

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# Unethical favouritism and KH: The mediating role of organisational injustice

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## Abstract

This study examined unethical favouritism and knowledge hiding (KH) to ascertain the extent to which unethical favouritism influences KH as well as the extent to which organisational injustice mediates the relationship between unethical favouritism and KH. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design of 305 randomly selected respondents from one public and four private universities in northcentral Nigeria. A structured questionnaire served as the research instrument. The study used the Content validity index and Cronbach alpha to test for the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Structural equation modelling served as the data analysis technique. The results indicate that unethical favouritism significantly influences KH, and organisational injustice mediates the relationship between unethical favouritism and KH. The point of departure of this study from previous studies is the unveiling of the influence of favouritism on KH through the mediation of organisational injustice, which is a consequence of favouritism.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Employee perception of fairness, equity and justice in an organisation is very crucial to their confidence in the system and thus their degree of satisfaction and engagement. This demands that an organisation's leadership should not only be fair and just but must make the employees perceive the leadership to be fair and just. Previously, "behavioural scientists have provided converging evidence that social behaviour in economic games is not solely motivated by the monetary consequences of the available actions, but it is also motivated by moral preferences for doing what people think to be the right thing, beyond the monetary consequences that this action brings about" (Bilancini et al, 2020).

Relationships in the workplace are regarded by scholars as an asset to work settings. Relationships seem to be much more fundamental to what leadership represents than authority or dominance in contemporary times (Palermo, et al., 2019). Consequently, leadership

should manage relationships with employees in a manner that is consistent with ethical provisions. Employees are very sensitive to the kind of treatment they receive from the organisation's leadership. When people feel fairly or advantageously treated by their bosses or by the leadership of their organisations as the case may be, they are more likely to be motivated and probably have a higher sense of satisfaction. However, when they feel unfairly treated they are likely to have a sense of dissatisfaction, and this will stimulate feelings of disaffection and demotivation ultimately (Adenugba & Oteyowo, 2012; Inegbedion, 2022; Inegbedion et al, 2020). To this end, employees constantly measure the degree of fairness of the organisation to ascertain how fair the system is to them. This underscores the essence of equity theory. One factor that can easily precipitate employees' feeling of inequity in the organisation is a perception of unethical favouritism on the part of leadership to some of their colleagues. Unethical favouritism is prevalent in many group settings such as families, work settings and political systems, as well as

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religious settings, among others. Thus, the practice of unethical favouritism by leaders is broadly current, especially in a political and social world (Ozler & Buyukarslan, 2011; Sroka & Weinhardt, 2020; Yusof and Puteh, 2017).

Knowledge management is critical to organisational performance and informed organisations are paying increasing attention to knowledge management practices, especially capturing, socialisation, knowledge sharing and internalisation (Wang et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021). However, when employees' stake in the performance of their organisations is in doubt, it stimulates a feeling of possessiveness, a desire to retain ownership of their knowledge. This development, which is consistent with the psychological ownership theory, is manifesting negatively in their KH behaviour in organisations (Pierce et al., 2001). Results of empirical studies indicate that some of the causes of KH include workplace exclusion (Gürlek, 2020; Mahmood et al., 2021; Rezwan & Takahashi, 2021; Vaio et al., 2020). Another factor that stimulates KH is abusive supervision (Gürlek, 2020; Rezwan & Takahashi, 2021). The other factors are organisational injustice (Gürlek, 2020; Jahanzeb et al., 2021; Rezwan & Takahashi, 2021), distrust in co-workers (Connelly et al., 2012; Gürlek, 2020; Rezwan & Takahashi, 2021) and career ambition (Gürlek, 2020). Other KH antecedents are ethical leadership (Abdullah et al., 2019; Anser et al., 2021; Men et al., 2018), and incivility (Aljawameh & Atan, 2018; Arshad & Ismail, 2018; Kumar et al., 2020).

Objective measures of employee performance are scarce; this forces firms to rely on subjective judgments for evaluation (Prendergast & Topel, 1996). Unfortunately, subjectivity opens the door to favouritism, especially unethical favouritism, which, in turn, precipitates organisational injustice, a knowledge-hiding predictor. Favouritism promotes bias and discrimination to some groups of people especially the minority group and thus precipitates a feeling of inequity and injustice (Wood, 2015). To this end, this study sought to investigate the influence of unethical favouritism on KH as well as the extent to which organisational injustice mediates the relationship between unethical favouritism and KH.

## 2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the literature on favouritism and KH. The review of literature is organised under four major subheadings; conceptual review, theoretical review, empirical review and gaps in the literature.

### 2.1 | Concept of favouritism

Favouritism is a common concept in organisational and social life. It brings mixed feelings to various categories of people, depending on whether they are favoured or otherwise. It refers to “the practice of giving preferential treatment to a person or group at the expense of another” (Palermo et al., 2019). It is the provision of special privileges to a select group of people in a system. Such a group could

consist of friends, people with the same ethnic identity, same-sex or colleagues and acquaintances, in a work organisation, career and personnel decisions, among others (Sroka & Weinhardt, 2020). Thus, unethical favouritism is the practice of favouring a person or a group of persons in an organisation in decision making. Such decisions cut across the areas of performance evaluation, disciplinary measures, sponsorships, awards and promotion, among others. It is pertinent to mention that favouritism could be ethical as in the case of meritocratic favouritism or unethical-like nepotism, cronyism and clientelism (Ozler & Buyukarslan, 2011). Unethical favouritism encompasses nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism. Favouritism devastates workers and managers (Jones & Stout, 2015). Such an attitude constrains employees and managers' capacity to understand justice (Karakose, 2014).

