Equitable Work Policies, Diversity Management, and Employee Productivity in Food Processing Organisations in South West Nigeria

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Abstract
This study investigates the influence of equitable employment practices (equitable work policies) and diversity management on employee productivity within food processing organizations located in South West Nigeria. The method used in this research was an explanatory cross-sectional survey model. Data collection occurred from a stratified sample of 400 production workers, quality control personnel, maintenance workers and first-line supervisors working in one of the five food processing sub-sectors; data collection included equitable work policy measures (fair leave, consistent discipline, transparent workload), diversity management measures (diversity training, inclusive meetings and language assistance) and employee productivity measures (objective measures of production per worker, absenteeism rates and error rates). Perceptual measures were only employed as substitutes when objective data did not exist. Due to a large number of food processing companies and a highly diverse workforce, South West Nigeria provides a relevant analytical setting to examine the impact of equity and inclusion on productivity among employees. Data were analysed using variance based structural equation modelling, and the findings indicate that equitable work policies and diversity management exert positive and statistically significant effects on employee productivity and jointly explain a meaningful proportion of productivity variance. The results emphasise that productivity improvements in labour intensive manufacturing environments can be achieved not only through technological investments but also through deliberate attention to fairness and inclusive workforce management, with important implications for managerial practice and industrial policy in Nigeria.
Keywords: Equitable work policies; Diversity management; Employee productivity; Food processing; Nigeria.
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Introduction

The productivity of employees in the food processing industry in Nigeria is influenced by more than just the use of technology, capital utilization and production processes; it is also determined by the quality of employee management, and to what degree fairness and inclusion exist within organisational practices. The food processing industries operating in South West Nigeria generally produce goods through a labour-intensive and process-based approach, where

employee behaviour will have direct effects on both the quantity of output produced and the quality of products being produced, as well as whether or not employees show up to work. As these organisations draw on labour pools comprised of workers who vary significantly in terms of culture and educational backgrounds, these organisations must proactively develop, enact and maintain fair and inclusive employment practices in order to maximize productivity in high-speed production settings. Previous research has shown that the implementation of management systems focused on fairness and inclusion can have a positive influence on the operational efficiency of manufacturing firms in developing nations. The institutional environment and labour markets of developing countries vary significantly from those of developed countries, therefore employees' responses to their organisation's people management practices may be very much influenced by how well their employer is able to manage its people (Bloom & Van Reenen, 2011; Adebayo & Ugbede, 2022).

Equitable work policies represent formalized, and/or standardized practices that guarantee employees' access to opportunities, leave entitlements, disciplinary actions, workload assignments, and employee input/voice. Diversity management represents the systematic organisational efforts to recruit, retain, and utilize individuals across various dimensions (i.e., race, gender, age, language, education, etc.) of difference. Previous studies in Nigeria have shown that the consistent implementation of these policies will increase employees' perception of fairness, employee commitment, and employee engagement, all of which are empirically supported antecedents of productivity (Ekejiuba and Muritala, 2023a; Ekejiuba and Muritala, 2023b). Additionally, the attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of these policies in operationally intensive work environments (such as food processing) are directly associated with measurable performance indicators such as output per worker, absenteeism rates, and error frequencies.

Although there has been significant research conducted on the relationship between diversity and performance in Nigeria, most of this research has focused on government institutions, service organisations, and governance-related outcomes. Limited attention has been given to manufacturing-based organisations and environments. When manufacturing-based organisations have been researched, many studies have relied on perceptual measures of performance, whereas few have used objective measures of productivity (Nkiru et al., 2019; Akpoviroro, Ismaila, and Abu, 2020). Relatedly, although previous research has found that well-managed workplace diversity positively impacts organisational performance in private universities in South West

Nigeria (Olu Ogunleye et al., 2023), little information is provided about how this relates to factory-based, shift-driven production systems. Therefore, the current study investigates the impact of equitable work policies and diversity management on employee productivity in food processing organisations in South West Nigeria using equity and inclusion constructs and measuring productivity at the plant level using objective metrics. This study offers sector-specific empirical data to help guide managerially-informed decisions and inform policy development regarding how fairness and inclusion can be utilized to positively influence productivity in labour-intensive industrial settings.

