

The Moral Architecture of Public Service: Justice, Legitimacy, and Conflict in a Nigerian Teaching Service Commission

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ABSTRACT

Organizational justice has increasingly been recognized as a critical determinant of institutional legitimacy and effective conflict management within public sector organizations, yet empirical evidence from African public bureaucracies remains limited. This study examines the moral architecture of public service by investigating the interrelationships among organizational justice, institutional legitimacy, and organizational conflict within a Nigerian Teaching Service Commission. Anchored in Rawls' Theory of Justice and Social Contract Theory, the study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design integrating quantitative and qualitative evidence to provide both empirical and normative insights. Quantitative data were collected from 387 valid respondents selected through proportionate stratified random sampling, while qualitative evidence was generated through 20 semi-structured interviews with purposively selected Commission officials, teachers, and union representatives. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis, whereas qualitative data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's framework, with findings integrated through an explanation-building strategy. The results revealed generally low perceptions of organizational justice ($M = 2.74$) and institutional legitimacy ($M = 2.64$), with procedural justice recording the lowest mean score ($M = 2.58$). Promotion delays (80.6%) and unfair staff postings (73.9%) emerged as the principal sources of organizational conflict. Correlation analysis showed a strong positive relationship between organizational justice and institutional legitimacy ($r = 0.741, p < .01$) and a significant negative relationship between organizational justice and organizational conflict ($r = -0.693, p < .01$). Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that organizational justice explained 68.4% of the variance in institutional legitimacy ($R^2 = 0.684, p < .001$), with procedural justice constituting the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.386, p < .001$). Qualitative findings corroborated these results by revealing widespread perceptions of promotion inequity, procedural opacity, declining institutional trust, and strong demands for merit-based governance. The study concludes that organizational conflict is fundamentally rooted in deficits of organizational justice rather than administrative inefficiency alone and argues that restoring institutional legitimacy requires embedding justice, transparency, and accountability as the normative foundations of public administration.

Keywords: Organizational justice; institutional legitimacy; conflict management; public administration; Rawls' Theory of Justice; social contract theory; Nigeria



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INTRODUCTION

The legitimacy of public institutions rests not merely on the legal authority conferred upon them but on the extent to which citizens and public employees perceive their decisions and administrative practices as fair, transparent, and impartial. Institutional justice constitutes the moral foundation upon which public confidence, employee commitment, and administrative effectiveness are built. Where public institutions consistently uphold principles of distributive fairness, procedural integrity, and respectful interpersonal treatment, they cultivate legitimacy and voluntary compliance. Conversely, persistent perceptions of injustice generate distrust, weaken institutional authority, encourage workplace conflict, and undermine the capacity of government agencies to fulfil their public mandates (Rawls, 1999; Ukeje et al., 2026).

Across many African public bureaucracies, administrative conflict has become increasingly intertwined with broader crises of governance, institutional legitimacy, and declining public trust. Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that these challenges extend beyond administrative inefficiency or financial constraints to include structural deficiencies in organizational justice, political interference, weak accountability mechanisms, and inconsistent implementation of public policies (Ololube, 2025; Ayanda, 2025; Braji, 2025). Recent studies further argue that ineffective public institutions not only diminish service delivery but also weaken democratic governance by eroding citizens' confidence in state institutions and the social contract between government and society (Ndema & Ndukwe, 2026; Obasun, 2025).

Nigeria exemplifies these governance challenges. Although successive governments have introduced numerous public sector reforms aimed at improving accountability, transparency, and administrative performance, many institutions continue to experience persistent conflict, politicisation of personnel management, weak institutional autonomy, and declining public confidence (Braji, 2025; Dal, 2026). The implementation of constitutional principles intended to promote equity within the public service has similarly been constrained by political patronage, elite manipulation, inconsistent enforcement, and limited institutional oversight, thereby undermining meritocracy and organizational legitimacy (Aghamelu, 2025). Consequently, conflict within public organizations increasingly reflects deeper concerns regarding justice, fairness, and institutional credibility rather than merely operational or managerial shortcomings. These concerns are particularly significant within state Teaching Service Commissions, which occupy a strategic position in educational governance through their statutory responsibility for the recruitment, appointment, posting, promotion, discipline, and welfare of teaching personnel. Because these responsibilities directly influence

employees' careers and professional identities, perceptions of fairness in administrative decision-making become central to organizational legitimacy. Allegations relating to inequitable promotion practices, inconsistent postings, discretionary disciplinary measures, and perceived favouritism have repeatedly generated disputes within Teaching Service Commissions, suggesting that organizational conflict frequently originates from contested perceptions of justice rather than administrative inefficiency alone (Ondo State House of Assembly Committee on Education, 2018). International experience similarly demonstrates that public service institutions maintain legitimacy when personnel administration is insulated from political interference and governed through transparent, merit-based procedures that balance neutrality with constitutional accountability (Augustin-Joseph & Wilson, 2026).

Recent governance scholarship increasingly recognizes that institutional legitimacy emerges through meaningful stakeholder participation, transparent decision-making, and accountable governance structures. Inclusive administrative processes enhance trust, strengthen institutional credibility, and reduce conflict by reinforcing employees' confidence that organizational decisions are both procedurally and substantively fair (Ukeje et al., 2026). Likewise, comparative studies of public sector conflict management across Africa indicate that institutions characterized by clear legal frameworks, independent dispute-resolution mechanisms, and reduced political interference experience greater organizational stability and more effective conflict resolution than those governed through discretionary administrative practices (Ololube, 2025). These findings suggest that justice should be understood not simply as an ethical aspiration but as a strategic institutional resource for sustaining effective governance. Despite an expanding body of literature on public sector reforms, organizational conflict, and governance in Nigeria, relatively limited attention has been devoted to examining how organizational justice functions as the moral architecture through which institutional legitimacy is either strengthened or undermined within state public service organizations. Existing studies have predominantly emphasized administrative reforms, anti-corruption initiatives, policy implementation, leadership, or governance capacity (Ayanda, 2025; Braji, 2025; Eguah, 2026), while giving comparatively little attention to the philosophical foundations linking justice, legitimacy, and conflict in public institutions responsible for human resource governance. This gap is particularly evident within Teaching Service Commissions, whose institutional effectiveness depends heavily upon employees' perceptions of procedural fairness, distributive equity, and respectful administrative interactions.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the theoretical and conceptual literature underpinning organizational justice, institutional legitimacy, and conflict management. This is followed by the methodology, findings and discussion, before concluding with the study's theoretical contributions, policy implications, and recommendations for strengthening justice-centred governance within Nigerian public institutions.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored principally in John Rawls' Theory of Justice, particularly his conception of justice as fairness, which provides a normative framework for evaluating whether institutional arrangements distribute opportunities, responsibilities, rewards, and sanctions fairly among members of an organisation. Rawls (1999) argues that just institutions are those whose governing principles would be freely selected by rational individuals operating behind a veil of ignorance, where no individual knows his or her future social position, authority, ethnicity, political affiliation, or personal advantage. Under such conditions, institutional rules cannot be designed to privilege particular interests but must instead promote fairness, equality of opportunity, and protection of the least advantaged members of society.

