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The influence of workplace relationships and job satisfaction of private universities in Mogadishu: employee performance as a mediator variable

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Drawing on literature and empirical studies, this research examined the relationships between employers and employees, and among employees, and their impact on employee performance and job satisfaction at private universities in Mogadishu. Using a quantitative methodology, 198 academic staff members were selected for representativeness. Data on employee performance, job satisfaction, and workplace relationships were gathered via questionnaires and analyzed using Smart PLS 4 and SPSS version 23. The findings indicated that positive employer-employee relationships significantly enhance job satisfaction and employee performance. Conversely, while connections among academic staff were linked to higher job satisfaction, they negatively impacted performance outcomes, suggesting complex workplace dynamics. The research revealed significant effect sizes, highlighting the practical impact of these relationships, showing that strong employer-employee relationships could notably improve engagement, reduce attrition, and enhance performance in private universities. These relationships accounted for 31.7% of the variability in performance outcomes, underscoring their real-world relevance. The study provides actionable insights for educational institutions to improve job satisfaction and performance by fostering positive employer-employee relationships through structured support programs, regular feedback, and team-building activities. Suggestions for further research were offered to address the identified shortcomings.

KEYWORDS

workplace relationships, employee performance, job satisfaction, private universities, Mogadishu

1 Introduction

Mayo, a prominent figure in human relations, emphasizes the correlation between worker morale and workplace relationships (Omodan et al., 2020). The field of workplace relationships, which has been an established academic discipline since the 1940s, aims to enhance communication among employers, managers, and employees (Mohamed et al., 2024). Recent developments have necessitated modifications to traditional theoretical frameworks,

underscoring the significance of workplace relationships and performance evaluations (Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu, 2018; Tran et al., 2018).

Personnel are essential for organizational success, and robust workplace relationships are crucial for both management and employees (Arimie, 2019). Positive interactions with employers and employees enhance motivation, job satisfaction, performance, and productivity (Abun et al., 2018; Anasi, 2020). As the significance of human resources in operations increases, employees need to integrate resources such as technology, finance, information, and managerial tools (Cetinkaya et al., 2021). Employers prioritize fostering a conducive work environment for efficient task completion (Abdullahi et al., 2023). Workplace relationships have garnered significant scholarly attention, with researchers employing various theoretical frameworks to elucidate and evaluate the impact of these interpersonal dynamics within organizational contexts (Caillier, 2017).

Strong workplace relationships between higher education employers and workers are crucial for fulfilling obligations and ensuring employee involvement in setting working conditions (Ngari and Agusioma, 2013). Positive relationships with superiors, peers, and students can boost productivity, job satisfaction, and employee performance, while unhealthy relationships can negatively affect productivity and experience (Skaggs, 2015; Ndagire et al., 2023). Poor workplace relationships can negatively impact employee motivation, performance, job satisfaction, and mental health, leading to high attrition and tension (Abun et al., 2018; Anasi, 2020).

Universities face high student competition, emphasizing the importance of academic staff relationships for organizational and individual well-being (Sias, 2008; Ndagire et al., 2023). Workplace relationships significantly impact workers' well-being and performance evaluations, but their impact on working behavior must be thoroughly examined (Tran et al., 2018). Research on African workplace relationships is challenging due to insufficient studies and complex socio-cultural and political factors (Cetinkaya et al., 2021). The majority of related research has focused on European countries and the United States (Tran et al., 2018). However, this study will concentrate on Africa, specifically examining higher education in Somalia. Therefore, there is a need for more research on workplace relationships, job satisfaction, and employee performance (Abun et al., 2018; Mohamed et al., 2023a, 2023b). Despite the pervasive nature of this line of research, no study was identified that examined the association between workplace relationships and job satisfaction. Employee performance serves as a mediator variable.

The higher education system in Somalia was rendered inoperative by a civil war in 1991. Subsequently, in 1999, it was reestablished through the collaborative efforts of local communities, diaspora groups, religious organizations, and international entities. Mogadishu, the capital city of Somalia, currently hosts one national university and 67 private universities of higher learning (Mohamed et al., 2024).

The research examines the impact of employee-employee and employer-employee relationships on job satisfaction and employee performance among Mogadishu-based private university staff, highlighting challenges like lack of qualified personnel, inadequate administrative staff, limited learning materials, and insufficient research publications (Mohamed, 2020; Mohamed et al., 2024). This study aims to achieve specific objectives based on previous research results:

- 1 The research scrutinizes the effect of employer-employee relationships on job satisfaction at private universities in Mogadishu.
- 2 The research aims to examine the effect of employee relationships on job satisfaction in private universities in Mogadishu.
- 3 Employee performance mediates the relations among workplace relationships and employee performance in private universities in Mogadishu.

2 Literature review

2.1 Workplace relationships

Workplace relationships refer to interpersonal interactions involving managers, employees, leaders, and colleagues at the same level (Sias, 2008; Methot et al., 2017; Caillier, 2017). They include sharing information and emotions to achieve goals, including supervisor-subordinate, peer, and mentoring relationships with colleagues (Tran et al., 2018; Anasi, 2020). Workplace relationships are interactions between individuals, groups, or organizations to achieve specific goals, including short-term exchanges or ongoing engagement between employers and subordinates and employees, encompassing linkages and dynamics within a work context (Cetinkaya et al., 2021; Bella, 2023). The study defines workplace relationships as the connections between employers, subordinates, and employees.

Academic researchers have studied workplace relationships, including peer-coworker, romantic, supervisor-subordinate, and consumer relationships (Sias, 2008). These relationships can be supportive, antagonistic, beneficial, dysfunctional, friendly, or hostile (Methot et al., 2017). The workplace has evolved, encompassing attributes, organizational influences, managerial competencies, resources, labor, technology, markets, employees, values, leadership, work methodologies, interpersonal dynamics, and workplace layout (Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu, 2018; Abun et al., 2018).

Organizations have various relationships, including supervisors, coworkers, mentors, and romantic connections (Cetinkaya et al., 2021). Workplace relationships involve interactions with customers, professors, clients, and romantic partners (Abe, 2021). These relationships are crucial for an organization's results, task fulfillment, and human well-being, providing a framework for work and a thriving work environment (Cetinkaya et al., 2021).