Statement of the Problem

Food processing organisations in South West Nigeria operate with highly diverse and heterogeneous workforces differentiated by language, education, gender, and skill levels, yet employee management practices remain largely informal and unevenly applied. Although existing studies suggest that diversity management and fair work related practices can enhance employee commitment and organisational performance, most of this evidence is drawn from public institutions and service based organisations rather than factory based production systems where productivity is monitored through objective operational indicators (Adebayo and Ugbede, 2022; Ekejiuba and Muritala, 2023a; Ekejiuba and Muritala, 2023b). Manufacturing studies that examine workforce diversity typically emphasise innovativeness or generalised performance outcomes and rely predominantly on perceptual measures, offering limited insight into how equitable work policies and inclusive management practices influence daily productivity on production lines (Akpoviroro, Ismaila, and Abu, 2020; Nkiru et al., 2019).

Consequently, there remains a significant empirical gap in linking equitable work policies and diversity management to measurable employee productivity indicators such as output per worker, absenteeism rates, and error levels within Nigeria's food processing sector. This gap constrains managers' and policymakers' ability to justify the adoption of formalised fairness oriented and inclusive practices based on evidence of operational performance outcomes. Addressing this limitation is therefore essential for generating sector specific, evidence based guidance capable of improving workforce management and productivity in labour intensive food processing organisations.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the influence of equitable work policies and diversity management on employee productivity in food processing organisations in South West Nigeria.While the specific objectives of the study are to:

1. determine the effect of equitable work policies on employee productivity in food processing organisations in South West Nigeria;
2. examine the effect of diversity management on employee productivity in food processing organisations in South West Nigeria; and
3. determine the combined predictive power of equitable work policies and diversity management on employee productivity in food processing organisations in South West Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do equitable work policies influence employee productivity in food processing organisations in South West Nigeria?
2. How does diversity management affect employee productivity in food processing organisations in South West Nigeria?
3. What is the combined predictive effect of equitable work policies and diversity management on employee productivity in food processing organisations in South West Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study:

$H_0$1: There is no significant effect of equitable work policies on employee productivity in food processing organisations in South West Nigeria.

$H_0$2: There is no significant effect of diversity management on employee productivity in food processing organisations in South West Nigeria.

$H_0$3: There is no significant combined predictive power of equitable work policies and diversity management on employee productivity in food processing organisations in South West Nigeria.

Conceptual Review and Hypotheses Development

Employee Productivity

Employee Productivity is how well employees are able to translate labour inputs into desired outputs in a timely, consistent manner. Employee Productivity is typically measured by way of quantifiable operational metrics that are used in the manufacturing/food processing sectors, including the amount of product produced per employee, absenteeism, quality/product defect rate, and consistency in employee performance from shift-to-shift. Subjective measures of performance are more likely to be employed in assessing employee performance in service organisations; whereas in factory-based production environments, quantifiable measures of employee performance are utilized since minor disruptions in employee attendance, coordination, and/or task completion can have an adverse impact on the flow and efficiency of production processes (Bloom & Van Reenen, 2011). As a result, employee productivity in labour-intensive food processing companies is a function of both technology/capital and employee behaviour, discipline, and compliance with standardized operating procedures.

Equitable Work Policies and Employee Productivity

Equitable Work Policies represent the formal rules and daily organisational processes by which workplace fairness is maintained including leave, disciplinary action, work load, training and employee voice opportunities. These policies are an integral component of labour intensive food processing organisations' efforts to define how employees perceive managerial decision making and their assessment of being treated fairly at work. The implementation of these policies in a transparent and consistent manner leads to increased attendance reliability, more adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and increased sustained work effort from employees. These behavioural outcomes are most critical in the discipline required to achieve coordinated and continuous production flow in factory-based production systems. Consistently throughout empirical research it has been found that managers who implement fair and well-established workplace management policies experience reduced absenteeism, increased employee commitment and enhanced job performance specifically within manufacturing environments where employee behaviour directly impacts the level of product produced (Adebayo and Ugbede, 2022; Bloom & Van Reenen, 2011). Based on this, it is expected that Equitable Work Policies will have a major impact on employee productivity in labour-intensive food processing organisations.

Diversity Management and Employee Productivity

Diversity Management refers to an organisation's intentional efforts to embrace, manage, and fully use the differences in the workforce of its employees based on their sex, level of education, languages spoken, cultural origin, skills, etc. Most food-processing organisations in South-West Nigeria are made up of heterogeneous groups of workers who come from a variety of different social-cultural backgrounds. If diversity is not deliberately managed in these organisations, it may result in barriers to communication, difficulties with coordinating tasks, and increased social fragmentation in the context of the production environment that has shifts. Nevertheless, if diversity-management strategies are implemented by managers, through inclusive supervision and diversity-related training, they will enhance cooperation, common performance standards and better coordinated task-performance among workers from various backgrounds. Research findings show that there are strong correlations between the effective implementation of diversity management practices, employee engagement, lower levels of conflict, and more uniform performance results for all industries, including manufacturing/production (Akpoviroro, Ismaila, & Abu, 2020; Nkiru et al., 2019; Olu Ogunleye et al., 2023). Therefore, based on this rationale, we hypothesize that the effective management of diversity will positively affect worker-productivity in food-processing organisations.

