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## Exploring Iranian Teachers' Perceptions of Classroom Justice and Its Dimensions in EFL Instructional Contexts

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### Abstract

In any education context, teachers are mainly responsible for enacting the core values of classroom justice and equality. To address this notion, this qualitative study went through the exploration of the perceptions that Iranian EFL teachers had of classroom justice and its main dimensions. To this end, 31 EFL teachers, chosen through purposive sampling, filled out an open-ended questionnaire, and a sub-group of them participated in a semi-structured interview. The major findings, resulting from the content and thematic analyses of the data done both manually and through the MAXQDA software (Version 2020), revealed that first, all the participants, except one, regarded classroom justice as a crucial element of their instructional practice; second, interactional, procedural, and distributive dimensions of justice were reflected in the definitions that the teachers provided for classroom justice; and third, in line with the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the study, the teachers conceptualized the classroom justice dimensions through their unique principles in relation to the various domains of classroom learning, teaching, assessment, and interactions. A pedagogical implication based on the findings is that by becoming aware of how they perceive justice in their instructional practice, teachers may take the initial strides toward enhancing their just treatment of students, and consequently, increase their professional effectiveness.

**Keywords:** classroom justice, distributive justice, EFL context, interactional justice, procedural justice, teachers' perceptions

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## 1. Introduction

Students come to the class with the expectation of being treated fairly by their instructors (Chory et al., 2017), and they regard having a just behavior as one of the primary qualities of effective teachers (Mameli et al., 2018). Babad (2009) also made the point that the person being mainly responsible for enacting the core values of fairness, justice, and equality in the classroom ecology is the teacher. Despite the significance of instructional justice and fairness, students from various cultures often report being treated unfairly by their instructors (Čiuladienė & Račelytė, 2016; Horan et al., 2010; Rasooli et al., 2019).

Following Tyler's (1987) claim regarding the scarcity of research on justice and fairness in the domain of classroom, and Walzer's (1983) assertion that education makes up a unique sphere of justice (Sabbagh & Resh, 2016), at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some scholars took the lead by extending the social psychology theory of justice to the instructional context. Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004) have defined classroom justice as "perceptions of fairness regarding outcomes or processes that occur in the instructional context" (p. 254), involving the three main dimensions of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice, each being realized through a number of justice principles (Adams, 1965; Bies & Moag, 1986; Deutsch, 1975; Greenberg, 1993; Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). In particular, classroom justice is realized when a teacher/student judges the course outcomes (i.e., distributive justice), course procedures and policies (i.e., procedural justice), and teachers' interpersonal communion with students (i.e., interactional justice) as fair (Chory et al., 2014; Resh & Sabbagh, 2014).

To date, most of the studies of justice in the instructional context have focused on the students' perceptions of classroom justice in relation to their behavioral/affective responses and academic outcomes (Rasooli et al., 2018). However, how teachers perceive their own enactment of fairness in different aspects of the classroom and how much they are concerned with maintaining classroom justice in their own practice are crucial for creating and maintaining a just classroom atmosphere (Grazia et al., 2020). Moreover, as teachers and students are placed at the two sides of the justice give-and-take relationship, focusing on the students' perceptions of classroom justice and their responses, to the disregard of teachers' classroom justice perceptions and practices, would not

provide us with a clear picture of what classroom justice is (Gasser et al., 2018; Sonnleitner & Kovacs, 2020).

More importantly, the majority of such studies have been quantitative in nature, being a one-shot examination of the study participants through close-ended questionnaires (e.g., Argon & Kepekcioglu, 2016; Berti et al., 2016; Kaufmann & Tatum, 2018; Molinari & Mameli, 2017). What is less observed is the use of qualitative investigations providing thick descriptions of classroom justice from key instructional actors' perspectives. Last but not least, the examination of classroom justice in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, where teacher-student rapport and quality communication are essential building blocks of learning and instruction (Pishghadam et al., 2019), is a neglected area of research, demanding immediate attention by language education researchers around the globe.

To make a stride toward addressing the highlighted gaps in the exiting literature, the present study sought to go through a qualitative and in-depth exploration of the perceptions that Iranian EFL teachers had of the concept of classroom justice and its main dimensions.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Theoretical Framework***

As a core value essential in any individual's life, justice has been conceptualized under the social psychology theory of justice in the areas of social sciences, political sciences, and organizational behavior, where it has been studied from a phenomenological, socially- and subjectively-oriented perspective (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Thibaut & Walker, 1975).

