



Influence of Social Skills on Organisational Performance in Public Universities in Kenya's Western Region: The Moderating Role of Organisational Justice

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Abstract

This research aimed to assess the impact of social skills on organisational performance and to identify the moderating effect of organisational justice on the relationship between leadership emotional intelligence and organisational performance in public universities western region, Kenya. The research philosophy used was positivism, and a descriptive explanatory research methodology. The target population included 1,282 academic professionals employed at four public institutions in the Western region, Kenya. The stratified and basic random sampling techniques were used. The sample size for the investigation was calculated by Slovin's method. Primary data was collected using questionnaires and an interview schedule. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were utilised. Social skills significantly influence organisational performance, explaining 33.6% of the variance. Adding organisational justice increases explanatory power to 68.9%, while its moderating effect raises it to 70.6%. The interaction term (Moderated Social skills) positively affects performance ($B = 0.231$, $p < .05$), suggesting that when social skills are effectively moderated by organisational justice, it enhances organisational performance. Organisational justice enhances the impact of interpersonal competencies, leading to improved collaboration, motivation, and performance in higher education institutions.

Introduction

The concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) gained popularity in the 1990s largely due to the work of Daniel Goleman (Serrat, 2017). Perception, comprehension, regulation, and application of emotions in various contexts are all aspects of emotional intelligence (Kotsou et al., 2019). Personal connections, team dynamics, educational opportunities, and well-being are all profoundly impacted by EI. Individuals' capacity for self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill development was one of the five pillars upon which Goleman's (1995) original classification of EI rested (Brownie, 2019). Cherry (2018) expanded the model's scope by emphasising the importance of intrinsic drive and empathy as foundational components of emotional regulation.

The ability to identify and cultivate relationships, as well as the competency in sustaining connections and networks, are characterised by Onuegbu (2021) as social skills. Leadership, knowledge acquisition, persuasiveness, and the ability to effectively drive change are essential components of social skills (Onuegbu, 2021). On top of that, there are two schools of thought when it comes to defining social skills: the intrapersonal (self-awareness, self-evaluation, self-control) and the



interpersonal (Little et al., 2017). Since they are helpful in every facet of life, soft skills have long been considered a field of study worthy of continuous study. A high level of self-awareness, the ability to understand and control one's emotions, and remarkable social skills are the hallmarks of high emotional intelligence, according to Parvez (2022). Additionally, they are empathetic, can console others, and have the power to influence others. Low emotional intelligence is characterised by a lack of self-awareness, difficulty controlling emotions, difficulty understanding moods and feelings, difficulty sympathising with others, difficulty soothing others, difficulty influencing others, and poor social skills.

Organisational justice significantly influences organisational performance by fostering fairness and motivating employees to contribute effectively. Research indicates that employees who perceive fairness are more engaged and committed, enhancing overall productivity (Das & Mohanty, 2023). Organisational justice (OJ) affects various aspects, including task distribution, compensation, and disciplinary measures, impacting employee satisfaction and retention (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Studies on emotional intelligence (EI) and organisational performance (OP) yield mixed results, with some showing a strong relationship and others indicating no significant effect (Moon, 2021; Said et al., 2021). Organisational justice moderates this relationship, as employees with high EI perceive fairness positively, enhancing job satisfaction (Mustafa et al., 2022).

Higher education institutions are increasingly confronted with complex challenges such as globalisation, rising student populations, and the rapid pace of knowledge generation (Igoki, 2021). These dynamics demand a highly skilled and motivated workforce to maintain and enhance institutional performance. EI has emerged as a critical leadership attribute that significantly influences employee engagement and performance, thereby shaping overall organisational success (Mendelson & Stabile, 2019). Organisational performance refers to an institution's ability to achieve its strategic goals through effective use of resources (Sangiorgi & Siboni, 2017), and is often assessed by comparing actual outcomes to intended targets (Munir & Azam, 2017). High-performing employees are vital, as their efforts directly contribute to institutional outputs. According to Wattoo et al. (2020), strong job performance boosts productivity and efficiency. In the context of public universities, performance is commonly evaluated based on academic achievements, research output, financial sustainability, and levels of student satisfaction (Muwardi et al., 2020).