Theoretical Review

This research is founded primarily on the theories of Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity, and the theories of organisational Justice, along with an explanatory model using Social Exchange Theory. Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity theory proposes that employee performance will be enhanced when employees have the required abilities, are motivated to perform, and have opportunities to make effective contributions to their organisations (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Fair workplace policies create motivation and opportunity through fair treatment and access to organisational resources, and diversity management creates opportunities for employees to leverage their unique abilities, experiences, and perspectives to improve performance (Adebayo & Ugbede, 2022).

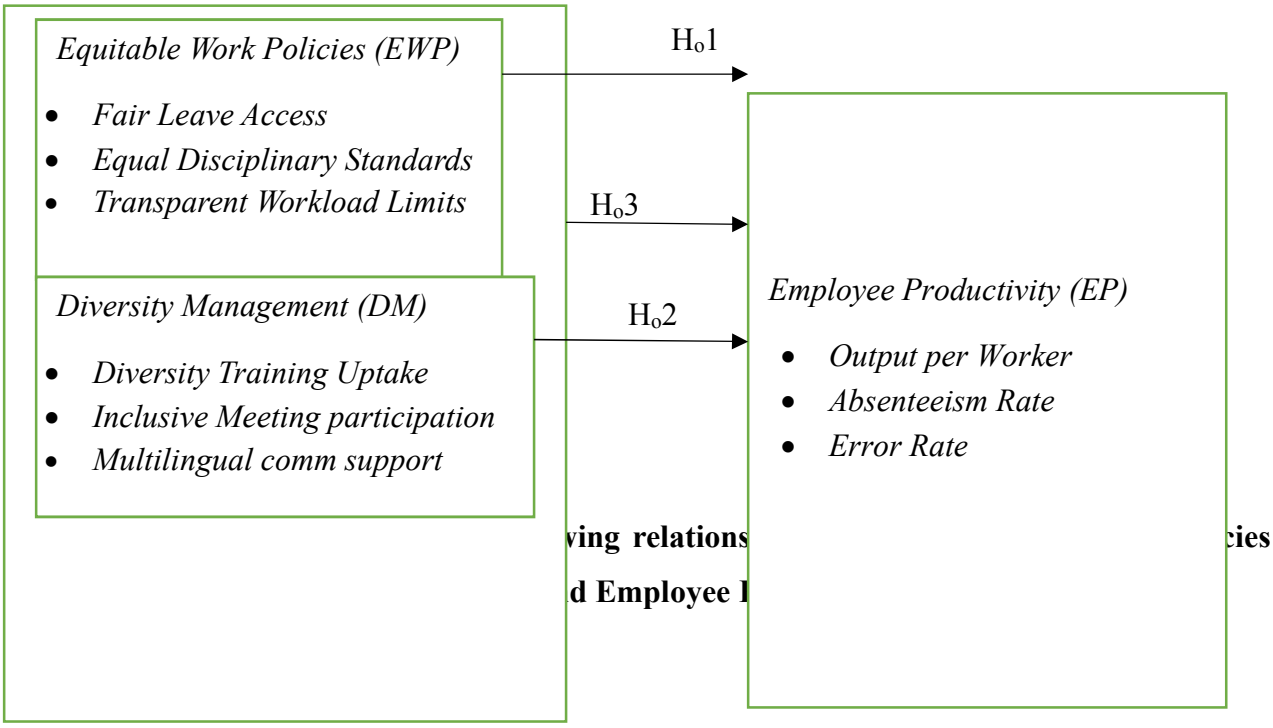
Organisational Justice theory also helps explain the impact of perceived fairness in procedures and outcomes on employee attitudes and behaviour. Employees are more likely to reciprocate with higher levels of effort, compliance with operational standards, and commitment

to quality requirements when they believe the disciplinary process, workload allocation, and leave policies used by their organization are fair, leading to better productivity outcomes (Ekejiuba and Muritala, 2023a, Greenberg, 1990). Social Exchange Theory provides additional insight into this phenomenon by suggesting that employees are likely to engage in reciprocal behaviours (such as reduced absenteeism and improved attention to detail) when employees perceive their workplace as being equitable and inclusive (Blau, 1964), and this is especially important in a production environment like the food processing industry where there are strict process and quality controls.