Applied to the Nigerian Teaching Service Commission, Rawls' framework provides an analytical standard for assessing recruitment, promotion, deployment, disciplinary procedures, conflict resolution, and administrative decision-making. Administrative decisions can be considered just only when they could reasonably be accepted by every employee irrespective of future organisational position or personal interest. Where promotion, posting, welfare allocation, or disciplinary measures become influenced by political patronage, ethnicity, favouritism, or arbitrary discretion, the institution departs from Rawlsian justice because its governing principles no longer satisfy impartiality or equal moral consideration.

Recent scholarship on Nigerian public institutions strongly supports this theoretical orientation. Reuben (2025) argues that governance failures in Nigeria are fundamentally rooted in weak institutional capacity, poor accountability, corruption, and ineffective policy implementation rather than merely administrative inefficiency.

Institutional weakness therefore represents not simply a technical problem but a failure of justice because organisational rules cease to operate fairly across members. Similarly, Ayanda (2025) demonstrates that sustainable public-sector reforms require institutional transparency, accountability, and effective implementation mechanisms capable of rebuilding public confidence in government organisations. Together, these studies suggest that institutional legitimacy emerges not

from statutory authority alone but from consistently fair administrative practice. The Rawlsian perspective is further reinforced by contemporary research on procedural justice and legitimacy within Nigerian public institutions. Akinboyewa (2026), examining the Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme, demonstrates that perceptions of procedural fairness significantly influence institutional legitimacy, trust, social cohesion, and programme effectiveness. The study shows that ethnocentrism, patrimonialism, and unequal treatment undermine confidence in public institutions because stakeholders perceive administrative processes as biased rather than impartial. These findings closely align with Rawls' argument that institutional legitimacy depends upon fair procedures rather than simply favourable outcomes. Likewise, Ndema and Ndukwe (2026) conclude that persistent failures in policy implementation within the Nigerian civil service erode democratic legitimacy by weakening public trust, reinforcing patronage networks, and diminishing organisational accountability. Their findings illustrate how deficiencies in procedural justice gradually undermine both administrative performance and institutional legitimacy.

The framework is complemented by Social Contract Theory, particularly the perspectives advanced by John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, both of whom explain legitimacy as arising from morally justified authority rather than coercive power. Locke (1989) argues that governmental authority derives from the consent of those governed and remains legitimate only while protecting their rights and fulfilling institutional obligations. Where public organisations violate principles of fairness, transparency, or accountability, they lose moral legitimacy regardless of their formal legal authority. Rousseau (1997), in contrast, locates legitimacy in adherence to the general will, arguing that public institutions exist to advance collective welfare rather than sectional interests. From this perspective, organisational conflict frequently emerges when administrative authority is captured by political patronage, ethnic loyalties, or personal interests that displace the common good.

Recent Nigerian governance literature provides substantial empirical support for this social contract perspective. Ololube (2025) demonstrates that prolonged public-sector conflicts are largely products of weak institutional autonomy, political interference, and ineffective dispute-resolution mechanisms rather than inevitable consequences of labour relations. The study further argues that transparent mediation, institutional independence, and rule-based administrative processes significantly reduce organisational conflict while strengthening governance legitimacy. Similarly, Joseph and Okunade (2026) show that governance deteriorates when democratic institutions become subordinated to elite interests through political manipulation and weak institutional accountability, thereby reinforcing the importance of legitimacy as a prerequisite for sustainable

governance. Beyond institutional effectiveness, this study also incorporates the ethical dimension of public administration. Okonkwo (2025) argues that justice, human dignity, solidarity, inclusiveness, and the common good constitute essential moral foundations for public policy and anti-corruption reforms in Nigeria. These ethical principles complement Rawls' distributive justice by emphasising that public institutions must not only administer rules fairly but also cultivate organisational cultures grounded in integrity, equity, and respect for human dignity.

Drawing together these theoretical traditions, this study conceptualises the moral architecture of public service institutions as the integrated system of distributive arrangements, procedural rules, ethical norms, and interactional practices through which organisational authority is exercised. Moral architecture extends beyond administrative efficiency or statutory compliance by evaluating whether institutional arrangements satisfy principles of fairness, impartiality, legitimacy, and accountability. A bureaucracy may comply with formal legal procedures while simultaneously possessing a deficient moral architecture if appointments, promotions, disciplinary actions, or conflict-management processes are influenced by patronage, ethnicity, political interference, or arbitrary discretion. Consequently, this study argues that organisational conflict within the Nigerian Teaching Service Commission should not be interpreted merely as an administrative or labour-management problem but as evidence of deeper deficiencies within the institution's moral architecture. Persistent disputes over promotion, welfare, deployment, disciplinary procedures, and organisational justice reflect failures in distributive fairness, procedural legitimacy, ethical governance, and institutional accountability. By integrating Rawls' Theory of Justice with Social Contract Theory and recent scholarship on Nigerian public-sector governance, institutional legitimacy, conflict management, and ethical administration, this framework provides a comprehensive analytical foundation for explaining how justice shapes legitimacy, organisational trust, conflict dynamics, and administrative performance within public service institutions. This study aims to examine how organisational justice shapes institutional legitimacy and influences conflict management within a Nigerian State Teaching Service Commission. Specifically, the study investigates employees' perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice; evaluates the extent to which these dimensions of organisational justice influence institutional legitimacy; and examines how perceived organisational justice and institutional legitimacy affect the effectiveness of conflict management mechanisms. By integrating Rawls' Theory of Justice and Social Contract Theory, the study seeks to provide a normative explanation of how fairness in administrative decision-making strengthens institutional trust and promotes effective conflict management in

public sector organizations.

Conceptual and Literature Review

Organizational justice has emerged as one of the most influential concepts in public administration, organizational behaviour, and governance studies because it explains how employees evaluate fairness within institutional settings and how these evaluations shape organizational outcomes. Justice in organizations extends beyond compliance with formal rules to encompass the fairness of institutional decisions, the procedures through which decisions are made, and the quality of interpersonal treatment experienced by organizational members. The foundational work of Adams (1965) introduced Equity Theory, arguing that employees continuously compare their contributions and rewards with those of others, and perceptions of inequity generate dissatisfaction, conflict, reduced commitment, and withdrawal behaviours. Building on this foundation, Greenberg's conceptualization of organizational justice and the meta-analysis of Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, and Ng (2001) established three complementary dimensions of organizational justice—distributive, procedural, and interactional justice—which remain the dominant framework for analysing fairness in organizations.

Distributive justice concerns the perceived fairness of organizational outcomes such as salaries, promotions, transfers, recognition, and allocation of institutional resources. Employees are more likely to demonstrate commitment and trust when rewards correspond to effort, competence, and established organizational standards. Procedural justice refers to the fairness, consistency, transparency, neutrality, and inclusiveness of the processes through which these outcomes are determined. Fair procedures increase employees' confidence in institutional authority even when outcomes are personally unfavourable because transparent decision-making signals respect for due process. Interactional justice complements these dimensions by emphasizing the quality of interpersonal treatment, including dignity, honesty, respect, adequate communication, and timely explanations provided by organizational leaders during decision implementation.

Contemporary empirical evidence continues to reinforce the importance of organizational justice across public institutions. Chen, Sun, Wu, Ha, and Zheng (2025) demonstrated that perceptions of procedural and interactional justice significantly improved employee well-being, organizational trust, and technology acceptance among police officers, indicating that justice remains fundamental even within highly structured public organizations. Similarly, Alkafaween and Yüksel (2025) found that employees' perceptions of organizational justice positively influenced institutional commitment and organizational effectiveness within the Ministry of Youth

and Sports. Derelioğlu (2025) further reported that transparent administrative practices, equitable treatment, and consistent managerial behaviour significantly strengthened employees' confidence in university governance. De Gieter, De Cooman, Hofmans, Pepermans, and Jegers (2012) likewise established that justice perceptions reduce turnover intentions by increasing psychological satisfaction with organizational rewards. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that organizational justice functions not merely as a human resource variable but as a strategic institutional resource that strengthens organizational effectiveness, employee morale, and administrative stability.

