



Research Article

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The Effect of Nepotism and Knowledge Sharing on the Performance of Academic Staff in Jordan: The Mediating Role of Trust

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Abstract

The performance of employees is important for all organizations. The literature has focused on this performance in the business organization while few examined it in the educational context. Important variables such as knowledge sharing (KS), nepotism, and trust have not been widely investigated in educational settings in developing countries. The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of KS, nepotism, as well as trust on the performance of academic staff (PAS). In addition, the study investigates trust as a mediator in the link between nepotism-KS-PAS. Based on the review of theories and prior studies, the study proposed a positive effect of KS and trust on PAS while the negative effect of nepotism on PAS. Trust will mediate these effects. The population of this study is the academic staff in Amman, the capital of Jordan. A total of 332 responses were collected using stratified random sampling. The data was collected via an online questionnaire. The data was analyzed using Smart PLS. The finding showed that KS, and trust affected positively PAS while Nepotism negatively affected PAS. Trust mediated the effect of KS on PAS. Universities have to establish a trusting culture to encourage KS. Nepotism is harmful to the performance of organizations and individuals. Universities have to eliminate the source of nepotism by implementing a fair and justice culture.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, Nepotism, Performance of academic staff, Trust

1. Introduction

Higher education in universities includes several key stakeholders such as students, academic staff, non-academic staff, and university management. Academic staff is the most important because qualified and active academic staff can help in improving the contribution of the university and its ranking as well as its contribution to the society. Therefore, the performance of academic staff (PAS) to a large degree determines the contribution and the performance of a university (Abba & Mugizi, 2018; Ofuyatan & Edeki, 2018). This is because the academic staff is responsible for creating new knowledge and sharing this knowledge among students and others in society in the form of public lectures and workshops (Maican et al., 2019; Schmalings et al., 2019).

Universities and countries around the world rely on their academic staff to improve the ranking

and contribution of the university and the country. For example, in 2021, in the United States (US), the number of articles published in Scopus and Web of Science Database accounts for 12,839,607 with h-index of the country accounting for 2,386. Other countries recorded high number of publications as well as h-index, this includes China, United Kingdom (UK), Germany, Japan, France, Italy, Canada, India, and Australia. While in comparison, the highest h-index of the Middle Eastern countries is 361 for Saudi Arabia followed by 329 for Iran. On the other hand, the h-index of Jordan accounted for 176 (SCImago, 2021).

Further, in terms of the universities' rankings, western universities have high ranks compared with other universities around the world. Among the first 500 universities, the overwhelming majority are American universities followed by European universities (Webometric, 2020). Some Asian universities such as Japanese, South Korean, Chinese, and Singaporean universities were listed among the first 500 universities. Only three universities from the Middle East (Saudi Arabia and Iran) were listed among the first 500 universities (Webometric, 2020).

Against this view, the studies pertaining to academic staff in Jordan and other developing countries are limited (Al-Mzary et al., 2015; Siron et al., 2015). The majority of previous studies focused on the employee performance in the context of business organizations while in the context of educational institutions in developing countries, there is a lack of studies (Ghabban et al., 2018; Muda et al., 2017). Therefore, the need arose to study the PAS in developing countries and determine the predictors that can influence performance.

In Jordan, the actual PAS is less than the expected performance (Al-Mzary et al., 2015). Academic staff is less productive, compared to other regional countries, and this could be due to the high nepotism in the country (El-Said & Harrigan, 2009; Loewe et al., 2013; Muasher, 2011) as well as the lack of KS among academic staff (Ige et al., 2019; Ramjeawon & Rowley, 2017; Tan, 2016). In addition, trust among the academic staff is essential to improve their productivity (Iqbal et al., 2019). Nevertheless, few previous studies have examined these variables in the context of PAS in developing countries (Houldsworth, 2020; Rahman et al., 2018; Virgana & Kasyadi, 2020).