#### 2.1.1 | Nepotism

Nepotism is understood in the scientific literature and in public opinion, as the abuse of a person's position, power, or influence in order to confer a privilege on his/her relatives. Nepotism is an expression of both unethical favouritism and cronyism (Bekesiene et al., 2021). By conferring privileges on a given category of people, nepotism is a type of unethical favouritism. Nepotism interrupts the connection between employment and meritocracy and thus makes way for state exploitation. To this end, “nepotism imposes costs that can range from unfair competition for employment opportunities on a society” (Geys, 2017; Szakonyi 2019).

*Cronyism* is the unethical favouritism that a superior shows to his or her subordinate as a result of their relationship, rather than the competence or capability of the latter, in exchange for his/her personal loyalty (Khatiri & Tsang, 2003). When cronyism is prevalent in an organisation, certain employees are favoured, who are cronies, and ignore others who are non-cronies (Shaheen et al., 2020), thus it is unethical.

#### 2.1.2 | Ethnic favouritism

Ethnic favouritism is the unequal treatment of citizens based on their ethnicity and it is characteristic of the political leadership in many African countries (Ilorah, 2009). Briefly, ethnic favouritism is the extension of preferential treatment to some members of an organisation owing to their ethnic identity. Organisations that have ethnic-biased leaders practise ethnic favouritism. It is another form of unethical favouritism.

#### 2.1.3 | Knowledge hiding

KH in organisations negates the objective of knowledge management and it has negative consequences on innovativeness. KH is “an intentional attempt by an individual to withhold or conceal knowledge that

has been requested by another person” (Aljawarneh & Atan, 2018; Connelly et al., 2012), the same applies to team members (Bari et al. 2019; Singh 2019), as well as between line managers and subordinates for various reasons (Afshar-Jalili et al. 2021; Butt 2021). Bari et al. (2019) see KH (KH) as “a novel phenomenon which is defined as an intentional effort to conceal or hold back the knowledge that has been asked by others.” Connelly et al. (2012) observed that KH behaviour is counterproductive. Although it is prevalent within organisations, it is inimical to the attainment of organisational goals, being counterproductive (Rezwan & Takahashi, 2021).

## 2.2 | Theoretical framework

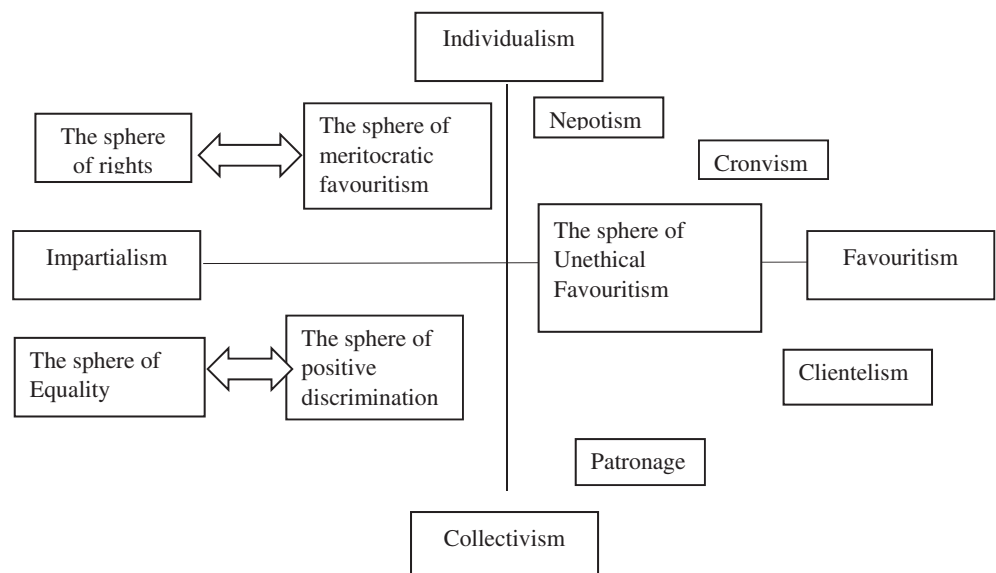
This study employs three theories; the two dimensional picture of favouritist behaviours by Ozler and Buyukarslan (2011), the social categorisation theory, which is a part of the social identity theory and the organisational climate theory as its framework.

*The two dimensional picture of favouritist behaviours* by Ozler and Buyukarslan (2011) presents two categories of favouritism prevalent in organisations. The first category concerns the sphere of ethical favouritism or impartiality and its correlates of the sphere of rights and meritocratic favouritism, which have an individualistic dimension as well as the sphere of equality and positive discrimination which are collectivist. The second category consists of the sphere of unethical favouritism and its correlates of nepotism and cronyism, which have an individualistic dimension as well as patronage and clientelism which are collectivist. Thus, both categories of favouritism have individualistic and collectivist dimensions. While the ethical favouritism has the capacity to stimulate or reinforce employee behaviours that facilitate the attainment of organisational goals, the unethical favouritism has a propensity to precipitate ill feelings among the unflavoured in the organisations and thus lead to KH by some employees (See Figure 1).