Empirical Evidence and Research Gap

While previous research has provided significant contributions toward understanding of equity, diversity and performance, much remains to be addressed. A great deal of the Nigerian research has been focused on both public institutions and organisations that are service oriented. The majority of these studies use subjective performance measurement approaches and do not investigate production-based factory settings. Most of the studies that have investigated manufacturing environments focus primarily on either the aspect of innovation or general organisational performance as opposed to employee level productivity measures generated from an organization's record of operations (Akpoviroro et al., 2020; Nkiru et al., 2019). Consequently, there is a lack of empirical evidence demonstrating how equitable work practices and diversity management may influence objective productivity measurements including output per worker, absence rates, and error rates for employees in food processing companies located in southwest Nigeria.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to address this gap by unifying equitable work practices and diversity management into one empirical model and investigating the relationship between these variables and employee productivity through the examination of objective plant level data. Additionally, the research will respond to calls for sector specific, evidence-based research which can provide input to managerial practice and policy formulation in Nigeria's manufacturing sector.



This study employed a cross-sectional survey with an explanatory design to assess how fair employment policies, diversity management, and worker engagement relate to each other within food processing companies in southwestern Nigeria. The choice of this design lies in its adaptability to studying relations between latent variables at a single point in time when the perspective is explanation and prediction, not causation. Cross-sectional surveys have very frequent application in organisational and productivity research, especially in the case of manufacturing (because they provide generalisable insights based on large samples collected without intervention or manipulation) (Bryman, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The population comprised production, quality, maintenance, and first-line supervisory employees in registered food processing organisations within the region. These groups were targeted because they are directly involved in operational processes and therefore most relevant for assessing employee productivity. Workforce figures and listings were obtained from state manufacturers' associations and regulatory agencies, estimating an accessible population of 3,500 employees across five major food processing subsectors. This frame ensured representativeness of diverse production environments and job roles.

Using Yamane's formula (1967) at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 400 employees was determined as adequate for statistical reliability. To increase representativeness, this study employed a multistage stratified sampling approach that reflected the structural composition of the food processing industry in South West Nigeria. Food processing organisations were first classified into five main subsectors, namely beverages, grain milling and flour, bakery and confectionery, dairy and cold chain, and meat and poultry. These subsectors represent the dominant industrial activities within the region. Each subsector was then further stratified according to organisational size, categorised as small, medium, and large. Proportionate allocation was applied to ensure that the sample closely resembled the target population, thereby minimising sampling bias and enhancing external validity (Etikan et al., 2016).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that comprised validated measurement instruments. Equitable treatment of employees, conceptualised as organisational equity, was assessed using items adapted from Colquitt's (2001) organisational justice scale, with particular emphasis on fair workload distribution and consistent disciplinary practices. Diversity management was measured using indicators adapted from Nishii (2013) and Shore et al. (2018), including diversity training and inclusive communication practices. A four-point Likert scale was adopted to reduce central tendency bias and allow for greater response differentiation. Employee productivity data were obtained using a combination of objective plant level records, such as production per worker, absenteeism, and error rates, supplemented with perceptual measures where objective records were unavailable.

Prior to the main survey, a pilot study involving 50 employees was conducted to assess the clarity and reliability of the research instrument, with all Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Data collection was carried out through both online and onsite surveys, with informed consent obtained from all participants and confidentiality assured. Descriptive and reliability analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS version 29, while hypothesis testing was performed using SmartPLS 4. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling was selected due to its suitability for non-normal data, complex predictive models, and moderate sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019). Path significance was assessed using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. All procedures complied with institutional research ethics standards, and ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection.

Table 1. Stratified sample allocation by plant size and product sub sector (n = 400)

Plant size	Beverages	Grain milling and flour	Bakery and confectionery	Dairy and cold chain	Meat and poultry	Row total
Large	23	26	29	22	20	120
Medium	36	40	43	32	29	180
Small	21	22	23	18	16	100
Totals	**80**	**88**	**95**	**72**	**65**	**400**

Source: Authors' computation, South West Nigeria field survey (2025).

Results and Data Analysis

The results are presented in four stages, namely sample characteristics, measurement model assessment, structural model evaluation, and hypothesis testing. This sequence is consistent with established reporting practices for survey-based studies and research using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling in management research.

