

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC OWNED UNIVERSITIES IN RIVERS STATE.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between psychological contract and employee performance in public-owned universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study focused on two dimensions of psychological contract—relational and transactional contracts—and their influence on two key measures of employee performance—task performance and contextual performance. A correlational research design was adopted. The population of the study consists of 8,063 teaching and non-teaching staff of public universities in Rivers. The Taro Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size for the study, yielding a sample size of 380 respondents. The study employed a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.78. 324 valid responses were retrieved and analyzed using Spearman Rank Order Correlation at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed significant and positive relationships between relational contract and task performance, relational contract and contextual performance, transactional contract and task performance, and transactional contract and contextual performance. These results suggest that when employees perceive that their psychological contracts—both relational and transactional—are being fulfilled by the university management, they are more likely to perform effectively in their assigned duties and exhibit positive discretionary behaviors that contribute to institutional success. The study concluded that a well-managed psychological contract enhances both the formal and informal aspects of employee performance. It recommends that university management should strengthen relational and transactional employment practices to foster improved staff engagement and productivity. These findings underscore the critical role of mutual expectations and trust in driving organizational performance in the education sector.

Keywords: Psychological contract, relational contract, transactional contract, task Performance, contextual performance, employee performance, public universities.

INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is a critical factor that determines the overall effectiveness, competitiveness, and sustainability of any organization. It reflects how well employees execute their tasks, interact with others, adapt to changes, and contribute to the organizational goals. In higher education institutions, particularly public-owned universities, employee performance is not only essential for academic excellence but also for administrative efficiency, student satisfaction, and institutional reputation. Performance encompasses various dimensions including task execution, contextual behavior, innovation, adaptability, and quality service delivery. When employees perform at optimal levels, it leads to improved productivity, goal alignment, and long-term organizational success. Conversely, poor employee performance often results in inefficiencies, increased turnover, low morale, and institutional failure. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence performance is vital for human resource management and strategic planning.

Among these influential factors, the psychological contract plays a significant role in shaping how employees perceive their obligations and expectations within the workplace. The psychological contract refers to the unwritten, implicit set of mutual expectations between employers and employees, which extends beyond formal contracts. It covers the beliefs employees hold about the terms and conditions of their employment, including perceived promises of fair treatment, job security, professional development,

and reciprocal loyalty. According to Rousseau (1995), psychological contracts can influence employee attitudes, behaviors, and motivation, ultimately affecting how they perform in their roles. When these psychological expectations are fulfilled, employees are more likely to demonstrate commitment, engagement, and high performance. However, when there is a breach or violation of the psychological contract, it can lead to dissatisfaction, reduced motivation, absenteeism, and even exit intentions.

Relational and transactional contracts are two fundamental dimensions of the psychological contract that affect employee performance in different ways. Relational contracts are based on long-term socio-emotional commitments between the employee and the organization. They emphasize trust, loyalty, mutual respect, and shared goals. These elements promote a deep sense of belonging and organizational identification, which are crucial in fostering contextual performance. Contextual performance refers to behaviors that support the organizational environment, such as cooperation with colleagues, volunteering for additional tasks, and promoting the values of the institution (Organ, 1997). When employees perceive that their organization values their contributions, respects their well-being, and invests in their long-term development, they are more likely to go beyond their formal job descriptions. They participate more actively in university activities, demonstrate goodwill, and help foster a collaborative workplace culture. In the context of public-owned universities, relational contracts can encourage academic staff to contribute to student mentorship, engage in collaborative research, and support institutional reforms without expecting immediate rewards.

Transactional contracts, on the other hand, are based on short-term, economic exchanges. They focus on clearly defined roles, fair compensation, performance-based rewards, and specific deliverables. While they may not evoke the same emotional investment as relational contracts, transactional contracts are essential for ensuring task performance. Task performance refers to the core job responsibilities of an employee, including the timely and accurate completion of duties, compliance with procedures, and goal attainment (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). In public universities, where lecturers and administrative staff often face large workloads and bureaucratic pressures, clarity in job expectations and adequate compensation are vital motivators. When employees perceive that they are being fairly rewarded for their efforts and that the institution fulfills its obligations regarding salary, promotion, and workload balance, they are more inclined to perform their tasks diligently and efficiently.

