

# Organizational Justice In Higher Education: Perceptions Of Taiwanese Professors And Staffs

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## ABSTRACT

*Higher education in Asia is becoming more prominent according to Western higher education researchers, but it is also being influenced by globalization, resulting in two types of structural inequality in higher education. Organizational justice relates to positive developments of educational organizations. It refers to the sense of fairness and equality on aspects of organization policies and regulations relating to individual interests perceived by organizations' internal members. This research first reviews the related literature to identify internal factors in the concept of organizational justice in higher education. The author designed a survey questionnaire to assess professors' perceptions of organizational justice at their universities. The author sent out the questionnaires to Taiwanese professors with different research expertise at different universities. This research divided organizational justice into distributive justice, procedure justice, interpersonal justice, and information justice. Ultimately, 180 valid questionnaires were collected and analyzed. Four background variables (gender, age, position, and institutional type) showed statistical correlations with organizational justice in Taiwan's higher education institutions.*

**Keywords:** Organizational Justice in Higher Education; Structural Inequality at University, Taiwan

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Asia is becoming more prominent according to higher education researchers (Levin, 2010; Marginson, Kaur, & Sawir, 2011). As Mok (2015) pointed out that the impact of international rankings on higher education in Asia had pushed Asian governments to apply various strategies (i.e., funding and quality assurance) to respond to the global competition of universities. Higher education in Asia is also being influenced by globalization, resulting in two types of structural inequality in higher education (Naidoo, 2010). One type is outside the national context in the globalized society, where differences of institutions and nations will be larger due to different types of power that global linking institutions and nations possess. Another type is in the national context, where the stratification among higher education institutions in a nation will also be larger, leading to universities favored by national governments possessing many more resources than those not chosen (Marginson, Kaur, & Sawir, 2011). Thus, studying inequality issues in higher education is important in the context of globalization. Specifically, three areas should be studied: the inequality of higher education competitions between internationalized research universities; the issue of academic resource inequality of higher education institutions; and the sense of equality in higher education institutions.

One significant case of the current inequality issues in the context of Taiwan higher education is the over-emphasis of academic research productions. The global university rankings gave high weights to numbers and citations of journal articles. The number of journal articles influenced academic resource distribution in the universities. As the result, the sense of inequality arises amongst professors in Taiwan. Chou (2014) pointed out this problem in her article "The SSCI Syndrome in Taiwan's Academia". She argued that the over-emphasis on quantitative indicators of higher education evaluations used by the Taiwanese government and universities has caused reactions amongst academic members across disciplines.

Organizational justice relates to positive developments of educational organizations (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). It refers to the sense of fairness and equality on aspects of organization policies and regulations relating to individual interests perceived by organizations' internal members (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). There are two types of organizational justice. The first type focuses on the fairness and justice of organizational policies and regulations. The second type involves internal members' perceptions of the fairness and justice of these policies and regulations (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002). Organizational members perceive organizational justice as positively relating to their job satisfaction, trust, commitment, and performance (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002).

This research first reviews the related literature to identify internal factors in the concept of organizational justice in higher education. The author designed a survey questionnaire to assess professors' perceptions of organizational justice at their universities. The author sent out the questionnaires to Taiwanese professors with different research expertise at different universities.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Organizational justice considers issues related to organizational members' attitudes on the fairness of organizational regulations and policies (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998). Such justice is about rules and social norms that can define the distribution of resources within an organization. These resources include rewards or punishments as well as treatment among members and interpersonal relationships (Bies & Tripp, 1995).

Organizational justice includes three factors: distributive justice, procedure justice, and interpersonal justice. To address the importance of information sharing and information access in society, Colquitt (2001) added one more factor, information justice, to the broad concept of organizational justice.