*Social identity theory* (SIT) explains what makes people see themselves as individuals or as group members. In addition, the theory

indicates the consequences of personal and social identities for individuals and group. *Social categorisation* explains the process by which employees group themselves and others into differentiated categories. Such grouping helps to simplify perception and cognition related to the social world by identifying similarity relationships or by imposing structure on it (or both). *Social Identity and Social Categorisation theories* provide explanation for exclusion at work better. The “majority of the team members segregate and exclude the perceived minority group member(s) when a person differs from them in terms of ideas, work or communication styles” (Shore et al., 2011) as well as social status, ethnicity, culture and language (Miminošvili & Černe, 2021; Tajfel, 1981). To this end, “minority group members desire to belong and be included in the culturally dominant group colleagues and superiors in response to social categorisation and differentiation in an in-group and out-group membership” (Miminošvili & Černe, 2021). Prolonged exclusion always often triggers feelings of negative reciprocity and cause the employee that feels excluded to engage in KH behaviour as a retaliation for their exclusion. But in other cases, a migrant can hide knowledge to increase his chance of inclusion. Consequently, perceived exclusion by marginalised members might stimulate KH. However, empirical literature is yet to provide justification for KH on that basis or the mechanisms applied by people in hiding knowledge (Miminošvili & Černe, 2021).

*Organisational climate theory* explains that climates form because of the need to reduce social uncertainty. Principles from Gestalt psychology and symbolic interactionism have been integrated with social learning theory (Beus et al., 2018) to propose that the anxiety caused by social uncertainty is what drives people to cognitively predict their social environments through symbolic social interactions this gives way to shared meaning called climate “that informs behaviour that guides individual and group expectancies and subsequently alleviates the anxiety of social uncertainty” (Beus et al., 2018). In view of the foregoing, negative organisational climate engenders the exclusion, incivility, injustice, abusive supervision and other unpleasant circumstances that give rise to insecurity and hence cause some employees to hide knowledge.



**FIGURE 1** A two dimensional picture of favoritist behaviors (Ozler & Buyukarslan, 2011).

Anderson and West (1998) used their understanding of climate research to distinguish the cognitive schema and shared perception approaches which examined individuals' constructive representations and the organisation's practices procedures respectively, as well as the "interactive" approach which sees the key determinant of the organisational climate as the interaction between group members. Given the influence of the climate, the interaction (Momeni, 2009) the employees emit different emotional and behavioural reactions (Koene et al., 2002). Thus, while a caring organisational climate elicits work outcomes that are positive (Fu & Deshpande, 2014), a harsh climate elicits negative work outcomes like abusive supervision (Park et al., 2018; Wu & Hu., 2009; Zhang & Bednall, 2016) and organisational injustice. Empirical studies have linked abusive supervision to aggression among power-oriented individuals in a weak human resource support climate (Richard et al., 2020). This makes employees feel insecure.

## 2.3 | Empirical review

This section is categorised into two; empirical review of favouritism studies and empirical review of KH studies.

### 2.3.1 | Empirical review of favouritism studies

Akdoğan and Alparslan (2020) investigated "do members of disadvantaged groups possess a motivation of favouritism towards advantaged groups?" The design was a survey of 145 Kurdish Turkish respondents. The results are consistent with Social Identity Theory. Palermo et al. (2019) investigated "favouritism: exploring the uncontrolled" spaces of the leadership experience." The design was a survey of 23 interviews in eight consultancy companies in four multinationals and four internationals using semi-structured interviewees. The results indicate that there are ethical justifications for ethical favouritism, thus implying the ethical ambiguity bedevilling leadership as a concept and a practice.

Dinara (2015) examined "favouritism and nepotism in an organisation: causes and effects." The article illustrates that nepotism quite often creates opportunities for simulation of superior positions. The study concludes that advancement of favouritism and nepotism leads to a "brain drain" from Russia, which is hazardous to the country's social and economic development. Neelam et al. examined "nepotism concept evaluation: A systematic review and bibliometric analysis." The design was a literature review of 371 documents sourced from the Scopus database. The results indicate that nepotism significantly affects companies that hire staff. The various dimensions of unethical favouritism significantly influence a firm's efficiency and lead to poor performance.

Yusuf and Puteh (2017) investigated the relationship between favouritism and job performance in family-owned businesses using a cross-sectional survey of 350 randomly selected employees. A structured questionnaire served to elicit the data. The results indicated that

employee job performance had a moderate relationship with favouritism and gender and social ties. Prendergast and Topel (1996) examined "favouritism in organisations." They observed that subjectivity stimulates favouritism Daskin (2013) examined "favouritism and self-efficacy as antecedents of managers' politics perceptions and job stress" with a focus on frontline managers (HFMs) in Turkish Cypriot hotels. The design was a cross-sectional survey of 85 randomly selected respondents from the hotels. A structured questionnaire served as the instrument of data collection. Partial least squares method served to test the hypothesised relationships. Results indicate that self-efficacy decreased perception of organisational politics and job stress as well as favouritism exerted a significant positive impact on POPs perception of organisational politics and job stress.