Both dimensions of the psychological contract—relational and transactional—work in tandem to influence different aspects of employee performance. A strong relational contract can enhance trust and engagement, which boosts contextual performance, while a robust transactional contract ensures that task-related expectations are met. For instance, an academic staff member who believes the university is committed to their career development (relational contract) and also receives prompt remuneration and recognition for published research (transactional contract) is more likely to perform effectively both in core teaching tasks and in voluntary institutional roles. Moreover, when these contracts are aligned with institutional policies and communicated transparently, they foster a culture of accountability and shared responsibility. Employees who understand what the university expects from them and what they can expect in return are better positioned to contribute meaningfully to the university's strategic goals.

In the unique context of public-owned universities in Rivers State, Nigeria, the relevance of the psychological contract becomes even more pronounced. These institutions often grapple with funding constraints, political interference, infrastructural deficits, and management challenges. Under such conditions, maintaining employee morale and performance is difficult. Employees may experience unmet expectations regarding promotions, research grants, or staff welfare. Breaches in the psychological contract under these conditions can have dire consequences, including strikes, loss of trust in leadership, and reduced academic output. This is why it is crucial to explore how psychological contracts influence performance specifically in this environment. While transactional issues such as delayed salaries or unclear roles can directly impair task performance, unfulfilled relational aspects like a lack of recognition or poor communication can severely weaken contextual engagement and organizational citizenship behaviors.

Furthermore, the dimensions and measures discussed provide a framework for evaluating and improving employee performance through psychological contract management. Indicators of relational contracts,

such as mutual respect and long-term support, can be linked with contextual performance behaviors like collegial cooperation and initiative. Similarly, transactional contract indicators like compensation fairness and defined roles directly correlate with task performance indicators such as timeliness and adherence to protocols. By aligning institutional policies with these dimensions, university administrators can foster a conducive work environment that motivates employees and enhances overall performance. Leadership in these universities must strive to understand the psychological expectations of their workforce and manage them proactively through open communication, employee involvement, and fair HR practices. There is a need to carry out a study on Psychological Contract and Employee Performance of Public-Owned Universities in Rivers State to provide empirical insights that will inform policy reforms and enhance workforce effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

Employee performance is a critical determinant of institutional success in public organizations, especially within the education sector, where the quality of outputs and services directly influences national development goals. In public-owned universities in Rivers State, concerns about employee performance have become increasingly prominent, manifesting in both academic and administrative inefficiencies. These challenges have hindered the institutions' ability to maintain academic excellence, uphold professional standards, and meet the expectations of students, government agencies, and other stakeholders.

A central aspect of this challenge is the persistence of poor task performance among employees. There are frequent reports of incomplete or delayed execution of core responsibilities such as lesson preparation, grading, administrative documentation, and adherence to procedural timelines. These shortfalls contribute to disorganized academic calendars, late publication of results, and overall disruption of the academic process. The inability of staff to consistently meet job requirements and maintain expected levels of productivity points to an erosion of commitment and accountability in daily operations.

In parallel, the problem of inadequate contextual performance has also surfaced as a significant concern. Many employees display limited willingness to go beyond formal job descriptions by engaging in voluntary, cooperative, or institution-supportive behaviors. There is a noticeable decline in participation in non-mandatory activities such as committee service, peer support, community engagement, and institutional innovation. This lack of organizational citizenship behavior has weakened internal cohesion and reduced the collective motivation needed to drive institutional progress. In the public university context, where collaboration and proactive engagement are vital, the absence of strong contextual performance threatens both short-term functionality and long-term development.

These ongoing performance issues, spanning both task execution and contextual engagement, demand urgent academic inquiry to better understand the underlying dynamics and provide evidence-based solutions.