Sample Characteristics

The data contained in Table 2 represents the demographics and organisational attributes of the respondents. As shown by the distribution, the respondents were representative of the various job roles, tenure categories, education levels, shift patterns, union membership status and plant sizes. Therefore, this diversity of data indicates that the sample used to examine the employee productivity of food processing organisations in South West Nigeria was appropriate.

Table 2: Sample Characteristics of Respondents (n = 400)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Job role	Production	212	53.0
	Quality	68	17.0
	Maintenance	74	18.5
	First line supervisor	46	11.5
Tenure	Under 1 year	58	14.5

	1 to 3 years	151	37.8
	4 to 7 years	126	31.5
	Over 7 years	65	16.3
Education	Secondary	72	18.0
	OND or NCE	134	33.5
	HND or BSc	164	41.0
	Postgraduate	30	7.5
Shift pattern	Day	148	37.0
	Night	86	21.5
	Rotating	166	41.5
Union membership	Yes	173	43.3
	No	227	56.7
Plant size	Small	100	25.0
	Medium	180	45.0
	Large	120	30.0

Source: Authors' computation based on primary data from the South West Nigeria field survey (2025).

Measurement Model Assessment

The reliability and validity of the measurement model were evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, average variance extracted, heterotrait- monotrait ratios, and variance inflation factors. As presented in Table 3, all constructs met the recommended thresholds, demonstrating acceptable internal consistency as well as convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 3: Measurement Reliability and Validity Statistics

Construct	Items	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE	HTMT (max)
Equitable work policies	5	0.86	0.89	0.58	0.71
Diversity management	4	0.84	0.88	0.55	0.71
Employee productivity	4	0.82	0.86	0.52	0.64

Note. Cronbach's α and composite reliability ≥ 0.70; AVE ≥ 0.50; HTMT < 0.85. Indicator variance inflation factors ranged from 1.15 to 2.18, indicating no multicollinearity concerns.

Source: Authors' computation using SmartPLS 4 outputs from the South West Nigeria field survey (2025).

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients among the study variables. All correlations are positive and statistically significant, providing preliminary support for the hypothesised relationships while remaining below thresholds that would indicate multicollinearity.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Equitable work policies	3.09	0.56	1.00		
2. Diversity management	3.02	0.53	0.48**	1.00	
3. Employee productivity	3.14	0.51	0.43**	0.36**	1.00

Note. n = 400. Four-point Likert scale. **p < 0.01 (two tailed).

Source: Authors' computation using IBM SPSS version 29 based on the South West Nigeria field survey (2025).

Structural Model Evaluation and Hypothesis Testing

The structural model was evaluated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling. Model fit indices indicate adequate fit, with a standardised root mean square residual value below the recommended threshold of 0.08 and a normed fit index exceeding 0.90. The coefficient of determination shows that equitable work policies and diversity management jointly explain 31% of the variance in employee productivity, indicating moderate explanatory power for behavioural research.

To enhance robustness, multiple regression analysis with HC3 robust standard errors was conducted using SPSS, yielding consistent results with the PLS-SEM estimates. **Figure 2 below**