Positive workplace relationships, including trust, collaboration, communication, respect, and social support, are crucial for effectiveness (Bella, 2023). However, the relationship between employees and managers is the primary source of workplace challenges (Abun et al., 2018). To address these issues, supervisors should focus on building strong employer-subordinate and employee-employee relationships (Abe, 2021). This study examines the significance of workplace relationships from two vantage points: the relationships between employers and workers and the relationships among employees.

2.1.1 Employer-employee relationships

Employee relationship management emphasizes fostering solid connections among workers and employers, improving competence, eagerness, and performance (Florence and Anthony, 2016). Barnard

(1968) and Mayo's Hawthorne Experiments (1927–1932) revolutionized work relationships, focusing on cooperative structures and employee behaviors (Mohamed et al., 2024). Mayo's work aimed to understand labor issues in the industrial sector from a different perspective, encompassing legal, informal, financial, social, and psychological ties (Arimie, 2019).

Employer-employee relationships refer to the official and unofficial, monetary, social, and psychological connections that exist between a worker and their employer (Mohamed et al., 2024). The employer-employee connection is characterized by effective communication, friendly cooperation, and shared understanding, which enhances employee motivation and morale (Arimie, 2019). Employer-employee relationships are formal and informal connections between workers and employers, characterized by efficient communication, harmonious cooperation, and shared understanding, which boost motivation and morale (Mohamed et al., 2024). Employer-employee relations are complex and encompass many different facets of labor relations and interactions between employers and trade unions (Arimie, 2019). The study defines employer-employee interactions as contractual agreements outlining the duties and responsibilities of both parties, including work performance, remuneration, and perks.

The human relations approach has significantly influenced research on the association between owners and workers, emphasizing the need for managers to balance salary limitations with worker productivity, motivation, and engagement in decision-making while promoting collaboration between employers and employees (Abun et al., 2018; Arimie, 2019). The employer-employee relationship is mutually dependent, with employers relying on employees for functions and smooth operations and employees relying on employers for financial compensation and a supportive environment. Effective relationships, communication, and conflict resolution are crucial for organizational success, as failure can lead to downfall (Okafor et al., 2023).

Positive employer-employee relationships enhance employee engagement, performance, motivation, dedication, and trust, ultimately optimizing the work environment to achieve organizational objectives (Arimie, 2019; Anasi, 2020; Abdullahi et al., 2023). These relationships are crucial for organizational success, motivating employees, and boosting job satisfaction (Anasi, 2020). Employers should focus on fostering harmonious workplaces, eliminating conflict, and enhancing corporate culture, communication, and knowledge (Abdullahi et al., 2023). This study is essential because there is a need for quantitative research to demonstrate the association between the employer-employee relationship and job satisfaction in the unique setting of Somalia.

2.1.2 Employee-employee relationships

Employee relationships are informal interactions between employees and management, promoting job satisfaction and motivation, encompassing fairness, justice, culture, management style, guidelines, complaint arrangements, and conflict management (Florence and Anthony, 2016; Abun et al., 2018). Employee-employee relations refer to the involvement of an individual's perception of their connection with colleagues and the exchanges and bonds between members of the same team or department (Staniec, 2021; Bella, 2023). Employee relations involve interpersonal interactions, disagreements, collaboration, and group dynamics, promoting job motivation and a

sense of ease and self-assurance among workers and employers (Cetinkaya et al., 2021; Okafor et al., 2023). This research utilizes the definitions presented by Abun et al. (2018), Staniec (2021), and Bella (2023).

Employee relations are crucial for a productive work environment, building trust, fostering active participation, and improving company results (Abun et al., 2018). A favorable atmosphere with high employee participation can increase corporate results and employee well-being (Basilio and Abun, 2023). Strong relationships with peers and coworkers provide emotional, professional, and instrumental support, positively influencing job satisfaction and employee performance (Tran et al., 2018). Maintaining excellent relationships is essential for organizational performance, growth, and learning (Anasi, 2020; Staniec, 2021). The goal is to achieve harmony and reduce conflict, with rewards playing a moderating role (Florence and Anthony, 2016).

Managers should prioritize fostering positive employee relationships and promoting effective communication and teamwork through team objectives, activities, and regular meetings to boost motivation and confidence (Florence and Anthony, 2016; Staniec, 2021; Basilio and Abun, 2023). Research on employee relationships and job satisfaction is crucial for ensuring employee performance in universities, especially in academic staff, to create a positive work environment and ensure organizational success (Ngari and Agusioma, 2013). This study is vital, as it is necessary to do quantitative research to establish the correlation between employee connection, work satisfaction, and employee performance, specifically in the distinct context of Somalia.

2.2 Workplace relationships and employee performance

Performance is a complex concept involving behavioral engagements and expected outcomes in the workplace (Pradhan and Jena, 2017). It is influenced by factors like motivation and cognitive abilities (Mousa, 2020). Performance is correlated with participation, collaboration, and engagement (Florence and Anthony, 2016). Academic staff's performance in university environments is significant due to demanding work schedules and workloads, challenging students, and competing expectations (Okafor et al., 2023).

Employee performance refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of behavior and contributions toward achieving an organization's objectives (Florence and Anthony, 2016; Pradhan and Jena, 2017). It encompasses work achievement, effort, meaningful work, engaged profile, and compassionate colleagues (Odero and Makori, 2018). Employees' performance is strongly linked to their capacity to accomplish objectives within specified timeframes and limits. This is assessed based on work output, quality, autonomy, punctuality, and interpersonal connections (Rana et al., 2019). Worker performance is a value that an organization derives from the behaviors of an employee who contributes directly and indirectly to its goals (Mousa, 2020). It is the success or general result of their efforts compared to predefined targets (Abdullahi et al., 2023). Current employee performance is primarily based on financial performance and productivity, neglecting employees' role in organizational performance and their perception of HR practices (Odero and Makori, 2018; Okafor et al., 2023). The research incorporates many definitions of employee performance sourced from Pradhan and Jena (2017), Odero and Makori (2018), Rana et al. (2019), Abdullahi et al.