Institutions of higher education are pivotal to economic and social advancement. Universities are faced with challenges which include insufficient research funds, limited teaching personnel, and low compensation, which affect performance (Ayiro, 2020). Mwangi and Waithaka (2018) emphasise that university leaders must use effective leadership abilities, such as emotional intelligence (EI), to address these challenges. Although overseen by highly competent experts, several universities have budgetary limitations, resource deficiencies, and staff discontent, often resulting in strikes. This indicates a deficiency in leadership regarding the management of organisational difficulties and the sustenance of staff motivation. Studies on social skills and organisational performance (OP) at universities provide contradictory results. Certain research demonstrates a favourable correlation between emotional intelligence (EI) and organisational performance (OP) (Shafait & Huang, 2023; Mishra, 2023). In contrast, others contend that social skills do not affect OP (De Le Santos, 2023; Makokha et al., 2023). The inconsistencies arise from the use of several emotional intelligence models, including Goleman's frameworks (1995, 2001, 2003) and Cherry's model (2018), which integrates motivation. Moreover, research on organisational justice (OJ) and organisational performance (OP) indicates a correlation (Das & Mohanty, 2023; Mustafa et al., 2022). Muchemi (2019) reveals a deficiency in Africa about OJ's influence on employee behaviour. This research investigated OJ as a



moderating element in the link between social skills and organisational performance in public universities in the western region, Kenya.

The objectives of the study are twofold. First, it seeks to examine the effect of social skills on organisational performance in public universities in the western region of Kenya. Second, it aims to determine the moderating effect of organisational justice on the relationship between social skills and organisational performance within the same context. To guide the investigation, two null hypotheses have been formulated. The first (H01) states that social skills have no statistically significant effect on organisational performance in public universities in the western region of Kenya. The second (H02) posits that organisational justice has no statistically significant moderating effect on the relationship between social skills and organisational performance in these institutions.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework: Mayer and Salovey Model of EI

Mayer and Salovey introduced the EI hypothesis in 1990, characterising EI as the capacity to recognise, articulate, comprehend, control, and manage emotions (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2018). Leaders with emotional intelligence can manage stress, negotiate social relationships, and improve work satisfaction (Cui, 2021). In 1997, Mayer and Salovey developed their model into the four-branch framework, including the management of emotions to attain objectives, awareness of one's own and other people's emotional states, the ability to decode emotional cues, and the ability to use emotional intelligence to improve one's thinking (Brou Fossier, 2022). By measuring the ability to perceive, facilitate, comprehend, and control emotions, the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) is a popular tool for gauging emotional intelligence (Bru-Luna et al., 2021). There is a positive association between MSCEIT scores and psychological well-being, interpersonal connections, and professional achievement (Nagdive, 2021). Zeidner et al. (2003, as mentioned in Singh et al., 2022) consider it the most scientifically robust emotional intelligence model, but Weinberger (2002) endorses its limited emotional intelligence approach. Critics contend that ability-based emotional intelligence assessments have low predictive validity and reliability concerns (Miao et al., 2017; Maul, 2012). Notwithstanding this, Goleman (1998) associated EI with professional achievement, whereas Des Los Santos (2023) used this framework to examine the relationship between EI and employee turnover.

Empirical Literature

The reviewed studies collectively illustrate the growing recognition of soft skills, emotional intelligence, communication, and leadership competencies in shaping employee performance across various contexts. Kurniawati and Cerya (2021) revealed that interpersonal communication contributed 39% to job motivation, underscoring the value of social interactions in enhancing employee motivation and ultimately performance. Saman et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative, explanatory study in Pakistan's higher education sector. They found that self-confidence, achievement orientation, and the ability to develop others positively impacted performance, while conflict management and emotional self-awareness were not significant. In Thailand, Sangperm et al. (2020) demonstrated that self-motivation and social skills positively influenced judges' performance. Chala and Bouranta (2020) studied the maritime sector in Greece and found that soft skills like adaptability, problem-solving, teamwork, and communication significantly enhanced contextual employee performance. Henry (2020) examined customer satisfaction in Tanzania's CRDB Bank PLC, revealing a strong relationship between employees' social skills and customer satisfaction. Tumwebaze et al. (2020) focused on conflict resolution methods in Uganda's KCCA, identifying compromise and third-party mediation as significant predictors of employee performance. Negotiation was not found to be impactful.



In Kenya, Omulo (2019) found that leadership competencies, especially social awareness, positively influenced performance in state corporations. Social skills, however, were the least impactful competency. Conversely, Muthembwa (2019) found that social skills positively influenced SME performance in Nakuru, indicating the varying weight of soft skills across industries. Lastly, Lankisa (2022) explored e-leadership at the University of Nairobi and found that e-social, e-communication, and e-technological skills significantly enhanced employee productivity. This supports the relevance of adapting leadership and interpersonal skills to digital environments, especially in academic institutions.