As an umbrella term, organizational justice, encompassing the three main dimensions of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice, involves how one evaluates the degree of fairness in organizational processes, outcomes, and interactions (Kazemi et al., 2015). A comprehensive understanding of the justice dimensions is dependent on the consideration of the justice principles, representing appropriateness in a specific context (Cropanzano et al., 2015; Ehrhardt-Madapathi et al., 2018). Being the first dimension of organizational

justice, distributive justice refers to the perceptions of fairness regarding the distribution of outcomes. This dimension is realized through the principles of *need* (i.e., outcome distribution according to one's exceptionalities and needs), *equity* (i.e., outcome distribution based on one's contribution, effort, and performance), and *equality* (i.e., equal distribution of outcomes among individuals) (Adams, 1965; Deutsch, 1975; Jasso et al., 2016).

Procedural justice, as another dimension of organizational justice, pertains to the perceptions of fairness in terms of the employed policies and procedures for making allocation decisions. This dimension is perceived to be maintained when the procedures are judged to be impartial (i.e., *bias suppression* principle), established on sufficient and accurate information (i.e., *accuracy* principle), employed consistently across time and individuals (*consistency* principle), modifiable (i.e., *correctability principle*), taking into account the concerns of all individuals who are involved (i.e., *voice* principle), resting on the prevailing moral and ethical values (i.e., *ethicality* principle), enacted clearly and with transparency (i.e., *transparency* principle), and are reasonable (i.e., *reasonableness* principle) (Kazemi & Törnblom, 2008; Leventhal, 1980; Leventhal et al., 1980;; Rasooli et al., 2019; Thibaut & Walker, 1975).

Interactional justice, as the third dimension of organizational justice, relates to the perceptions of fairness in the communication of information and interpersonal interactions, when individuals perceive to be in a caring environment (i.e., *caring* principle), treated respectfully (i.e., *respect* principle) and with decorum (i.e., *propriety* principle), and when information is communicated to them in a timely manner (i.e., *timeliness* principle), honestly (i.e., *truthfulness* principle), and based on adequate and logical explanations (i.e., *adequacy/justification* principle) (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1993; Rasooli et al., 2019).

## 2.2 Empirical Background

Following this conceptualization, some key scholars have established the foundations of social psychology theory of justice in the context of instruction (e.g., Chory-Assad, 2002; Colquitt, 2001; Cooper et al., 1982; Dalbert & Maes, 2002; Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006; Gouveia-Pereira et al., 2003; Resh & Sabbagh, 2014; Tata, 1999; Tyler, 1987). It is now evident that there has been a growing interest over the past 20 years in research on the three dimensions of justice in the

sphere of education (Rasooli et al., 2018; Resh & Sabbagh, 2016). However, from a methodological vantage point, more qualitative explorations and empirical investigations of the justice principles in the instructional context are still needed (Kazemi, 2016). A review of the related literature has also revealed that students' perceptions of classroom justice influence a wide range of student variables such as student motivation, academic achievement (Kazemi, 2016), engagement (Berti et al., 2016), agency (Grazia et al., 2020), student-teacher relationship (Jiang et al., 2018), emotional and behavioral reactions (Chory et al., 2017), interest in a given subject (Sonnleitner & Kovacs, 2020), willingness to talk, affect toward the teacher, cognitive learning (Kaufmann, & Tatum, 2018), and psychological need satisfaction (Molinari & Mameli, 2017).

Few studies have also been found in the literature examining classroom justice from the teachers' viewpoint in the domain of education (Berti et al., 2010; Ehrhardt et al., 2016; Ehrhardt-Madapathi et al., 2018; Gasser et al., 2018; Horan & Myers, 2009; Poulos, 2004; Sonnleitner & Kovacs, 2020). The majority of the studies were done in the European and Western educational contexts to the disregard of the Middle East, Asian, or other cultural contexts. In addition, most of such studies were large-scale, quantitative investigations, while only 10 qualitative studies have been done to date using instruments of the interview or open-ended questionnaire to explore perceptions or experiences of classroom (in)justice from the teachers' or learners' perspectives (Bempechat et al., 2013; Buttner, 2004; Čiuladienė & Račelytė, 2016; Chory et al., 2017; Horan et al., 2010; Houston & Bettencourt, 1999; Israelashvili, 1997; Lizzio & Wilson, 2008; Rasooli et al., 2019; Robbins & Jeffords, 2009).