shows the path coefficient of the model

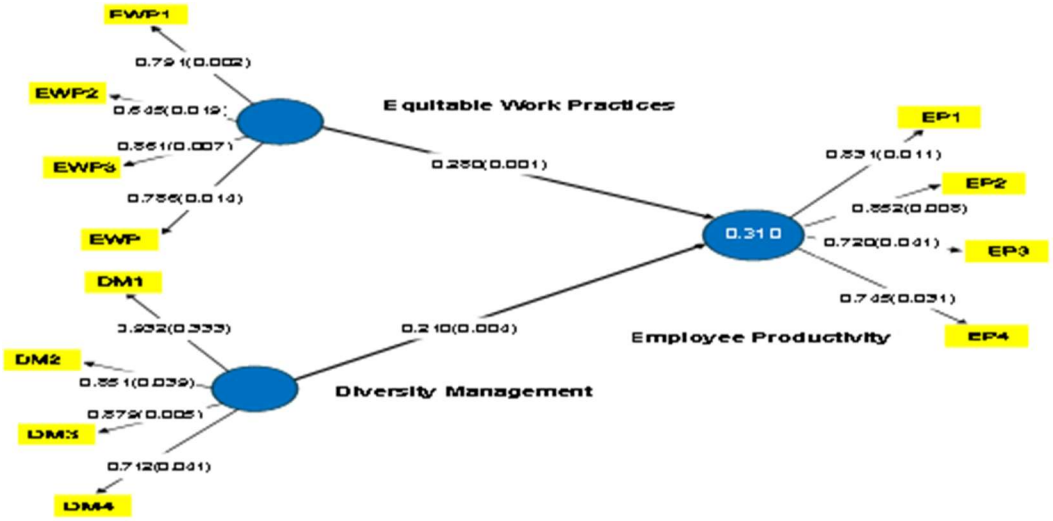


Figure 2: Path coefficient on the relationship between Equitable work Practices, Diversity Management and Employee Productivity

Figure 2 shows that the majority of the outer loadings show path coefficient above 0.7 and p value above 0.000. The inner loadings also shows the coefficient and p value of the constructs.

Table 5: PLS-SEM Structural Model Results

Path	β	t value	p value
Equitable work policies → Employee productivity	0.28	4.91	0.001
Diversity management → Employee productivity	0.21	2.88	0.004

Model fit: SRMR = 0.061; NFI = 0.912

Explained variance: R^2 (Employee productivity) = 0.31

Source: Authors' computation using SmartPLS 4 from the South West Nigeria field survey (2025).

The result showed that equitable work policies has a positive effect on employee productivity in food processing organisations in Southwest Nigeria (β1= 0.280). This means that an improvement in EWP will improve EP by 0.280. The result also showed a prob-value of 0.001< 0.05. This means that the positive effect is also statistically significant. Also, diversity management has a positive and significant effect on employee productivity (β1= 0.280; P= 0.004 < 0.05). A close emphasis on these two effects shows that equitable work practices have the highest positive effect on employee productivity as revealed from the coefficient β1= 0.280.

The model explains 31% of the variance in employee productivity ($R^2 = 0.31$), showing moderate explanatory power. The model fit indices (SRMR = 0.061; NFI = 0.912) indicate a good fit, confirming that the model adequately represents the observed data.