In July 2020, one of the leading universities in Jordan dismissed 21 academic staff because they did not publish an article in the last five years (Alghad, 2020). Publication of reliable articles in Jordan is lower than most of regional countries. Until January 2021, number of reliable articles in Jordan accounted to 45,884 while countries such as Tunisia, which has almost same population as Jordan published 94,962 articles, Saudi Arabia published 211,269 articles, United Arab Emirates (UAE) published 62,282 articles (SCImago, 2021). Further, the ranking of the best Jordanian universities; University of Jordan is 1149th while the King Saud University in Saudi Arabia occupied the rank of 415th worldwide followed by Cairo University from Egypt in the rank of 602nd and American University of Beirut in the rank of 637th. Jordan as a country occupied the ninth rank among Arab countries (Webometric, 2020). Therefore, this study is conducted to examine the relationship among the variables.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Performance of Academic Staff

Several studies attempt to understand the predictors of the performance of employees (Alawamleh et al., 2018; Mathews & Khann, 2016; Sanyal & Hisam, 2018; Sujatha & Krishnaveni, 2018; Theresia et al., 2018). Nevertheless, previous studies focused more on manufacturing and industrial as well as business organizations so the findings of previous studies cannot be generalized on the PAS (Lawal et al., 2017; McHugh et al., 2019; Oaya et al., 2017; Realyvásquez et al., 2016; Teryima et al., 2016).

Prior studies in employee performance investigated performance as a single dimension construct. However, with the complexity of the working environment, employee performance is increasingly treated as a multidimensional construct (Mawoli and Babandako, 2011). There is variation in the measurement of PAS while studies used one dimension such as Mehmood and

Ahmad (2016) who deployed three questions to measure the PAS. Ali and Musah (2012) also used one dimension. Other studies have measured performance using two dimensions such as Cadez et al. (2017) who measured performance using teaching quality and research productivity. Three dimensions and more were used also in previous studies such as Hassna et al. (2009) and Zhou et al. (2010). All the multi-dimensions measurements include the teaching performance and research performance. Consequently, the PAS is evaluated using these two criteria in this research.

2.2 Overview of Higher Learning Institutions in Jordan

The universities in Jordan encourage researchers to publish articles. Publication by the law has an allocation of 2% of the budget of private universities (Mah'd & Buckland, 2009). The university also provides training courses for staff to sharpen their skills and capabilities in publishing and teaching. After the appointment, academic staff gets specialized workshops related to teaching and publication as well as assessment. The training is mandatory for all academic staff and considered as one of the criteria to be prompted to a higher position. Private and public universities establish a staff academic development centre in which the staff gets a variety of training (European Commission, 2017).

Public universities are in charge of determining the issue and governance of the service of academic staff. The specification of the terms is established by the council of higher education (COHE). The governing law decides the minimum qualification that is needed for academic staff to be recruited, promotion policy, working time, teaching load, duties of the academic staff, salaries, and compensations which include the retirement or end service compensation and other practices of the academic staff (Al-Khasawneh & Moh'd Futa, 2013; Alshura & Assuli, 2017).

In Jordan, policymakers are concerned due to the high brain drain in the country and the desire of academic staff to migrate the country to other countries that offer higher salaries and advantages. To counter this issue, the council of higher education set a law of devoting 2% of the revenue of universities to send academic staff to prestigious universities. In addition, the council monitors the ratio of academic staff to students for quality assurance (Al-Twal et al., 2019; Al-Attari, 2020; Albalas et al., 2019; Wanniarachchi et al., 2020).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Among the theories that support the association between the variables of this research is the social exchange theory (SET) which is described as "the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or expensive, between at least two persons" (Van Wijk et al., 2014). Trust and KS are essential (Dyer & Chu, 2011). The theory argues that trust functions as a link between individuals in managing internal and external interactions (Brown et al., 2019; Gorondutse & Hilman, 2019). Tlaiss and Elamin (2015) utilized the SET which described properly the link between the variables. Iqbal et al. (2019) utilized the theory to explain the association between interpersonal trust as a mediating variable in the setting of E-HRM and employee productivity. In this work, the SET is used to explain the direct influence of KS on PAS, and it is also employed to explain the mediating function of trust in the setting of PAS.

2.4 Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

Based on SET, this study proposed that KS, and trust are critical for the PAS and expected to have a positive effect on PAS. Nepotism in this study is expected to have a negative effect on the PAS. The study also proposes a mediating role of trust between KS and nepotism, and PAS. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this study.