Conceptual Framework

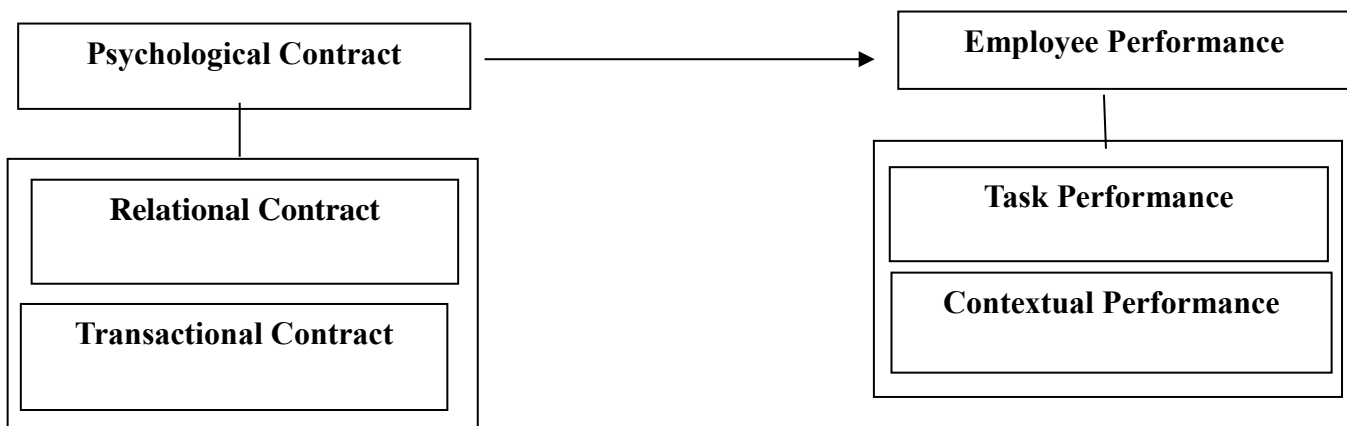


Fig 1.1: Conceptual Framework of Psychological Contract and Employee Performance

Source: Conway and Briner (2005); Igbinomwanhia et al. (2020); Ismail and Nasir (2010); Turnley and Feldman (2000).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the relationship between psychological contract and employee performance of public owned universities in Rivers State. The objectives of the study include to:

1. ascertain the relationship between relational contract and task performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.
2. determine the relationship between relational contract and contextual performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.
3. investigate the relationship between transactional contract and task performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.
4. examine the relationship between transactional contract and contextual performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between relational contract and task performance of public owned universities in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between relational contract and contextual performance of public owned universities in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between transactional contract and task performance of public owned universities in Rivers State?
4. What is the relationship between transactional contract and contextual performance of public owned universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between relational contract and task performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between relational contract and contextual performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between transactional contract and task performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between transactional contract and contextual performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

The Concept of Psychological Contract

The psychological contract refers to the unwritten, informal set of expectations and beliefs that exist between an employee and their employer regarding mutual obligations. It extends beyond the formal employment contract, encompassing perceptions about job security, career development, support, fairness, and recognition (Rousseau, 1989). Unlike legal contracts, the psychological contract is subjective and shaped by individual interpretations and experiences. It serves as a framework through which employees evaluate their treatment by the organization, and it influences their attitudes, motivation, and behavior. When the psychological contract is perceived as being fulfilled, employees are more likely to demonstrate trust, loyalty, and increased performance. Conversely, when they perceive a breach such as a lack of recognition or broken promises it can result in dissatisfaction, disengagement, and reduced commitment (Conway & Briner, 2005).

Dimensions of Psychological Contract

Psychological contracts are often categorized into two major dimensions: relational contracts and transactional contracts. These dimensions capture the emotional and economic aspects of the employment relationship.

Relational Contract: The relational contract is grounded in long-term, socio-emotional elements such as mutual trust, loyalty, support, and a shared commitment to organizational goals. Employees who perceive a strong relational contract are more likely to feel valued and integrated into the organization. This dimension includes expectations of personal development, job security, recognition, and emotional support from management. In public-owned universities, relational contracts may be reflected in consistent mentorship, career growth opportunities, and genuine institutional care for employee well-being (Rousseau, 1995).

Transactional Contract: In contrast, the transactional contract is based on short-term, specific, and economically-driven exchanges. It includes clearly defined roles, responsibilities, remuneration, performance-related rewards, and conditions such as working hours and job tasks. Employees expect the organization to honor these tangible aspects, and in return, they commit to fulfilling their job duties. This form of contract is more prevalent in task-specific roles and is essential for maintaining discipline and productivity. In universities, it involves timely salary payment, role clarity, and performance evaluation systems.

Employee Performance

Employee performance refers to the effectiveness with which employees fulfill their job responsibilities and contribute to organizational goals. It encompasses both the direct execution of tasks and the broader behaviors that support a positive and productive work environment. High employee performance is essential for the success of any institution, especially in educational settings where outcomes depend on staff commitment, initiative, and cooperation (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993). Performance is not limited to academic output but includes administrative competence, responsiveness, adaptability, and collegiality, all of which contribute to institutional development.