Kolstad and Wiig (2013) sought to find out whether an educated mind takes the broader view. Empirical evidence support in-group bias in social dilemma situations. The design was a quasi-experimental survey. They used data from dictator games involving 523 respondents to analyse how education influences in-group favouritism. The results show that education has a significant positive influence on in-group bias. In addition, gender and family background have positive influences on in-group favouritism. De Luca et al. (2018) Examined "ethnic favouritism: Not just an African phenomenon" to validate or refute the popular opinion that ethnic favouritism is an African phenomenon. Based on the outcome of the analysis of data on night-time light intensity, the authors challenge these preconceptions and found ethnic favouritism equally significantly practiced outside of Africa.

### 2.3.2 | Empirical review of knowledge-hiding studies

Gürlek (2020) investigated "the antecedents of KH in organisations" to find out the extent to which these antecedents predict KH. A structured questionnaire served to collect the research data and structural equation modelling (SEM) served to analyse the data. The findings indicate that workplace ostracism, abusive supervision, organisational injustice, distrust in co-workers, and career ambition have a positive and significant influence on KH behaviour. Miminoshvili and Černe (2021) investigated "workplace inclusion-exclusion and knowledge-hiding behaviour of minority members," The authors used semi-structured interviews to elicit the desired data and thematic analysis served as the data analyses technique. Workplace exclusion turned out to be significantly responsible for minority members' engagement in knowledge-hiding behaviour.

Abdullah et al. (2019) investigated "ethical leadership and KH" The design was a survey of 245 manufacturing and service sector employees. Supervisors' ethical leadership exhibited a negative relationship with KH and instrumental thinking moderates the weak positive relationship between supervisors' ethical leadership and relational social capital. Mubarak et al. (2021) investigated "what makes people hide knowledge? Influence of passive leadership and creative self-efficacy" The design was a cross-sectional survey, the results of the study revealed that passive leadership significantly influences the practice

of KH among individual employees. KH practices have a significant negative relationship with creative self-efficacy.

## 2.4 | Gaps in literature

Several empirical studies abound on KH. They include “the antecedents of KH in organisations” (Gürlek, 2020), “workplace inclusion-exclusion and knowledge-hiding behaviour of minority members” (Miminoshvili & Černe, 2021), “understanding KH in business organisations: A bibliometric analysis of research trends,” (Vaio et al., 2020), as well as “the psychology behind KH in an organisation” (Rezwan & Takahashi, 2021). Others are “KH and Machiavellianism,” as well as “what makes people hide knowledge? Influence of passive leadership and creative self-efficacy” (Mubarak et al., 2021).

Notwithstanding the abundant literature on KH, none of the studies on KH appears to have focused on the possible influence of favouritism on KH. Apart from (Ozler & Buyukarslan, 2011) none of the studies on favouritism distinguished between ethical/meritocratic favouritism and unethical favouritism. The purpose of this study was to fill these gaps. Based on the foregoing, the study tested the null hypotheses below:

**H01-H03.** Nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism have no significant influence on organisational injustice in organisations.

**H04-H06.** Nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism have no significant influence on KH in organisations.

**H07.** Organisational injustice does not mediate the relationship between favouritism and KH in organisations.

## 3 | METHODOLOGY

The design was a cross-sectional survey of 600 respondents who are employees of universities in north-central Nigeria. The respondents were contacted online through social media channels (Facebook and Instagram). Out of the 600 requested, 387 voluntarily participated in the study. Out of the 387 that participated in the study, 305 of them agreed that they were familiar with the concept of “KH”. Since KH is the outcome of the study, only the responses of the 305 respondents acquainted with KH were analysed. A structured questionnaire served as the research instrument.

### 3.1 | Measurement of variables

Two demographic characteristics of the respondents were included; therefore, two items measured the demographic characteristics, gender and highest educational qualification. Two nominal options (male and female) measured gender while three ordinal responses served to

measure the highest educational qualification. The research items were grouped into five; nepotism, cronyism, ethnic favouritism, organisational injustice and KH. Four Likert scale items measured each of nepotism, ethnic favouritism, organisational injustice and KH while five Likert scale items measured cronyism, bringing the total number of items to 21.

### 3.2 | Sampling technique

The study employed an online survey to collect the data from the employees of one public and four private Universities in north-central Nigeria through the systematic sampling technique. The authors collected the sampling frames of the institutions from the respective institutions' human resources departments. The systematic sampling technique was preferred to the simple random sampling technique because it permits the researcher to avoid the rigours of randomisation associated with the simple random sampling technique. However, being a probability sampling technique the systematic sampling technique guarantees some degree of randomisation and representativeness of the sample to the population. The study requested 600 respondents. The choice of 600 respondents was to increase the chances of having a reasonable number of participants since online surveys often have an unimpressive response rate (Ilieva et al., 2002; Manzo & Burke, 2012). Three hundred and five, representing 50.83% of the invited respondents participated in the study. The author used the online survey method due to its cost-effectiveness as well as the increase of internet usage in Nigeria owing to the increased access to internet facilities and increase in digitalisation consciousness (Khan et al., 2021). The research instrument (questionnaire) employed has three sections. The first section consists of the introduction and a brief explanation of the purpose of the study and the assurance of anonymity of the respondents. This is followed by the demographic characteristics of the respondents (Section 2); and the last section presents the items that measure the research question (Section 3).