Scrutinizing these studies has uncovered that most of them have combined justice dimensions, principles, and domains in their analytical frameworks. For instance, Rasooli et al. (2019) discovered the domains of teacher affect, punishment, attendance policy, scheduling, syllabus design, pedagogy, classroom participation, assignment, feedback, assessment, course content, grading, peer cheating, and interpersonal relationship in relation to the procedural, distributive, and interactional justice principles. Similarly, Chory et al. (2017) and Horan et al. (2010) identified affect, opportunities, instructor grade, and punishment as domains of distributive justice violations, found class procedures, grading procedures, make-up/late-attendance policies, scheduling/workload, not following

through, promise-keeping, information for exams, instructor error, feedback, availability, and not enforcing policies to be related to procedural justice violations, and detected rude/insensitive, implied student stupidity, singled out student, sexist/racist/prejudiced, instructor affect, and accuse students of wrongdoing as the domains of interactional justice violations.

In these qualitative investigations, the data were thematically analyzed for detecting the domains mapped into particular principles within the distributive, procedural, and interactional classroom justice dimensions. Conduction of such exploratory studies is quite beneficial as they allow for discovering pertinent justice principles and domains in particular instructional contexts. Given this notion, through employing a purely qualitative research approach, the current study endeavored to find answers to the following research questions.

1. To what extent is the idea of being a just teacher important to Iranian EFL teachers?
2. How do Iranian EFL teachers perceive instructor classroom justice behavior?
3. From Iranian EFL teachers' perspectives, how do teachers incorporate justice when distributing educational outcomes, enacting class procedures and policies, and interacting with students?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Context

The present qualitative study was conducted in the ELT context of Iran, attempting to explore EFL teachers' perceptions regarding the concept of classroom justice. Although the generalizability of findings is not a concern in qualitative research, in this methodology section, an attempt was made to fully explain the data collection and analytic procedures employed in the present study for meeting two main concerns: First, to meet the dependability principle—the qualitative equivalence of reliability in quantitative studies—as clear presentation of various steps taken in a study ensures that other researchers will arrive at similar findings by following the steps and analyzing the data, and second, to meet the transferability principle—the qualitative equivalence of generalizability in quantitative studies—referring to the transferability of a study's findings, interpretations, and conclusions to similar instructional contexts (Nassaji, 2020).

### **3.2 Participants**

A group of 31 EFL instructors, teaching at various English language institutes in Iran, participated in the study. They were chosen based on purposive sampling, which is the most recommended sampling strategy (Dörnyei, 2007) in qualitative research, through which information rich participants (Patton, 2015) are intentionally selected to provide insights regarding the target phenomena. Accordingly, the participants were chosen based on their willingness and potential abilities to contribute their knowledge, experiences, and attitudes about classroom justice and its dimensions. Aside from the mentioned criterion, for maximizing variation among the participants, they were selected from various majors, academic levels, teaching experiences, provinces, teaching levels, genders, and age ranges. As recommended by Palinkas et al. (2013), maximum variation enables attending to the potential diversity among the participants and spotting “important shared patterns that cut across cases” that achieve “their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity” (p. 535), in turn assisting the sample-to-population extrapolation of data in qualitative research (Patton, 2015).

The participants were from both genders (Female = 20, 64% and Male = 11, 36%). Regarding their age, 10 participants were between 20-29 (32%), 20 participants were between 30-39 (65%), and one participant was between 40-49 (3%) years old. With regard to the last academic degree that they obtained, two participants were BA students (7%), three participants were BA graduates (10%), 14 participants were MA graduates (45%), one participant was a PhD candidate (3%), and 11 participants were PhD holders (35%). They were chosen from different provinces of Iran; namely, Ardabil (N = 1, 3%), Golestan (N = 14, 45%), Isfahan (N = 1, 3%), Guilan (N = 1, 3%), Tehran (N = 12, 39%), and Khorasan Razavi (N = 2, 7%). They also varied regarding their years of teaching experience, ranging from 0-4 (N = 10, 32.2%), 5-9 (N = 5, 16.1%), 10-14 (N = 10, 32.2%), 15-19 (N = 5, 16.1%), to 20-24 (N = 1, 3.2%) years old. They have also been teaching at different proficiency levels; namely, beginner (N = 11, 36%), early intermediate (N = 14 = 45%), intermediate (N = 24, 77%), advanced (N = 18, 58%), and proficient (N = 8, 26%). Likewise, they have been teaching various



age groups, ranging from children (N = 7, 23%), teenagers (N = 19, 61%), to adults (N = 24, 78%).

### 3.3 Instruments

Three instruments were used for data collection in the present study; a demographic information scale, an open-ended questionnaire, and a semi-structured interview. The demographic information scale enabled collecting data regarding the participants' age, teaching experience, gender, major, academic level, province, the proficiency level, and the age range they were teaching at the time of the data collection. The open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview contained several items/prompts (Appendix A) seeking to elicit the perceptions that Iranian EFL teachers had of the various dimensions of classroom justice in the education context they were involved.