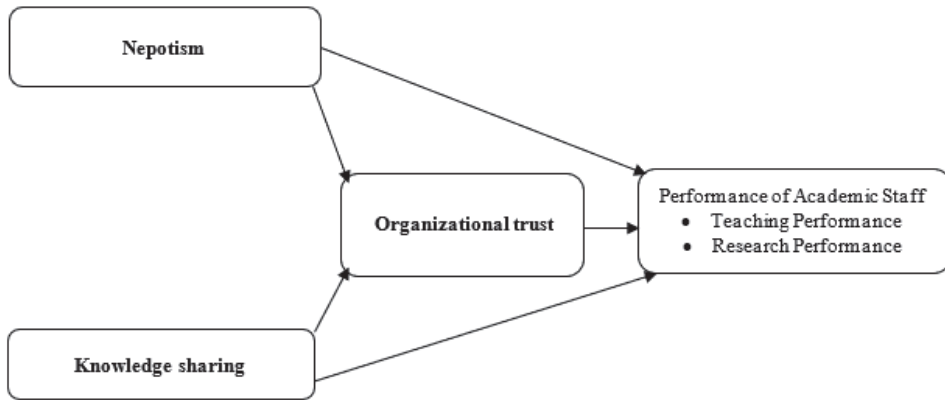


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.4.1 Knowledge Sharing and PAS

KS enhances the skills and capabilities, as well as problem-solving of the parties, involved in KS. Previous studies are of the opinion that KS can have a positive impact on employee performance as well as organizational performance. Kuzu and Özilhan (2014) conducted a study to identify the effect of KS on the performance of employees working at hotels. The findings indicated that KS affected significantly the performance of employees. Ghabban et al. (2018) found that KS affect positively the PAS in Saudi Arabia. KS was found to have a positive impact on academic staff performance in several other studies (Chong et al., 2014; Jolaee et al., 2014; Rahman et al., 2018). Accordingly, in this study, it is proposed that KS among academic staff will have a positive effect on PAS in Jordanian universities.

H1: There is a significant effect between KS and the PAS

2.4.2 Nepotism and PAS

Nepotism is a phenomenon that is widely spread in developing countries. It has several negative impacts on organizational and individual outcome. In Arabic term, it is known as “Wasta”. A study conducted by Büte (2011) found that nepotism has a negative impact on employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and HRM practices among employees working in banks in Turkey. Nepotism was also found to be positively associated with disengagement of employees in public organization in Ethiopia (Kawo & Torun, 2020). Nepotism (Wasta) in the Middle East affects the relationship in the organization as well as KS, satisfaction and performance (Sfeir, 2019).

However, in the study of Chukwuma, Agbaeze, Madu, Nwakoby, and Icha-Ituma, (2019), nepotism was found to have a non-significant negative relationship with the emotional engagement of employees working in private organization in Nigeria. In this study, it is expected that the high level of nepotism (Wasta) will have a negative impact on the PAS of staff working in Jordanian universities.

H2: There is a significant effect between nepotism and the PAS

2.4.3 Trust and PAS

Researchers incorporated trust and attempted to find its impact on organizational and individual outcomes. For example, Ko (2010) found that trust can enhance the knowledge and skills of consultants. Trust promotes KS between consultants and clients. Holste and Fields (2010) found that

trust plays a critical role and encourages the sharing and application of knowledge among co-workers. Jo *et al.* (2015) investigated the effect of trust on the creativity of employees. The findings showed that trust is essential for improving the creativity of employees. Fainshmidt and Frazier (2016) also found that establishing a trust culture will lead to a positive impact on the capabilities of employees and the organization. In the study of Iqbal *et al.* (2019), trust affected the performance of employees.

Trust among individuals can have a large effect on the way that knowledge is shared or transferred. This is because individuals will not share their knowledge if they do not trust the other party and for this reason, the existence of trust can affect individual behaviour (Turner & Makhija, 2006). The relationship between employees and their organizations must be based on mutual trust. The increase in vulnerability has increased the role of trust in the working environment (Sharkie, 2009). Organizational trust has a significant positive effect on employee empowerment (Yilmaz, 2019). The study of Jiang and Chen (2017) found a positive effect of organizational trust in organizational learning and creativity among employees in high-tech industries in China. Organizational trust was also found to have a positive effect on the well-being of employees (Naami & Hashemi, 2020). Organizational trust was also found to have a significant effect on work attitudes such as turnover intention and stress at workplace (Cho & Song, 2017; Top & Tekingunduz, 2018). Organizational trust affected positively the employee performance in hotels in Nigeria (Onyeizugbe *et al.*, 2018). Accordingly, in this study, it is believed that the organizational trust will lead to positive impact on the PAS in Jordan.