The theoretical basis of organizational justice is social exchange theory, which explains rational actions and decisions related to rewards for human beings. Decisions about human behavior come from objective cost-efficiency analyses and action choices (Homans, 1961). As the theoretical foundation of organizational justice, social exchange theory formulates the thinking that organizational members' perceptions will influence their actual actions. Another important theory relating to organizational justice is equity theory, developed by Adams (1965), which further explains how organizational members compare their inputs in the organization and their returns/outcomes as well as how these comparisons in their minds influence their actions.

Social exchange theory and equity theory are the theoretical basis of distributive justice. Thibaut and Walker (1975) highlighted the importance of the process of distributing resources within an organization; thus, procedure justice became another important factor. In the 1980s, Bies and Moag (1986) argued that procedure justice is relating to interpersonal relationships among organizational members. When organizational leaders distribute their resources, their interpersonal relationships with workers influence the distribution results, which is why interpersonal justice became the third factor of organizational justice. Finally, the global and highly developed information communication Technology (ICT) strengthened the importance of information access and information exposure's influence on distribution and procedure; thus, information justice is the fourth factor in organizational justice (Greenberg, 1993).

Regarding empirical studies of organizational justice in higher education, Martinson, Anderson, Crain, and Vries (2006) sent questionnaires to scientific researchers and scholars to explore their perceptions of organizational justice inside research institutes and how their perceptions influenced their scientific research behaviors. Colquitt (2001) sent questionnaires to 301 third-grade university students; the research results supported the four factors of organizational justice at the higher education level. The four factors—distribution justice, procedure justice, interpersonal justice, and information justice—showed positive correlations with organizational satisfaction as well as participants' collective self-esteem and ratings of leaders.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

Based on the literature review, this research constructed a questionnaire on organizational justice at higher education institutions. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework of organizational justice at higher education institutions. As

the literature review suggested, this research divided organizational justice of higher education into four factors: distributive justice, procedure justice, interpersonal justice, and information justice. This research conceptualized indicators that can represent distributive justice as the equal distributions of accountability, salary, and reward of all members at higher education institutions. The conceptual indicators of procedure justice are consistent, are ethical, and apply respect in the administrative procedures at higher education institutions. Regarding interpersonal justice, indicators include the sense of equality among positions, gender, ethnicity, social, economic backgrounds. Indicators of information justice are the degree of understandability, the variety of medias, and instantaneousness.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of organizational justice at higher education institutions