#### 3.2.1 | Validity and reliability

To ensure that the instrument measures what it was designed to measure and to ensure that repeated measures will be consistent; the author designed the instrument and gave it to experts in the management sciences in the author's institution for their evaluation and opinion. Subsequently, the author conducted a pilot test of 20 respondents from a population different from the one studied. The responses served to compute the content validity index for scale and item level. The content validity indexes were 0.81, 0.80, 0.79, 0.82, 0.81 and 0.79 for the entire instrument, nepotism, cronyism, ethnic favouritism, organisational injustice and KH respectively. Consistent with Zamanzadeh et al.'s (2015) threshold of 0.78, the instrument was regarded as valid (see Table 1). The study used Cronbach alpha to test the reliability of the instrument. The computed alpha values were 0.89, 0.74, 0.72, 0.73, 0.80 and 0.77 for the entire instrument,

**TABLE 1** Validity tests.

| Construct                | S-CVI | I-CVI | Number of items |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|-----------------|
| Entire instrument        |       | 0.81  | 21              |
| Nepotism                 |       | 0.80  | 4               |
| Cronyism                 |       | 0.79  | 5               |
| Ethnic favouritism       |       | 0.82  | 4               |
| Organisational injustice |       | 0.81  | 4               |
| Knowledge hiding         |       | 0.79  | 4               |

Source: Author's computation.

**TABLE 2** Reliability statistics.

| Construct                | Cronbach alpha |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| Entire instrument        | 0.89           |
| Nepotism                 | 0.74           |
| Cronyism                 | 0.72           |
| Ethnic favouritism       | 0.73           |
| Organisational injustice | 0.80           |
| Knowledge hiding         | 0.77           |

Source: Author's computation.

nepotism, cronyism, ethnic favouritism, organisational injustice and KH, respectively. All the computed alpha values were above 0.7, thus implying that the items in the instrument are internally consistent and thus, the instrument is reliable. This is consistent with Hair et al. (2006) (see Table 2).

### 3.2.2 | Method of data analysis

The research data were analysed using descriptive measures such as mean and standard deviation, as well as inferential statistics. Structural equation modelling served as the inferential statistic. The choice of the structural equation modelling was to determine the influence of favouritism on KH with organisational injustice as the mediating variable.

### 3.2.3 | Model specification

To determine the effects of favouritism on KH, using organisational injustice as a mediating variable, the study employed the following regression models.

$$.kh = f(\text{nep, cro, eft}) \quad (1)$$

$$.kh = \theta_0 + \theta_1 \text{nep} + \theta_2 \text{cro} + \theta_3 \text{eft}_e \quad (2)$$

$$.\text{oinj} = f(\text{nep, cro, eft}) \quad (3)$$

**TABLE 3** Demographic characteristics of respondents.

| S/N | Variable  | Frequency           | (%). |      |
|-----|-----------|---------------------|------|------|
| 1.  | Gender    | Male                | 173  | 56.7 |
|     |           | Female              | 132  | 43.3 |
| 2.  | Education | B Sc. Or Equivalent | 40   | 13.1 |
|     |           | Master's            | 102  | 33.4 |
|     |           | Ph.D                | 163  | 53.4 |

$$.\text{oinj} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{nep} + \beta_2 \text{cro} + \beta_3 \text{eft} + e \quad (4)$$

$$.kh = f(\text{oinj, nep, cro, eft,}) \quad (5)$$

$$.kh = \lambda_0 + \lambda_1 \text{oinj} + \lambda_2 \text{nep} + \lambda_3 \text{cro} + \lambda_4 \text{eft} + e_1 \quad (6)$$

where .kh = KH; .oinj = organisational injustice; .nep = nepotism; .cro = cronyism; .eft = ethnic favouritism; .e = stochastic error term.  $\theta_0$  = proportion of the variation in KH that is not explained by the explanatory variables (nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism);  $\theta_i$  ( $i = 1-3$ ) = slopes of the coefficients of nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism;  $\beta_0$  = proportion of the variation in the dependent variable (organisational injustice) that is not explained by the independent variables (nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism);  $\beta_i$  ( $i = 1-3$ ) are the regression coefficients indicating the effect of the independent variables (nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism) on the mediating variable (organisational injustice);  $\lambda_0$  = intercept of the model with mediation;  $\lambda_1$  = the effect of organisational injustice (the mediating variable) on the dependent variable (KH);  $\lambda_i$  ( $i = 2-4$ ) is the effect of favouritism (nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism) adjusted for the mediation of organisational injustice on KH.

The structural equation models are:

$$(\text{nep, cro, eft} < - \text{oinj}) \quad (7)$$

$$(\text{oinj, nep, cro, eft} < - \text{KH}) \quad (8)$$

### 3.3 | Ethical approval

The author requested and got ethical approval from his institution's Research Ethical Board to conduct the study. In line with the ethical requirements, the author conducted the study in compliance with ethical standards. However, the author did not receive an ethical approval number, as there was no ethical approval number attached to the approval.

## 4 | RESULTS

The demographic distribution of the respondents indicate that majority of the respondents are male 173 (56.7%) and majority have Ph.D

degrees 163 (53.4%) (See Table 3). The results of the descriptive statistics indicate that the means and standard deviations were 3.389 (0.778), 3.127 (0.386), 3.456 (0.468), 3.193 (0.510) and 3.324 (0.641) for nepotism, cronyism, ethnic favouritism, organisational injustice and KH respectively. The results indicate that all the means were above 3, the mid-point, and thus indicate that majority of the respondents answered in the affirmative (See Table 4). The highest variability in perception occurred in nepotism while the least was for cronyism as indicated by the standard deviations of 0.778 and 0.386 for nepotism and cronyism, respectively.