Conceptual Framework

The following framework illustrates relationship between independent variable, moderating variable and dependent variable as shown in figure 1.

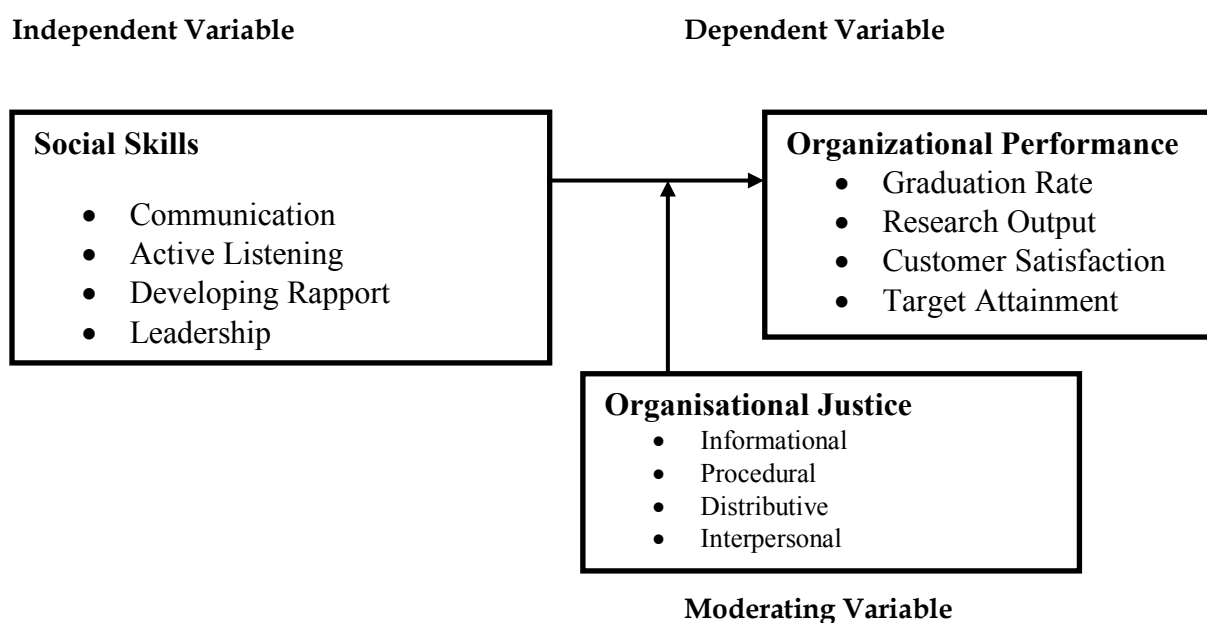


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Method

Study Area: The study was conducted in Western Kenya, focusing on Alupe, Kibabii, Masinde Muliro, and Kaimosi Friends Universities. The area provides a rich cultural and educational context for examining leadership, emotional intelligence, organisational justice, and employee performance.

Research Philosophy: The study was grounded in the positivist paradigm, which emphasises objectivity, empirical evidence, and measurable observations to establish factual knowledge. This approach allows for statistical testing of hypotheses and identification of cause-and-effect relationships. By applying quantifiable methods, the study ensured reliability, accuracy, and validity in investigating emotional intelligence, organisational justice, and performance.

Research Design: A descriptive explanatory design was adopted to capture both the current state of emotional intelligence and organisational justice in public universities, while explaining their effects on performance outcomes. This design enabled systematic collection of data, description of existing practices, and statistical testing of relationships among variables to draw meaningful, evidence-based conclusions.



Target Population: The study's target population comprised 794 academic staff across four public universities in Kenya's Western region. This included professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, assistant lecturers, and graduate assistants. The diverse representation of academic ranks ensured balanced insights into leadership emotional intelligence, organisational justice, and employee performance within the higher education sector.