These prompts were designed based on the social psychology theory of justice in the instructional context, in general, and the definition and classification of teacher classroom justice in terms of distributive, procedural, and interactional dimensions, in particular (Chory, 2007; Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004). To ensure the content validity of these items/prompts, three university instructors in the field of applied linguistics who were experts in the domains of teacher education and justice were asked to check the suitability of their content and language. Based on their comments and feedback, revisions were made, and the prompts were finalized.

### 3.4 Data Collection Procedure

In line with the Helsinki's (1964) declaration and its later amendments as well as the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committees, a formal, written consent letter (BERA, 2011) was signed by the participants approving that they voluntarily participated in the study and let the researchers use their responses as data as far as their identity remains anonymous. To ensure the confidential treatment of the participants' information, throughout the analysis and reporting stages of the study, numbers were used as codes whenever referring to the participants' responses. Having signed the consent letter, each participant was debriefed on the general purpose of the study, the nature of the participants'



cooperation, and the general concept of classroom justice. Subsequently, they were asked to fill out the demographic and open-ended questionnaire. It took the participants around 30-40 minutes to respond to both instruments. There was no restriction on the length of the participants' responses; some gave concise responses while others wrote detailed accounts. As the participants were all English language teachers with a sufficient level of English proficiency, the questionnaires were prepared and responded to in English.

From among the 31 participants, who had filled out the questionnaire, five took part in the follow-up semi-structured interview based on their own willingness and ability to orally elaborate on the textual responses that they had provided in response to the questionnaire items. The rationale behind holding an interview with a sub-group of the participants was to increase the findings' trustworthiness and arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon at hand through triangulating multiple sources of data (Denzin, 1989; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each interview session, lasting for 20-30 minutes, was recorded for later content and thematic analyses. All the data were collected virtually, first, to observe the health protocols to decrease the likelihood of spreading the Coronavirus as the data collection happened during the COVID-19 pandemic and, second, to facilitate gathering the data from various geographical locations in Iran. Therefore, the questionnaires were prepared in an online format via Google Docs, and the interviews were held through the virtual platforms of WhatsApp and Skype.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

In qualitative research studies, content analysis is identified as a typical approach for analyzing various modes of communication messages (e.g., visual, textual, and verbal) (Cole, 1998). Hence, in this study, the textual and verbal data obtained respectively from the participants' responses to the open-ended questionnaire and interview prompts went through content analysis. In doing so, the researchers examined the manifest content, not the latent content. Sentence was chosen as the unit of data analysis while attempts were made to preserve the meaning and integrity of the participants' statements. Additionally, during the coding, the researchers regarded an idea as distinct on the condition that it could not be

exchanged with another (Li, 2006). Across all the data, a total of 528 statements were identified.

For further coding of the statements, the researchers devised codes, identified their boundaries and content independently, and finally, created a codebook. When necessary, modifications were made to the codes at the time of data analysis (Morgan, 1997). There are two approaches to content analysis; deductive (i.e., analysis is done based on a particular theoretical position) and inductive (i.e., there is no priori theoretical framework, and the codes and themes emerge entirely from the data) (Abrahamson, 1983; Berg, 2001). In this study, the researchers adopted both the deductive and inductive approaches of analysis in that they read, re-read, and coded the data by drawing on the social psychology theory of justice and at the same time being open to accepting new codes and themes that could emerge from the responses. Both approaches included the stages of preparation, organization, and reporting, during which text or speech segments were condensed into content categories (Weber, 1990).