The philosophical foundations of organizational justice originate from broader theories of justice and political legitimacy. Locke's social contract theory posits that governmental authority derives its legitimacy from the consent of the governed and exists primarily to protect individual rights through impartial governance (Locke, 1989). Rousseau (1997) similarly argued that legitimate authority emerges from collective agreement and equal participation in public decision-making, while Rawls (1999) proposed that justice requires fairness in both institutional procedures and the distribution of opportunities and benefits. These philosophical traditions provide the normative basis for contemporary organizational justice by emphasizing that institutions derive legitimacy not solely from legal authority but from fairness, impartiality, transparency, and equal treatment. Consequently, organizational justice represents the operational expression of these philosophical principles within administrative institutions.

Institutional legitimacy refers to the extent to which employees and citizens perceive public institutions as rightful, trustworthy, competent, and deserving of voluntary compliance. Unlike formal legal authority, legitimacy is socially constructed through consistent institutional behaviour, procedural fairness, accountability, transparency, and ethical leadership. Recent governance scholarship increasingly recognises legitimacy as one of the most valuable assets of democratic institutions because it facilitates voluntary compliance, policy implementation, and institutional resilience. Bazie and Diallo (2025) found that declining institutional performance significantly reduced public trust and weakened state legitimacy across the Sahel, while Malliaros and Alejandro Pacheco-Jaramillo (2026) proposed that institutional legitimacy develops through the interconnected principles of voice, transparency, accountability, choice, and public trust. Likewise, Ukeje, Suzana, Ejem, Akor, Aloh, Arinze, and Nwangbo (2026) demonstrated that stakeholder participation substantially improves policy legitimacy by increasing transparency and citizen confidence in governmental decision-making. Within Nigeria, questions of institutional legitimacy remain closely connected to governance quality and public sector performance. Adebayo (2004) argues that public

administration achieves legitimacy through adherence to merit, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness to public expectations. However, contemporary evidence suggests that persistent governance failures continue to undermine these ideals. Reuben (2025) attributes declining confidence in Nigerian public institutions to weak institutional capacity, inadequate accountability, political interference, and inconsistent policy implementation. Similarly, Ayanda (2025) advocates comprehensive institutional reforms centred on meritocracy, administrative professionalism, and stronger governance systems as prerequisites for sustainable public administration. Studies by Braji (2025), Dal (2026), Ndema and Ndukwe (2026), Okonkwo and Idigo (2025), Joseph and Okunade (2026), and Obasun (2025) consistently identify corruption, political patronage, weak institutions, and ineffective policy implementation as major contributors to declining institutional legitimacy across Nigeria's public sector.

An important dimension of institutional legitimacy concerns fairness in personnel administration. The implementation of the Federal Character Principle, designed to promote equitable representation, has generated continuing scholarly debate regarding the balance between representational equity and merit-based administration. Aghamelu (2025) argues that inconsistent implementation of the policy has sometimes produced perceptions of unfairness, reduced administrative efficiency, and weakened employees' confidence in public institutions. Similarly, Akinboyewa (2026) demonstrates that procedural justice significantly influences institutional legitimacy because employees are more willing to support institutional decisions when they perceive decision-making processes as fair, impartial, and transparent.

Conflict management constitutes another essential component of effective public administration because organizational conflict is inevitable wherever individuals compete for limited resources, authority, recognition, or career advancement. Conflict itself is not inherently dysfunctional; rather, its consequences depend largely on how institutions identify, manage, and resolve disagreements. Bercovitch, Kremenjuk, and Zartman (2009) define conflict management as the systematic application of institutional mechanisms designed to prevent escalation while promoting negotiation, mediation, collaboration, and mutually acceptable solutions. Contemporary scholarship increasingly views conflict management as an integral component of institutional governance rather than merely an administrative procedure. Oyekanmi (2025), Wassan, Kousar, and Bhutto (2026), and Sembodo, Arifin, Rahayu, Rahman, and Sahid (2025) demonstrate that sustainable conflict resolution depends upon procedural fairness, stakeholder participation, transparent communication, and institutional credibility rather than coercive administrative control.

Within Nigerian public institutions, conflict management has frequently been associated with industrial disputes, grievances over promotion, political interference, inequitable resource allocation, and inconsistent disciplinary procedures. Fashoyin (2008) observed that ineffective industrial relations weaken organizational productivity because unresolved disputes erode trust between employees and management. Imhanlahimi and Ikeanyibe (2009) similarly found that ineffective conflict management negatively affects service delivery within Nigerian public institutions, while Ikeanyibe and Osho (2013) demonstrated that weak institutional structures significantly contribute to conflict escalation within state bureaucracies. Ololube (2025) further argues that effective conflict management requires impartial leadership, transparent grievance mechanisms, and institutional commitment to fairness. These findings indicate that conflict management cannot be understood independently of organizational justice because perceptions of unfairness frequently constitute the underlying source of organizational disputes. Recent governance scholarship increasingly suggests that organizational justice, institutional legitimacy, and conflict management are mutually reinforcing rather than independent administrative concepts. Suddaby and Zakaria (2026) argue that institutional theory explains organizational effectiveness through the interaction between institutional norms, legitimacy, and organizational behaviour. Roth and Sales (2026) similarly contend that institutional purpose and organizational legitimacy become sustainable only when governance structures consistently reflect principles of fairness, accountability, and transparency. Eguah (2026) further demonstrates that transformational leadership strengthens institutional reform primarily by embedding justice, trust, and ethical governance within organizational culture.

Viewed collectively, the literature demonstrates that public institutions perform more effectively when organizational justice strengthens institutional legitimacy and when legitimate institutions possess credible mechanisms for resolving organizational conflict. Nevertheless, existing scholarship has largely examined these concepts independently, either emphasizing organizational justice as a human resource construct, institutional legitimacy as a governance outcome, or conflict management as an administrative function. Few studies, particularly within Nigerian public administration, have integrated these constructs into a single analytical framework that explains how fairness generates legitimacy and how legitimacy subsequently shapes institutional approaches to conflict management. This theoretical fragmentation represents a significant gap in contemporary public administration literature.

Accordingly, the present study conceptualises organizational justice, institutional legitimacy, and conflict management as interconnected dimensions of institutional governance.

Organizational justice provides the normative foundation upon which institutional legitimacy is constructed, while institutional legitimacy enhances employees' willingness to accept administrative decisions and engage constructively in conflict resolution processes. Conflict management therefore becomes not merely a procedural mechanism but an institutional outcome that reflects the quality of justice embedded within governance structures. By integrating these concepts into a unified explanatory framework, this study contributes to contemporary debates on governance reform, institutional effectiveness, and public sector administration in Nigeria while extending existing scholarship beyond fragmented analyses of isolated organizational variables.