The results of the structural equations model of unethical favouritism and KH indicate that the computed z values and associated significant probabilities are 0.63 (0.528), 3.90 ( $p < .001$ ) and 1.40 (0.160) for nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism, respectively. The

implication is that only cronyism has a significant influence on KH while nepotism and ethnic favouritism have no significant influences on KH (See Table 5 and Figure 2).

The results of the structural equations model of favouritism and organisational injustice indicate that the computed z values and associated significant probabilities are 3.15 (0.002), 14.54 ( $p < .001$ ), 1.53 (0.125) and 11.42 ( $p < .01$ ) for constant, nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism, respectively. The implication is that nepotism and ethnic favouritism have significant positive influences on organisational injustice. (See Table 6 and Figure 2).

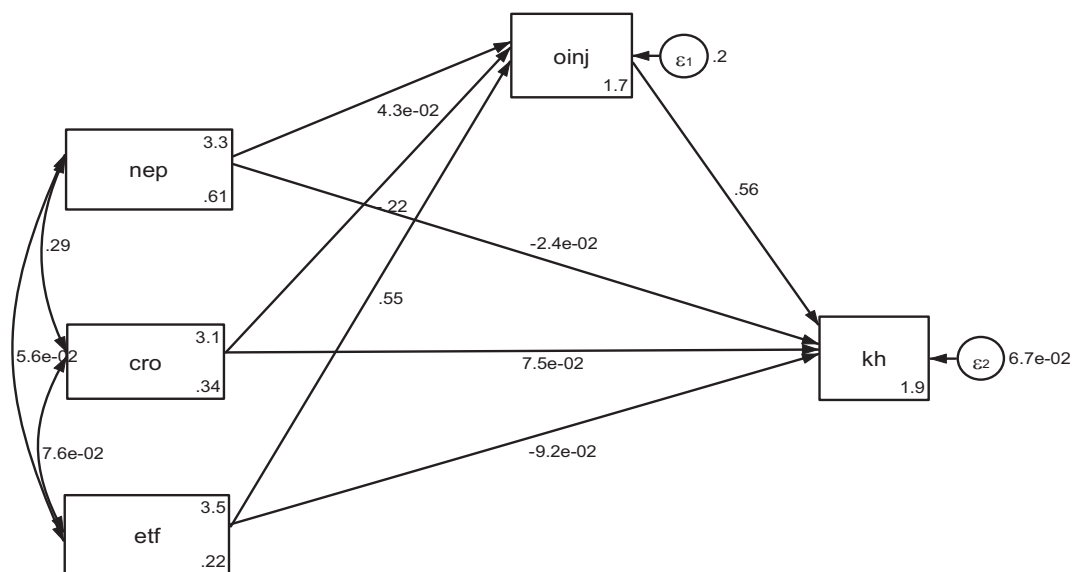
The results of the structural equations model of favouritism and KH (with organisational injustice as the mediating variable) indicate that the computed z values and associated significant probabilities are 4.85 ( $p < .001$ ), 3.45 (0.001), 2.51 (0.012), 3.63 ( $p < .001$ ) and 3.00 (0.003) for organisational injustice, nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism, respectively. The implication is that all the independent variables (nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism) have significant positive influences on KH through the mediating influence of organisational injustice (See Table 7). Three goodness-of-fit tests were performed, the equation-level goodness-of-fit test, the Wald's test for equations and the stability test. The equation-level goodness-of-fit test shows that the R-square value is 0.5372. The R-square value indicates that 53.72% of the variation in KH is due to variations in the explanatory variables (see Table 8). The results of Wald's test for

**TABLE 4** Descriptive statistics of the research variables.

| S/N | Variable                 | Mean  | Standard dev. |
|-----|--------------------------|-------|---------------|
| 3.  | Nepotism                 | 3.389 | 0.778         |
| 4.  | Cronyism                 | 3.127 | 0.386         |
| 5.  | Ethnic favouritism       | 3.456 | 0.468         |
| 6.  | Organisational injustice | 3.193 | 0.510         |
| 7.  | Knowledge hiding         | 3.324 | 0.641         |

**TABLE 5** Favouritism predictors and kh.

| Standardised | OIM coefficients | Standard error | Z    | $p >  z $ | 95% confidence interval |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Structural   |                  |                |      |           |                         |
| .kh <-       |                  |                |      |           |                         |
| .nep         | 0.0355           | 0.0562         | 0.63 | 0.528     | -0.0746 0.146           |
| .cro         | 0.2115           | 0.0542         | 3.90 | 0.000     | 0.1052 0.318            |
| .etf         | 0.0792           | 0.0564         | 1.40 | 0.160     | -0.0313 0.190           |
| Cons         | 2.7413           | 0.4662         | 4.25 | 0.000     | 1.4784 4.004            |



**FIGURE 2** Favouritism and knowledge hiding.

| Standardised | OIM coefficients | Standard error | Z     | $p >  z $ | 95% confidence interval |       |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|-------|-----------|-------------------------|-------|
| Structural   |                  |                |       |           |                         |       |
| .oinj <-     |                  |                |       |           |                         |       |
| .nep         | 0.5050           | 0.0347         | 14.54 | 0.000     | 0.4369                  | 0.573 |
| .cro         | 0.0630           | 0.0411         | 1.53  | 0.125     | -0.1434                 | 0.018 |
| .etf         | 0.4240           | 0.0371         | 11.42 | 0.000     | 0.3512                  | 0.497 |
| .Cons        | 1.4844           | 0.4705         | 3.15  | 0.002     | 0.5622                  | 2.407 |