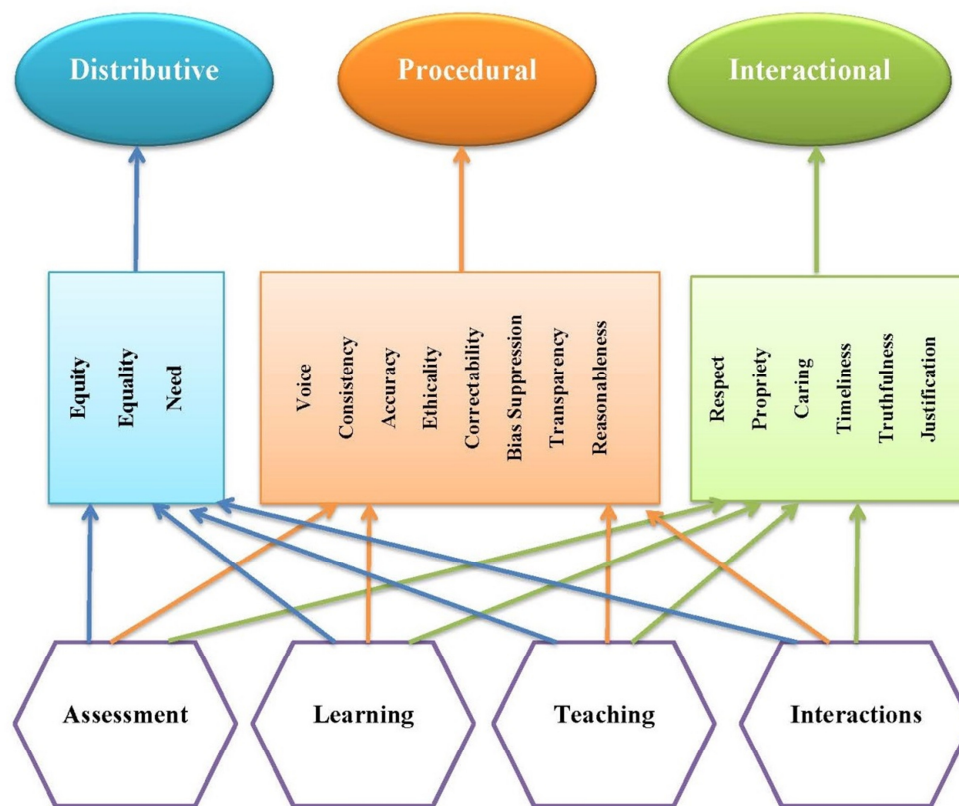
Initially, content analysis in this study was done manually. Then, as a triangulation of different analytic approaches and to increase the credibility of findings, the data were analyzed once more through the MAXQDA software (Version 2020) as recommended by Creswell (2014). The analyses arrived at through the two approaches were in congruence, approving Moriss' (1993) assertion that the manual and computer-assisted approaches to content analysis are equally productive.

The data were coded and then thematically analyzed at three levels for identifying justice dimensions, principles, and domains within them. To identify the justice dimensions, a code list was deductively devised by drawing on the existing literature (e.g., Chory, 2007; Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004) specifying the procedural, distributive, and interactional justice dimensions. To spot the justice principles, similarly, based on the literature, a deductive code list was developed containing the principles pertaining to each justice dimension; accordingly, the distributive justice principles were need, equality, and equity; the procedural justice principles were consistency, voice, correctability, transparency, ethicality, bias suppression, accuracy, and reasonableness; and the interactional justice principles were propriety, caring, respect, truthfulness, timeliness, and adequacy/justification (e.g., Colquitt, 2001; Jasso et al., 2016; Rasooli et al., 2019). Finally, to identify the justice domains, a

code list was devised based on the classroom elements of learning, assessment, teaching, and classroom interactions in relation to the interactional, procedural, and distributive justice dimensions and principles (Chory et al., 2017; Horan et al., 2010; Rasooli et al., 2019). At each of these three levels of coding, the researchers were open to include new codes and themes that could emerge from the data. Figure 1 presents the schematic representation of the three levels of coding in the present study.

**Figure 1**

*Three Levels of Coding: The Justice Dimensions, Principles, and Domains*



As an example of the way the justice dimensions, principles, and domains were coded, the following statement was analyzed: *“the teacher should not be lenient*

toward the absence of one student while being strict toward another”. This statement was coded within the procedural justice dimension (i.e., *the enactment of the attendance policy*), the procedural justice principle of *consistency* (i.e., enacting attendance policy consistently across individuals), and the domain of *attendance policy*. The researchers double or triple coded some statements as they carried two or more justice dimensions, principles, or domains at the same time. For instance, a statement from Participant 5 was coded as an instance of the interpersonal justice dimension (principle: respect; domain: teacher treatment) and the distributive justice dimension (principle: equality; domain: time allocation) simultaneously: “*Teachers are the source of knowledge and should respect their students and allocate equal amounts of time to their students*”.

For ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the codes, 20% of them were checked independently by a second coder, expert in the domains of qualitative research and teacher education. The first coder provided the second coder with a detailed description of the employed analytic framework and codebook in line with the recommendation that keeping detailed records of the coding steps and decisions facilitates the confirmability of the data and results by other coders and investigators (Nassaji, 2020). Investigator triangulation—when more than one researcher is involved in data collection or analysis—proves that the obtained findings are not merely a random selection of a single investigator and thus, enhances the credibility of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015).

Across all the data, a total number of 173 codes (units) were detected for the distributive justice dimension and its principles and domains, and an inter-coder agreement coefficient of 97% was reached as a result of the second coder’s checking of 20% of the units. Moreover, a total number of 77 codes (units) were spotted for the procedural justice dimension and its principles and domains, and an inter-coder agreement coefficient of 94% was reached on 20% of the data. Finally, 75 codes (units) were found based on the interactional justice dimension and its principles and domains, and an inter-coder agreement coefficient of 87% was reached for 20% of the data. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and the codes were finalized. The codes pertaining to each justice dimension, principle, and domain across all data were counted to compute the frequency.