Research Hypotheses

Hypothesis One (H_1): Organisational justice has a significant positive influence on institutional legitimacy. Hypothesis Two (H_2): Institutional legitimacy has a significant positive influence on conflict management effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design in which quantitative data collection and analysis preceded qualitative inquiry, with integration occurring during the interpretation of findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The explanatory sequential approach was selected because it enables statistical patterns identified in the quantitative phase to be subsequently explored through qualitative evidence, thereby providing a richer understanding of the institutional processes underpinning organisational justice, institutional legitimacy, and workplace conflict within a Nigerian Teaching Service Commission. The design is particularly appropriate for studies examining complex governance phenomena where numerical trends require contextual and philosophical interpretation. Although the broader empirical investigation was originally undertaken within a public administration framework, the present study reinterprets the evidence through the normative perspectives of Rawls' Theory of Justice and Social Contract Theory. Consequently, the quantitative findings establish the prevalence and distribution of perceived organisational justice deficits, while the qualitative evidence provides interpretive depth regarding how institutional actors construct meanings of fairness, legitimacy, and conflict within everyday administrative practice.

Study Area and Population

The study was conducted within a State Teaching Service Commission in Nigeria, the statutory institution

responsible for the recruitment, deployment, promotion, discipline, and general management of public secondary school teachers. The target population comprised administrative personnel of the Commission, public secondary school teachers under its authority, and recognized teachers' union representatives who regularly engage with the Commission on employment-related matters.

Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

The quantitative component employed proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure adequate representation of the major stakeholder groups across the three senatorial districts of the state. Stratification minimized sampling bias by ensuring proportional inclusion of respondents from the various administrative and geographical units.

A total of 420 structured questionnaires were administered. Of these, 387 questionnaires were correctly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 92.1%, which exceeds the response threshold generally considered adequate for organizational survey research (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). The qualitative phase adopted purposive criterion sampling to select participants possessing substantial institutional knowledge and direct experience of recruitment, promotion, staff posting, disciplinary procedures, grievance management, and labour relations. Twenty key informants participated in semi-structured interviews, comprising senior Commission officials, experienced teachers, and union executives. Recruitment continued until sufficient information redundancy was achieved, indicating thematic saturation.

Data Collection Instruments

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of four sections measuring organizational justice, institutional legitimacy, conflict management practices, and respondents' demographic characteristics. Items were developed from established organizational justice and public administration literature and adapted to the Nigerian public service context. Qualitative data were generated through semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol designed to elicit participants' experiences of administrative decision-making, procedural fairness, distributive equity, interpersonal treatment, institutional trust, and conflict resolution practices. The semi-structured format allowed consistency across interviews while providing flexibility for participants to elaborate on issues emerging during discussion.

Validity and Reliability

To enhance content validity, the questionnaire and interview guide were reviewed by experts in public

administration, organizational behaviour, and research methodology. Their observations informed revisions relating to clarity, construct relevance, and contextual appropriateness before field administration. Internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Reliability values ranged from 0.79 to 0.84 across the principal constructs, exceeding the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70 and indicating satisfactory reliability for social science research (Hair et al., 2022). The credibility of the qualitative findings was strengthened through prolonged engagement with participants, careful transcription of interviews, iterative coding, and comparison of emerging themes across participant categories. Methodological triangulation between survey and interview data further enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise respondents' perceptions of organisational justice, institutional legitimacy, and conflict management practices. Inferential analyses were employed where appropriate to examine relationships among the principal variables. Qualitative interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. The analytical process involved familiarisation with the data, systematic coding, generation of initial themes, review of thematic patterns, definition and refinement of themes, and production of the interpretive narrative. Coding combined inductive identification of emergent meanings with deductive attention to the theoretical constructs of distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, institutional legitimacy, and organisational conflict. Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during interpretation using an explanation-building strategy. Quantitative results established the empirical magnitude of organisational justice concerns, whereas qualitative evidence explained the institutional mechanisms, contextual dynamics, and normative implications underlying these statistical patterns. This integrative approach strengthened the overall explanatory power of the study and facilitated the philosophical reinterpretation advanced in this article.

Theoretical Reinterpretation

While the empirical dataset originated from a broader investigation into conflict management within public organisations, the present article constitutes a distinct theoretical contribution by reinterpreting the evidence through Rawlsian justice theory and Social Contract Theory. Rather than treating organisational conflict solely as a managerial or administrative phenomenon, the study conceptualises conflict as an outcome of perceived

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 387).

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	219	56.6
	Female	168	43.4
Age	21–30 years	72	18.6
	31–40 years	129	33.3
	41–50 years	118	30.5
	Above 50 years	68	17.6
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	182	47.0
	Master's Degree	154	39.8
	Doctorate	51	13.2
Years of Service	Below 5 years	64	16.5
	5–10 years	123	31.8
	11–20 years	137	35.4
	Above 20 years	63	16.3
Respondent Category	Teachers	291	75.2
	Administrative Staff	71	18.3
	Union Representatives	25	6.5

institutional injustice and declining organisational legitimacy. This philosophical reinterpretation enables a deeper understanding of how distributive, procedural, and interactional justice shape public employees' perceptions of institutional authority and organisational trust.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles governing social science research were strictly observed throughout the study. Institutional approval was obtained before fieldwork commenced. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was secured from all respondents before data collection. Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and no personally identifiable information was included in the analysis or reporting of findings. Interview recordings and completed questionnaires were securely stored and used exclusively for academic purposes in accordance with accepted research ethics standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Socio-demographic Characteristics

The socio-demographic profile of respondents provides important contextual information for interpreting perceptions of organisational justice, institutional legitimacy, and conflict management within the Teaching Service Commission. As presented in (Table 1), a total of 387 valid responses were analysed, representing a response rate of 92.1% from the 420 questionnaires administered. The respondents comprised 219 males (56.6%) and 168 females (43.4%), indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution that adequately represents both male and female perspectives within the Commission (Table 1). In terms of age, the largest proportion of respondents (129; 33.3%) fell within the 31–40 years category, followed by those aged 41–50 years (118; 30.5%), while respondents aged 21–30 years and

those above 50 years constituted 18.6% and 17.6%, respectively (Table 1). This distribution suggests that the majority of participants were in their active professional years and therefore possessed sufficient institutional experience to evaluate administrative processes and conflict management practices. Regarding educational attainment, 182 respondents (47.0%) possessed bachelor's degrees, 154 (39.8%) held master's degrees, and 51 respondents (13.2%) had doctoral qualifications (Table 1). The high educational profile of respondents enhances the credibility of the findings because organisational justice perceptions are evaluated by individuals capable of critically assessing institutional procedures and administrative practices. Similarly, the distribution of years of service demonstrates substantial organisational experience. Respondents with 11–20 years of service constituted the largest group (137; 35.4%), followed by those with 5–10 years (123; 31.8%), while 64 respondents (16.5%) had served for less than five years and 63 (16.3%) had more than twenty years of experience (Table 1). The predominance of mid-career employees is particularly important because this group is most likely to have experienced multiple recruitment, promotion, transfer, disciplinary, and grievance procedures administered by the Commission. The respondent categories further demonstrate broad institutional representation. Public secondary school teachers constituted 291 respondents (75.2%), administrative staff accounted for 71 (18.3%), while recognised union representatives comprised 25 respondents (6.5%) (Table 1). This distribution strengthens the validity of the findings because the perspectives captured reflect the experiences of the Commission's principal stakeholders rather than a single occupational category. The demographic profile therefore provides confidence that the subsequent findings are grounded in the experiences of respondents possessing adequate educational qualifications, institutional exposure, and direct engagement with the administrative processes examined in this study.

