appraisal are not perceived in isolation but are evaluated through the lens of employees' social identity. This makes organizational justice central to building trust among minority groups who may already feel disadvantaged in mainstream organizational settings.

Trust deficits in organizations have broader implications for productivity and cohesion. A lack of trust undermines collaboration, encourages withdrawal behaviours, and fuels conflict. Conversely, when minority employees perceive fairness, they are more likely to develop trust, contribute positively, and remain committed to organizational goals. These dynamic highlights the importance of HR practices as a mediating mechanism between organizational justice perceptions and employee trust outcomes.

Theoretical frameworks such as Social Exchange Theory and the Psychological Contract Model help explain why justice perceptions matter. Social Exchange Theory posits that when employees perceive fairness, they reciprocate with positive attitudes such as trust and loyalty. Similarly, the psychological contract emphasizes that employees expect fairness as part of the implicit agreement with their employers. Breaches of fairness undermine trust and destabilize the employment relationship (Ugwu & Ojeaga, 2017).

Despite growing research on organizational justice in Nigeria, relatively few studies focus explicitly on minority workgroups. Much of the scholarship examines justice perceptions in the general workforce without accounting for differences in minority experiences. For example, while distributive and procedural justice have been linked to commitment and performance in Nigerian banking and private sectors (Adeniji, Misturat, Oluwafunmilayo, Ogbari, & Folorunso, 2024), little is known about how these dynamics play out among employees who belong to marginalized or underrepresented groups.

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the relationship between organizational justice and employee trust among minority workgroups in Southwest Nigeria. By focusing on HR practices as the primary lens, it explores how fairness perceptions in areas such as recruitment, promotion, and performance evaluation shape trust in management and the wider organization. This approach not only extends existing organizational justice literature but also contributes context-specific insights relevant for Nigerian workplaces.

Ultimately, understanding the link between organizational justice and trust among minority groups has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it advances knowledge on justice-trust dynamics in multicultural contexts. Practically, it provides HR managers and organizational leaders with evidence to design inclusive and fair policies that foster trust across diverse employee groups. In doing so, this research positions organizational justice as a crucial strategy for building trust, reducing conflict, and enhancing productivity in Southwest Nigerian workplaces.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Organizational justice has long been recognized as a critical determinant of employee attitudes and behaviours. Greenberg's (1990) foundational work categorized organizational justice into three distinct but interconnected dimensions: distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. Distributive justice concerns the perceived fairness of outcomes, such as salaries, promotions, and workload distribution. Procedural justice addresses the fairness of the methods used to arrive at decisions, while interactional justice relates to the quality of interpersonal treatment during decision-making processes. Together, these dimensions shape employees' overall sense of fairness in the workplace.

Several studies have confirmed the impact of distributive justice on employee trust. When employees perceive outcomes such as pay and promotions to be allocated fairly, they are more likely to trust organizational leaders and reciprocate with loyalty and commitment (Onyegbula, *et al.*, 2024). Conversely, perceived inequities often erode trust and foster resentment, particularly in competitive and hierarchical workplaces. Distributive justice is especially salient in developing economies, where limited resources and wage disparities amplify perceptions of fairness or unfairness in HR practices.

Procedural justice also plays a pivotal role in cultivating trust. Fair and transparent decision-making processes signal impartiality and respect, thereby encouraging employees to believe in the credibility of management (Ogunkoya, *et al.*, 2024). In contrast, opaque or biased procedures breed suspicion and distrust. For instance, Ugwu and Ojeaga (2017) demonstrated that Nigerian employees' engagement was significantly influenced by their perceptions of procedural fairness, highlighting its importance in organizational settings where power asymmetries may otherwise discourage participation.

Interactional justice, which emphasizes dignity and respect in interpersonal exchanges, has equally strong implications for trust. Research shows that employees who feel respected in communication, feedback, and daily interactions are more likely to develop

positive perceptions of the organization (Adeniji, *et al.*, 2024). On the other hand, employees who experience disrespect or exclusion often generalize these experiences to broader judgments about the organization's fairness, thereby undermining trust.

Beyond justice dimensions, employee trust is reinforced through HR practices such as recruitment, performance appraisal, and promotion policies. Studies in African contexts indicate that consistent, unbiased HR systems enhance employees' willingness to invest in organizational goals (Chegini, 2009; Akuffo, 2020). In Nigeria, where favouritism and nepotism are common criticisms of organizational practices, the fairness of HR processes becomes a key determinant of whether employees especially those from minority groups believe in the integrity of their employers (Abubakar, Chauhan, & Kura, 2014).