As for content validity of the questionnaire/interview items/prompts, three experts in the field of teacher education checked the items for their relevance and

clarity by rating each item on a scale of 1 to 4 (i.e., for clarity: (1) *not clear*; (2) *item needs some revision*; (3) *clear but needs minor revision*; (4) *very clear*; and for relevance: (1) *not relevant*; (2) *item needs some revision*; (3) *relevant but needs some minor revision*; (4) *very relevant*). The content validity index (CVI) was calculated through dividing the number of experts who evaluated the item as clear or relevant (rating 3 or 4) by the total number of experts. The CVI values can range from 0 to 1; when the CVI value is larger than .79, the item is clear or relevant, when the CVI value is between .70 and .79, the item requires revision, and when the CVI value is smaller than .70, it is better to exclude the item (Rodrigues et al., 2017). As all the three experts gave a rating of 3 or 4 to the six items, the calculated content validity indices for each item were found to be 100%, showing that the items were clear and relevant, and thus could be maintained.

#### 4. Results

In the current study, five overarching themes of “importance of classroom justice”, “EFL teachers’ conceptualization of classroom justice”, “distributive justice”, “procedural justice”, and “interactional justice” were identified. These themes and their sub-themes were extracted from both the interview and open-ended questionnaire data. These themes and their details are explicated hereunder.

##### 4.1 Importance of Classroom Justice

All the participants, except one, regarded classroom justice as a crucial element of their instructional practice. They brought different reasons in this regard; they believed that justice is “*One of the basic teaching principles that a teacher must know*” as it “*directly impacts cognitive and affective learning of the students*” (Participant 31), and “*students’ attitudes toward the teacher, subject matter, learning, and teaching in general*” (Participant 28). Participant 1 mentioned that: “*The influence that a teacher has on students is tremendous. So, if you, as a teacher, are not careful with justice in your class, then your students may feel awkward or traumatized. This is something that I personally cannot live with. This would make me really upset*”. They also believed that: “*Without justice, the*

*students may feel demotivated*” (participant 9) and “*discouraged*” (Participant 21), and on the whole, “*the efficiency of the class decreases*” (Participant 19). Last but not least, Participant 18 stated that: “*If you are unjust, no matter how well you do your job as a teacher, the class will not reach the expected results at the end of the term*”.

#### 4.2 Teachers’ Conceptualizations of Classroom Justice

Analysis of the data revealed that classroom justice has been defined differently by EFL teachers; however, the interactional, procedural, and distributive justice dimensions have been reflected in their definitions. For instance, some of the participants defined justice in the following ways:

*Making sure all are included in every aspect of class learning and showing proper reaction to whatever students need.* (Participant 1)

*It refers to the impartial/unbiased attitude towards assessment benchmarks, care, behaving in the class, kind and frequency of praise, eye contact, assistance to students, and punishment, interpersonal communication, opportunities for learning and teaching, teacher’s time budgeting, empathy toward students, and availability in and out of class.* (Participant 2)

Others defined a just teacher as the one who “*tries to set a balance in teaching techniques and materials, assessment, and assignments by aligning them with the students’ needs, wants, and expectations*” (Participant 4), “*behaves respectfully when in contact with all learners* (Participants 6); “*is even-handed and aware of students’ needs, accommodating their specific idiosyncrasies*” (Participant 7); “*involves him/herself in the students’ learning*” (Participant 30), “*provides equal opportunity for the students’ participation*” (Participant 28), “*sets the expectations according to the students’ capabilities*” (Participant 25), and “*does not grade students based on his/her personal attitude toward students*” (Participant 24).