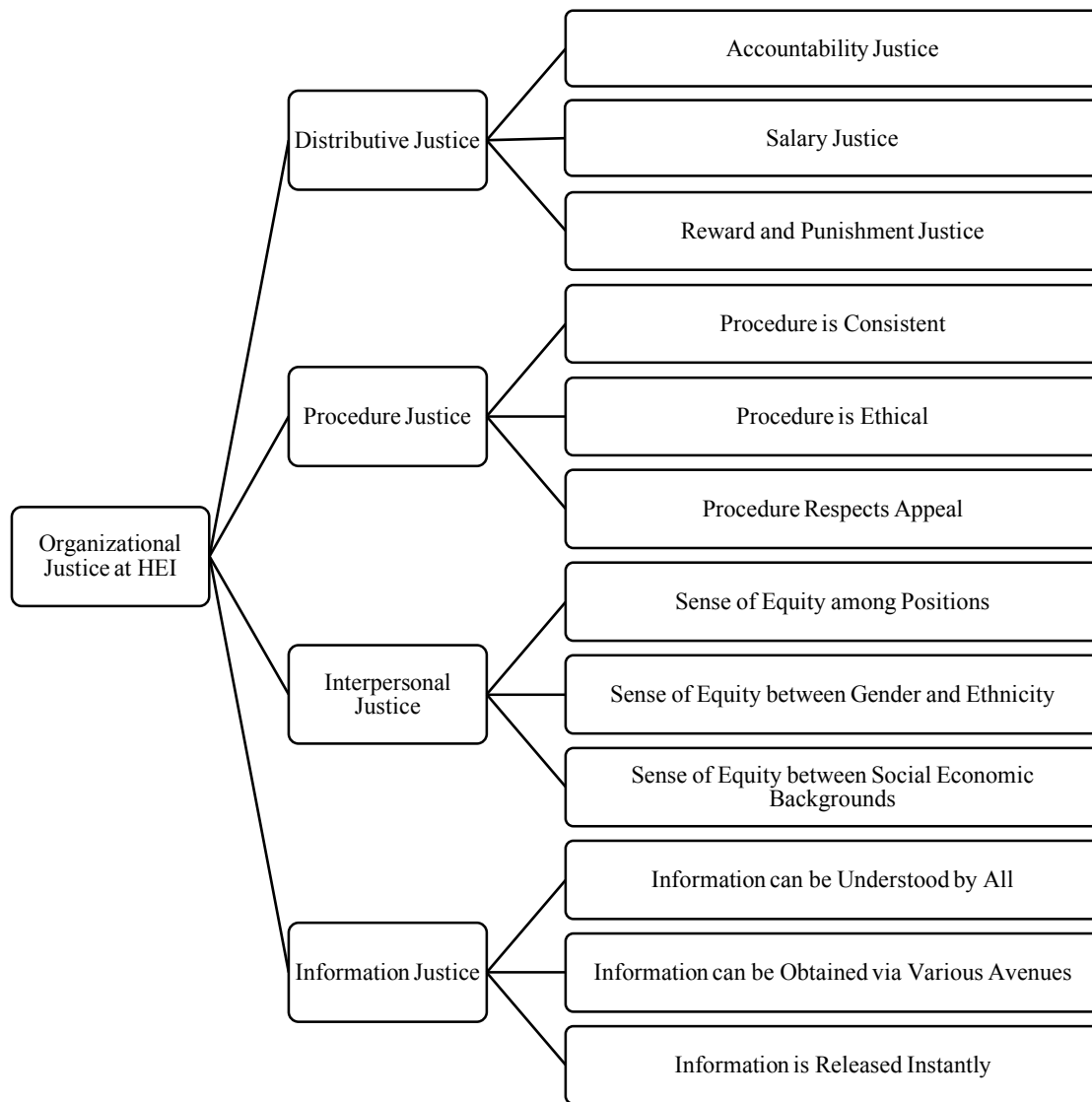


Table 1 summarizes the Cronbach alpha values and factor loadings of all items. The Cronbach alpha value of all items is .963, while all items' Cronbach alpha values when the items deleted were less than or equal to .963.

**Table 1.** Cronbach Alpha Values of All Items of Organizational Justice in Higher Education

Items of Organizational Justice in Higher Education	Cronbach Alpha When Item Deleted
Administrative works are distributed equally to all staffs at my university	.961
Hours of work are equal among all staffs at my university	.962
Resources and equipment are distributed equally to different offices at my university	.961
The equal distribution of work rewards to all staffs at my university	.961
Regulations of rewards and fines are equal to all staffs at my university	.961
Rights of all staffs are equal at my university	.962
Accountability of all staffs are equal at my university	.961
Academic and administrative committees are established based on equal procedures at my university	.963
Administrative decisions are made based on equal procedures at my university	.961
Decision procedures of meeting are transparent and open at my university	.961
Administrative decisions are made based on accurate and the latest information at my university	.961
Administrative decisions can equally consider university development and rights of staffs at my university	.961
My university periodically examines and fixes inequality problems of administrative procedures	.961
Staffs in different positions are treated equally at my university	.962
Staffs of different ethnicities are treated equally at my university	.963
Male and female staffs are treated equally at my university	.962
Staffs with different appearances are treated equally at my university	.963
Staffs with different economic income backgrounds are treated equally at my university	.962
Staffs who have relatives or friends in a high position in the government are not treated better at my university	.961
Communication among staffs flows freely at my university	.960
Information is instantly released to all staffs at my university	.961
Information can be easily obtained from different offices at my university	.962
The information divide between positions is low at my university	.962
Information can be obtained from different medias (paper, the internet, audio, and video) at my university	.961

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The means and standard deviations of four factors and the whole concept of organizational justice in higher education are in table 2. The data in this table indicate that participants perceived a higher sense of justice at their university on the factor of interpersonal justice. Distributive justice is the factor that participants perceived to provide the least sense of justice in the context of their higher education environment.