Minority group dynamics further complicate the relationship between justice and trust. Employees from underrepresented backgrounds often face subtle discrimination or exclusion that shapes their justice perceptions. For instance, research in South Africa revealed that minority employees were more sensitive to fairness violations, particularly in promotions and recognition, because such practices signal inclusion or exclusion within the organizational hierarchy (Dhanpat, Modau, Lugisani, MaboJane, & Phiri, 2018). These findings resonate in the Nigerian context, where ethnic, cultural, and religious identities strongly influence workplace interactions.

Scholars argue that organizational justice is not only a predictor of trust but also a mechanism through which organizations can foster inclusivity and reduce intergroup tensions. For example, Moorman (1991) emphasized that justice enhances organizational citizenship behaviours, while later research extended this to show that fairness perceptions mitigate the negative effects of perceived discrimination (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001). In workplaces where minority employees feel vulnerable, fairness in HR practices functions as a buffer against mistrust and disengagement.

Despite these insights, gaps remain in the literature, particularly regarding the experiences of minority workgroups in Nigeria. While studies have linked justice perceptions to employee commitment and engagement in general populations (Ugwu & Ojeaga, 2017; Onyegbula *et al.*, 2024), little empirical attention has been paid to how minority employees uniquely interpret fairness in HR practices. Addressing this gap is vital, given that minority trust levels influence not only individual outcomes but also organizational cohesion and performance.

This study builds on existing scholarship by situating organizational justice and trust within the specific cultural, ethnic, and social realities of Southwest Nigeria. By doing so, it seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of how minority employees' perceptions of fairness influence their trust in HR practices. Ultimately, this focus contributes both to organizational justice theory and to the development of inclusive HR strategies that are culturally responsive in African workplaces.

## **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

### **Equity Theory**

Equity Theory, originally proposed by Adams, argues that individuals assess fairness by comparing their inputs (effort, skills, time) to the outcomes they receive (salary, recognition, promotions), relative to others in similar contexts. When employees perceive equity in this balance, they are more likely to feel satisfied, trusted, and committed to the organization. Conversely, inequity—whether under-reward or over-reward generates distress and motivates corrective actions such as reduced effort, disengagement, or withdrawal (Adeniji *et al.*, 2024).

In minority workgroups, equity perceptions can be particularly fragile due to pre-existing social disparities. Employees from marginalized backgrounds may interpret even subtle inequities as evidence of systemic bias, intensifying distrust in HR processes. Recent studies show that distributive justice strongly predicts employees' sense of belonging and fairness, with inequitable rewards often amplifying the negative effects of perceived discrimination (Onyegbula, Ade, & Can, 2024). This underscores the importance of equitable HR practices in building trust among minority employees in Nigerian workplaces.

Equity Theory also highlights that fairness judgments are not only rational calculations but also deeply social comparisons. In collectivist societies like Nigeria, where communal values shape expectations, employees often benchmark fairness against both in-group (ethnic/religious peers) and out-group members. Perceived inequities in pay, promotion, or workload distribution across these lines can therefore exacerbate mistrust and intergroup conflict (Ogunkoya, Ogunkoya, Hassan, & Fadeyi, 2024).

Moreover, HR practices such as performance appraisal and promotion decisions become salient indicators of equity. Employees interpret these decisions as signals of their relative worth within the organization. Studies confirm that when employees perceive fairness in such outcomes, they reciprocate with higher trust and discretionary behaviours, while inequitable systems erode morale and foster turnover intentions (Abubakar, Chauhan, & Kura, 2014).

In summary, Equity Theory provides a robust lens for examining how minority employees in Southwest Nigeria interpret fairness in HR practices. It suggests that equitable treatment is not merely about balancing inputs and outcomes, but also about managing perceptions of social and organizational belonging. This makes it particularly relevant for analyzing trust among minority employees navigating complex workplace dynamics.

### Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that workplace relationships are built on reciprocal exchanges of resources, both tangible (e.g., pay, benefits) and intangible (e.g., respect, trust). When organizations treat employees fairly and with dignity, employees feel obligated to reciprocate with loyalty, trust, and commitment (Cropanzano et al., 2017; Onyegbula et al., 2024). Justice in HR practices thus functions as a form of “social currency” that strengthens trust-based relationships between employers and employees. In minority workgroups, SET is particularly useful for understanding how fairness perceptions shape relational trust. Studies show that employees who perceive fair treatment are more likely to engage in positive discretionary behaviours, even in contexts where structural inequities exist (Colquitt et al., 2021). Conversely, unfair treatment disrupts the reciprocal exchange process, leading to withdrawal behaviours, reduced commitment, or even resistance.

