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Examining the Impact of Cognitive Flexibility on Quality of Work Life Considering the Mediating Role of Job Equity among Primary School Teachers in Simorgh County

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A B S T R A C T

The mediating role of job equity in the relationship between cognitive flexibility and quality of work life should not be overlooked. Job equity is one of the most critical issues that various organizations strive to achieve and implement today. The present study aimed to examine the impact of cognitive flexibility on the quality of work life considering the mediating role of job equity among primary school teachers in Simorgh County. This applied research employed a descriptive-survey design. The statistical population consisted of 230 primary school teachers in Simorgh County. Using Cochran's formula, a sample of 144 participants was randomly selected. Data were collected through standardized questionnaires, including the Cognitive Flexibility Inventory by Dennis and Vander Wal (2010), Walton's Quality of Work Life Questionnaire (1975), and the Job Equity Questionnaire by Barkhoda et al. (2021). Data analysis was conducted using structural equation modeling in Amos 21 software. The results indicated that cognitive flexibility impacts the quality of work life through the mediating role of job equity among primary school teachers in Simorgh County. Overall, it can be concluded that job equity plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between cognitive flexibility and quality of work life among teachers. Job equity creates a supportive and equitable environment that enables the effective utilization of cognitive flexibility, providing teachers with equal opportunities for professional growth and resource access.

Keywords: *Cognitive Flexibility, Quality of Work Life, Job Equity.*

1. Introduction

Cognitive flexibility is often described as the ability to shift one's thinking from old situations to new ones, overcome common responses or thoughts, and adapt to new situations (Miles et al., 2020; Miles et al., 2021). Thus, an individual is considered cognitively flexible if they can overcome their previous beliefs or habits when needed (Parvaresh et al., 2024). Ultimately, the ability to simultaneously think about two aspects of a subject, object, idea, or situation depends on cognitive flexibility (Lin, 2021). Based on these definitions, when sorting cards according to specific rules, children are deemed cognitively flexible if they can sort the cards simultaneously by the color of objects and the type of objects on the cards (Guarino et al., 2020). Generally, cognitive flexibility is defined as the ability to simultaneously be aware of all possible options in a specific situation. It is the capacity to construct or reconstruct personal knowledge in various ways to meet situational demands (Yu et al., 2020). Additionally, it refers to the human ability to adapt cognitive processing strategies to cope with new and unexpected environmental conditions (Arán Filippetti & Krumm, 2020; Cai & Qi, 2023; Yağan & Kaya, 2023).

Various factors are associated with cognitive flexibility, one of which is the quality of work life. In contemporary management, the quality of work life has become a major social issue worldwide (Orakcı, 2021). Advocates of quality of work life theory seek new systems to assist employees in balancing their work and personal lives (Bertiz & Karoglu, 2020). The quality of work life program includes any improvement in organizational culture that fosters employee growth and development within the organization. Hence, the value system of quality of work life emphasizes investing in individuals as the most important variable in the strategic management equation, believing that meeting employee needs leads to long-term improvement and efficiency within organizations. The current emphasis on quality of work life reflects its recognized importance (Magalhães et al., 2020).

The mediating role of job equity in the relationship between cognitive flexibility and quality of work life should not be overlooked (Yağan & Kaya, 2023). Job equity is one of the most critical topics that organizations today strive to achieve and implement (Yıldız-Akyol & Boyacı, 2020). Organizations with established job equity are successful, with motivated and enthusiastic employees who work toward the organization's goals and interests (Gram-Hanssen, 2019). Job equity fosters high morale among employees, increasing their effectiveness and efficiency in the workplace (Siqi-Liu & Egner, 2020). Unfortunately, existing statistics indicate that job equity for men and women is lacking in some societies, including ours. Men find jobs more easily, experience greater job security, and are more valued in organizations, with quicker and easier career advancement. Men face fewer obstacles to achieving goals and success in their careers, though this does not apply to all organizations (Ghosh & Halder, 2020).

