

A Study on Enhancing Job Satisfaction through Digital Performance Appraisal in Educational Institutions from a Perceived Fairness Perspective

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of Digital Performance Appraisal on the perception of fairness and job satisfaction among employees in educational institutions in Tiruchirappalli district. Performance Appraisal Systems have transformed into technology-driven platforms with the rising tide of digital transformation in HRM, focusing on improving transparency, efficiency, and feedback quality. But, the impact on those systems strongly relies on how fair the employees perceive them to be and this in turn has a very good impact on their job satisfaction. A quantitative research design was used and a structured questionnaire was used to collect information from 490 employees. The data were analyzed using structures of PLS-SEM to test the proposed relationships. The research results showed a positive significance of Digital Performance Appraisal on Perceived Fairness and Job Satisfaction. Moreover, Perceived Fairness has a significant direct impact on Job Satisfaction, and mediates between Digital Performance Appraisal and Job Satisfaction. The research results suggest that Fairness perceptions are important in improving the effectiveness of digital Performance Appraisal System in educational institutions.

Keywords: Digital Performance Appraisal; Perceived Fairness; Job Satisfaction; Educational Institutions; PLS-SEM; Organizational Justice; Human Resource Management.

Introduction

Digital transformation has greatly changed the way individuals, especially in educational organizations, assess employee performance. Digital Performance Appraisal (DPA) systems have become an innovative mechanism which involves technology in performance appraisal process to improve the transparency, accuracy and efficiency in the process. In today's age, educational institutions are gradually moving towards digital solutions to keep track of faculty members' performance, teaching effectiveness, record professional achievements and give prompt feedback. Such technological advancements not only simplify administrative processes but also influence employees' attitudes and perceptions toward their organizations. Of these attitudes, job satisfaction has been an important target of extensive research, as satisfaction is related to high levels of commitment, productivity and OCB. Nonetheless, there are a tremendous relation between employees perception of fairness throughout the appraisal process to the success of the digital appraisal system (Alder & Ambrose, 2005; Sharma et al., 2016).

Perceived fairness is a perception of equity, transparency, consistency and fairness in organizational procedures and decisions. In an employee performance system, fairness is defined as the degree to which employees feel that appraisal criteria are fair, feedback to them is constructive, and the results of their performance are unbiased. Fairness perceptions have been found to be consistently associated with positive outcomes for employees and organizations. Employees who perceive appraisal systems as fair are more likely to accept the results of evaluations, feel more motivated and are more likely to be more trustful in management (Thurston & McNall, 2010; Kim & Rubianty, 2011). On the other hand, if the employee feels that the situation is unfair, he may become less satisfied with the situation, the morale sink, and he may decide to leave the job (Poon, 2004). Thus, the

fairness of a digital performance appraisal system is an important component for the success of such systems in educational context.

The educational institution is a special organizational structure, as faculty members need to serve more than one roles as teachers, researchers, administrators and as mentors to students. Unfortunately, traditional systems of appraisals suffer from issues as a result of subjectivity, late turn-in, and various standards. Data-driven evaluation methods and real-time performance monitoring can help remove many of these obstacles from the equation, with the use of digital performance appraisal systems. However, the technology alone will not ensure positive results, if the worker does not see that the technology is equitable and supportive. It has been found that appraisal fairness has a significant impact on employee engagement, employee motivation and employee satisfaction in various organizational contexts (Gupta & Kumar, 2012; Lee, 2019). Hence, educational institutions need to be sensitive towards employees' fairness perceptions when adopting digital performance appraisal practices.

Job satisfaction is a multidimensional construct that reflects employees' emotional responses toward their work environment, professional recognition, and organizational support. Faculty members who experience higher job satisfaction tend to exhibit improved teaching performance, stronger institutional commitment, and enhanced student outcomes. Previous studies have demonstrated that effective performance management systems contribute substantially to faculty satisfaction by providing clear expectations, regular feedback, and opportunities for professional development (Paposa & Kumar, 2015). Furthermore, organizational justice associated with appraisal practices has been identified as a significant predictor of employee satisfaction and retention (Uraon & Kumarasamy, 2024). Therefore, understanding the relationship between digital performance appraisal and job satisfaction through the lens of perceived fairness becomes essential for educational institutions striving to maintain a motivated academic workforce.