**Table 2.** Means and SDs of Organizational Justice in Higher Education for All Items and Four Factors

Factors	N	Mean	SD
Organizational Justice in Higher Education (all items)	180	3.4752	.71524
Distributive Justice	180	3.0143	.85782
Procedure Justice	180	3.5880	.77664
Interpersonal Justice	180	3.8472	.75587
Information Justice	180	3.5389	.77679

The means and standard deviations of all items of organizational justice in higher education are in table 3. The participants perceived a higher sense of equality about ethnicity, economic background, gender, and appearance. However, one notable finding is that participants perceived a lower sense of equality when their colleagues have relatives or friends in a high position in the government. Social connections or social capital could be an influential element or determinant for organizational justice in higher education. The participants also perceived a lower sense of equality for hours of work between colleagues and rewards at work. Thus, the potential problem of the consistency between workload and reward balance is an important consideration when managing higher education institutions in Taiwan.

**Table 3.** Means and SDs of Organizational Justice in Higher Education for Each Item

Items of Organizational Justice in Higher Education	N	Mean	SD	Order
Administrative works are distributed equally to all staffs at my university	180	3.122	1.0338	19
Hours of work are equal among all staffs at my university	180	2.772	1.0239	24
Resources and equipment are distributed equally to different offices at my university	180	3.222	.9369	17
The equal distribution of work rewards to all staffs at my university	180	2.844	1.0074	23
Regulations of rewards and fines are equal to all staffs at my university	180	3.072	1.0085	20
Rights of all staffs are equal at my university	180	3.061	.9869	21
Accountability of all staffs are equal at my university	180	3.006	1.0056	22
Academic and administrative committees are established based on equal procedures at my university	180	3.978	.8253	5
Administrative decisions are made based on equal procedures at my university	180	3.856	.8530	6
Decision procedures of meeting are transparent and open at my university	180	3.583	.9909	9
Administrative decisions are made based on accurate and the latest information at my university	180	3.433	.8787	13
Administrative decisions can equally consider university development and rights of staffs at my university	180	3.161	.9981	18
My university periodically examines and fixes inequality problems of administrative procedures	180	3.517	.9600	12
Staffs in different positions are treated equally at my university	180	3.528	.9884	11
Staffs of different ethnicities are treated equally at my university	180	4.156	.7536	1
Male and female staffs are treated equally at my university	180	4.033	.8516	3
Staffs with different appearances are treated equally at my university	180	4.006	.8555	4
Staffs with different economic income backgrounds are treated equally at my university	180	4.044	.8576	2
Staffs who have relatives or friends in a high position in the government are not treated better at my university	180	3.317	1.1698	16
Communication among staffs flows freely at my university	180	3.406	.9955	15
Information is instantly released to all staffs at my university	180	3.606	.8875	8
Information can be easily obtained from different offices at my university	180	3.556	.8602	10
The information divide between positions is low at my university	180	3.433	1.0362	13
Information can be obtained from different medias (paper, the internet, audio, and video) at my university	180	3.694	.8528	7

Table 4 summarizes the result of *t*-tests on gender differences in the perception of organizational justice in higher education. From the macro perspective, female colleagues perceived a lower sense of justice among all factors than their male colleagues. The *t*-test results show a significant difference in the factors of distributive justice, procedure justice, interpersonal justice, and information justice. Gender is an important variable of organizational justice in the context of Taiwan’s higher education.