**TABLE 6** Favouritism predictors and organisational injustice.

| Standardised    | OIM coefficients | Standard error | Z    | $p >  z $ | 95% confidence interval |       |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------|------|-----------|-------------------------|-------|
| Structural . <- |                  |                |      |           |                         |       |
| .kh <-          |                  |                |      |           |                         |       |
| .oinj           | 0.2600           | 0.0753         | 3.45 | 0.001     | 0.4076                  | 0.112 |
| .nep            | 0.1668           | 0.0665         | 2.52 | 0.012     | 0.0365                  | 0.297 |
| .cro            | 0.1952           | 0.0537         | 3.63 | 0.000     | 0.0898                  | 0.300 |
| .etf            | 0.1895           | 0.0632         | 3.00 | 0.003     | 0.0656                  | 0.313 |
| Cons            | 3.1273           | 0.6447         | 4.85 | 0.000     | 1.8637                  | 4.390 |

**TABLE 7** Predictors of favouritism and KH.

| Depvars  | Variance fitted | Predicted | Residual | R-squared | Mc     | mc2    |
|----------|-----------------|-----------|----------|-----------|--------|--------|
| Observed |                 |           |          |           |        |        |
| .oinj    | 0.2589          | 0.1275    | 0.1214   | 0.4926    | 0.7018 | 0.4926 |
| .kh      | 0.4093          | 0.0378    | 0.3715   | 0.0924    | 0.3040 | 0.0924 |
| Overall  | 0.5372          |           |          |           |        |        |

**TABLE 8** Equation-level goodness-of-fit.

Note: mc = correlation between depvar and its prediction. mc2 =  $mc^2$  is the Bentler-Raykov squared multiple correlation coefficient.

**TABLE 9** Wald tests for equations.

|          | Chi-Sq | Df | $p$    |
|----------|--------|----|--------|
| Observed |        |    |        |
| .oinj    | 32.74  | 4  | 0.0000 |
| .kh      | 18.33  | 5  | 0.0000 |

equations show that the computed values of Chi-square for the dependent and independent variables and the associated significant probabilities were 291.08 ( $p < .001$ ) and 31.06 ( $p < .001$ ) for organisational injustice and KH respectively. These indicate that the coefficients of the equations in the structural equation model are significantly different from zero (see Table 9). The observed values of the eigenvalue stability condition are all zero. This is an indication of the stability of the structural equations model as there is no discrepancy between the observed and expected co-variances (see Table 10). The three goodness-of-fit tests all indicates a goodfit. The results of the fit statistics of the likelihood ratio test show that the model is the same as the saturated but significantly different from the baseline (See Table 12).

Lastly, a comparison of respondents' perception with demographic variables revealed that the calculated F and associated significant probabilities were 0.269 (0.605) and 0.125 (0.883) for gender and educational qualification respectively. The implication is that the demographic characteristics of the respondents have no significant influence on their perception of the research problem (see Table 9).

#### 4.1 | Discussion of findings

The first three hypotheses were to test whether unethical favouritism (nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism) are significant predictors of organisational injustice. The results indicate that cronyism has a positive significant influence on organisational injustice but nepotism and ethnic favouritism do not. The results are inconsistent with Dinara (2015). The purpose of testing the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh hypotheses was to examine whether organisational injustice mediates the relationship between unethical favouritism (nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism) and KH. The results of the test with the mediation of organisational injustice indicate that firstly, nepotism and ethnic favouritism predict organisational injustice, and secondly, all the



constructs of unethical favouritism (nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism) have a significant positive influence on KH, whereas only cronyism had a significant influence on KH in the model without mediation. The results are consistent with Ozler and Buyukarslan's (2011) two dimensional picture of favouritist behaviours theory and theory of organisational climate. The results also imply that organisational injustice has full mediation effect on the relationship between nepotism and KH as well as the relationship between ethnic

favouritism and KH but has partial mediation effect on the relationship between cronyism and KH. The results are consistent with Dinara (2015). The significant influence of organisational injustice on KH is consistent with Takahashi Jahanzeb et al. (2021) and Gürlek (2020). Specifically, organisational injustice mediates the relationship between favouritism and KH. This is consistent with the organisational climate theory.

The study also tested the relationship between respondent's perception and demographic characteristics. The results indicate that there is no statistically significant relationship between respondents' perceptions and demographic characteristics (See Table 11). Thus, the respondents' perception of the research problem was fair. While the results of the study are similar to those of Jahanzeb et al. (2021) and Gürlek (2020) and Gürlek (2020) in the aspect of KH, it differs from these and other empirical literature as far as the linkage of unethical favouritism to KH is concerned, it is also about the only study to have focused on unethical favouritisms and operationalised unethical favouritism with the three constructs; nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism. This is what makes this study unique (Tables 11 and 12).

**TABLE 10** Stability analysis of simultaneous equation systems.

| Eigenvalue stability condition |         |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| Eigenvalue                     | Modulus |
| 0                              | 0       |
| 0                              | 0       |

Note: Stability index = 0; All the eigenvalues lie inside the unit circle. SEM satisfies stability condition.