Structural Deficiencies in Organisational Justice

The first objective of this study was to examine the extent to which organisational justice characterises administrative practices within the Teaching Service Commission. The quantitative findings reveal consistently low perceptions of justice across the three recognised dimensions of organisational justice.

As shown in Table 2, procedural justice recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.58$; $SD = 0.81$), followed by distributive justice ($M = 2.71$; $SD = 0.88$). Although interactional justice obtained a relatively higher mean score ($M = 2.94$; $SD = 0.76$), it remained below the level normally associated with positive perceptions of organisational fairness. Consequently, the overall organisational justice score was low to moderate ($M = 2.74$; $SD = 0.72$) (Table 2), indicating that respondents generally perceived the Commission's administrative decisions as lacking consistency, transparency, and impartiality.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Organizational Justice Dimensions.

Variable	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Distributive Justice	2.71	0.88	Low
Procedural Justice	2.58	0.81	Low
Interactional Justice	2.94	0.76	Moderate
Overall Organizational Justice	2.74	0.72	Low–Moderate

These quantitative findings are reinforced by evidence regarding the principal sources of organisational conflict. Table 4 demonstrates that promotion delays were identified by 312 respondents (80.6%), making them the most frequently reported source of conflict within the Commission. This was followed by unfair staff posting (286 respondents; 73.9%), disciplinary procedures (264; 68.2%), communication gaps (247; 63.8%), political interference (226; 58.4%), and resource constraints (193; 49.9%). The concentration of conflict around promotion, posting, and disciplinary administration strongly suggests that employees associate organisational conflict with perceived injustice in personnel management rather than with resource scarcity alone.

The qualitative findings presented in Table 7 provide important explanatory depth for these statistical patterns. Seventeen of the twenty interview participants identified promotion inequity as a major institutional concern, describing promotion decisions as inconsistent and frequently influenced by political considerations rather than objective performance criteria. Likewise, 16 interviewees reported procedural opacity, arguing that administrative decisions were often made without adequate explanation or transparency. Furthermore, 18 participants expressed a strong desire for merit-based governance, indicating widespread expectations that organisational decisions should be guided by fairness

rather than personal relationships (Table 7). The integration of both datasets (Table 8) further confirms this interpretation. The quantitative finding of low procedural justice ($M = 2.58$) corresponds directly with interview participants' descriptions of inconsistent administrative procedures, while the high incidence of promotion disputes (80.6%) is explained by employees' perceptions that promotion criteria are unclear and unevenly applied (Table 8). The convergence of survey and interview evidence therefore strengthens the credibility of the conclusion that organisational conflict within the Commission is rooted primarily in perceived procedural injustice. These findings are consistent with Rawls' (1999) conception of justice as fairness, which argues that institutional rules derive legitimacy only when they can be justified to all persons under conditions of impartiality. From the perspective of the "original position" and the "veil of ignorance," promotion and disciplinary systems should operate according to principles that every employee would accept irrespective of their personal position within the organisation. The low procedural justice score observed in (Table 2), together with the widespread concern regarding promotion delays shown in Table 4, indicates that many employees perceive existing administrative procedures as failing this standard of impartial justification.

The present findings closely correspond with the work of Alkafaween and Yüksel (2025), whose study of employees in Türkiye's Ministry of Youth and Sports demonstrated that organisational justice is influenced more by institutional and managerial dynamics than by demographic characteristics. Similarly, despite the demographic diversity observed in (Table 1), respondents in the present study expressed broadly similar concerns regarding procedural fairness, suggesting that dissatisfaction originates from organisational processes rather than individual background characteristics.

Likewise, the results support the conclusions of Derelioğlu (2025), who reported that organisational justice perceptions are shaped principally by transparent administrative procedures and consistent management practices rather than by employees' gender, educational level, or organisational position. Derelioğlu further recommended increased employee participation, improved communication, and transparent decision-making to strengthen perceptions of justice. These recommendations resonate strongly with the present qualitative findings (Table 7), where respondents repeatedly emphasised procedural transparency and merit-based administration as prerequisites for restoring institutional confidence.

The findings also corroborate those of Chen et al. (2025), who found that supervisor justice significantly improves employees' job satisfaction while reducing occupational stress. Although Chen et al. focused on Chinese police officers rather than educational administrators, both studies suggest that employees'

experiences of fairness extend beyond formal organisational rules to include the quality of interpersonal interactions with supervisors. The relatively higher interactional justice score observed in Table 2 ($M = 2.94$) indicates that interpersonal treatment within the Commission is perceived somewhat more positively than procedural fairness, yet remains insufficient to compensate for broader concerns regarding promotion and administrative decision-making.

Furthermore, the findings partially support De Gieter et al. (2012), who demonstrated that procedural and interactional justice influence employees primarily through psychological rewards received from supervisors rather than through financial rewards alone. In the present study, interview participants repeatedly associated recognition, respectful treatment, and transparent communication with organisational fairness (Table 7), suggesting that employees value procedural dignity and managerial respect alongside distributive outcomes. This reinforces Rawls' argument that justice encompasses not only equitable distribution of institutional benefits but also equal respect for persons within institutional decision-making.

The quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that organisational justice within the Teaching Service Commission is constrained principally by weaknesses in procedural fairness, transparency, and merit-based personnel administration rather than by isolated managerial failures. Promotion practices, staff postings, and disciplinary procedures have become focal points through which broader concerns regarding institutional fairness are expressed. Consequently, organisational conflict should be understood not simply as an administrative problem but as a manifestation of perceived injustice embedded within the Commission's institutional structures.

Erosion of Institutional Legitimacy through Perceived Inequity

The second major theme emerging from this study concerns the relationship between organisational justice and institutional legitimacy. While the previous section established that respondents perceived substantial deficiencies in distributive, procedural, and interactional justice, the present findings demonstrate that these perceived injustices extend beyond dissatisfaction with administrative processes to undermine confidence in the Commission itself. The results indicate that organisational justice functions not merely as an internal management variable but as a critical determinant of institutional legitimacy, trust, and the willingness of employees to accept organisational authority. The descriptive analysis presented in Table 3 reveals consistently low levels of institutional legitimacy across all measured indicators. More than half of the respondents (52.2%) disagreed that Commission decisions were fair, while only 33.6%

expressed agreement, producing a relatively low mean score of 2.63. Similar patterns were observed regarding the transparency of promotion processes, where 53.7% of respondents disagreed that promotions were transparent, compared with only 29.5% who agreed, resulting in the lowest legitimacy indicator ($M = 2.48$). Likewise, fewer than two-fifths of respondents (35.7%) indicated that they trusted the Commission's leadership, whereas 46.0% expressed distrust ($M = 2.77$). Perceptions of administrative impartiality followed the same pattern, with 47.8% disagreeing that administrative procedures were impartial compared with 31.8% expressing agreement ($M = 2.69$). Collectively, these responses produced an overall institutional legitimacy score of 2.64, indicating generally weak confidence in the Commission's administrative authority (Table 3).

These descriptive findings are reinforced by the inferential statistics. The Pearson correlation analysis demonstrates a strong positive relationship between organisational justice and institutional legitimacy ($r = 0.741$, $p < .01$), indicating that improvements in employees' perceptions of fairness are associated with substantial increases in institutional legitimacy (Table 5). Conversely, organisational conflict exhibited a strong negative relationship with both organisational justice ($r = -0.693$, $p < .01$) and institutional legitimacy ($r = -0.651$, $p < .01$), suggesting that declining perceptions of fairness are accompanied by increasing organisational conflict and diminishing institutional trust (Table 5). These relationships provide empirical support for the proposition that justice constitutes one of the principal foundations upon which institutional legitimacy is constructed.