(2023), and Okafor et al. (2023) due to their compatibility and interchangeability.

Three factors characterize employee performance: motivation, declarative knowledge, and procedural knowledge (Florence and Anthony, 2016). Task performance, contextual performance, and counterproductive work behavior also contribute to overall organizational performance (Rana et al., 2019). This research examines the performance of academics at private universities in Mogadishu, focusing on task performance, contextual performance, and adaptive performance as three key measurements of employee performance (Pradhan and Jena, 2017; Mousa, 2020).

Task performance involves individuals' proficiency in core job tasks, requiring cognitive ability, task knowledge, and habits (Pradhan and Jena, 2017; Mousa, 2020). Contextual performance refers to less formal behaviors that impact an organization's social and psychological setting, as influenced by work dedication, normative behavior, ethics, and leadership (Rana et al., 2019). Adaptive performance refers to an employee's capacity to adjust to quickly changing work settings (Pradhan and Jena, 2017).

Employees are crucial for an organization's smooth operations and goal achievement, and a lack of performance can hinder policy compliance (Abdullahi et al., 2023). Organizational psychology researchers emphasize the interconnectedness of employee performance and satisfaction, emphasizing the significance of a constructive work atmosphere and supportive worker relations for improved performance (Odero and Makori, 2018).

Higher education institutions face challenges in managing employees due to their freedom to prioritize tasks, work-life balance, and social identity (Mousa, 2020). Academic staff performance is high due to challenging relationships, conflicting demands, long workweeks, and substantial responsibilities (Okafor et al., 2023). Universities must grapple with staff turnover, which decreases the number of skilled and experienced employees, negatively impacting student performance (Abdullahi et al., 2023). Despite studies, there is a need for more studies on specific variables influencing worker performance in higher education (Mousa, 2020; Okafor et al., 2023). This study examines the influence of workplace relationships on educational staff performance at private universities in Mogadishu. It aims to improve job satisfaction and competitive advantage by fostering relationships that enhance academic staff's performance (Abdullahi et al., 2023); (Okafor et al., 2023). Previous studies have not scrutinized the link between workplace relationships and employee performance, leading to the development of a hypothesis based on existing theoretical and empirical data:

H1: A positive and direct correlation exists between workplace relationships and employee performance in private universities in Mogadishu.

2.3 Workplace relationships and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to the good feelings and pleasure at work, which are impacted by one's emotional state and disposition (Masum et al., 2015; Abun et al., 2018). It promotes motivation and accomplishment, rather than personal gratification, and encompasses various emotions and attitudes toward their current employment

(Gessese and Premanandam, 2023). Job satisfaction is an employee's favorable or enjoyable emotional state as a consequence of their evaluation of their present employment, taking into account both its excellent and harmful elements (Kim et al., 2023). The current research uses various definitions of job satisfaction proposed by scholars like Masum et al. (2015), Abun et al. (2018), Gesesse and Premanandam (2023), and Kim et al. (2023), as they are mutually supportive.

Masum et al. (2015) identified eight key motivating elements for job satisfaction: salary, supervisory support, job security, training opportunities, team cohesiveness, career advancement, working environment, organizational culture, and policy. Job satisfaction is influenced by work conditions, payment, promotion, supervision, and coworkers. Work conditions include safety, while compensation includes wages. Promotions increase responsibility, and supervisory behavior determines organizational success (Abun et al., 2018).

Research is crucial for developing policies and strategies to attract and retain skilled personnel in higher education, focusing on factors like compensation, oversight, and work environment (Gessese and Premanandam, 2023). The study by Masum et al. (2015) provides inconclusive results on the factors influencing job satisfaction. The study examines job satisfaction among academicians at Mogadishu's private universities by examining six key attributes: salary, job security, coworkers, working environment, organizational support, and supervision over education.

Job satisfaction significantly impacts workplace relationships, motivation, productivity, and organizational success. It reduces turnover and burnout and promotes employee happiness, thereby aiding in the development of optimistic work environments (Tran et al., 2018; Gesesse and Premanandam, 2023; Bella, 2023). Universities are crucial in promoting social justice and job satisfaction, aiding human resource directors in creating policies that foster a positive work environment (Masum et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2023).

High worker turnover negatively impacts an institution's recruitment budget and productivity (Kim et al., 2023). Prioritizing job satisfaction, especially among academic staff, can improve work productivity and increase skills, motivation, and retention while reducing discontented personnel, affecting institutional loyalty and job pursuit (Gessese and Premanandam, 2023). More studies are required to scrutinize these characteristics' influence on job satisfaction among university academic workforces (Masum et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2023). It acknowledges the necessity of additional research and documentation, as prior research has demonstrated a positive correlation between job satisfaction and workplace relationships (Anasi, 2020; Gesesse and Premanandam, 2023). The study proposes a research hypothesis after comprehensively investigating relevant theoretical literature:

H2: The hypothesis proposes a causal link between workplace connections and job satisfaction in Mogadishu's private university sector.

2.4 Job satisfaction and employee performance

Job satisfaction refers to the level of contentment that people have in their work, and it is often influenced by many driving factors (Gessese and Premanandam, 2023). It is a prevalent practice that affects job performance, and receiving prizes and accomplishments is

considered suitable (Bella, 2023). Furthermore, employees who are very satisfied with their jobs are likelier to stay with the company (Mohamed et al., 2024). Organizations highly value human resources because they help them perform better in a market where competition is fierce (Abun et al., 2018). Employee performance and work satisfaction are significant in achieving company goals and strategic objectives (Anasi, 2020). There is a relationship between job happiness and worker performance, as happier workers are more productive and successful in their roles within the institution (Eliyana et al., 2019). In addition, the study's results show that enhancing job satisfaction improves employee performance (Memon et al., 2023).

H3: The hypothesis postulates a causal relationship between job satisfaction and employee performance within the private university sector of Mogadishu.