**TABLE 11** Respondents' perception and demographic variables.

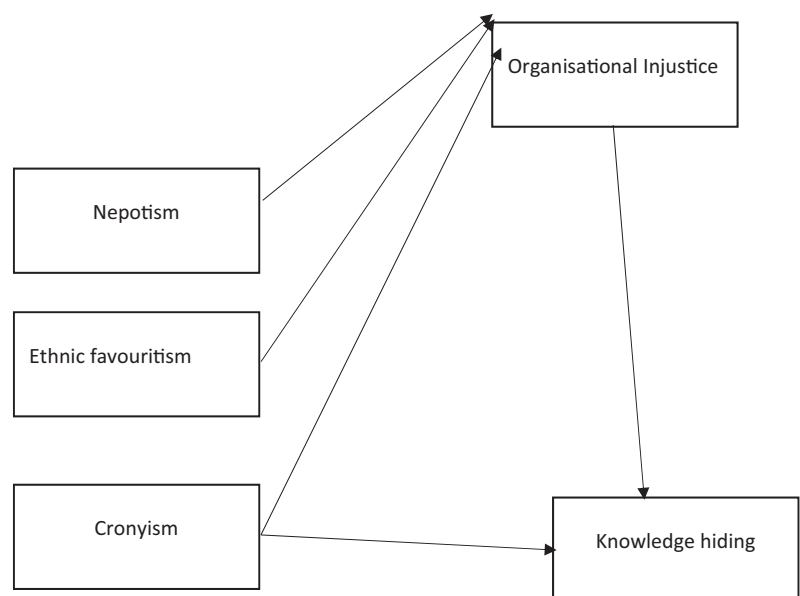
| Socio-demographic variable | F     | Sig.  |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|
| Gender                     | 0.269 | 0.605 |
| Educational qualification  | 0.124 | 0.883 |

**TABLE 12** Fit statistics.

| Fit statistic    | Value   | Description               |
|------------------|---------|---------------------------|
| Likelihood ratio |         |                           |
| Chi-sq. ms (0)   | 0.000   | Model versus saturated    |
| .p > Chi Sq.     |         |                           |
| Chi-Sq. bs (9)   | 218.004 | Baseline versus saturated |
| .p > Chi-sq.     | 0.000   |                           |

### 4.2 | Proposed model of KH and organisational effectiveness

Based on the research findings, the study proposed a model of unethical favouritism and KH in organisations. The model shows that without the mediation of organisational injustice, cronyism influences KH but with the mediating role of organisational injustice, nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism all have a significant influence on KH. Briefly unethical favouritism makes the employees to perceive the organisation as unjust to them; the feeling of organisational injustice leads to KH (see Figure 3).



**FIGURE 3** Proposed Model of Favouritism and knowledge hiding: The mediating role of some organisational injustice.

### 4.3 | Implications for managers

The results of the study indicate that favouritism has a significant positive influence on organisational injustice, and organisational injustice has a significant positive influence on KH. The implication is that when employees perceive that nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism prevail in the organisation, it stimulates their perception of injustice. Employees' perception of organisational injustice influences their desire to hide knowledge. The implication is that managers of organisations can significantly reduce employees' perception of organisational injustice by desisting from or minimising their involvement in all forms of favouritism (nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism) so that employees' perception of organisational injustice will be significantly minimised.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, this study concludes that cronyism significantly influences organisational injustice. In addition, nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism have significant positive influences on KH through the mediation of organisational injustice. Thus, organisational injustice significantly mediates the relationship between favouritism (nepotism, cronyism and ethnic favouritism) and KH. This study has contributed significantly to knowledge in business particularly and management sciences and social sciences generally. Although many studies have examined KH since the work of Connelly et al. (2012), most of such studies focused mainly on antecedents and consequences of KH. This study departs from previous studies through its investigation of the influence of unethical favouritism on KH and the identification of the mediating role of organisational injustice in the relationship between unethical favouritism and KH, which is a consequence of unethical favouritism. It is also pertinent to note that this study regards KH as the employee's disposition in the workplace. Furthermore, the deliberate linkage of favouritism with KH using organisational injustice as a mediating variable by showing that favouritism significantly influences KH is novel. The comprehensive model of favouritism and KH through the mediating effect of organisational injustice is also unique and insightful.

The study is not without limitations, which may constrain the generalisability of the results. Firstly, consistent with a quantitative study, it presented respondents with a set of constructs on favouritism to enable them to give their opinions on these factors. Their opinions formed the data of the study. A test for statistical significance of the data led to the inference of the study. Although the specific constructs emerged from empirical literature, there may be some other perceived constructs of unethical favouritism that may have debuted in this study had the respondents been given the opportunity to indicate their constructs. This is a limitation. This, notwithstanding the fact that the concepts employed in this study are empirically valuable serves to mitigate this constraint. Future studies should attempt to use mixed-method study by including some open-ended items to be

analysed qualitatively in addition to quantitative analysis. A second limitation bothers on the degree of randomisation achieved in sample selection, which is supposed to be a prerequisite for the representativeness of the sample. However, the study relies on the fact that it employed a probability sampling technique in selecting the respondents.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The study employed primary data. The dataset is attached as supplementary file to this submission.

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