H3: There is a significant effect between organizational trust and the PAS

2.4.4 Trust as a Mediator

One of the key tenets of the concept of social exchange is that trust is necessary for any transaction to take place. In order to improve KS and lessen the prevalence of nepotism, this research suggests that there should be a high level of trust among academic staff. As a result, the research suggests that trust serves as a mediating variable. Following this hypothesis, Kath *et al.* (2010) looked at how trust works and concluded that trust may serve as a mediator between the two variables. Niu (2010) looked at how trust mediated the connection between being a part of the business culture and acquiring new knowledge. The results showed that trust partly mediates the connection between involvement in industrial clusters and the acquisition of new knowledge.

Furthermore, the research conducted by Rezvani *et al.* (2016) confirmed the mediating variable effect of trust. The relationship between emotional intelligence and project success was shown to be mediated by trust. According to research by Afsar, Badir, and Khan (2015), trust mediates the relationship between job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and creative problem solving. Trust was shown to mediate the relationship between a high-performance work environment and employee outcomes including job satisfaction and desire to remain among Chinese nationals working for indigenous enterprises (Min *et al.*, 2020). Leadership and employee performance were also influenced by trust (Saleem *et al.*, 2020). In this research, it is hypothesised that trust will mediate the connection between KS, E-HRM, and PAS.

H4: Trust mediates the effect of KS on PAS

H5: Trust mediates the effect of nepotism on the PAS

3. Methodology

This study is a hypothesis testing study and for this reason, the study uses a survey design. The population of this study is the entire public and private universities in Jordan. In Jordan, there are 30 universities. 10 are public universities while 18 are private universities and 2 are regional universities. Eleven of the universities are located in Amman, the capital of Jordan. The eleven universities in Amman are the population of this study. The study focuses on the Jordanian academic staff. This is

because the non-Jordanian academic staff are limited and working on a contract basis.

The number of academic staff in each university was collected either from the website of the university or other websites available on the internet. One university was deleted due to the notion that this university is a regional university and has high number of non-residences. This makes the population of this study is 10 university that employ Jordanians academic staff. At a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 5%, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) recommend a sample size of 352. However, since the stratified sampling method is being used, the sample size for each institution is determined by the university's total student population. The total number of replies is 458; an extra 30% were dispersed based on strata. A questionnaire is used to gather this data. The measurement was adopted from numerous sources.

To ensure content validity, a group of experts was invited to validate the Arabic and English copies of the questionnaire. All the feedback from experts was considered for refining the measurement of the variables. A pilot study was conducted. Questionnaires were used to gather the bulk of the data for this research. An online questionnaire in Arabic was developed using technological resources like google Forms. Two language versions of the questionnaire were sent out. Both English and Arabic versions were made available. In all, 458 surveys were sent out to the respondents. Thus, 385 replies were collected. Nine of the respondents are non-Jordanian and they were removed (385-9= 376). In addition, 19 of the respondents do not have E-HRM, and these responses are from none of the listed universities in this study. Thus, they were removed (376-19= 357). This makes the response rate 78%.

Thirteen of the replies were deemed insufficient because they were missing more than 15% of content. The mean score was substituted for the other replies since they were missing fewer than 15% of the answers. Consequently, the whole answer is 344 (357-13=344). Twelve replies were found to be extreme and were thus excluded from the analysis. This makes the complete and usable responses account for 332. Normality was assessed and the highest value of Skewness is -.92 for KS while the highest value of Kurtosis is -1.3 for teaching performance (TP). The correlation analysis showed that there is no multicollinearity because the largest value of VIF is 2.185 for organizational trust which is less than 10. Thus, the two conditions are achieved, and multicollinearity is not an issue among the variables of this study.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Respondents Profile

This study collected data from academic staff working in ten universities in Amman, Jordan. The majority of the respondents are male (76.5%) with ages between 30 to 40 years (41%) and education of Ph.D. degree (86.1%), 41.3% of the respondents have experience of fewer than 5 years and 38% have a positive of an assistant professor. 71.7% have no admin position.

4.2 Smart PLS Analyses

In this part, an evaluation of both the measurement model and the structural model are presented.

4.2.1 Measurement Model

According to Hair et al. (2017), the internal consistency reliability of the measurement model and the composite reliability, both of which should be more than 0.70, are analysed in order to determine the accuracy of the model. In addition, the reliability of the indicator, also known as the indicator loadings (factor loadings), has to be more than 0.70. Additionally, convergent validity is tested, and it is determined to be fulfilled if the AVE is greater than 0.50. In addition, the assessment takes into account the achievement of discriminant validity, which is accomplished when the indicator loading

is greater than the sum of all its cross-loadings. As can be seen in Table 1, the CA, CR, and AVE criteria were successfully met.