2.5 Workplace relationships, job satisfaction, and employee performance

Workplace relationships significantly impact employee motivation, performance, and job longevity (Ngari and Agusioma, 2013). Strong relationships enhance job satisfaction, emotional state, and productivity (Abun et al., 2018). Effective management of positive relationships improves job satisfaction and productivity (Tran et al., 2018; Anasi, 2020). Management intervention can promote social activities and foster positive employee-employee relationships, fostering a healthy work environment and enhancing job satisfaction and performance (Abun et al., 2018; Cetinkaya et al., 2021; Basilio and Abun, 2023).

Workplace relationships are crucial in all organizational settings, including universities, as they involve interactions between individuals fulfilling their roles (Ndagire et al., 2023). Factors influence professional relationships among academic personnel, and regular assessment is essential to meet performance standards (Skaggs, 2015).

Positive workplace relationships among employees enable employers to focus on their staff, leading to better performance (Abdullahi et al., 2023). Employee performance directly impacts organizational success and is linked to employee efforts (Rana et al., 2019). Research shows that strong relationships with supervisors and reasonable access to organizational information significantly enhance employee performance (Mohamed et al., 2024). Efficient employee relations strategies substantially influence performance, and more studies are needed to examine the factors contributing to these relationships and their effect on job satisfaction and employee performance (Abdullahi et al., 2023).

Researchers analyzed previous studies on workplace relationships' impact on job satisfaction and employee performance, highlighting the need for further research to examine the correlation between these variables. Previous research has not utilized employee performance as a mediator in studying workplace relationships and job satisfaction. The study examines workplace relationships, job satisfaction, and employee performance among academic staff at private universities in Mogadishu. Hence, drawing from the available theoretical and empirical evidence, the subsequent hypothesis is formulated:

H4: Job satisfaction mediates the link between workplace relationships and employee performance at Mogadishu's private universities.

2.6 Theoretical framework

The Social Exchange theory, developed by American sociologist and pioneer in behavioral sociology George Homans, will serve as the foundation for this study. The theory postulates that an exchange process influences social behavior where individuals evaluate the benefits and risks of their relationships (Mohamed et al., 2024). The theory also explains that individuals form partnerships based on cost-benefit analysis, while firms establish implicit agreements with workers, rewarding their time and effort and providing necessary assistance (Abun et al., 2018). This theory has been chosen for this research because of its great relevance to many kinds of institutions, especially within the higher education environment. Workplace relationships, including the interactions between employers and employees and among employees themselves, are much esteemed by the majority of workers and may thus have a substantial influence on job satisfaction and employee performance. The variables being studied are strongly linked to social exchange theory.

2.7 Research model

Evaluating workplace relationships is essential for achieving the organization's objectives and fostering a positive work environment. Previous research conducted in underdeveloped nations has shown that academic staff with stronger workplace relationships and better levels of job satisfaction are more likely to experience a decrease in their academic employee performance. A few studies also examined the effect of employee performance in mediating the link between workplace relationships and job satisfaction among academic staff in higher education institutions. However, this research must be more adequately implemented in Somali higher education institutions. This study aims to fill the gap in research knowledge by proposing that employee performance acts as a mediator in the link between workplace relationships and job satisfaction in private universities in Mogadishu. Figure 1 depicts the model used in the study:

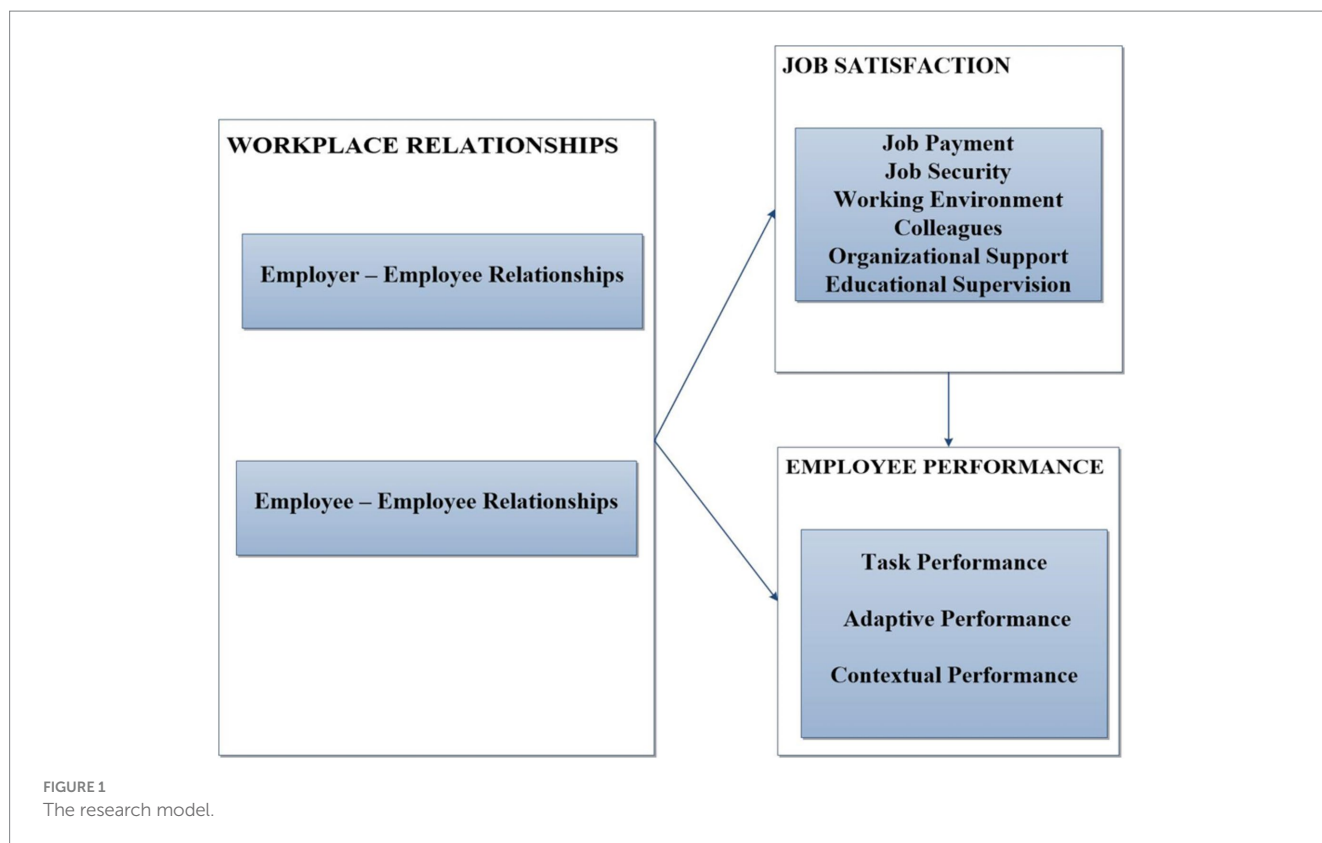
3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