The regression analysis further demonstrates the magnitude of this relationship. As shown in Table 6, the three dimensions of organisational justice collectively explained 68.4% of the variance in institutional legitimacy ($R^2 = 0.684$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.679$, $F = 275.48$, $p < .001$). Procedural justice emerged as the strongest predictor of institutional legitimacy ($\beta = 0.386$, $p < .001$), followed by interactional justice ($\beta = 0.302$, $p < .001$) and distributive justice ($\beta = 0.241$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that employees derive institutional confidence principally from the fairness and consistency of administrative procedures rather than from distributive outcomes alone. The statistical significance of all three predictors confirms that organisational justice operates as a multidimensional construct in which procedural, distributive, and interpersonal fairness jointly influence institutional legitimacy. The qualitative findings complement these statistical relationships by revealing the institutional processes through which legitimacy is either strengthened or weakened. As presented in Table 7, 15 of the 20 interview participants described declining institutional trust arising from repeated experiences of perceived unfairness in promotion, disciplinary procedures, and administrative decision-making. Similarly, 16 participants identified procedural opacity as

Table 3: Perceived Institutional Legitimacy.

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean
Commission decisions are fair	33.6	14.2	52.2	2.63
Promotion processes are transparent	29.5	16.8	53.7	2.48
Staff trust Commission leadership	35.7	18.3	46.0	2.77
Administrative procedures are impartial	31.8	20.4	47.8	2.69
Overall Institutional Legitimacy	—	—	—	2.64

Table 4: Major Sources of Organizational Conflict.

Conflict Source	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rank
Promotion delays	312	80.6	1
Unfair staff posting	286	73.9	2
Disciplinary procedures	264	68.2	3
Communication gap	247	63.8	4
Political interference	226	58.4	5
Resource constraints	193	49.9	6

Table 5: Correlation Matrix.

Variables	1	2	3
Organizational Justice	1		
Institutional Legitimacy	0.741**	1	
Organizational Conflict	-0.693**	-0.651**	1

Note: $p < .01$ **Table 6.** Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Institutional Legitimacy
Dependent Variable: Institutional Legitimacy.

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	1.124	.192	—	5.85	<.001
Distributive Justice	.238	.051	.241	4.67	<.001
Procedural Justice	.354	.048	.386	7.39	<.001
Interactional Justice	.287	.046	.302	6.24	<.001

Model Statistics

 $R^2 = 0.684$ Adjusted $R^2 = 0.679$ $F = 275.48$ $p < .001$ **Table 7:** Qualitative Themes from Interviews (n = 20).

Theme	Representative Finding	Frequency
Perceived Promotion Inequity	Promotions perceived as inconsistent and politically influenced	17
Procedural Opacity	Lack of transparency in administrative decisions	16
Declining Institutional Trust	Employees expressed reduced confidence in Commission leadership	15
Communication Deficits	Poor communication aggravated workplace tensions	14
Desire for Fair Governance	Respondents advocated merit-based administration	18

a recurring feature of organisational practice, arguing that decisions affecting employees were frequently communicated without adequate explanation or opportunities for meaningful participation. These concerns converged with the views of 18 participants, who emphasised that restoring confidence in the Commission would require transparent, merit-based governance rather than discretionary administrative practices (Table 7).

The mixed-methods integration presented in Table 8 provides particularly compelling evidence of this relationship. The quantitative finding of low institutional

legitimacy ($M = 2.64$) corresponds directly with qualitative accounts describing favouritism, political influence, and inconsistent application of administrative rules. Likewise, the strong statistical association between organisational justice and institutional legitimacy ($r = 0.741$) is explained by interview participants who consistently associated fairness with confidence in leadership, administrative credibility, and willingness to cooperate with institutional decisions (Table 8). The convergence of both strands of evidence substantially strengthens the explanatory validity of the findings.

The hypothesis testing results further confirm this

Table 8: Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings.

Quantitative Finding	Qualitative Explanation	Integrated Interpretation
Low procedural justice (M = 2.58)	Staff reported inconsistent application of administrative procedures	Weak procedural fairness undermines legitimacy
Low institutional legitimacy (M = 2.64)	Employees perceived favouritism and political influence	Justice deficits reduce institutional trust
High incidence of promotion disputes (80.6%)	Interviewees viewed promotion criteria as unclear	Promotion processes are principal drivers of conflict
Strong justice-legitimacy relationship ($r = .741$)	Respondents associated fairness with confidence in leadership	Organizational justice strengthens legitimacy
Negative relationship between justice and conflict ($r = -.693$)	Participants linked unfair treatment with resistance and grievances	Justice functions as a mechanism for conflict prevention

interpretation. Hypothesis One, which proposed that organisational justice positively influences institutional legitimacy, was fully supported. The regression analysis identified procedural justice as the strongest predictor of legitimacy ($\beta = 0.386$, $p < .001$), demonstrating that employees' confidence in institutional authority depends primarily upon perceptions that organisational procedures are transparent, impartial, and consistently applied (Table 9). This finding reinforces the central argument of the study that legitimacy is fundamentally a moral rather than merely an administrative construct.

From the perspective of Rawls' (1999) Theory of Justice, these findings are unsurprising. Rawls maintains that institutional legitimacy derives from the fairness of the principles governing social cooperation rather than from the authority of office holders themselves. Institutions command voluntary compliance only when individuals believe that the rules regulating opportunities, obligations, and benefits could be accepted under conditions of impartiality. The low procedural justice score (M = 2.58) observed earlier (Table 2), together with the low legitimacy score (M = 2.64) reported in (Table 3), suggests that many employees perceive the Commission's institutional arrangements as failing to satisfy this standard of justice as fairness. The findings are highly consistent with the study by Bazie and Diallo (2025), who demonstrated that declining confidence in state institutions is closely associated with perceptions of ineffective governance and inadequate public service delivery. Although their study examined state legitimacy within the context of insecurity in Burkina Faso, both investigations arrive at a similar conclusion: institutional legitimacy depends less upon formal authority than upon citizens' confidence that institutions operate fairly, transparently, and responsively. Whereas Bazie and Diallo identified insecurity and governance failures as principal determinants of institutional trust, the present study demonstrates that organisational injustice within a public institution similarly erodes legitimacy by undermining employees' confidence in administrative processes. The present findings likewise support the Voice–Choice–Transparency–Trust (VCTT) framework proposed by Malliaros and Alejandro Pacheco-Jaramillo (2026). Their study argues that institutional legitimacy is

sustained where transparency, participation, and accountable leadership reinforce public trust, whereas concentrated power and opaque governance weaken institutional quality. This argument corresponds closely with the present findings. The low level of perceived promotion transparency (M = 2.48) and the substantial proportion of respondents questioning the fairness of Commission decisions (52.2% disagreement) (Table 3) indicate that deficiencies in transparency and employee voice contribute directly to declining institutional legitimacy. Similarly, interview participants repeatedly associated opaque administrative processes with reduced confidence in organizational leadership (Table 7), thereby providing qualitative support for the VCTT framework.