Sampling Procedures: Stratified random, purposive, and simple random sampling techniques were used. Slovin's formula determined a sample size of 266 respondents, ensuring adequate representation across cadres. In this study, stratified sampling was employed to ensure representation of different categories of academic staff across the four public universities in the Western region of Kenya. Stratification was based on academic rank (professors, associate professors, senior lecturers, lecturers, assistant lecturers, and graduate assistants). Within each stratum, simple random sampling was applied to select participants proportionately from the total population in each university. This approach ensured that respondents from different academic ranks and institutions were adequately represented in the final sample, minimising bias and enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

Data Collection Instruments: Data were collected using closed-ended questionnaires (based on the EI scale), interview schedules for administrators, and document analysis for institutional reports and metrics. The scale was structured as follows: 1 represented "strongly disagree," 2 denoted "disagree," 3 represented "fairly agree," 4 denoted "agree," and 5 stood for "strongly agree,". After securing permits and approvals, questionnaires were administered with support from research assistants, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality.

Pilot Study

A pilot study with 27 respondents at Maseno University was undertaken to test and refine research instruments. The process helped identify ambiguities, enhance clarity, and ensure appropriateness of questions. Results guided adjustments to improve the validity, reliability, and overall suitability of instruments before application in the whole study. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, a statistical technique for internal consistency. Items with alpha coefficients of 0.7 and above were accepted as reliable, consistent with educational and social science research standards. Instrument validity was established through multiple approaches. Face and content validity were assessed by expert reviews and pilot feedback, ensuring comprehensiveness. Construct validity was tested using factor analysis to confirm that items appropriately measured the underlying variables.

Data Processing and Analysis

Collected data were cleaned to address errors, missing values, and inconsistencies, then coded for analysis using SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and percentages summarised responses. Inferential analyses, including correlation, regression, and hierarchical regression, examined relationships among variables, testing hypotheses and moderation effects to derive meaningful interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical requirements were strictly adhered to. Research permits were obtained, alongside institutional approvals. Respondents were informed of the study objectives and provided consent before participation. Voluntary participation was emphasised, with confidentiality and anonymity assured. Sensitive questions were avoided, ensuring respect, privacy, and protection of all participants throughout data collection and reporting.



The Findings of the Study

Descriptive Statistics of Variables in the Study

Questions about social skills were designed to elicit a degree of agreement from respondents as shown in Table 1

Table 1: Social skills

No.	Social skills	5	4	3	2	1	Mean	SD
1	My supervisor promotes open communication and encourage open debates	125 (59.2)	71 (33.6)	12 (5.7)	1 (0.5)	2 (0.9)	4.50	0.71
2	My supervisor has no trouble reading people's nonverbal cues.	50 (23.7)	121 (57.3)	36 (17.1)	2 (0.9)	2 (0.9)	4.02	0.73
3	My supervisor is skilled at the art of active listening	89 (42.2)	107 (50.7)	13 (6.2)	0 (0)	2 (0.9)	4.33	0.68
4	Just by listening to people's tones, my supervisor can gauge their emotional state.	65 (30.8)	124 (58.8)	20 (9.5)	0 (0)	2 (0.9)	4.18	0.68
5	My boss is great at making and keeping friends on the job.	53 (25.1)	114 (54)	38 (18)	4 (1.9)	2 (0.9)	4.00	0.77
6	My supervisor promotes a friendly and cooperative work atmosphere	43 (20.4)	83 (39.3)	73 (34.6)	8 (3.8)	4 (1.9)	3.73	0.895
7	My supervisor is able to deftly navigate even the most challenging circumstances.	53 (25.1)	101 (47.9)	45 (21.3)	9 (4.3)	3 (1.4)	3.91	0.871
8	My supervisor is able to influence and inspire my colleagues	64 (30.3)	98 (46.4)	31 (14.7)	14 (6.6)	4 (1.9)	4	0.943
Aggregate Scores							4.08	0.785

The findings summarised from Table 1 indicate that the majority of respondents demonstrate strong social skills across several dimensions of interpersonal effectiveness. A large portion of respondents (59.2% strongly agreed and 33.6% agreed) affirmed that they promote open communication and encourage debates, supported by a mean score of 4.18. This underscores a workplace culture that values transparency and collaborative dialogue. Additionally, 80.1% either strongly agreed or agreed that they easily understand non-verbal messages, with a mean of 4.02, implying strong non-verbal interpretive skills crucial for interpersonal communication. Regarding active listening, 92.9% of the respondents reported proficiency, reflected in a high mean of 4.33. Similarly, 89.6% of respondents claimed they could detect emotions through tone of voice, with a mean score of 4.18, indicating strong emotional awareness in conversations. Overall, the aggregate mean of 4.08 and a standard deviation of 0.79 confirm that most respondents possess well-developed social skills, including communication, empathy, relationship-building, and leadership. These competencies are essential for teamwork, conflict resolution, and productivity. However, minor levels of disagreement in some areas suggest the need for targeted capacity-building programmes to enhance social and emotional competencies among the few who may be lagging.