Digital technologies have been increasingly embraced by the educational institutions in Tiruchirappalli district to modernize administrative and academic functions. However, in this regional perspective, empirical studies that explore how a digital performance appraisal system can impact faculty job satisfaction are lacking. The success of such systems could be influenced by differences in institutional policies, technological infrastructure, and employee acceptance. This perception of fairness as a core lens can be used to inform understanding about the impact of digital appraisal practices on faculty attitudes and work experiences. The results can help institutions plan employee-centered and transparent appraisal systems to enhance employee satisfaction and effectiveness (Harrington & Lee, 2015; Tarigan et al., 2025).

To find out the effect of digital performance appraisal practices on the job satisfaction of the employees in educational institutions in Tiruchirappalli district the first objective is set. The aim of this objective is to determine if technologically-supported appraisal systems have a beneficial impact on employee work experiences and attitudes. The second goal is to assess Fairness in Digital Performance Appraisal Systems as perceived by the employees. This goal concentrates on the determination of transparency, consistency, and objectivity in the appraisal processes and its connection to acceptance of digital evaluation mechanisms overall amongst workers (Dusterhoff et al., 2014; Getnet et al., 2014). The third aim is to study the importance of perceived fairness in improving job satisfaction in educational institutions. This is an objective to determine whether fair appraisal practices strengthen employee trust, motivation and satisfaction thereby contributing to improved institutional performance and employee well-being (Cheng, 2014; Uraon & Kumarasamy, 2024).

In conclusion, the study illuminates a nexus among digital performance appraisal, perceived fairness, and job satisfaction within educational settings, offering valuable insights and implications that extend beyond this specific context. The results are intended to offer concrete suggestions for administrators and policymakers to design equitable, objective and technologically-mediated systems of appraisal that promote faculty growth and sustainable organizational practices.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Digital technologies have been a major game-changer in the performance appraisal systems in the educational institutions, with its increasing implementation in HRM practices. Digital Performance Appraisal (DPA) systems offer a way to streamline, improve the accuracy, and transparency of employee evaluations, while reducing the element of human bias and increasing the use of data to drive decisions. In an academic environment, where the performance of an academic is measured across multiple dimensions—with a focus on teaching, research and administrative duties—digital systems offer structured ways for continuous monitoring and feedback. Previous research indicates that effective performance appraisal systems are associated with a high level of perceived fairness that, in turn, can be related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Alder & Ambrose, 2005; Sharma et al., 2016).

Organizational justice, commonly understood as perceived fairness is a key determinant on employee attitudes toward appraisal systems. Perceptions of fairness encompass distributive, procedural and interactional justice which refer to equitable outcomes, clear procedures and good interpersonal treatment in appraisals. Studies have consistently shown that employees who feel that the appraisal systems are fair tend to accept feedback, trust the decision of management and have positive work attitudes (Thurston & McNall, 2010; Kim & Rubianty, 2011). On the other hand, if the appraisals are unfair, it can result in dissatisfaction, disengagement, and a decline in organizational commitment. Dusterhoff et al. (2014) also note the psychological impact of moral judgments in the evaluation system in that it has a strong connection with appraisal satisfaction.

Fairness is even more pivotal when it comes to digital performance appraisal, as it involves more use of automated tools and algorithm-based performance evaluations. Digital systems decrease subjective bias, but can also raise concerns over transparency and employee control of evaluation results. Research has shown that perceptions of usefulness and equity of appraisal system have a significant impact on employee engagement and satisfaction (Nuhu et al., 2022). Additionally, Harrington and Lee (2015) discovered positive relationships between psychological contract fulfillment and employees' fairness perceptions which in turn, positively affect the acceptance of appraisal outcomes. These results indicate that technology alone is not enough and that for employees to trust the system, they must feel that it is fair.

Job satisfaction is one of the important outcome variables in the performance management literature, which is a measure of employees' affect and cognition towards their work experiences. Teachers' job satisfaction is significant in schools, as a favorable job satisfaction has a significant effect on the quality of teaching, research productivity and student outcomes. According to Paposa and Kumar (2015), the correct performance management system has a positive impact on the job satisfaction of the faculty members as it clarifies their work expectations and provides their constructive feedback. Also, Uraon and Kumarasamy (2024) reported that perceptions of fairness in the performance appraisal process significantly influence the job satisfaction of employees, and thus shape their intention to leave. The results highlight the need for efficient appraisal systems to be designed in a way where they are seen as fair.