The findings also resonate strongly with Matimolane (2026), whose analysis of governance failures in South Africa demonstrates that persistent institutional dysfunction and perceived corruption progressively erode democratic legitimacy by diminishing public confidence in state institutions. Although Matimolane examined municipal water governance rather than educational administration, the underlying institutional dynamics appear remarkably similar. In both contexts, citizens' confidence deteriorates when organizational processes are perceived to be unfair, inconsistent, or captured by particular interests. The prominence of political interference as a reported source of conflict (58.4%) in Table 4 similarly suggests that respondents perceive administrative decisions as vulnerable to external influence rather than governed by impartial institutional rules.

Comparable conclusions were reached by Okonkwo and Idigo (2025), who argue that governance failures generate feelings of injustice, exclusion, and marginalisation that ultimately undermine institutional trust. The strong negative relationship between organizational conflict and institutional legitimacy ($r = -0.651$, $p < .01$) (Table 5) provides empirical support for this proposition. Employees who perceive organizational procedures as unfair are more likely to question the legitimacy of institutional authority and less likely to cooperate voluntarily with organizational decisions, thereby creating conditions conducive to persistent

conflict. The findings further reinforce the broader democratic governance perspective advanced by Hersi (2025), who contends that democratic decline is driven not only by institutional weakness but also by ethical failures, elite capture, and declining civic trust. Within the Teaching Service Commission, interview participants' concerns regarding political influence in promotions and disciplinary administration (Table 7) illustrate how institutional legitimacy may be weakened when employees perceive that administrative authority serves particular interests rather than the collective good. Although the organisational context differs from national democratic governance, the normative logic remains similar: institutions retain legitimacy only when authority is exercised according to principles perceived as just, impartial, and publicly accountable.

The present findings are also consistent with contemporary institutional theory as articulated by Suddaby and Zakaria (2026). Institutional theory emphasises that organisational legitimacy depends not only upon formal organisational structures but also upon shared social norms, values, and cultural expectations regarding appropriate organisational behaviour. The statistical evidence demonstrates that the existence of formal administrative procedures has not translated into legitimacy because employees question whether these procedures embody the normative values of fairness and impartiality. Consequently, organisational legitimacy appears to depend less upon institutional form than upon employees' collective evaluation of institutional conduct. Similarly, Roth and Sales (2026) caution that organisations may experience legitimacy erosion when institutional objectives become disconnected from their core normative purpose. Their concept of "purpose overload" suggests that organisational legitimacy declines when institutions lose coherence between their stated mission and actual administrative practices. This perspective provides an insightful interpretation of the present findings. The Commission's statutory mandate emphasises merit-based management of teaching personnel, yet respondents reported widespread concerns regarding promotion delays (80.6%), unfair staff postings (73.9%), and political interference (58.4%) (Table 4). Such inconsistencies between institutional purpose and organisational practice inevitably weaken employees' confidence in the Commission's legitimacy.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrates that institutional legitimacy within the Teaching Service Commission is fundamentally dependent upon organisational justice. Employees evaluate institutional authority primarily through the fairness of administrative procedures, transparency of decision-making, and consistency of organisational conduct. Where these conditions are absent, confidence in institutional leadership declines, organisational conflict intensifies, and formal administrative authority loses its moral foundation. These findings therefore extend Rawls' theory

beyond philosophical abstraction by providing empirical evidence that justice functions as a practical institutional resource through which legitimacy is generated, sustained, or eroded within contemporary public organisations.

The Normative Vacuum in Conflict Management

The third major theme emerging from this study concerns the effectiveness of conflict management mechanisms within the Teaching Service Commission. While the previous sections demonstrated that deficiencies in organisational justice contribute to declining institutional legitimacy, the present findings reveal that conflict management mechanisms themselves operate within an institutional environment characterised by inconsistent procedural standards, limited organisational trust, and weak normative legitimacy. Consequently, the evidence suggests that the Commission's conflict management challenges arise not from the absence of formal dispute resolution structures but from the inability of those structures to command confidence as fair, impartial, and consistently applied institutional processes.

The descriptive findings presented in Table 4 indicate that conflict within the Commission is concentrated around core human resource management functions rather than interpersonal disagreements. Promotion delays constituted the most frequently reported source of organisational conflict, identified by 312 respondents (80.6%), followed by unfair staff posting (286 respondents; 73.9%), disciplinary procedures (264 respondents; 68.2%), communication gaps (247 respondents; 63.8%), political interference (226 respondents; 58.4%), and resource constraints (193 respondents; 49.9%). These findings demonstrate that organisational conflict is principally institutional rather than individual in nature, emerging from employees' interactions with administrative structures governing recruitment, promotion, discipline, and personnel management rather than from isolated interpersonal disputes.

The inferential statistics reinforce this interpretation. As shown in (Table 5), organisational conflict exhibited a strong negative relationship with organisational justice ($r = -0.693$, $p < .01$) and institutional legitimacy ($r = -0.651$, $p < .01$). These coefficients indicate that employees who perceived lower levels of fairness also reported higher levels of organisational conflict and lower confidence in institutional authority. The magnitude of these relationships suggests that conflict management cannot be understood independently of broader organisational justice processes. Rather, conflict appears to function as a consequence of institutional arrangements perceived to violate principles of fairness and procedural consistency. The regression results presented in Table 6 further clarify the institutional foundations of effective conflict management. Procedural justice emerged as the

Table 9: Summary of Hypotheses Testing.

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Result	Decision
H1: Organisational justice has a significant positive influence on institutional legitimacy.	Multiple Regression	$\beta = .386, p < .001$	Supported
H2: Institutional legitimacy has a significant positive influence on conflict management effectiveness.	Pearson Correlation	$r = .651, p < .001$	Supported

strongest predictor of institutional legitimacy ($\beta = 0.386, p < .001$), followed by interactional justice ($\beta = 0.302, p < .001$) and distributive justice ($\beta = 0.241, p < .001$). Since Hypothesis Two established a positive association between institutional legitimacy and conflict management effectiveness ($r = 0.651, p < .001$) (Table 9), the findings collectively indicate that conflict management effectiveness depends substantially upon the fairness of organisational procedures. In other words, institutions that administer procedures transparently and consistently are more likely to resolve disputes successfully because employees recognise their authority as legitimate.

The qualitative evidence provides important insight into the mechanisms through which these statistical relationships operate. As presented in Table 7, 17 interview participants described promotion processes as politically influenced and inconsistent, while 16 participants reported that administrative procedures lacked transparency. Furthermore, 14 respondents identified communication deficiencies as contributing significantly to workplace tensions, whereas 18 participants argued that merit-based governance represented the most important institutional reform required to reduce organisational conflict. These findings indicate that respondents viewed conflict management not merely as a question of dispute resolution techniques but as a reflection of broader institutional values governing fairness, accountability, and administrative integrity.

The mixed-methods integration summarised in Table 8 strengthens this interpretation. The quantitative finding that promotion disputes constitute the leading source of conflict (80.6%) corresponds directly with interview participants' descriptions of unclear promotion criteria and inconsistent administrative procedures. Likewise, the strong negative correlation between organisational justice and conflict ($r = -0.693$) is explained qualitatively by participants' repeated assertions that unfair treatment encourages resistance, grievances, and industrial disputes. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative evidence therefore demonstrates that conflict within the Commission originates primarily from perceived failures of procedural justice rather than from deficiencies in formal conflict management mechanisms alone.