Measures of Employee Performance

Employee performance can be measured through various lenses, with task performance and contextual performance being two widely recognized dimensions.

Task Performance: Task performance relates to the core duties assigned to an employee. It involves the timely completion of tasks, accuracy, adherence to institutional policies, and the application of skills necessary for job execution. In public universities, task performance may include teaching, research, grading, and administrative tasks. Effective task performance ensures academic excellence, operational efficiency, and organizational reliability.

Contextual Performance: Contextual performance refers to behaviors that go beyond formal job requirements and contribute to the broader organizational environment. It includes helping colleagues, showing initiative, volunteering for committees, and aligning with institutional values. Such behaviors enhance teamwork, communication, and the overall workplace culture. In public-owned universities, contextual performance is vital for collaborative academic efforts, innovation, and the advancement of institutional goals (Organ, 1997).

Relationship between Psychological Contract and Employee Performance

The relationship between psychological contract and employee performance is deeply interconnected. When employees perceive that their psychological contracts are honored, they are more likely to reciprocate with both high task and contextual performance. Fulfilled relational contracts foster emotional commitment, leading to increased cooperation, loyalty, and voluntary efforts. Meanwhile, the fulfillment of transactional contracts encourages precision, discipline, and adherence to formal duties. In public-owned universities in Rivers State, maintaining both dimensions of the psychological contract is essential for improving staff morale and productivity. A breach in the psychological contract—such as delayed

promotions, unclear communication, or lack of institutional support—can lead to reduced trust and performance deterioration. Therefore, managing psychological contracts effectively is key to fostering a motivated, high-performing workforce in educational institutions.

Theoretical Review

Psychological Contract Theory

The Psychological Contract Theory was developed by Denise Rousseau in 1989 to explain the unwritten and implicit expectations that exist between employees and their employers. This theory assumes that individuals form beliefs about the obligations and mutual expectations within the employment relationship, which are shaped by organizational culture, communication, and individual interpretation. It distinguishes between transactional contracts, which are economic and short-term in nature, and relational contracts, which are socio-emotional and long-term. When the perceived psychological contract is fulfilled, employees tend to reciprocate with loyalty, trust, and improved performance. However, when there is a breach such as unmet expectations for promotion, recognition, or support employees may respond with reduced commitment, lower morale, and diminished performance (Rousseau, 1995).

Despite its widespread application, the theory has been criticized for its subjectivity and lack of measurable constructs. Critics argue that since psychological contracts are based on individual perceptions, they are difficult to observe, standardize, or evaluate empirically (Conway & Briner, 2005). Nevertheless, the theory remains vital in understanding employee behavior in organizations. In the context of public-owned universities in Rivers State, the theory helps explain how perceived breaches in psychological contracts—such as delayed promotions, lack of communication, or poor managerial support—can lead to low task and contextual performance among staff. The theory provides a lens through which the relationship between institutional practices and staff performance can be analyzed, especially in environments where formal employment terms are often insufficient to capture the full range of employee expectations.

Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory was first introduced by George Homans in 1958 and later developed further by Peter Blau in 1964. The theory is based on the idea that human interactions are transactions in which individuals seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs. It posits that relationships, including those in the workplace, are built and maintained through a continuous exchange of resources, whether tangible (such as salary or job security) or intangible (such as respect or recognition). In organizational settings, the theory suggests that when employees perceive they are being treated fairly and supported adequately by their employers, they feel a sense of obligation to reciprocate through increased job performance, loyalty, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Blau, 1964).

One of the core assumptions of Social Exchange Theory is that human behavior is driven by the principle of reciprocity. Individuals engage in social exchanges with the expectation that their contributions will be returned in some form. This assumption implies that positive workplace experiences—such as recognition, trust, and development opportunities—will motivate employees to give back to the organization through dedication and high performance. It also suggests that negative or unrewarding experiences may result in withdrawal, reduced effort, or turnover intentions.

Despite its strengths, a major criticism of the theory is its emphasis on rational and economic aspects of human interaction. Critics argue that it may downplay the emotional, cultural, and ethical dimensions of workplace behavior, which are also crucial in shaping employee attitudes. Nevertheless, the theory offers a useful lens for understanding the dynamics between employers and employees. In the context of public-owned universities in Rivers State, Social Exchange Theory helps explain why staff members who perceive fulfillment of their psychological contracts whether through supportive leadership, fair treatment, or recognition are more likely to demonstrate strong task performance and engage in positive, discretionary behaviors that benefit the institution.