Considering these points, it is crucial to examine cognitive flexibility's impact on the quality of work life, given the mediating role of job equity among primary school teachers in Simorgh County. This study aims to investigate the impact of cognitive flexibility on the quality of work life, with job equity as a mediator, among primary school teachers in Simorgh County. The main research question is whether cognitive flexibility affects the quality of work life considering the mediating role of job equity among primary school teachers in Simorgh County.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This research falls under applied research and employs a descriptive-survey design. The statistical population consisted of 230 primary school teachers in Simorgh County. The required minimum sample size was determined using Cochran's formula, resulting in a sample of 144 participants, selected through simple random sampling.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Cognitive Flexibility

The Cognitive Flexibility Inventory, designed by Dennis and Vander Wal in 2010, consists of 20 items with three subscales (alternatives, control, and human behavior alternatives). This inventory is used to assess an individual's progress in clinical and non-clinical settings for developing cognitive flexibility in cognitive-behavioral therapy for depression and other psychological disorders. It uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from "very low" to "very high."(Cheraghpour Khonakdar et al., 2023).

2.2.2. Quality of Work Life

The Quality of Work Life Questionnaire, developed by Walton in 1973, evaluates quality of work life across eight dimensions (adequate and fair compensation, safe and

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healthy work environment, continued growth and security opportunities, organizational lawfulness, human capabilities, social integration, overall life space, and social relevance of work life). Responses to each item are scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "very low" to "very high." (Darmoko, 2024; Maarefvand & Shafiabady, 2024).

2.2.3. Job Equity

The Job Equity Questionnaire, developed by Barkhoda et al. in 2021, contains 41 items across four dimensions: salary and benefits, job promotion, job limitations, and job responsibilities. Responses are scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "very low" to "very high."

2.3. Data analysis

The reliability of the instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. A pilot study involving 30 preliminary questionnaires was conducted, and the reliability coefficients were calculated using AMOS21. The Cronbach's alpha for cognitive flexibility was 0.85, for quality of work life was 0.90, and for job equity was 0.86, indicating satisfactory reliability for all instruments.

Data analysis was performed using statistical methods, including structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS21 software.

3. Findings and Results

The descriptive statistics for the study variables, including mean (M) and standard deviation (SD), are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables

Variable	M	SD
Cognitive Flexibility	3.85	0.72
Job Equity	3.57	0.68
Quality of Work Life	3.91	0.76

The average score for cognitive flexibility was 3.85 (SD = 0.72), indicating that participants reported a relatively high level of cognitive adaptability in workplace contexts. Job equity had a mean score of 3.57 (SD = 0.68), suggesting moderate perceptions of fairness and equity within the organizational setting. The quality of work life demonstrated a mean score of 3.91 (SD = 0.76), reflecting overall favorable evaluations of workplace conditions and satisfaction.

Table 2 displays the correlation matrix among the study variables.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

Variable	Cognitive Flexibility	Job Equity	Quality of Work Life
Cognitive Flexibility	1.00	0.22	0.25
Job Equity	0.22	1.00	0.20
Quality of Work Life	0.25	0.20	1.00

A moderate positive correlation was observed between cognitive flexibility and quality of work life (r = 0.25), indicating that individuals with greater cognitive flexibility are likely to report higher satisfaction with their work life. Cognitive flexibility also demonstrated a positive correlation with job equity (r = 0.22), suggesting that cognitively flexible individuals perceive a greater sense of fairness and equity in the workplace. Lastly, job equity was positively correlated with the quality of work life (r = 0.20), highlighting the role of fairness and equity in enhancing overall workplace satisfaction. All correlations fall within the expected range and are statistically significant.

The structural equation model diagram tested to examine the research objectives are shown for the standardized estimation state in the following:

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Figure 1

Standardized Coefficients in the Final Model

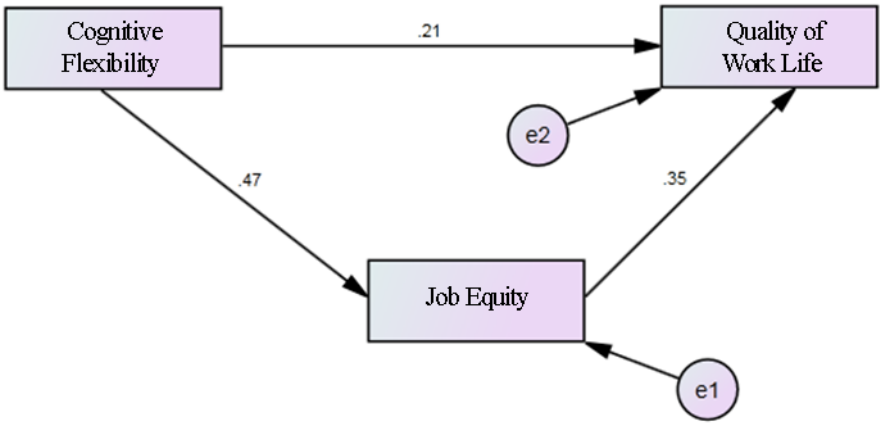

Table 3

Estimated Coefficients of the Structural Equation Model

Independent Variable	Coefficient	Standardized Coefficient	Estimation Error	Critical Value	Significance Level
Cognitive Flexibility → Job Equity	0.491	0.469	0.077	6.353	0.000
Job Equity → Quality of Work Life	0.365	0.346	0.088	4.166	0.000

The Sobel test was used to examine the mediating role. The results of the test are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Results of the Sobel Test

Significance Level	z-value	Sb	Sa	b	a
0.000	3.476	0.088	0.077	0.365	0.491

Based on the results, the z-value is greater than 1.96, and the significance level is less than 0.05. Therefore, it can be stated that cognitive flexibility influences the quality of work life, considering the mediating role of job equity among primary school teachers in Simorgh County.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicate that since the absolute value of the z-statistic for the mediating role of job equity among primary school teachers in Simorgh County exceeds 1.96, job equity serves as a mediator in the relationship between cognitive flexibility and quality of work life. In other words, the impact of cognitive flexibility on the quality of work life can also be explained through job equity, highlighting its mediating role.

According to prior studies, the findings align with prior studies (Gram-Hanssen, 2019; Yağan & Kaya, 2023). The results demonstrate that job equity plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between cognitive flexibility and quality of work life. Cognitive flexibility, which refers to an individual's ability to shift thought patterns and adapt to changing conditions, has a significant and positive direct relationship with the quality of work life (Magalhães et al., 2020). Individuals with high cognitive flexibility are better equipped to handle workplace challenges, maintain calm in stressful situations, and propose effective solutions to work-related problems. This trait alone can improve the quality of work life, but its impact is amplified when paired with job equity (Yu et al., 2020).

Job equity entails the fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities in the workplace. It is

achieved when teachers feel they have equal conditions for professional development and access to resources compared to their colleagues. This sense of justice and equity fosters a healthier work environment where teachers are more motivated and generally more satisfied with their work life (Siqi-Liu & Egner, 2020).

The findings reveal that job equity significantly enhances the impact of cognitive flexibility on the quality of work life. In equitable workplaces, teachers with high cognitive flexibility can more effectively confront challenges and leverage equal opportunities for professional growth. Conversely, the absence of job equity may diminish the positive effects of cognitive flexibility, as feelings of injustice can lead to stress, dissatisfaction, and reduced job commitment (Ghosh & Halder, 2020).

These findings highlight that the combination of cognitive flexibility and job equity can significantly improve the quality of work life for teachers. Job equity serves as a foundational factor, creating an environment where teachers can fully utilize their cognitive abilities and derive greater satisfaction from their work life.

Consequently, it is recommended that educational policymakers and administrators develop and implement strategies that emphasize creating and maintaining job equity among teachers. This factor not only directly enhances the quality of work life but also strengthens the positive effects of cognitive flexibility.

This study concludes that job equity plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between cognitive flexibility and the quality of work life for teachers. Cognitive flexibility, as a vital psychological trait, helps teachers perform better in the face of professional challenges and improve their quality of work life. However, this effect reaches its peak when a fair and equitable work environment is established.

Job equity, by providing a supportive and fair workplace, creates a foundation that allows teachers to fully utilize their cognitive abilities and benefit from equal opportunities for professional growth and resource access. A sense of fairness and the absence of discrimination in the workplace enhance job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and teacher motivation, thereby amplifying the positive impact of cognitive flexibility on the quality of work life.

To improve teachers' quality of work life, it is essential to focus on strengthening job equity and fostering a fair environment. Educational managers and policymakers should adopt approaches that emphasize justice and equity in the workplace, enabling teachers to maximize their cognitive capacities and derive greater satisfaction from their work life. These findings provide a basis for effective decision-making in human resource management and educational planning.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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