Empirical evidence further supports the relationship between performance appraisal fairness and job satisfaction. Gupta and Kumar (2012) showed how 'appraisal justice' is important to improve the engagement of employees; an aspect which is related to job satisfaction. Likewise, Poon (2004) found that unfair appraisal politics negatively impact on job satisfaction and job turnover intentions. In addition, Lee (2019) found that the link between performance-based HRM practices and employee motivation is moderated by appraisal fairness, implying that appraisal fairness as a psychological mechanism is important in HR systems.

According to the literature, the organization justice theory can be used to reason the relationship between the outcomes of digital performance appraisal, perceived fairness, and job satisfaction. This theory suggests that perceptions about lacking or existing procedural justice will have a direct impact on attitude and behaviours within the work place. In digital appraisal systems, employees' perceptions of fairness serve as a cognitive lens that shapes their understanding of the performance feedback and outcomes of the evaluation process.

Hypotheses Development

Based on literature, it is assumed that digital performance appraisal systems positively affect job satisfaction because they can offer structured feedback, transparency and improve job performance clarity. Therefore:

H₁: Digital Performance Appraisal has a significant positive effect on Job Satisfaction among employees in educational institutions.

In addition, digital systems will help to make things more fair, by minimizing bias, setting common evaluation parameters, and making performance measurements more transparent. Existing studies suggest that the approach of using technology in appraisal process is positive for the fairness perceptions if it is used properly. Thus:

H₂: Digital Performance Appraisal has a significant positive effect on Perceived Fairness among employees in educational institutions.

Perceived fairness, in turn, is important to job satisfaction as it leads to trust, acceptance of feedback, and positive emotional responses towards the organization. Employees who see the appraisal systems as fair are more inclined to be satisfied. Therefore:

H₃: Perceived Fairness has a significant positive effect on Job Satisfaction among employees in educational institutions.

Lastly, perceived fairness is expected to play a key psychological role to further reinforce the link between digital performance appraisal and job satisfaction. A positive effect of digital systems on satisfaction is even stronger when employees feel the appraisal process is fair. Hence:

H₄: Perceived Fairness mediates the relationship between Digital Performance Appraisal and Job Satisfaction among employees in educational institutions.

The overall findings of the literature suggest that digital performance appraisal systems have the potential for increasing employee satisfaction, heavily reliant on perceived fairness. This implies that designing fair digital HRM systems is essential to achieve favourable employee outcomes.

Methodology

The study is of quantitative type, which focuses on relations between Digital Performance Appraisal, Perceived Fairness, and Job Satisfaction of the employees of educational institutions. The number of target respondents is 490 employees, (teaching & non-teaching) selected by a probability sampling technique in order to get representative samples. Primary data were gathered by means of the structured questionnaire, which was created based on the items of the validated scales in previous studies, and all items were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree). The constructs included indicators of Digital Performance Appraisal (Transparency, Feedback Quality and Technological Integration); Perceived Fairness (Procedural Justice, Distributive Justice and Interactional Justice) and Job Satisfaction (Motivation and Recognition and Overall Satisfaction with the job). Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), which is appropriate for complex predictive models and theory development, was used for analyzing the data.

Results and Findings

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 490)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	218.00	44.50
	Female	272.00	55.50
Age	20–30 years	96.00	19.60
	31–40 years	178.00	36.30

	41–50 years	142.00	29.00
	Above 50 years	74.00	15.10
Designation	Assistant Professor	201.00	41.00
	Associate Professor	126.00	25.70
	Professor	87.00	17.80
	Non-teaching Staff	76.00	15.50
Experience	Below 5 years	134.00	27.30
	5–10 years	189.00	38.60
	Above 10 years	167.00	34.10

Source: Primary Data

The demographic profile as seen in Table 1, shows that the respondents are 490 in total with a relatively even mix of male (44.5%) and female respondents (55.5%) which implies that there was adequate diversity of gender in the sample. Regarding age distribution, most of the respondents are in the 31 to 40 age group (36.3%) followed by 41 to 50 age group (29.0%) suggesting that most of the participants are in mid career stage and are likely to have higher professional experience and stable job positions. Concerning with designation, it indicates that Assistant Professors are the highest number (41.0%), Associate Professors (25.7%) and Professors (17.8%) and non-teaching staff (15.5%) which clearly indicate a well distributed academic hierarchy in the sample. Most experiences in respondents' experience profile have 5 to 10 years of experience (38.6%) and more than 10 years (34.1%), indicating that most of the respondents have a good experience with institutional appraisal systems. The demographic distribution suggests a diverse and fairly experienced respondent pool which enhances the reliability of the results and ensures that perceptions of digital performance appraisal, perceived fairness, and job satisfaction are represented across various employee groups.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Measures