The main goal of this research is to investigate how workplace relationships affect job satisfaction and employee performance. This study employed an explanatory research approach to this. This technique analyzes a specific situation or problem to examine the connections and interactions between different variables (Saunders et al., 2023).

3.2 Target population

This study's main aim is to investigate workplace relationships and their possible impact on job satisfaction and staff performance inside private universities in Mogadishu. The collapse of Somalia's central government in 1991 led to a prolonged civil war, which hurt several sectors, including higher education (Mohamed et al., 2024). In 1999, many parties collaborated to reinstate the higher education system (Mohamed et al., 2023a, 2023b). Somalia's capital, Mogadishu,



has experienced significant growth in its higher education sector, with private and state-owned universities playing a crucial role (Mohamed, 2020). According to recent data research conducted by Iftin Foundation (2022), Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, is home to one university the government controls and 67 privately owned institutions. The researchers chose four universities from a pool of 67 based on their distinguished student and faculty populations and student-to-lecturer ratios. Furthermore, these universities were among the earliest institutions established in Mogadishu. Mohamed et al. (2024) indicate that these universities were among the first established in Mogadishu. The selected universities had 342 lecturers, while all Somali institutions had 2,501 (Mohamed et al., 2023a, 2023b).

3.3 Sample size and sampling

The survey targeted 342 personnel from various universities, with a research sample size of 181, following Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table recommendations. To ensure equal opportunity, the study used a random sampling method to select participants from private universities in Mogadishu, including administrative staff and lecturers.

3.4 Measurements and data collections

The study used scales from previous research to identify workplace relationships, employee performance, and job satisfaction. Abun et al. (2018) identified two categories, Employer-Employee Relationship and Employee-Employee Relationship, with 12 items. Mousa (2020)

identified three items of employee performance: task, adaptive, and contextual performance, with 14 items. Noori (2023) identified six types of job satisfaction: job payment, job security, working environment, colleagues, organizational support, and educational supervision with 18 items. Participants provided ratings on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to agree strongly. The research consisted of 44 questions that examined the factors influencing job satisfaction and employee performance. The scales have been utilized in numerous studies pertaining to education and, consequently, are considered valid instruments. For this reason, the reliability of the scales was examined in this research, and it was determined that their composite reliabilities exceeded the threshold values.

The researchers used secondary and primary data, primarily questionnaires, to survey 198 faculty members at private universities in Mogadishu. The structured survey, a five-point Likert scale, was analyzed from 198 correctly completed responses. Secondary data was sourced from academic publications, books, and reports from various higher education institutions.

3.5 Data analysis

The quantitative data in this research was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26 with SMART PLS version 4. The hypotheses examined in this research were analyzed using structural equation modeling. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the socio-demographic features of the academic personnel. The instrument's reliability and validity were assessed through measurement modeling, while structural modeling was employed to examine the relationships among the research model's variables.

3.6 Ethical consideration

This study adhered to research ethics, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of data throughout all phases of the study, which is a crucial requirement for researchers involving human participants in social science research.

4 Findings

4.1 Respondents profile

Researchers conducted a data screening process using a Google form to minimize missing data and excluded 19 respondents with identical responses, indicating disengagement, from the study. The research examined five demographic variables and found that out of 198 participants, 150 identified as male, indicating a bias toward men due to cultural norms influencing labor demography in the nation. The data shows that 131 out of 198 participants were permanent workers, with 54 part-time employees and 13 special contractors, indicating that permanent staff employment is prevalent at these universities. The research categorized participants into five age groups: 59 under 30, 104 between 30 and 39, 28 between 40 and 49, and 7 over 50–59. Most participants were young, with the majority falling within the age range of 30 to 39.

The study categorized employment experience into four categories: 64 participants had less than 5 years, 113 had 6–15 years, 5 had over 21 years, and 16 had 16–20 years, indicating a significant degree of diversity within the workforce. The majority of 132 respondents in Mogadishu have a master’s degree, with 43 having a bachelor’s degree, four having extra degrees, and 19 holding doctorates. However, there is a significant need for more Ph.D. holders in private universities.

4.2 Measurement model evaluation and analysis

The measurement model evaluation is undertaken to evaluate the validity and reliability of the constructs. Multiple indicators were assessed to evaluate the measurement model’s validity and reliability. These indicators included factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), average variance extract (AVE), discriminant validity, and VIF to detect multicollinearity.

4.2.1 Constructs loadings, CR, AVE, and VIF for multicollinearity

Before data analysis, the researchers validated the measurement model to ascertain its construct validity, internal consistency, accuracy, and reliability. The study results are shown in Tables 1, 2, respectively.

All of the items’ factory loadings exceeded the 0.6 threshold that was recommended by Chin (1998), Hair et al. (2022), and Chua (2022). The composite reliability (CR) of all latent items in this research is above the recommended threshold of 0.7, as proposed by Hair et al. (2022) and Chua (2022). The composite reliability range for the latent constructs in this study was between 0.702 and 0.840. The average variance extract (AVE) represents the entire amount of

variation in the indicators that can be explained by the latent construct (Hair et al., 2022). The AVE values exhibited a range of 0.505 to 0.598, exceeding the predetermined threshold value of 0.5 (Chua, 2022; Hair et al., 2022). Thus, the outcome reveals that the study’s measuring model demonstrates the necessary existence of convergent validity (refer to Table 1).