Recent empirical work emphasizes that SET extends beyond transactional exchanges. Adeniji et al. (2024) argue that justice perceptions foster long-term trust by signalling that the organization values fairness as a cultural norm, not just as an operational mechanism. This cultural reinforcement is especially critical in Nigerian workplaces, where diverse ethnic and cultural identities influence how employees interpret fairness.

SET also suggests that trust is cumulative and evolves over time. An isolated fair HR practice may not immediately create trust, but consistent fairness across multiple practices builds a pattern of reliable reciprocity. Conversely, repeated violations of fairness, particularly towards minority employees, can erode trust permanently. This dynamic highlights why HR practices must be sustained and consistent to cultivate long-term trust (Ogunkoya et al., 2024).

Finally, SET provides a theoretical basis for examining organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs). When employees perceive justice, they are more likely to go beyond formal job requirements, which further enhances organizational performance (Colquitt et al., 2021). In Nigerian workplaces, such reciprocity could strengthen not only minority trust but also overall organizational cohesion.

### Psychological Contract Theory

Psychological Contract Theory refers to employees’ unwritten expectations about mutual obligations between themselves and their organizations. These expectations go beyond formal employment contracts, encompassing perceptions of fairness, respect, and reciprocity. Violations of this contract such as perceived injustice in HR practices are often experienced as breaches of trust that trigger negative emotional and behavioural responses (Guest, 2017; Ugwu & Ojeaga, 2017).

For minority employees, the psychological contract is often more sensitive to justice perceptions. This is because fairness in HR practices serves as a key indicator of whether the organization is committed to inclusivity and equity. A breach in this contract, such as favouritism in promotions or biased recruitment, is more likely to be interpreted as systemic exclusion rather than isolated incidents (Dhanpat, Modau, Lugisani, MaboJane, & Phiri, 2018).

Recent studies affirm that fulfilment of the psychological contract fosters higher trust, engagement, and organizational commitment. Onyegbula et al. (2024) found that fairness in HR practices significantly enhances employees’ belief in the reliability of their organizations, thereby strengthening trust. Similarly, Ogunkoya et al. (2024) observed that organizations perceived as just in their practices are more likely to retain employees, particularly in highly competitive sectors like banking.

The theory also highlights the asymmetry of trust repair. Once the psychological contract is breached, restoring trust requires more than simply correcting the violation—it demands consistent demonstrations of fairness and respect over time (Colquitt et al., 2021). This insight is crucial in Nigerian workplaces, where minority employees may already approach organizational relationships with caution due to prior experiences of exclusion.

Furthermore, Psychological Contract Theory underscores the emotional dimension of fairness. Perceived breaches evoke not only cognitive recalculations but also feelings of betrayal, which can erode trust more deeply than distributive or procedural injustices alone (Adeniji et al., 2024). This suggests that HR practices must be designed to meet both the tangible and psychological expectations of employees to sustain trust.

Ultimately, Psychological Contract Theory provides a framework for understanding how perceptions of fairness in HR practices extend beyond policy compliance. For minority employees in Nigeria, it reveals how trust is contingent not only on outcomes but also on the organization’s ability to honour implicit expectations of equity and inclusion.

### Comparative Analysis of Theories

Theory	Core Assumptions	Focus in Justice/Trust	Relevance to Minority Workgroups	Limitations in Context
<b>Equity Theory</b> (Adams)	Employees compare inputs (effort, skills) and outcomes (pay, recognition) with peers to judge fairness.	Emphasizes <b>distributive justice</b> (fairness of outcomes).	Highlights how perceived inequities in HR practices (e.g., pay gaps, promotion bias) may erode trust among minority employees.	Overly rational; does not fully capture emotional and cultural aspects of fairness.

<b>Social Exchange Theory (SET)</b>	Relationships are built on reciprocal exchanges of resources (material & social).	Fair treatment by employers generates trust and reciprocal loyalty from employees.	Explains how fair HR practices can strengthen long-term trust and discretionary behaviours in minority groups.	Assumes reciprocity is uniform; may overlook power imbalances that limit minority employees' ability to reciprocate.
<b>Psychological Contract Theory</b>	Employees hold implicit expectations about organizational obligations beyond formal contracts.	Fairness breaches are experienced as <b>contract violations</b> , leading to loss of trust.	Shows how unmet expectations of equity and inclusion are especially damaging for minority employees.	Trust repair is complex; restoring broken contracts in contexts of systemic bias may require more than policy changes.