Table 1: Reliabilities and Validities

	CA	CR	AVE	KS	NEP	OT	RP	TP
Knowledge Sharing (KS)	0.97	0.98	0.88	<u>0.94</u>				
Nepotism (NEP)	0.95	0.96	0.82	-0.05	<u>0.91</u>			
Organizational trust (OT)	0.98	0.98	0.92	0.36	0.14	<u>0.96</u>		
Research performance (RP)	0.93	0.95	0.75	0.32	-0.10	0.35	<u>0.87</u>	
Teaching performance (TP)	0.96	0.97	0.83	0.29	-0.10	0.36	0.43	<u>0.91</u>

4.2.2 Structural Model

According to Hair et al. (2017), the structural model should be evaluated according to four criteria. These include the R-squared value, Q²-value, path coefficient (testing hypotheses), and effect size (f²). Hair et al. (2017) pointed out that R² greater than 0.25 is considered weak while greater than 0.75 is considered substantial. In this study, the R-square accounted for 41.6 for the direct effect model while increased to 43.7 for the mediating effect indicating that 41.6 to 43.7% of the PAS can be explained by the variables. The value of Q² for PAS is 0.281. This value is greater than 0 and presents an acceptable cross-validated redundancy. For the effect size, all the effect sizes are acceptable because they are greater than 0.02. Figure 2 shows the structural model of this study.

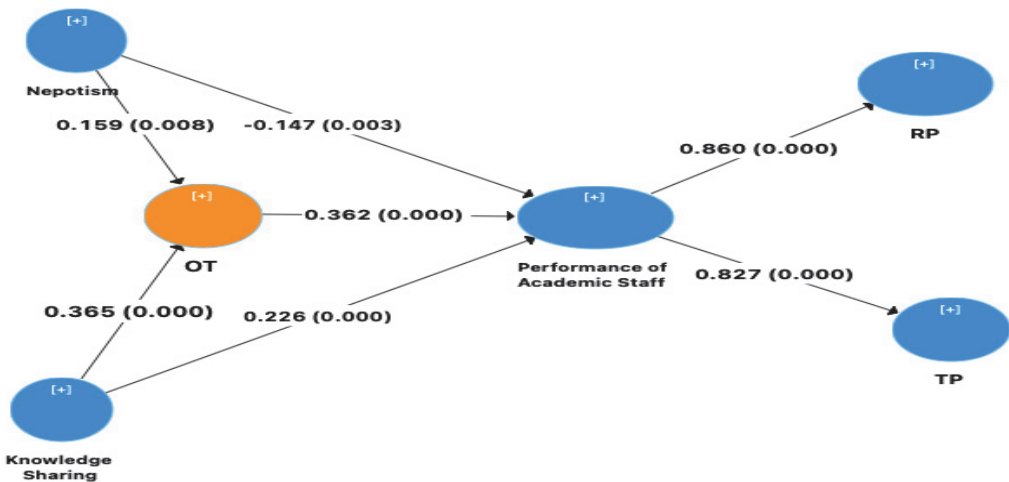


Figure 2: Structural Model

4.3 Hypotheses Testing

The findings of hypotheses testing indicated that the effect of KS is significant (B=0.226, P<0.05), thus, H₁ is supported. For H₂, the effect of nepotism on PAS is negative and significant (B=-0.147, P<0.05). Thus, H₂ is supported. For H₃, organizational trust has a significant effect on the PAS (0.362, P<0.05). for the mediating role of organizational trust, it mediated the effect of both the KS and the nepotism on the PAS as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Result of Hypotheses Testing

H	Path	β	STDEV	T-value	P Values	Label
H1	Knowledge Sharing -> PAS	0.23	0.05	4.19	0.00	Supported
H2	Nepotism -> PAS	-0.15	0.05	3.00	0.00	Supported
H3	OT -> PAS	0.36	0.06	6.29	0.00	Supported
	Knowledge Sharing -> OT	0.36	0.06	5.72	0.00	
	Nepotism -> OT	0.16	0.06	2.67	0.01	
H4	Knowledge Sharing -> OT -> PAS	0.13	0.04	3.73	0.00	Supported
H5	Nepotism -> OT -> PAS	0.06	0.02	2.40	0.02	Supported

5. Discussion

The first hypothesis was proposed and predicted that the effect of KS on PAS is positive and significant. The findings showed that the proposition is true. KS affected PAS in Jordan indicating that the increase in the KS practices will result in a positive increase in the PAS. The positive effect of KS can be explained based on the fact that when staff shares important information about teaching or publication and research, the staff will benefit from this information to support their performance, and this leads to an increase in their performance either in research or in teaching. The findings are in line with the findings of previous studies. The findings of the study of Kuzu and Özilhan (2014) showed that KS affected positively the performance of employees. Prior literature found a positive effect of KS on employee performance (Ghabban et al., 2018).