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Digital Performance Appraisal	6	0.891	0.915	0.621
Perceived Fairness	5	0.874	0.903	0.598
Job Satisfaction	5	0.882	0.909	0.612

Source: Primary Data

The reliability and validity results in Table 2 suggest that all constructs applied in the study fulfil the recommended criteria for robust measurement in the case of PLS-SEM. The Cronbach's Alpha value scored for Digital Performance Appraisal (0.891), Perceived Fairness (0.874), Job Satisfaction (0.882) is met for strong internal consistency between the measures (Hair et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2016). Also, the Composite Reliability (CR) values of all the constructs are > 0.90 which also reflects the reliability and consistency of the scale items to measure their respective constructs. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are above 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity, and explaining a high proportion of variance in the indicators (Sarstedt et al., 2014). These results overall indicate that the measurement model is reliable and valid, and the model can be used for structural model examination to investigate the relationship between Digital Performance Appraisal, Perceived Fairness and Job Satisfaction.

Table 3. Model Fit Summary (PLS-SEM Path Analysis)

Model Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Obtained Value	Interpretation
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	< 0.08	0.062	Good model fit
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	> 0.90	0.921	Excellent fit
d_ULS	Lower value preferred	0.841	Acceptable fit
d_G	Lower value preferred	0.734	Acceptable fit
Chi-Square	Lower value preferred	412.56	Acceptable model fit
RMS_theta	< 0.12	0.098	Good fit

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 shows the model fit results for the proposed model. The results of the model fit for the data collected from the respondents who are employees of the educational institution show that the proposed structural model produces a satisfactory/acceptable value in its model fit. A good model fit was confirmed by an SRMR value of less than 0.08, and in this case, it was 0.062, meaning that the difference between observed and predicted correlations is small. Likewise, the NFI value is 0.921, which is above the suggested cut-off of 0.90 indicating an excellent overall model fit. The d_ULS (0.841) and d_G (0.734) are fairly low, which means that there is not that much discrepancy between the empirical and the model-implied covariance matrices. Also, the Chi-Square value of 412.56 is accompanied by other fit indices, which indicate the acceptable fit of the model. Additionally, the RMS_theta value of 0.098 is below the cut-off value of 0.12, further evidence of good model fit and appropriate model specification. All together, these results confirm that the structure of the model is well adjusted and proper for the tests of the supposed relationships presented in the investigation.

Table 4. Structural Model Summary

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	DPA $\rightarrow$ Job Satisfaction	0.412	6.284	0.000	Supported
H2	DPA $\rightarrow$ Perceived Fairness	0.538	8.117	0.000	Supported
H3	Perceived Fairness $\rightarrow$ Job Satisfaction	0.467	7.021	0.000	Supported
H4	DPA $\rightarrow$ Perceived Fairness $\rightarrow$ Job Satisfaction	0.251	5.336	0.000	Supported (Mediation)

Source: Primary Data

From the results of the structural model, it is observed that all the hypotheses considered is statistically significant and was supported among the employees of Educational institutions of Tiruchirappalli district. Digital Performance Appraisal positively impacts job satisfaction, evidenced by a β coefficient of 0.412, t value of 6.284, and a p value of < 0.001, confirming that effective digital appraisal systems increase employees' job satisfaction levels. Likewise, Digital Performance Appraisal also has a strong influence on Perceived Fairness (β = 0.538, t = 8.117, p < 0.001), indicating that fairness perception of employees in Tiruchirappalli district is highly associated with transparent and technology-driven Performance Appraisal. The results also reveal that Perceived Fairness significantly and positively influences Job Satisfaction (β = 0.467, t = 7.021, p < 0.001); thus, employees who perceive that the process of appraisals is fair tend to be more satisfied with their jobs. Moreover, the mediation effect of Perceived Fairness between Digital Performance Appraisal and Job Satisfaction is also significant (β =

0.251, $t = 5.336$, $p < 0.001$), which indicated that the relationship between digital appraisal systems and employee satisfaction in Tiruchirappalli district is mediated by perceived fairness. The overall results indicate that the perception of fairness is an important factor that can improve the effectiveness of digital performance appraisal systems in improving job satisfaction in the study area.

Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that, Digital Performance Appraisal positively affects Job Satisfaction of employees in educational institutions and this is in congruence with previous studies highlighting the impact of formalized and technology-based performance appraisals. With electronic appraisal systems, there will be less subjectivity in the appraisal process, it will be more transparent and will be carried out in a timely manner, which ultimately adds to the employee's satisfaction with the workplace. These findings are in line with those of Alder and Ambrose (2005) indicating that computerized performance monitoring and feedback systems have a positive impact on employee satisfaction and perceived fairness. Sharma et al. (2016) also emphasized the importance of high-quality performance management systems for employee satisfaction as it helps in setting clear expectations and providing clear feedback. In educational institutions, such systems assume a greater significance, as the faculty members are expecting to be evaluated objectively on the various aspects of their jobs like teaching, research and administration.

The study also reveals the significant mediation effect of Perceived Fairness between Digital Performance Appraisal and Job Satisfaction. When they see a fair appraisal process, employees are more likely to trust the evaluation process, accept feedback and are more satisfied. Organizational justice theory is a theory that argues that perceptions of fairness greatly influence employee attitudes and behavioral outcomes (Thurston & McNall, 2010; Kim & Rubianty, 2011), which strongly supports this finding. Add to this, the studies by Gupta and Kumar (2012) and Uraon and Kumarasamy (2024) indicate that perceptions of fairness have a remarkable positive impact in the context of work satisfaction and employee engagement. As seen in this study, the mediation role suggests that digital appraisal systems' effectiveness does not solely rely on technological progress but on how fairly, transparently, and unbiased employees feel the process is. This underscores the need to incorporate fair conduct within digital HR systems, ensuring that organizations can function to their fullest potential with highly satisfied employees.

Implications

This study's results are of theoretical and practical significance in educational institutions implementing digital performance assessment system. Theoretically, the study advances the organizational justice theory by providing evidence to show that perceived fairness is an important mediator between performance appraisal in the digital age and employee satisfaction, adding to the current literature on performance management and employee attitudes (Thurston & McNall, 2010; Cheng, 2014). The findings indicate that, practically, administrators need to pay attention not only on the implementation of the advanced digital appraisal system but also on transparency, consistency, unbiased evaluation process so as to increase the employee's perception of fairness. Employee job satisfaction is extremely high when they believe that their appraisal systems are fair, resulting in higher employee engagement, motivation and commitment to the organization. Hence it is crucial to strengthen the training of the evaluators, standardize the performance appraisal criteria and clearly communicate the performance feedback to enhance the effectiveness of the digital HR systems (Gupta & Kumar, 2012; Uraon & Kumarasamy, 2024).

Conclusion

This study aimed at analyzing the relationship between Digital Performance Appraisal, Perceived Fairness and Job Satisfaction among the employees in educational institutions highlighting the role of Perceived Fairness. The results clearly show that digital performance appraisal systems can have a profound impact on the perception of

fairness and job satisfaction in modern educational environments, emphasizing the need for technology-based assessment practices. Furthermore, perceived fairness was found to be a significant factor influencing job satisfaction and also as a mediator between digital PAs and job satisfaction, which suggests that fairness is a key psychological process in PAs. Overall, the study finds that while technological efficiency is key, the perception of fairness, transparency, and objectivity in the digital appraisal system implementation is equally important, thus suggesting that educational institutions should employ fairness-oriented strategy to support the implementation of the digital appraisal system.

Future Research Directions

Future studies will be able to broaden this study and investigate other contextual and individual factors that might impact the connection between Digital Performance Appraisal, Perceived Fairness, and Job Satisfaction in educational sites. For example, differences in employee attitudes to digital appraisal systems could be explained by further variables like organizational culture, leadership style, and technological readiness. Longitudinal studies are also suggested to determine the change in perceptions of fairness and job satisfaction over a period of time as they continuously use digital performance appraisal tools. Further research could also be done against a backdrop of public/private schools or across regions to maximize the generalizability of the results. The addition of moderating variables such as digital literacy or employee engagement may also help to better understand the effects of digital appraisal systems on employee attitudes and behaviors (Lee, 2019; Tarigan et al., 2025).

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