### 3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research adopted a cross-sectional survey design to examine how perceptions of organizational justice influence employee trust among minority workgroups in Southwest Nigerian workplaces. A quantitative approach was preferred because it enables the testing of hypothesized relationships across a relatively large and diverse workforce, ensuring measurable comparisons of fairness perceptions among different employee groups.

The study was conducted in selected organizations across Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun States, which represent the industrial and commercial hubs of Southwest Nigeria. These locations were chosen because they host diverse workforces drawn from multiple ethnic and cultural backgrounds, making them suitable for exploring fairness perceptions in heterogeneous settings. The population of interest included employees in banking, telecommunications, and higher education institutions sectors with long-standing reputations for workforce diversity and structured HR systems.

To adequately capture minority perspectives, the study employed a purposive and stratified sampling technique. First, organizations were identified based on their size (at least 200 employees) and documented diversity policies. Within each organization, employees were stratified into majority and minority groups using criteria such as ethnicity, language, and religion. From these strata, participants were randomly selected. A sample of 350 respondents was determined sufficient, guided by Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table and SEM requirements for adequate statistical power (Hair et al., 2019).

Data collection relied on a structured questionnaire comprising three main sections. The first captured demographic information such as gender, age, job tenure, and ethnic or cultural affiliation. The second assessed perceptions of organizational justice using items adapted from Colquitt's (2001) multidimensional scale, which measures distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. The third assessed employee trust in HR practices, using Mayer and Gavin's (2005) trust scale, supplemented with items reflecting fairness in recruitment, promotion, and disciplinary procedures, tailored to the Nigerian workplace context. Responses were anchored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

To ensure contextual fit, the instrument was pilot tested with 25 employees from two organizations in Lagos. Feedback from the pilot study informed revisions to phrasing and item sequencing for better comprehension. Reliability testing from the pilot yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.80 for all subscales, exceeding the acceptable threshold (Nunnally & Bernstein, 2018). Content validity was further strengthened through expert reviews by HR scholars and practitioners familiar with Nigerian workplace dynamics.

The final survey was administered both electronically and in paper form, depending on organizational preference. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Ethical approval was obtained from the researchers' institutional review board, and organizational consent letters were secured before approaching employees.

Data cleaning and analysis were conducted using SPSS version 27 and AMOS. Descriptive statistics summarized respondents' demographic characteristics and overall perceptions. Pearson correlation tests provided preliminary evidence of associations between organizational justice dimensions and trust. Hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), chosen for its robustness in handling latent variables and complex interrelationships. In addition, multi-group SEM compared responses between majority and minority employee groups, highlighting whether minority status moderated the justice–trust link.

Finally, strict attention was paid to ethical considerations. Respondents were fully informed about the purpose of the study, participation was voluntary, and no personally identifiable information was collected. Data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

#### 4.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 327)**

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	179	54.7%
	Female	148	45.3%
Age	26–40 years	189	57.8%
	41 years and above	96	29.4%
	18–25 years	42	12.8%
Education	Bachelor's degree	175	53.5%
	Postgraduate (MSc/PhD)	118	36.1%
	Diploma/OND	34	10.4%
Group Identity	Majority	203	62.1%
	Minority	124	37.9%

#### Interpretation

The demographic results reveal a fairly balanced gender distribution, though men slightly outnumber women. The workforce is predominantly young to middle-aged, with nearly 58% falling within the 26–40 age range, indicating a dynamic and career-active population. Educational attainment is relatively high, as over half of respondents hold a bachelor's degree and more than one-third possess postgraduate qualifications, suggesting a skilled and knowledgeable workforce. Importantly, the sample composition shows that minority workgroups represent a substantial proportion (37.9%), providing a strong basis for comparing fairness perceptions and trust across majority and minority groups.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables (N = 327)**

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Minority (M)	Majority (M)
Distributive Justice	3.41	0.76	3.21	3.52
Procedural Justice	3.53	0.71	3.32	3.65
Interactional Justice	3.66	0.68	3.42	3.77
Employee Trust in HR	3.59	0.74	3.36	3.72

**Table 3: Correlation Matrix of Organizational Justice Dimensions and Employee Trust**

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Distributive Justice	—			
2. Procedural Justice	.52***	—		
3. Interactional Justice	.48***	.55***	—	
4. Employee Trust	.47***	.64***	.58***	—

\*Note: \*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 4: Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) Results – Majority vs. Minority Comparisons**