**Table 4.** T- of Gender and Factors of Organizational Justice in Higher Education

Factors	Gender	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i> Value	Sig.
HEOJ ALL	Male	89	3.6259	.76021	2.851	.005**
	Female	91	3.3278	.63871		
Distributive Justice	Male	89	3.1910	.90015	2.785	.006**
	Female	91	2.8414	.78114		
Procedure Justice	Male	89	3.7303	.87093	2.459	.015*
	Female	91	3.4487	.64678		
Interpersonal Justice	Male	89	3.9682	.80241	2.144	.033*
	Female	91	3.7289	.69150		
Information Justice	Male	89	3.6989	.75746	2.784	.006**
	Female	91	3.3824	.76748		

\**p* < .05; \*\**p* < .01; \*\*\**p* < .001

Table 5 summarizes the *t*-test results related to the perception of organizational justice in higher education based on institution type differences. From the macro perspective, colleagues at national universities tended to perceive a lower sense of justice among all factors than their colleagues at private institutions. The *t*-test results show statistically significant differences in distributive justice, interpersonal justice, and information justice.

**Table 5.** T-test of Institutional Type (National and Private) and Factors of Organizational Justice in Higher Education

Factors	Types	N	Mean	SD	t Value	Sig.
HEOJ ALL	National	62	3.2769	.78312	-2.746	.007**
	Private	118	3.5794	.65660		
Distributive Justice	National	62	2.8134	.86010	-2.305	.022*
	Private	118	3.1199	.84111		
Procedure Justice	National	62	3.4328	.83930	-1.958	.052
	Private	118	3.6695	.73217		
Interpersonal Justice	National	62	3.6747	.90406	-2.032	.045*
	Private	118	3.9379	.65110		
Information Justice	National	62	3.2613	.87635	-3.318	.001**
	Private	118	3.6847	.67856		

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 6 summarizes the *t*-test results related to the perception of organizational justice in higher education based on institutional history differences. From the macro perspective, colleagues at older universities tended to perceive a lower sense of justice among all factors (despite the interpersonal justice factor) than colleagues at newer institutions. The *t*-test results show no statistically significant differences in the factors.

**Table 6.** T-test of University History and Factors of Organizational Justice in Higher Education

Factors	History	N	Mean	SD	t Value	Sig.
HEOJ ALL	11–20 Y	26	3.5641	.67456	.684	.495
	>21 Y	154	3.4602	.72290		
Distributive Justice	11–20 Y	26	3.2637	.72696	1.610	.109
	>21 Y	154	2.9722	.87304		
Procedure Justice	11–20 Y	26	3.6923	.72678	.740	.460
	>21 Y	154	3.5703	.78562		
Interpersonal Justice	11–20 Y	26	3.6987	.76161	-1.084	.280
	>21 Y	154	3.8723	.75451		
Information Justice	11–20 Y	26	3.6692	.81769	.925	.356
	>21 Y	154	3.5169	.77026		

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 7 summarizes the ANOVA results of the four factors of organizational justice in higher education among participants' positions. From the macro perspective, adjunct staffs tended to perceive a lower sense of justice than regular staffs and faculty. The ANOVA analysis found statistically significant differences between faculty and staffs. Faculty members usually have higher administrative positions than staffs in the Taiwanese higher education system. Taiwan's law provides universities with autonomy, and professors play a key role in the shared governance system of higher education in Taiwan. The position is an important variable to consider in studies of organizational justice in higher education, as confirmed by this study.

**Table 7.** ANOVA of Position and Factors of Organizational Justice in Higher Education

Factors	Position	N	Mean	SD	F Value	Post-Hoc
HEOJ ALL	(1)Faculty	38	3.9879	.69167	16.490***	(1)>(2) (1)>(3)
	(2)Regular Staff	86	3.4268	.67631		
	(3)Adjunct Staff	56	3.2016	.61215		
Distributive Justice	(1)Faculty	38	3.5827	.91043	12.359***	(1)>(2) (1)>(3)
	(2)Regular Staff	86	2.9136	.83307		
	(3)Adjunct Staff	56	2.7832	.68647		
Procedure Justice	(1)Faculty	38	4.1842	.61609	17.483***	(1)>(2) (1)>(3)
	(2)Regular Staff	86	3.4845	.78658		
	(3)Adjunct Staff	56	3.3423	.65399		
Interpersonal Justice	(1)Faculty	38	4.2632	.73177	11.808***	(1)>(2) (1)>(3) (2)>(3)
	(2)Regular Staff	86	3.8663	.67680		
	(3)Adjunct Staff	56	3.5357	.75660		
Information Justice	(1)Faculty	38	3.9895	.70970	12.636***	(1)>(2) (1)>(3) (2)>(3)
	(2)Regular Staff	86	3.5488	.73641		
	(3)Adjunct Staff	56	3.2179	.73586		