4.2.2 Convergent and discriminant validities

Convergent validity is determined using two different methods, factor loading and average variance extracted (AVE), as shown in Table 1. After establishing the convergent validity, the next step is to assess the model’s discriminant validity by comparing the squared correlations across components and the average variance retrieved for each construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Chin (1998) and Fornell and Larcker (1981) have proposed two methods to evaluate discriminant validity in Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis. The evaluation used the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and the recently created heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT). Table 2 demonstrates the use of the Fornell-Larcker criterion.

The correlation between the chosen variable constructs and the square root of the average variance recovered from each construct, as shown in Table 2, was lower than the square root of the average extracted variance. Therefore, it was concluded that the variables demonstrated adequate discriminant validity. In light of the deficiencies identified in the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, the HTMT was formulated to improve the evaluation of the discriminant validity of the construct. As shown in Table 3, the study used the HTMT to assess the discriminant validity.

According to Henseler et al. (2015), an HTMT value less than 0.90 is considered acceptable for a model’s discriminant validity. The findings of our model evaluation, displayed in Table 3, indicate that all values are below 0.90. This further supports the Fornell-Larcker

TABLE 1 Constructs loadings, CR, AVE, and VIF for multicollinearity.

Variables	Indicators	Loading	CR	AVE	VIF
Employer-employee relationship	EER01	0.625	0.71	0.51	1.314
	EER02	0.675			1.397
	EER03	0.765			1.286
	EER04	0.78			1.413
Employee-employee relationship	ER01	0.722	0.702	0.598	1.456
	ER02	0.876			1.617
	ER03	0.712			1.181
Job satisfaction	JS01	0.692	0.84	0.505	1.645
	JS02	0.704			1.315
	JS03	0.757			1.777
	JS04	0.712			1.836
	JS05	0.69			1.759
	JS06	0.692			1.688
	JS07	0.727			1.89
Employee performance	EP01	0.705	0.724	0.535	1.315
	EP02	0.733			1.405
	EP03	0.73			1.446
	EP04	0.757			1.259

TABLE 2 Fornell-Larcker criterion.

Variables	(EP)	(ER)	(EER)	(JS)
Employee performance (EP)	0.731			
Employee and employee relationships (ER)	0.286	0.774		
Employer and employee relationships (EER)	0.301	0.289	0.714	
Job satisfaction (JS)	0.535	0.380	0.268	0.711

TABLE 3 HTMT ratio.

Variables	(EP)	(ER)	(EER)	(JS)
Employee performance (EP)				
Employee and employee relationships (ER)	0.403			
Employer and employee relationships (EER)	0.393	0.424		
Job satisfaction (JS)	0.665	0.491	0.349	

Criterion and validates the discriminant validity of the constructs in our model.

4.2.3 Model fit

One of the first indices proposed to address this issue was the goodness-of-fit index (GoF), which offers a practical way to assess the PLS model’s overall validity (Hu and Bentler, 1998). The model’s adequacy was evaluated based on five indicators: SRMR, D_LS, D_G, NFI, and Chi-square indices. SRMR measures the difference between the observed and anticipated correlation matrices. The goodness of fit addresses any errors in the model specification (Hair et al., 2022). Dijkstra and Henseler (2015) introduced two methods, d_LS and d_G, for computing discrepancy, with statistical significance of the empirical correlation matrix not exceeding $p > 0.05$. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) is a statistical measure that calculates the Chi-square value for a proposed model and compares it to a reference point. It ranges from 0 to 1, with a value above 0.90 indicating a well-fitting model (Hu and Bentler, 1998). The research used the Goodness of Fit approach to assess the appropriateness of the model fit, as seen in Table 4.

The research employs the usage of SRMR, with a value lower than 0.086, which indicates that the findings are promising and satisfy the acceptable threshold. The study used d_LS and d_G to compute disparities, with a statistical significance of $p > 0.05$. Both d_LS and d_G satisfy the requirements, demonstrating their acceptability. The research used the Normed Fit Index (NFI) to evaluate the model’s overall fit. A reasonable degree of fit is achieved when the NFI exceeds the threshold of 0.90. The study shown in Table 4 indicates that the model displays an acceptable degree of conformity.

4.3 Analysis of the structural model

The next step in evaluating PLS-SEM involves examining the structural model, which was assessed and found acceptable after testing. The assessment processes include multicollinearity, Coefficient of determination, predictive relevance, effect magnitude, and path coefficients, with detailed information for each stage.

TABLE 4 Model fit.

Fit indices	SRMR	D-ULS	DG	NFI
Standard values	<0.10	>0.05	>0.05	>0.90
Findings	0.086	1.276	0.356	0.949

4.3.1 Collinearity

The study conducted a comprehensive collinearity diagnostic to detect common method bias in the data obtained from a single source using the same instrument. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was assessed to ensure the lack of collinearity among items, with VIF levels below five, as recommended by Hair et al. (2022) and Chua (2022). The results from Table 1 indicate that our model does not exhibit collinearity.

4.3.2 Effect F-square (F2), coefficient of determination (R2), and predictive relevance (Q2)

F-square refers to the change in R-square that occurs when an exogenous variable is excluded from the model (Cohen, 1998). The external construct’s impact on the endogenous construct is classified as slight, moderate, or vigorous, with numbers 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 representing the degrees of impact (Chua, 2022). The study’s findings are presented in Table 5. The coefficient of determination (R2) is a crucial statistic for evaluating the PLS-SEM path model’s predictive accuracy and assessing the influence of endogenous components on exogenous variables (Chin, 1998). Falk and Miller (1992) emphasized that an R2 value of 0.10 or higher is necessary for assessing the sufficient explanation of an endogenous component’s variance. The study’s findings are reported in Table 5. Q-square is a statistical tool that assesses the predictive relevance of a model, with values above zero indicating well-reconstructed values and values below zero indicating less relevant predictive value (Hair et al., 2022). The results of the study about Q-square are shown in Table 5.