Qualitative Results

The respondents were asked to state whether there are incidents where teaching staff handle conflicts or complex interactions with colleagues and students. All respondents acknowledged that conflicts and complex interactions among faculty members and students were inevitable in the university environment. The primary sources of conflict identified include differences in academic opinions,



student grievances regarding grading and workload distribution among faculty, and interpersonal tensions between staff members. A DVC noted that some faculty members frequently mediate conflicts among students, especially in cases of academic dishonesty, group project disputes, and disciplinary issues. Another respondent stated that faculty members occasionally encounter challenging interactions with students who dispute grades or request special accommodations. Among faculty members, conflicts often arise due to differences in teaching approaches, research collaborations, or administrative decisions. A Registrar mentioned that junior and senior faculty members sometimes experience friction over workload allocation and recognition for research contributions. In some cases, tensions escalate into formal complaints or require intervention from university leadership.

Respondents were asked whether they are satisfied with the way faculty members handle conflicts or complex interactions with colleagues and students. The respondents expressed mixed opinions on whether faculty members effectively handle conflicts and complex interactions. Some respondents were satisfied, noting that most faculty members handle disputes professionally by engaging in open communication, practising diplomacy, and adhering to institutional guidelines. A DVC emphasised that faculty training programmes on conflict resolution and interpersonal skills have helped improve the way teaching staff navigate challenges. However, others expressed concerns that not all faculty members manage conflicts effectively. A Registrar noted that some faculty members struggle with emotional regulation, leading to heated disagreements or strained relationships with students and colleagues. Some respondents also indicated that unresolved conflicts can sometimes escalate, negatively impacting teamwork and collaboration within departments. A few respondents highlighted that while some faculty members actively seek mediation and resolution strategies, others prefer to avoid conflicts altogether, which can lead to prolonged tensions. There were also concerns that power dynamics between senior and junior faculty members sometimes make it difficult for open dialogue and conflict resolution to take place.

Moderating Influence of Organisational Justice on the Relationship between Social Skills and Organisational Performance

The research used hierarchical regression analysis to investigate if organisational justices influence the association between organisational performance in the public universities in the Western region, Kenya and Social skills

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adj.	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
			R ²		R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1a	.579 ^a	.336	.333	.339347	.336	105.640	1	209	.000
2b	.830 ^b	.689	.686	.232644	.354	236.681	1	208	.000
3c	.840 ^c	.706	.702	.226890	.017	11.684	1	207	.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social skills

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social skills, Organisational justice

c. Predictors: (Constant), Social skills, Organisational justice, social skills* Organisational justice

Source: Field Data (2024)

In Model 1, social skills alone accounted for 33.6% of the variance in organisational performance ($R^2 = 0.336$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a moderately strong direct effect. In Model 2, when organisational justice was added to the model, the explained variance increased significantly to 68.9% ($R^2 = 0.689$, $\Delta R^2 =$



0.354, $p < 0.05$), demonstrating that organisational justice substantially enhances the prediction of organisational performance. In Model 3, the interaction term (Social skills * Organisational Justice) was introduced, further increasing the explained variance to 70.6% ($R^2 = 0.706$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.017$, $p = 0.05$). This suggests that organisational justice significantly moderates the relationship between social skills and organisational performance. Overall, the findings confirm that organisational justice strengthens the positive impact of social skills on organisational performance, highlighting its essential role in enhancing workplace effectiveness.

Table 3: Regression Coefficient of Moderating influence

Model	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
1 (Constant)	2.543	.175		14.495	.000
Social skills	.441	.043	.579	10.278	.000
2 (Constant)	.645	.172		3.744	.000
Social skills	.225	.033	.296	6.908	.000
Organisational justice	.661	.043	.659	15.384	.000
3 (Constant)	-3.345	1.179		-2.836	.005
Social skills (SS)	1.238	.298	1.628	4.153	.000
Organisational justice (OJ)	1.573	.270	1.569	5.822	.000
SS*OJ	.231	.067	1.914	3.418	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Organisational Performance

Source: Field Data (2024)

Based on the regression coefficient found in Table 3, the regression model for the research is presented as follows.