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 8 summarizes the ANOVA results of the four factors of organizational justice in higher education among participants' ages. From the macro perspective, younger colleagues tended to perceive a lower sense of justice than their older colleagues. The ANOVA analysis found statistically significant differences between the 26–35 age group and the 46–55 age group. Colleagues between 46 and 55 years old tended to have a higher sense of justice than the youngest age group.

**Table 8.** ANOVA of Age and Factors of Organizational Justice in Higher Education

Factors	Age	N	Mean	SD	F Value	Post-Hoc
HEOJ ALL	(1)26–35	68	3.2604	.48202	4.873**	(3)>(1)
	(2)36–45	49	3.4549	.87565		
	(3)46–55	52	3.7220	.76775		
	(4)>56	11	3.7273	.45998		
Distributive Justice	(1)26–35	68	2.7983	.60772	2.916*	(3)>(1)
	(2)36–45	49	3.0321	1.04624		
	(3)46–55	52	3.2418	.93466		
	(4)>56	11	3.1948	.60364		
Procedure Justice	(1)26–35	68	3.3725	.59581	3.796*	(3)>(1)
	(2)36–45	49	3.5884	.86810		
	(3)46–55	52	3.8141	.87176		
	(4)>56	11	3.8485	.51884		
Interpersonal Justice	(1)26–35	68	3.6324	.60646	4.749**	(3)>(1)
	(2)36–45	49	3.8129	.86243		
	(3)46–55	52	4.0769	.80064		
	(4)>56	11	4.2424	.39696		
Information Justice	(1)26–35	68	3.3265	.57708	5.333**	(3)>(1)
	(2)36–45	49	3.4571	.95219		
	(3)46–55	52	3.8577	.74448		
	(4)>56	11	3.7091	.70065		

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$

### CONCLUSION

Globalization has intensified competition among higher education institutions in the world. Asia is a key region experiencing this trend. Thus, research universities in Asia are now pursuing higher rankings and recruiting talented students and scholars (Deem, Mok, & Lucas, 2008). Research articles predict that professors' workloads will increase more than ever. Competition among professors in higher education will also increase. The term "academic

capitalism” can reflect this kind of phenomenon, but the perception of organizational justice in higher education—an important psychological construct that can predict organizational health and well-being—is neglected in this global context and studies of higher education.

This research constructed a questionnaire to assess the sense and perceptions of organizational justice in higher education institutions for staff and faculty members in Taiwan based on a review of the literature and expert opinions. This research divided organizational justice into distributive justice, procedure justice, interpersonal justice, and information justice. The 24 items on the questionnaire represent these four factors. This research administered questionnaires to 250 staffs and professors at national and private universities in the southern region of Taiwan. Ultimately, 180 valid questionnaires were collected and analyzed. Four background variables—gender, age, position, and institutional type—showed statistical correlations with organizational justice in Taiwan’s higher education institutions. Staffs and professors at Taiwanese universities tended to perceive a higher sense of justice for interpersonal justice but the lowest sense of justice for distributive justice. Staffs and professors at Taiwanese universities tended to perceive a higher sense of equality related to ethnicity, economic background, gender, and appearance but a lower sense of justice when their colleagues had social connections or social capital. Professors and staffs also perceived a lower sense of justice related to hours of work and rewards from work.

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**NOTES**