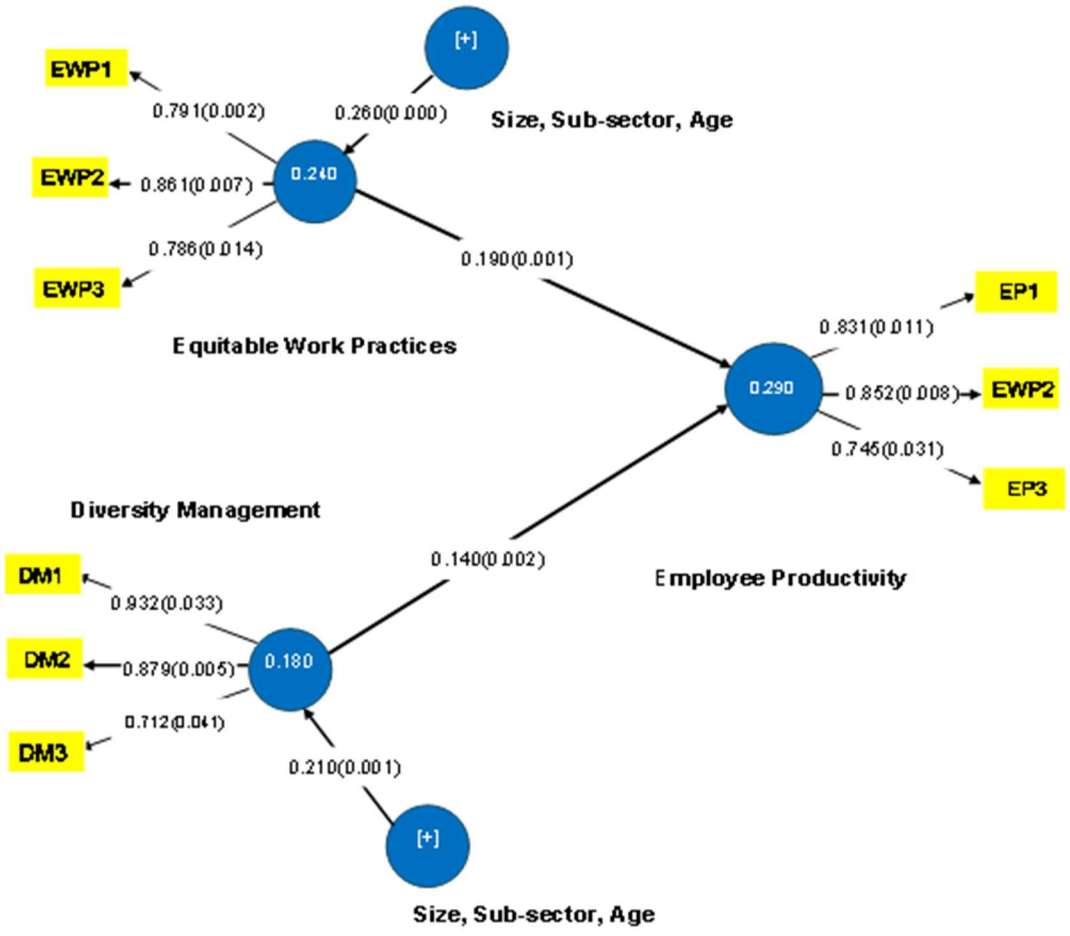


Figure 3: Path coefficient on the relationship between Equitable work Practices, Diversity Management and Employee Productivity where size, age and sub sector are used as a control variable

Author's computation using SMARTPLS 4.4.1, 2025

Table 6: Multiple Regression Results with Controls (HC3 Robust Standard Errors)

Predictor	Model 1 β	Model 2 β	Model 3 β
Equitable work policies	0.26***		0.19***
Diversity management		0.21***	0.14**
Control variables	Included	Included	Included
Adjusted R^2	0.24	0.18	0.29
F statistic	13.42***	10.11***	14.62***

Note. **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Source: Authors' computation using IBM SPSS version 29 based on the Southwest Nigeria field survey (2025).

The regression results confirm that equity in the workplace and diversity management continue to be strongly linked to employees' productivity levels as demonstrated by Models 1-3; and that this is true regardless of organisation size, subsector and age. In Model 1, there was a strong positive correlation between equitable policies at work and employees' productivity ($\beta = .26$, $p < .001$); and that these policies account for approximately 24% of the variance in employees' productivity levels (Adjusted $R^2 = .24$). In Model 2, it was revealed that diversity management is positively correlated to employees' productivity ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$); and that diversity management accounts for nearly 18% of the total variance (Adjusted $R^2 = .18$). In Model 3, when the two predictors and the controls were included in the model, the correlations between equitable policies at work ($\beta = .19$, $p < .001$) and diversity management ($\beta = .14$, $p < .01$) are less than those found in Models 1 & 2, yet they remain statistically significant; and the Adjusted R^2 increased by only 5%, to 0.29. As such, approximately 29% of the variance in employees' productivity can be explained by fair policies at work, effective diversity management and organisational characteristics. The consistency of the F-statistics across all models supports the stability and predictive power of the findings; and that the adoption of inclusive organisational practices will contribute to employees' productivity in various organisational environments.

Table 7: Summary of Hypotheses Testing

Null hypothesis	Statistical evidence	Decision
H_{01}: There is no significant effect of equitable work policies on employee productivity	$\beta = 0.28$; $p < 0.001$	Rejected
H_{02}: There is no significant effect of diversity management on employee productivity	$\beta = 0.21$; $p = 0.004$	Rejected
H_{03}: There is no significant combined predictive power of equitable work policies and diversity management on employee productivity	$R^2 = 0.31$; $p < 0.001$	Rejected

Source: Authors' synthesis based on PLS-SEM and multiple regression results from the South West Nigeria field survey (2025).

Discussion of Findings

Evidence from this study clearly shows that both equitable work policies and diversity management have a positive and statistically significant impact on the productivity of employees in food processing organisations in South-Western Nigeria. Equitable work policies and diverse workplace management practices provide substantial insight into how the fairness of an organisation's policies and practices can positively affect productivity in a manufacturing setting where many workers are physically employed in the same environment. This study supports the empirical literature indicating that various people management practices including technology and structural factors directly affect productivity in manufacturing settings (Ichniowski, Shaw, and Prennushi, 1997; Bloom and Van Reenen, 2011).

The measured effect size was small to moderate and in line with established organisational and behavioural research literature, which indicated that numerous different factors interact to determine employee productivity.