The findings showed that nepotism negatively affected the PAS. This finding indicates that if nepotism increases, the PAS in Jordan will decrease. The negative effect of nepotism on PAS can be explained based on the fact that academic staff is required to be treated fairly in terms of promotion, benefits, selection, training and in terms of all organizational activities and procedures. Previous studies agree with the findings of this study. Nepotism or also known as Wasta has affected negatively the performance and job satisfaction of employees (Büte, 2011). Nepotism was also found to be directly and positively related to disengagement (Kawo & Torun, 2020), and negatively related to KS, satisfaction, and employee performance (Sfeir, 2019).

The findings showed that organizational trust is critical for PAS indicating that the relationship is positive and the increase in organizational trust will result in a positive increase in the PAS in Jordan. Having a high level of organizational trust will lead to a positive increase in the performance of employees as shown in various findings of previous studies (Jiang & Chen, 2017; Naami & Hashemi, 2020; Sharkie, 2009; Yilmaz, 2019).

Trust partially mediated the effect of KS on PAS. This indicated that part of the relationship between KS, and PAS be explained by the trust. This finding suggested that trust is an indispensable variable in the relationship between KS and PAS. Without trust, academic staff will not share information with each other. This indicates that part of the relationship between nepotism and PAS can be explained through trust. The increase in the trust will lead to an enhancement in the relationship between nepotism and PAS in Jordan. In line with this finding, trust also mediated the effect of a high performance work system and employee performance (Min et al., 2020), and trust mediated the effect of leadership on employee performance (Saleem et al., 2020).

6. Implications

This study has contributed to the body of knowledge and practices in relation to PAS. The study also confirmed the validity of SET. Trust and KS are practices that are built on exchange relationships and cost-benefit analysis. The study also contributed to the literature by examining the direct and indirect effects of trust. Trust was confirmed to be a mediating variable in this study. Previous studies are either descriptive focusing on describing the sample or correlational which examines the bi-

relationship between the variables. Multivariate analysis such as regression has been used in a few studies and this study has contributed to the literature by examining the causal relationship between the variables using regression analysis.

KS is important for the staff to enhance their performance. The findings showed that KS has a positive effect on PAS. Therefore, the management of the universities is advised to enhance the knowledge-sharing practices and create an atmosphere where those who share the knowledge are rewarded financially and non-financially. Workshops can be held to share the knowledge of the most experienced academic staff and this behaviour must be rewarded. Nepotism is an unhealthy phenomenon and universities that seek to increase their ranks must avoid nepotism in all practices and procedures. Nepotism can bring the wrong staff to the right position. This does not affect only the PAS and the overall performance of the university, but it also has an adverse effect on the new generation and the quality of education as well as the graduates.

Trust is critical as a direct effect variable and mediator. Establishing a trusting culture is a preferable step in improving the PAS and the universities. Universities in Jordan must create an atmosphere where the academic staff can trust each other and trust the universities. This can be done by establishing an indicator of trust in the organization and continuously assessing the level of trust and make corrective action.

7. Conclusion

This study was conducted in Jordan to examine PAS. The findings showed that KS has a significant effect on the PAS. Nepotism negatively affected the PAS and trust also affected positively the PAS. In addition, trust mediated the effect of KS and nepotism on PAS. There are some limitations that need to be highlighted in this study and deployed for future research. The sample of this study is limited to academic staff in universities in Amman, Jordan. Thus, the findings can be generalized to these universities and the academic staff in these universities. For future work, they are suggested to examine the PAS in different countries. The Middle East and developing countries need more studies regarding the PAS and the effect of KS, trust, and nepotism. Thus, replicating this study could be a direction for future work. Further studies are needed to examine the PAS using different populations such as private universities alone or public universities alone to understand the differences between these two types of universities in terms of performance and the benefit from these differences in improving the PAS. Future studies are also recommended to increase the sample size so that the generalizability can improve. Decision-makers are also advised to eliminate nepotism in the university and adopt a knowledge-sharing culture that is based on trust between all organizational members and the university.

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