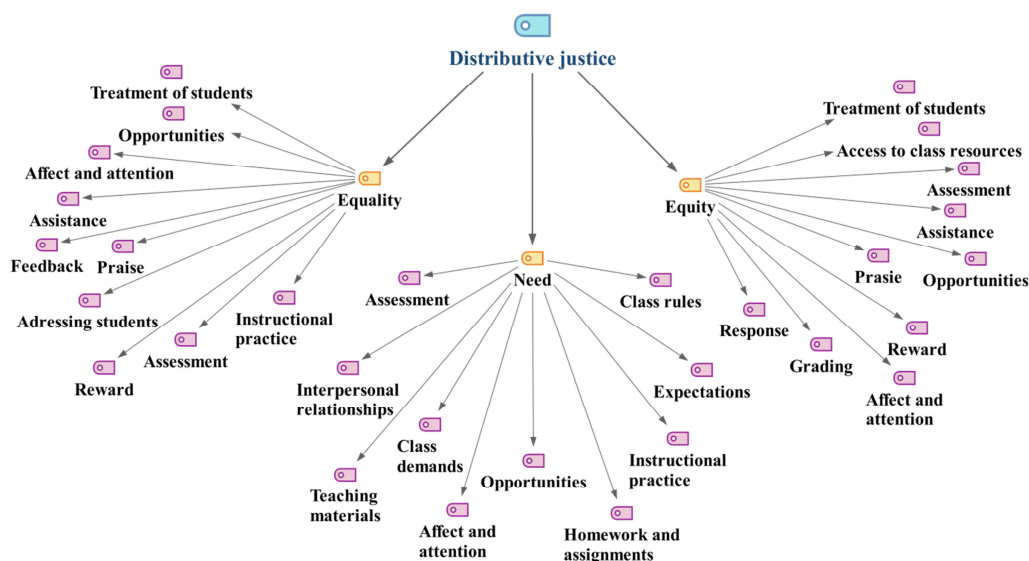
#### 4.3 Distributive Justice

Distributive justice was the most highlighted dimension across all the data with 173 codes found on it. Appendix B displays the frequencies pertaining to the distributive justice dimension and its related principles and domains. The frequencies indicate the relative importance of the domains and principles from

the participants' perspectives. Figure 2 also displays the hierarchical classification of the codes and sub-codes pertaining to the distributive justice.

**Figure 2**

*The Concept Map for the Distributive Justice Principles and Domains as Depicted by MAXQDA*



As noticed, the principles of equality, need, and equity were detected in this dimension, each dedicating 90, 43, and 40 codes to themselves, respectively. They emerged in relation to the various domains of teacher treatment of students, student opportunities, teacher affect and attention, assistance, feedback, teacher praise, addressing students, teacher care, teacher respect, assessment, instructional practice, reward, teacher expectations, teaching materials, student duties, access to class resources, decisions, punishment/penalty, interpersonal relationships, grading, teacher response, evaluation, homework and assignments, class rules, class demands, and teacher disapproval. As it is evident, these domains are related to all classroom elements of interactions, learning, assessment, and teaching.

As for the equality principle, the most frequently emerged domains were as follows: Thirty-four codes emerged when the participants reported that just teachers treat students equally and provide opportunities for them equally.



*Teacher behavior should not be different across students, and teachers should treat all in the same manner.* (Participant 12)

*The teacher should provide each and every student with equal learning opportunities.* (Participant 23)

Twenty-two codes emerged on the teachers' equal affect, assistance, and feedback to students:

*It is better if teachers keep eye contact with all students.* (Participant 24)

*Teachers should give equal help to all students on the exam day.* (Participant 31)

*As far as learning is concerned, everyone deserves to receive similar amounts of feedback.* (Participant 5)

In the need principle, the most salient domains were as follows: Twelve codes were identified on teacher affect and instructional practice based on the students' needs and individual differences.

*Teachers should give special attention to those students with special needs whatever the need is. It could be academic or emotional.* (Participant 1)

*There should be a difference in the way a teacher instructs different students because of their various learning styles.* (Participant 6)

Eleven codes were detected on the assignment of homework, assessment, and teacher expectations according to the students' various needs.

*Teachers should give differentiated assignments to students based on their ability level.* (Participant 31)

*I myself try to consider the level of my students and set assessment accordingly.* (Participant 4)

*Some students are extrovert and others are introvert. We cannot expect them to behave in the same way in the class.* (Participant 25)

The last principle found in distributive justice was equity. The most frequently emerged domains pertaining to this principle were grading, treatment of students, and reward (N = 14).

*For distributing grades, students' effort is important, and grades cannot be distributed equally to all students.* (Participant 24)

Teachers may find that some students are polite and appreciative while others show no respect for rules and basic values. In that case, if the teacher behaves toward everyone in the same way, negative behaviors may be reinforced. (Participant 5)