These findings align closely with the work of Oyekanmi (2025), who argues that sustainable conflict resolution requires addressing the structural causes of conflict rather than concentrating exclusively on its immediate manifestations. Drawing upon peacebuilding scholarship,

Oyekanmi demonstrates that conflict persists where governance systems fail to resolve underlying inequalities, historical grievances, and institutional exclusion. Although the present study examines an administrative organisation rather than post-conflict societies, similar institutional dynamics are evident. Promotion delays, perceived favouritism, and inconsistent disciplinary procedures (Table 4) represent structural organisational grievances that conventional conflict management mechanisms cannot adequately resolve unless underlying perceptions of injustice are simultaneously addressed. The present findings likewise correspond with Wassan, Kousar, and Bhutto (2026), whose comparative analysis of diplomacy and conflict resolution concludes that lasting conflict resolution depends upon inclusive dialogue, impartial mediation, institutional credibility, and sustained trust between disputing parties. Their findings emphasise that mediation mechanisms are unlikely to succeed where participants question the neutrality or legitimacy of the institutions responsible for administering them. This observation resonates strongly with the present results. Although formal grievance procedures exist within the Commission, the low procedural justice score ($M = 2.58$) (Table 2) and weak institutional legitimacy ($M = 2.64$) (Table 3) indicate that many employees doubt the impartiality of these mechanisms. Consequently, disputes that might otherwise be resolved administratively are more likely to escalate into prolonged organisational conflict.

The findings also reinforce the conclusions of Sembodo et al. (2025), who argue that effective conflict resolution should be understood as a constructive process of institutional reconciliation rather than merely the settlement of disputes. Their examination of legal reform in Indonesia demonstrates that durable conflict resolution emerges when institutions successfully integrate competing interests through transparent and context-sensitive procedures. Similarly, respondents in the present study repeatedly advocated for transparent, merit-based administration (Table 7), suggesting that employees seek conflict management processes grounded in fairness and institutional consistency rather than discretionary administrative authority.

Comparable insights emerge from Syuhada, Syuib, and Usman (2026), whose analysis of judicial review procedures demonstrates that procedural uncertainty undermines public confidence because inconsistent administrative processes violate fundamental principles

of justice. Their argument that delayed or unpredictable institutional procedures generate legal uncertainty has clear relevance for the present findings. Promotion delays, identified by 80.6% of respondents (Table 4), represent not merely administrative inefficiency but procedural uncertainty that diminishes employees' confidence in organisational fairness. From this perspective, conflict emerges because institutional procedures fail to provide timely, predictable, and impartial administrative outcomes.

These findings can also be interpreted through Rawls' concept of pure procedural justice. According to Rawls (1999), institutions achieve legitimacy not simply because they produce desirable outcomes but because they apply publicly recognised rules consistently to all individuals. Where comparable cases receive different treatment owing to political influence, personal relationships, or administrative discretion, institutions violate the principle that equals should be treated equally. The qualitative evidence presented in Table 7, particularly respondents' descriptions of inconsistent promotions and politically influenced personnel decisions, suggests that employees perceive organisational procedures as departing from this standard of procedural impartiality.

The statistical findings reinforce this philosophical interpretation. Procedural justice demonstrated the strongest predictive influence on institutional legitimacy ($\beta = 0.386$) (Table 6), while organisational justice exhibited the strongest correlation with conflict reduction ($r = -0.693$) (Table 5). These findings indicate that employees' acceptance of conflict management outcomes depends less upon whether individual disputes are resolved favourably than upon whether organisational procedures themselves are perceived as impartial and consistently administered. Thus, procedural fairness constitutes the normative foundation upon which effective conflict management is built.

The qualitative findings further reveal that employees distinguish between the existence of institutional mechanisms and confidence in those mechanisms. Interview participants acknowledged that grievance procedures, disciplinary committees, and administrative appeal processes formally exist within the Commission. However, many questioned whether these mechanisms operate independently of political influence or managerial discretion (Table 7). This distinction is significant because it suggests that institutional legitimacy depends not on organisational structures alone but on employees' confidence that those structures embody principles of fairness, transparency, and accountability.

The quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrates that the principal weakness of conflict management within the Teaching Service Commission lies in what may be described as a normative vacuum. Formal procedures for managing organisational conflict are present, yet their effectiveness is undermined because employees do not consistently perceive them as legitimate, impartial, or

procedurally fair. Consequently, organisational conflict persists not because institutions lack mechanisms for dispute resolution, but because those mechanisms operate within an environment characterised by weakened organisational justice and declining institutional legitimacy.

This finding extends Rawlsian justice theory beyond distributive fairness by illustrating that procedural legitimacy constitutes the essential moral foundation of organisational conflict management. It also supports contemporary conflict transformation scholarship, which increasingly recognises that sustainable conflict resolution depends upon institutions capable of generating confidence through fairness, transparency, consistency, and inclusive governance rather than through administrative authority alone. Accordingly, strengthening conflict management within the Teaching Service Commission requires more than procedural reform; it requires the reconstruction of organisational justice as the normative basis upon which institutional legitimacy and durable conflict resolution ultimately depend.

Paper Highlights

- (i) This study integrates Rawls' Theory of Justice and Social Contract Theory to explain the interrelationship between organisational justice, institutional legitimacy, and conflict management in a Nigerian public sector institution.
- (ii) The findings demonstrate that procedural justice is the strongest predictor of institutional legitimacy, indicating that transparent, consistent, and impartial administrative procedures are more influential than distributive outcomes in fostering employee trust.
- (iii) Employees identified promotion delays, unfair staff postings, disciplinary procedures, and political interference as the principal institutional sources of organisational conflict within the Teaching Service Commission.
- (iv) Mixed-methods evidence confirms that perceived organisational injustice significantly weakens institutional legitimacy, resulting in declining confidence in administrative authority and increasing workplace conflict.
- (v) The study advances a normative governance framework, showing that effective conflict management depends fundamentally on organisational justice and institutional legitimacy rather than on the existence of formal grievance mechanisms alone.
- (vi) The research contributes to public administration scholarship by demonstrating that justice functions as the moral foundation of institutional legitimacy and sustainable conflict management within public organisations in developing democracies.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between organisational justice, institutional legitimacy, and conflict management within a Nigerian Teaching Service Commission using a convergent mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were collected from 387 respondents and analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression, while qualitative evidence from 20 key informant interviews was analysed thematically and integrated with the survey findings. The results revealed generally low perceptions of organisational justice ($M = 2.74$) and institutional legitimacy ($M = 2.64$), with procedural justice recording the lowest score ($M = 2.58$). Promotion delays (80.6%), unfair staff postings (73.9%), and disciplinary procedures (68.2%) were identified as the major sources of organisational conflict. Organisational justice was strongly associated with institutional legitimacy ($r = 0.741$, $p < .01$), while procedural justice emerged as its strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.386$, $p < .001$), explaining a substantial proportion of the variation in institutional legitimacy ($R^2 = 0.684$). The qualitative findings reinforced these results by highlighting concerns over procedural opacity, political interference, and the need for merit-based administration. The study contributes to public administration scholarship by demonstrating that organisational justice is the normative foundation of institutional legitimacy and effective conflict management. It concludes that strengthening transparency, merit-based personnel administration, accountability, and procedural fairness is essential for restoring institutional trust, reducing organisational conflict, and improving governance across Nigerian Teaching Service Commissions and similar public sector institutions.

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