$$Y = -3.345 + 1.238X_1 + 1.573Z + 0.231X_1Z$$

Where:

Y = Y = The organisational performance in public universities, Western region, Kenya

X_1 = Social skills

Z = Organisational justice

In Model 1, social skills had a significant positive effect on organisational performance ($B = 0.441$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 33.6% of the variance. This indicates that social skills alone are a strong predictor of organisational performance. A unit increase in social skills leads to a 0.441-unit increase in organisational performance. In Model 2, when organisational justice was added, both social skills ($B = 0.225$, $p < 0.001$) and organisational justice ($B = 0.661$, $p < 0.001$) had significant positive effects, explaining 68.9% of the variance. This highlights that organisational justice independently enhances organisational performance. A unit increase in organisational justice results in a 0.661-unit rise in organisational performance. In Model 3, the interaction term ($B = 0.231$, $p = 0.001$) was statistically significant, confirming that organisational justice moderates the relationship between social skills and organisational performance. An increase in organisational justice by one unit amplifies the effect of social skills on organisational performance by an additional 0.231 units. The negative constant ($B = -3.345$) suggests that, in the absence of both social skills and organisational justice, organisational performance tends to decline.

Discussion

The findings from Model 1 reveal that social skills have a significant positive effect on organisational performance. This suggests that employees who possess strong interpersonal and communication abilities contribute meaningfully to improved organisational outcomes. These results are in line with



those of Kurniawati and Cerya (2021), who found that interpersonal communication skills significantly enhanced job motivation and performance among staff in Indonesian universities. These findings reinforce the relevance of social interaction and communication in organisational success, particularly in academic institutions. Conversely, Omulo (2019), in a study on Kenyan state corporations, found that social skills were the least influential among leadership competencies, suggesting that the importance of social skills may vary across organisational contexts.

In Model 2, the inclusion of organisational justice significantly strengthened the relationship between social skills and organisational performance. This finding implies that fairness in treatment, resource allocation, and decision-making reinforces the positive effects of social competencies. It aligns with Kang'ethe and Waiganjo (2023), who observed that fairness in institutional practices enhanced employee awareness and performance in Kenyan public universities. Likewise, Masimane et al. (2022) showed that social skills and perceptions of justice improved employee performance at Kenya Commercial Bank, further confirming that fairness boosts the effectiveness of emotional and interpersonal skills in the workplace.

In Model 3, the introduction of the interaction term confirmed that organisational justice moderates the relationship between social skills and organisational performance. This means that while social skills alone are beneficial, their impact is maximised when employees perceive fairness in organisational processes. Udo and Ukpang (2016) support this finding, having discovered that social skills and social awareness significantly influenced academic performance in Nigerian universities, with fairness in leadership playing a critical role. De Los Santos (2023), however, found no significant link between emotional intelligence and employee turnover in Texas universities, illustrating that cultural and institutional differences can mediate these relationships.

Conclusions

The study concludes that social skills significantly influence organisational performance, particularly when supported by a fair and just organisational environment. Social competencies such as interpersonal communication, empathy, and active listening enhance collaboration, motivation, and leadership effectiveness. However, the moderating role of organisational justice is critical in amplifying this impact. To the extent that people believe that decisions, resources, and interpersonal treatment are fair, social skills become their most valuable asset, leading to improved employee engagement and organisational outcomes. Based on the findings, institutions should prioritise the development of employees' social skills through targeted training programmes in communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. Leadership workshops focusing on emotional intelligence can further strengthen relational competencies. Additionally, management should institutionalise fairness by ensuring transparency in decision-making, equal treatment, and merit-based reward systems. Policies should be reviewed to embed organisational justice principles across all levels.

The study contributes to the theoretical advancement of emotional intelligence and organisational behaviour literature by empirically validating the moderating role of organisational justice in the relationship between social skills and organisational performance. It supports the Social Exchange Theory, which posits that fair and reciprocal relationships enhance individual and collective outcomes. Additionally, it reinforces components of Emotional Intelligence Theory by demonstrating that social skills alone are not sufficient; fairness and justice must be present to maximise their impact on performance. The findings offer valuable insights for human resource and organisational development practitioners. They demonstrate the need for structured training programmes to enhance social skills such as communication, empathy, and collaboration among staff. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of cultivating a fair workplace culture. Managers and institutional leaders should actively promote transparency, fairness in decision-making, and equal treatment of



employees, which not only boosts morale but also leverages the full benefits of employee competencies for improved performance.

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