Equitable work policies' positive effect supports the idea that employees' reliability and adherence to standard operating procedures will increase if leave entitlement, disciplinary actions and workload allocations are governed by clear, consistently applied and easily accessible rules. In addition, the perceived procedural justice generated by equitable policies will reduce counterproductive work behaviour, including absenteeism and error prone performance, due to

employees' perception that their employer is just (Greenberg, 1990). This study extends previous Nigerian studies linking employees' fairness perceptions to higher levels of employees' commitment and engagement, using a new measure of productivity in a factory-based context. This study also found a significant and modestly sized relationship between diversity management and employee productivity. This theoretical basis for this result is grounded in Ability, Motivation and Opportunity theory, which states that employee performance increases when employees possess the ability to do so, are motivated to do so and have the opportunity to do so (Appelbaum, et al., 2000). Diversity practices include diversity training, diversity oriented participatory decision making, and multilingual communication. These are especially important in food processing plants because of the need for coordination, safety compliance and error reduction. The modest size of the diversity effect could indicate that diversity does not directly lead to increased productivity, unless there exists a system of equitable work policies.

The joint predictive effects of equitable work policies and diversity management suggest that equitable policies and practices produce greater productivity benefits when they occur in tandem and not separately. This finding provides clarity to mixed evidence previously reported in several manufacturing studies regarding the relationships between workforce diversity and manufacturing performance. The current study suggests that inclusivity is only effective when it occurs in a fair and transparent system, providing structure and predictability for employees, supporting the reciprocal behavioural responses predicted by Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964).

While this study has focused on food processing organisations, the findings may be cautiously generalised to all labour intensive manufacturing sub-sectors with comparable workforce characteristics, production processes, and institutional contexts. However, the cross-sectional nature of this study constrains causal inference, and the use of perceptual surrogates for productivity instead of actual records to avoid data collection limitations constitutes another methodological limitation. Longitudinal or mixed-method studies that can track changes in processes and causality over time would be well-positioned to address some of these limitations.

Conclusion

To build trust and morale, food processing companies need to implement fair labour practices. To do this, companies need to create equitable policies for employees regarding their leave,

disciplinary actions, and how much work they are assigned. Managers and supervisors have a responsibility to ensure all employees are treated equally by enforcing consistent application of company policies across all shifts and departments. Additionally, organisations can use diversity management practices, like role-specific training and multilingual communications support, to create a culture of inclusiveness and promote better collaboration and less error between employees working together from different backgrounds. Measuring employee equity and inclusion can help organisations measure the success of their policies and make data-driven decisions.

Recommendations

For Managers

Managers in food processing organisations must formally establish and implement fairly and consistently use the same equitable work policies regarding access to leave; disciplinary procedures; and workload distribution to enhance a perception of equity at the workplace level. Furthermore, managers must train their supervisors to utilize these policies equally throughout each shift and unit of work so that supervisors do not appear biased in the application of these policies, which would negatively affect productivity. Additionally, food processing organisations should implement the diversity management practices to promote coordinated effort, fewer errors, and better knowledge transfer amongst diverse workforces by providing role specific training to employees; including all employees in all meetings pertinent to the job; and supporting employees with multiple languages.

Furthermore, tracking and analyzing equity and inclusion metrics will provide additional information to make informed decisions based upon evidence when making managerial decisions.

For regulatory bodies and labour policy makers

Regulatory bodies and labour policy makers for various manufacturing sectors (including labour intensive sectors) should advocate for the adoption of equity and inclusion-oriented workforce management standards. The regulatory bodies and labour policy makers should include industry-wide guidelines and compliance frameworks for fair employment practices and inclusive communication systems into overall productivity and industrial development strategies. Food

manufacturers' associations and regulatory bodies could also support efforts to build managerial capacity to develop equitable and inclusive workplaces through training and education programs.

For scholarly research

To increase the strength of the causal relationships between equitable work policies, diversity management, and employee productivity, future research should utilize longitudinal or panel design to allow researchers to track changes in productivity over time. Future researchers are also encouraged to investigate mediators such as employee commitment, psychological safety, and engagement; and moderators, such as shift systems, union presence, and organisational size. Future research may also expand the analysis to other manufacturing sub-sectors and regions to increase generalizability and develop more detailed, context-specific models of the relationships between equitable work policies, diversity management, and employee productivity.

Contributions to Knowledge

This study contributes to knowledge by integrating equitable work policies and diversity management into a unified model that explains employee productivity in Nigeria's food processing sector. It advances research by employing objective plant-level data rather than perceptual measures, empirically validating Ability–Motivation–Opportunity and Organisational Justice theories. The study provides sector-specific evidence and a practical framework for managers to embed fairness and inclusion in productivity tracking. It also informs policy reforms promoting equitable labour systems and sets a foundation for future longitudinal research examining mediators such as commitment and psychological safety in industrial workforce productivity.

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