The table analysis shows that no variable significantly affects employee performance, with each contributing little. Employee performance has a small effect, with a relationship between employer and employee performance of 0.032 or 3.2%, indicating a small influence. In addition, variable employee relationships for employee performance are equivalent to 0.005 or 0.5%, indicating a small effect.

TABLE 5 F2, R2, and Q2.

Variables	F2	R2	R2 Adjusted	Q2
Employee-employee relationships and EP	0.005			
Employer-employee relationships and EP	0.032			
Employee-employee relationships and JS	0.121			
Employer-employee relationships and JS	0.033			
Job satisfaction (JS) and EP	0.267	0.172	0.163	0.136
Employee performance (EP)		0.317	0.306	0.091

Effect F-square (F2), coefficient of determination (R2), and predictive relevance (Q2). Bold values indicate Q-square findings.

TABLE 6 Direct relationships.

Variables	T-statistics	p values	Results
Employer and employee relationships → employee performance	2.183	0.029	Accepted
Employer and employee relationships → job satisfaction	2.392	0.017	Accepted
Employee relationships → employee performance	0.679	0.497	Rejected
Employee relationships → job satisfaction	3.861	0.000	Accepted
Job satisfaction → employee performance	7.868	0.000	Accepted

TABLE 7 Indirect relationships.

Variables	T-Statistics	p values	Results
Employee relationships → job satisfaction → employee performance	3.384	0.001	Accepted
Employer and employee relationships → job satisfaction → employee performance	2.151	0.032	Accepted

The study found that employee relationships have a moderate impact on job satisfaction, with 12.1%, while employer-employee relationships have a slight influence, with a 0.033 effect. Lastly, a significant effect is shown by the Job satisfaction variable for job satisfaction, which is equivalent to 0.267 or 26.7%. All of these findings are consistent with the recommendations made by Cohen (1998).

The R2 value for employee performance is 0.317, indicating that 31.7% of differences in performance can be attributed to workplace relationships, including employer-subordinate ties and employee relationships, as shown in Table 5. Table 5 reveals that workplace relationships, including those between employers, subordinates, and employees, significantly impact 17.2% of job satisfaction. The research findings align with Cohen's (1998) and Falk and Miller's (1992) suggestions.

The PLs predict process-determined Q2 values of 0.091 and 0.136 for employee performance and job satisfaction, confirming the model's predictive relevance as the estimated Q2 values exceeded zero (Hair et al., 2022). The study results are consistent with the recommendations made by Hair et al. (2022).

4.3.3 Direct relationships

The study examines the hypothesis using a two-tailed confidence interval and a significance level 0.05. It determines the direction of the link between endogenous and exogenous variables (Hair et al., 2022). The test involves analyzing probability values and t-statistics, with a 5% alpha value (p-value) indicating a likelihood less than 0.05 and a t-value equal to or higher than 1.96, indicating a statistically significant level of 5%. The acceptance or rejection of a hypothesis is determined by its significance (Hair et al., 2022). The study's results are shown in Table 6.

Table 7 reveals a significant association between research variables, indicating that the relationship between employers and employees significantly impacts employee performance, with a p-value of 0.029, which is lower than the significance threshold of 0.05 and a T-Statistics value of 2.183, exceeding the t-value of 1.96. The study found an insignificant correlation between employee relationships and employee performance, with a t-value of 0.679 and a p-value of 0.497. There was a substantial association between employee relationships and job satisfaction, with a p-value of 0.000 and a t-value of 3.861. The study also indicates a positive correlation between employers and employees and job satisfaction, with a p-value less than the 0.05 level ($p < 0.017$) and a T-Statistics value less than the t-value of 1.96 ($t > 2.392$). Finally, the research reveals a significant correlation between job satisfaction and employee performance, as indicated by a p-value of 0.000 and a t-value of 7.868.

4.3.4 Analysis of mediation results

A mediator variable in social science research influences the relationship between dependent and independent variables, and its use is increasingly necessary in modern literature and research projects (Hair et al., 2022). Chua (2022) categorized the mediating effect size values as high (0.25), medium (0.09), and small (0.01). The study analyzed the indirect impact of workplace relationship dimensions on employee performance and job satisfaction, with Table 7 providing a concise overview of the findings.

The study's inverse correlation was assessed using a bootstrapping approach, with job satisfaction as the mediating variable. The associations between employee relationships, job satisfaction, and employee performance are statistically significant, as shown by

t -values of 3.384 and p -values of 0.001. Similarly, the associations between employer-employee relationships, job satisfaction, and employee performance are statistically significant, as shown by t -values of 2.151 and p -values of 0.032. This indicates that job satisfaction plays a role in partly mediating the connection between dimensions of workplace relationships and employee performance. The findings of the study align with the recommendation put forth by Chua (2022).

4.4 Discussions

4.4.1 Workplace relationships and employee performance

The study reveals a significant correlation ($p = 0.029$) between employer-employee relationships and employee performance, particularly among private universities in Mogadishu, indicating that adopting strategies to manage the relationship between employers and employees significantly impacts employee performance. This study's findings align with Arimie (2019), and Okafor et al. (2023), who observed positive impacts of employer-employee relationships on job satisfaction. However, the negative relationship between employee interactions and performance Tran et al. (2018), who found positive correlations in similar environments. This discrepancy may stem from cultural or institutional variations, highlighting a need for further study on the contextual influences affecting workplace dynamics. The unexpected negative correlation between employee relationships and performance suggests potential contextual factors, such as role competition, differing priorities, or conflicts among academic staff, which could negatively impact performance. Hypothetically, high levels of informal interaction among staff may detract from task focus, or differing team dynamics could introduce tension that interferes with productivity, with a p -value of 0.497, $p > 0.05$. The results of this study are different from different from previous research conducted by Tran et al. (2018), Arimie (2019), Okafor et al. (2023), and Abdullahi et al. (2023).

4.4.2 Workplace relationships and job satisfaction

The study reveals a significant correlation between employee-employee relationships and job satisfaction, with a p -value of 0.000, $p < 0.05$, suggesting that high relationships among employees at private universities in Mogadishu are likely to lead to increased job satisfaction. Effective communication is crucial for fostering positive employee relations, which are linked to increased job motivation and confidence, thus indicating that these relationships may significantly affect job satisfaction (Basilio and Abun, 2023; Mohamed et al., 2024). The findings of this study align with the outcomes of previous research conducted by Abun et al. (2018), Anasi (2020), Bella (2023), and Mohamed et al. (2024).