Empirical Review

A study by Turnley and Feldman (2000) examined the effects of psychological contract breaches on employee attitudes and behaviors across various sectors. The findings showed that breaches in the psychological contract were significantly associated with reduced job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and increased intentions to leave. Employees who perceived a breach in promises related to support, recognition, or career advancement exhibited lower levels of performance. This study underscores the detrimental effects of unfulfilled expectations on workplace outcomes.

In a more specific context, Ismail and Nasir (2010) conducted a study among Malaysian university staff to assess how psychological contract fulfillment impacts performance. The study revealed a positive relationship between psychological contract fulfillment—particularly the relational elements like career development and supervisor support—and both task and contextual performance. Staff members who believed their psychological contracts were honored were more engaged, collaborative, and willing to exert extra effort beyond formal job roles. This reinforces the importance of maintaining relational aspects of the psychological contract in academic institutions.

In Nigeria, Igbinomwanhia et al. (2020) investigated psychological contract and job performance in public universities in the South-South region. The study found that breaches in both transactional and relational contracts negatively influenced employee performance. In particular, delayed promotions, lack of communication, and unmet welfare expectations were cited as major contributors to poor performance. The study concluded that maintaining psychological contract integrity is key to enhancing performance in Nigerian public universities.

Method

Research Design: This study adopted a correlational research design. This design was deemed appropriate as it enables the researcher to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between psychological contract and employee performance among teaching and non-teaching staff in public-owned universities in Rivers State.

Population of the Study: The population of the study comprised 8,063 teaching and non-teaching staff drawn from public-owned universities in Rivers State. This includes employees from institutions such as the University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State University, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, and other state-owned higher education institutions. The population figure was obtained from the Human Resources departments of the respective institutions as of 2024.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique: The study employed a simple random sampling technique to ensure that every member of the population had an equal chance of being selected. This method enhanced the representativeness of the sample. The Taro Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size for the study, yielding a sample size of 380 respondents. This number was considered adequate for generalizing findings to the entire population.

Instrument for Data Collection: Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed in a five-point Likert scale format ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". The questionnaire was developed to measure the dimensions of psychological contract (relational and transactional) and the measures of employee performance (task and contextual performance).

Validity Test: The instrument underwent face and content validity checks. Two experts in Measurement and Evaluation from the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education reviewed the questionnaire to ensure alignment with the research objectives. Based on their recommendations, adjustments were made to improve clarity, relevance, and coverage of key variables.

Reliability of the Instrument: The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's Alpha to determine its internal consistency. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.78, indicating that the instrument was sufficiently reliable for the study.

Administration of the Instrument: The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to respondents in their respective universities with the assistance of research aides. These assistants, who were staff members familiar with the institutional environment and personnel, helped facilitate access and efficient distribution. Their involvement ensured effective communication and encouraged higher

response rates. Completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately after they were filled to minimize loss and ensure data accuracy.

Method of Data Analysis: The data collected were analyzed using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation at a 0.05 level of significance to test the hypotheses on the relationship between psychological contract and employee performance. Additionally, partial correlation analysis was employed to test for the moderating effect of human capital development on the relationship. The decision rule was: if the significance value (p) is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected; if p is less than or equal to 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Data Analysis

A total 380 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the three public owned universities in Rivers State, Nigeria. 324 copies of the questionnaires were appropriately filled and returned while 56 were not returned or properly filled.

Hypothesis 1

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between relational contract and task performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

Table 1: Correlation Between Relational Contract and Task Performance

			Relational Contract	Task Performance
Spearman's rho	Relational Contract	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.745**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	324	324
	Task Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.745**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	324	324

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The spearman correlation revealed a statistically reliable relationship between the relational contract and task performance and $p > 0.05$ at 74.5%. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis was formulated which states that;

H_{A1}: There is a significant relationship between relational contract and task performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between relational contract and contextual performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

Table 2: Correlation Between Relational Contract and Contextual Performance

			Relational Contract	Contextual Performance
Spearman's rho	Relational Contract	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.811**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	324	324
		Correlation Coefficient	.811**	1.000

Contextual Performance	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
	N	324	324

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The spearman correlation revealed a statistically reliable relationship between the relational contract and contextual performance and $p > 0.05$ at 81.1%. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis was formulated which states that;