Predictor → Employee Trust	Overall Sample (β)	Majority Group (β)	Minority Group (β)
Distributive Justice	0.27**	0.21*	0.38**
Procedural Justice	0.41***	0.46***	0.29**
Interactional Justice	0.32***	0.28**	0.35***
R <sup>2</sup> (Variance Explained)	0.56	0.59	0.53

\*Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

#### 4.1 Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into how organizational justice shapes employee trust in HR practices among both majority and minority workgroups in Southwest Nigerian workplaces. The results indicate that all three dimensions of justice

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distributive, procedural, and interactional significantly predict employee trust, although their relative influence varies between minority and majority groups. These results reinforce existing evidence that perceptions of fairness are a critical foundation for cultivating trust and positive workplace relationships (Colquitt et al., 2021).

Demographic analysis showed that respondents were predominantly young to middle-aged and highly educated, which aligns with the profile of Nigeria's growing professional workforce. Importantly, minority employees accounted for nearly 38% of the sample, ensuring that their perceptions were adequately represented. This representation is critical, as minority groups often experience systemic inequities in HR processes such as promotions, training access, and resource distribution (Ogunyemi & Akinola, 2020).

The results support Equity Theory, as distributive justice was particularly salient for minority employees. Their stronger sensitivity to outcome fairness may stem from historical and structural inequalities in workplace opportunities. This aligns with evidence that minority employees evaluate fairness by closely comparing their outcomes to those of majority peers (Greenberg, 2020). Thus, when they perceive inequity in rewards or promotions, their trust in HR practices is disproportionately eroded.

Procedural justice emerged as the strongest predictor of trust for majority employees, suggesting that transparent and consistent processes matter most to this group. This finding supports the Social Exchange Theory (SET), which emphasizes reciprocal obligations: when organizations adhere to fair procedures, employees respond with greater trust and organizational commitment (Cropanzano et al., 2022). For majority groups, consistent HR practices reinforce their expectations of stability and legitimacy within the workplace.

Interestingly, interactional justice was found to significantly influence trust across both groups, with minority employees reporting slightly stronger associations. This emphasizes the relational and dignity-based aspects of fairness, reflecting the tenets of Psychological Contract Theory. When HR managers treat employees with respect, provide adequate explanations, and maintain open communication, employees interpret this as evidence of the organization's integrity. This is particularly critical for minorities, who may rely on interpersonal treatment as a signal of inclusivity in contexts where structural biases persist (Chaudhry & Singh, 2019).

The comparative SEM results highlight subtle but important differences: distributive justice weighed more heavily for minorities, while procedural justice was dominant among majorities. This suggests that justice is not experienced uniformly across groups, but is filtered through socio-cultural and historical lenses. In Nigeria's multi-ethnic workplaces, where social identities remain deeply salient, HR practices must therefore account for these variations to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities.

The high explanatory power of the justice dimensions ( $R^2 = 0.56$ ) indicates that organizational fairness accounts for more than half the variance in employee trust. This confirms that justice is not just one factor among many, but a central mechanism shaping how employees engage with HR systems. It also underscores the importance of embedding justice principles into everyday HR practices, from recruitment and promotions to conflict resolution.

From a practical standpoint, these findings call for HR managers in Nigeria to adopt equity-driven and inclusion-conscious practices. Efforts should focus not only on procedural reforms but also on distributive fairness ensuring that outcomes are visibly equitable and on respectful, transparent communication with all employees. For minority workgroups, targeted trust-building interventions may be necessary, such as mentorship programs, bias-aware promotion panels, and participatory decision-making processes.

Finally, while the results provide robust evidence of the justice–trust link, they also suggest that broader organizational culture and societal structures likely interact with these dynamics. Future studies should integrate cultural dimensions, such as power distance and collectivism, which strongly characterize Nigerian workplaces, to fully capture the complexities of fairness perceptions across groups.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study shows that distributive, procedural, and interactional justice strongly influence employee trust in HR practices, though their effects differ across groups. Minority employees placed more weight on distributive fairness, while majority employees emphasized procedural fairness. Interactional justice was critical across both groups, underscoring the importance of respect and transparent communication. Overall, trust in HR practices is shaped not only by fair outcomes and processes but also by inclusive and respectful treatment.

To strengthen trust, HR managers should prioritize equity-driven reforms that ensure fair distribution of rewards and opportunities for minority groups, while also institutionalizing transparent procedures for all employees. Respectful communication and consistent interpersonal treatment should be embedded into HR practices to foster inclusion. By aligning HR systems with justice principles, Nigerian workplaces can build stronger trust, engagement, and cohesion across diverse employee groups.

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