The researcher's findings indicate that employer-employee relationships significantly impact job satisfaction. The study's findings demonstrate a statistically significant correlation between employer-employee relationships and job satisfaction (p -value of 0.017; $p < 0.05$). Strong employer-employee relations at private universities in Mogadishu would lead to an increase in job satisfaction.

Positive employer-employee relationships are crucial for organizational success. They enhance employee engagement,

productivity, and job satisfaction, demonstrating the influence of these relationships on job satisfaction (Mohamed et al., 2024). This study's findings correspond to those of previous studies (Abun et al., 2018; Basilio and Abun, 2023; Mohamed et al., 2024).

4.4.3 Employee performance and job satisfaction

The research findings show that job satisfaction and employee performance have a positive relationship, with a p -value of 0.0.00, $p < 0.05$. The results of this study are consistent with previous research conducted by Eliyana et al. (2019) and Memon et al. (2023).

4.4.4 Workplace relationships, job satisfaction, and employee performance

The results clarify the role of job satisfaction as a mediator. Table 7 reveals that job satisfaction partially mediates the connection between workplace relationship dimensions and employee performance. This indicates that the enhancement of job satisfaction may be contingent upon the dimensions of workplace relationships. Moreover, these results enhance our understanding of the importance of job satisfaction and illustrate its ability to enhance employee performance. The findings of this study are consistent with the results of prior research undertaken by Abun et al. (2018), Tran et al. (2018), Arimie (2019), Eliyana et al. (2019), Anasi (2020), Bella (2023), Abdullahi et al. (2023), Memon et al. (2023), Okafor et al. (2023), and Mohamed et al. (2024).

4.5 Theoretical implications

This research makes substantial contributions to the existing literature on workplace relationships, job satisfaction, and employee performance. By addressing the research gap concerning strategies to enhance these relationships, it offers valuable insights for both theoretical understanding and theoretical implementation. The study builds upon previous research by conducting a more in-depth analysis of interpersonal dynamics and antecedents, providing a more comprehensive perspective on the factors influencing workplace relationships and their subsequent impact on job satisfaction and employee performance. The application of social exchange theory to analyze faculty relationships in an academic context is particularly noteworthy. This approach not only enhances our understanding of workplace relationships in general but also provides specific insights into the unique dynamics present in academic environments. Moreover, the study's framework has been designed with versatility in mind, allowing for its application across diverse academic and professional settings beyond the immediate context of the research. This adaptability increases the potential impact and relevance of the study's findings across various industries and organizational structures. Furthermore, by focusing on the context of Somalia, specifically Mogadishu, the research offers valuable insights into workplace dynamics in a region that has been historically underrepresented in such studies. This localized approach provides policymakers and private universities in Mogadishu with actionable strategies to improve employer-employee and inter-employee relationships, potentially leading to enhanced job satisfaction and performance in these institutions.

4.6 Practical implications

The research findings elucidate the complex interrelationship between workplace relationships, job satisfaction, and employee performance, particularly within the context of private universities in Mogadishu. These interconnected factors constitute a multifaceted ecosystem that significantly influences the overall work environment and organizational efficacy. By prioritizing the enhancement of workplace relationships, university administration can foster a more positive and supportive atmosphere, which may subsequently lead to increased job satisfaction among faculty and staff. This heightened satisfaction is likely to manifest in improved employee performance, as individuals who feel valued and connected to their colleagues tend to exhibit higher levels of motivation and commitment to their roles. Moreover, addressing these key variables could have far-reaching implications for the institutions as a whole. Increased employee performance resulting from stronger workplace relationships and higher job satisfaction may lead to reduced attrition rates, which is particularly crucial in academic settings where continuity and expertise retention are paramount. The implementation of targeted professional development initiatives, such as workshops and seminars focused on fostering workplace connections and improving job satisfaction, could serve as effective interventions. These initiatives would not only provide employees with valuable skills and insights but also demonstrate the university's commitment to their well-being and professional growth. Ultimately, this study contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on workplace dynamics, offering practical implications for university management and potentially informing future research and policy decisions in the higher education sector.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the pivotal role of professional workplace relationships in influencing job satisfaction and employee performance within academic institutions in Mogadishu. To address issues of burnout, isolation, and lack of support, it is recommended that universities implement structured mentorship programs, provide clear paths for career advancement, and promote mental health support systems. Such programs would not only enhance job satisfaction but also support sustained performance by fostering a well-rounded and supportive work environment. Regular engagement surveys could further help institutions identify specific areas of improvement, allowing for targeted interventions that empower staff and reduce attrition. To cultivate a more efficient and gratifying work environment, private universities should prioritize initiatives that encourage transparent communication, mutual trust, and collaborative efforts. Furthermore, the implementation of workplace relationships and the promotion of a cooperative organizational culture can further enhance workplace satisfaction and employee performance. By providing specialized training programs and workshops focused on relationship-building, university administrations can equip their academic staff with the requisite skills to establish and maintain robust professional networks. These findings offer valuable insights for educational institutions aiming to foster a harmonious and high-performing workplace.

5.1 Limitations and future studies

The study acknowledges its limitation in population as it encompassed only the employees of private universities in Mogadishu. Consequently, further research is necessary to corroborate or refute the findings of this study, examining universities in other contexts, different types of employees, and across various countries. This study relied solely on quantitative methods, future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach to gain more comprehensive insights into the effects of workplace relationships on academic performance and research productivity. Based on self-reported and perceived responses, the results may not be generalizable due to response bias. This study underscores the need to examine additional factors such as stress management, student and lecturer relationships, organizational trust and commitment, employee silence, and staff turnover in subsequent research.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Research and Development Center, SIMAD University. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

MM: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft. FM: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Resources, Validation, Writing – original draft. IM: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing – review & editing. MF: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Resources, Writing – review & editing.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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