H_{A2}: There is a significant relationship between relational contract and contextual performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 3

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between transactional contract and task performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

Table 3: Correlation Between Transactional Contract and Task Performance

			Transactional Contract	Task Performance
Spearman's rho	Transactional Contract	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.783**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	355	355
	Task Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.783**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	355	355

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The spearman correlation revealed a statistically reliable relationship between the transactional contract and task performance and $p > 0.05$ at 78.3%. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis was formulated which states that;

H_{A3}: There is a significant relationship between transactional contract and task performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 4

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between transactional contract and contextual performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

Table 4: Correlation Between Transactional Contract and Contextual Performance

			Transactional Contract	Contextual Performance
Spearman's rho	Transactional Contract	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.714**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	324	324
	Contextual Performance	Correlation Coefficient	.714**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	324	324

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Spearman correlation revealed a statistically reliable relationship between the transactional contract and contextual performance and $p > 0.05$ at 71.4%. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and an alternative hypothesis was formulated which states that;

H_{A4}: There is a significant relationship between transactional contract and contextual performance of public owned universities in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed significant relationships between the dimensions of psychological contract and employee performance indicators in public-owned universities in Rivers State. The first hypothesis established a strong positive relationship between relational contract and task performance, with a correlation coefficient of .745. This implies that when employees perceive supportive, long-term, and trust-based relationships with their institutions, they tend to execute their assigned tasks more effectively. This finding aligns with the work of Ismail and Nasir (2010), who reported that psychological contract fulfillment, especially relational aspects, significantly enhanced academic staff performance in Malaysian universities. Similarly, Conway and Briner (2005) emphasized that relational contracts build employee loyalty and encourage higher job commitment.

The second hypothesis revealed an even stronger correlation (.811) between relational contract and contextual performance. This suggests that employees who feel emotionally connected and valued are more likely to engage in voluntary behaviors that support the university environment, such as helping colleagues and participating in non-obligatory tasks. Organ (1997) supported this outcome, noting that positive socio-emotional exchanges enhance organizational citizenship behaviors. Turnley and Feldman (2000) also found that employees with fulfilled relational contracts tend to demonstrate higher levels of contextual performance due to enhanced morale and perceived fairness.

Hypothesis three indicated a significant relationship between transactional contract and task performance, with a correlation of .783. This shows that employees respond positively to clear role definitions, compensation, and other tangible benefits. When transactional elements of the psychological contract are met, such as salary, job security, and performance evaluation, staff members are motivated to carry out their formal duties efficiently. This finding corroborates the study by Igbinomwanhia, Igbinoba, and Oviawe (2020), which found that well-defined transactional exchanges improve job output in Nigerian public universities.

The final hypothesis confirmed a significant relationship (.714) between transactional contract and contextual performance. Although relational elements often dominate contextual behaviors, this result suggests that transactional fulfillment also fosters a sense of fairness and reciprocity that motivates employees to go beyond their job descriptions. Employees who feel adequately rewarded and supported materially may engage in behaviors that foster a positive institutional climate, which echoes the observations made by Rousseau (1995) and Turnley and Feldman (2000).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both relational and transactional dimensions of the psychological contract play a critical role in influencing employee performance in public-owned universities in Rivers State. The strong positive correlations found between these dimensions and both task and contextual performance indicators underscore the importance of maintaining clear, fair, and supportive employment relationships. Employees respond positively not only to economic rewards and job clarity (transactional contracts) but also to trust, mutual respect, and long-term commitment (relational contracts). When universities fulfill both forms of psychological contracts, they create a motivated and high-performing workforce. Consequently, institutional efforts that seek to improve staff performance must prioritize both the socio-emotional and material expectations of their employees. Addressing these areas comprehensively can lead to improved job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and overall institutional effectiveness, particularly in the educational sector where performance is closely tied to national development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. University management should strengthen long-term relational bonds with staff through consistent career development, recognition, and transparent communication to enhance task performance.
2. Institutions should build emotional support systems and inclusive leadership practices that encourage voluntary, contextual behaviors among staff.
3. Public universities should ensure prompt remuneration, clear job descriptions, and fair appraisal systems to sustain high levels of task performance.
4. Transactional expectations like job security and resource provision should be consistently fulfilled to reinforce employees' willingness to contribute beyond their formal roles.

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