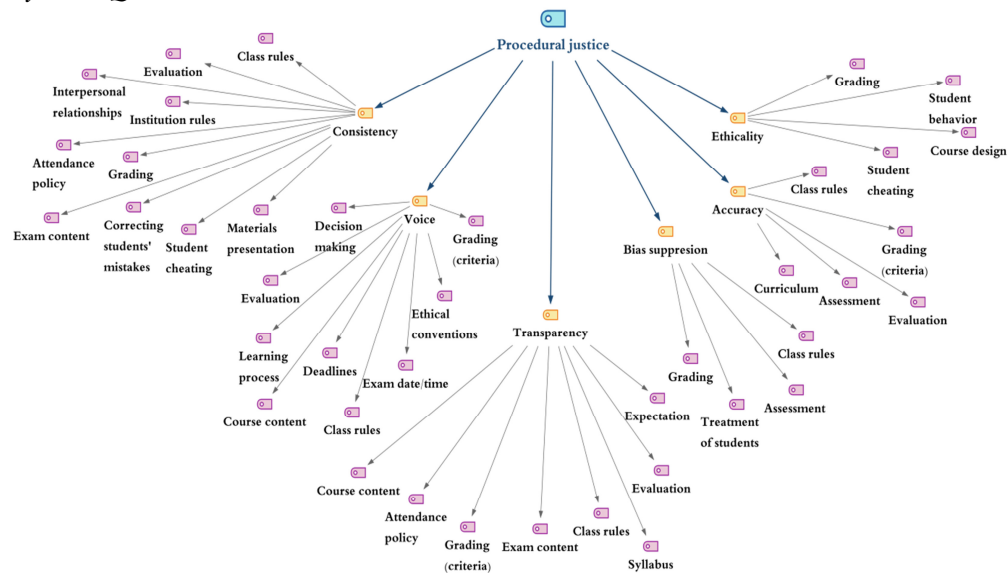
The extensive list of all domains, related to distributive justice, and their frequencies can be seen in Appendix B.

#### 4.4 Procedural Justice

The second ranked dimension, in terms of frequency of codes, was procedural justice ( $N = 77$ ). Appendix C presents the frequencies associated with the procedural justice dimension and its related principles and domains. In this dimension, the six principles of consistency ( $N = 20$ ), voice ( $N = 16$ ), transparency ( $N = 15$ ), bias suppression ( $N = 11$ ), accuracy ( $N = 9$ ), and ethicality ( $N = 5$ ) were found (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*The Concept Map for the Procedural Justice Principles and Domains as Depicted by MAXQDA*



These principles were found in relation to the domains of student cheating, class rules, correcting students' mistakes, exam content, materials presentation, interpersonal relationships, grading, institution rules, evaluation, attendance policy, decision making, exam date/time, evaluation, learning process, course content, deadlines, grading (criteria), ethical conventions, expectations, syllabus, teacher treatment, assessment, curriculum, course design, and student behavior. As it is evident, these domains are within all the four classroom elements of interactions, teaching, assessment, and learning.

Teacher justice was most frequently defined within the consistency principle when teachers employ attendance policy, class rules, and grading consistently over time (N = 11). Some of the participants' remarks are presented hereunder.

*A Just teacher is not lenient toward the absence of one student while being strict toward another.* (Participant 31)

*The teacher should stick to the class rules, no matter who breaks them.* (Participant 6)

*I myself design a checklist and mark all students based on that.* (Participant 27)

With regard to the voice principle, the participants reported that just teachers allow students to voice their opinions most frequently in the domains of decision making, course content, and exam date/time (N = 8):

*Just teachers ask for students' ideas regarding the time of exams and topics for discussion in the class.* (Participant 24)

*I do ask for my students' voice and choice in the selection of appropriate materials.* (Participant 23)

For the transparency principle, codes were most frequently found in the domains of grading criteria and class rules (N = 8).

*I make clear the amount of score that I assign for each aspect of class such as presentation, homework, and exams.* (Participant 31)

*I believe in setting clear class rubrics or standards for students to know what is expected of them.* (Participant 1)

The bias suppression principle was most recurrently found when irrelevant student factors or teachers' personal beliefs do not influence grading, assessment, and teacher treatment of students (N = 9):

*Just teachers consider only students' performance rather than intervening factors, including gender or family relation with the teacher when grading.* (Participant 4)

*Teachers should control their feelings in their behaviors toward students.* (Participant 16)

Regarding the accuracy principle, the participants most recurrently reported that grading, assessment, and evaluation criteria must be established based on sufficient and accurate information:

*Evaluation must be based on criteria being holistic and covering any aspect of learning.* (Participant 23)

*I try to have lots of rules, tools, and rubrics making sure that I am designing assessment in a proper way so that any type of student would benefit from it.* (Participant 1)

*I determine scoring criteria which are almost inclusive.* (Participant 1)

The last principle was ethicality when the teachers' handling of course design, student behavior, student cheating, and grading was in line with the moral and ethical standards (N = 4):

*I believe that teachers should not provide students with extra scores because of students' doing a particular work for the teacher, e.g., filling out a questionnaire or editing a manuscript belonging to the teacher.* (Participant 4)

*Cheating and unethical behaviors should be banned in class.* (Participant 9)

The extensive list of all the domains related to the procedural justice and their frequencies has been placed in Appendix C.

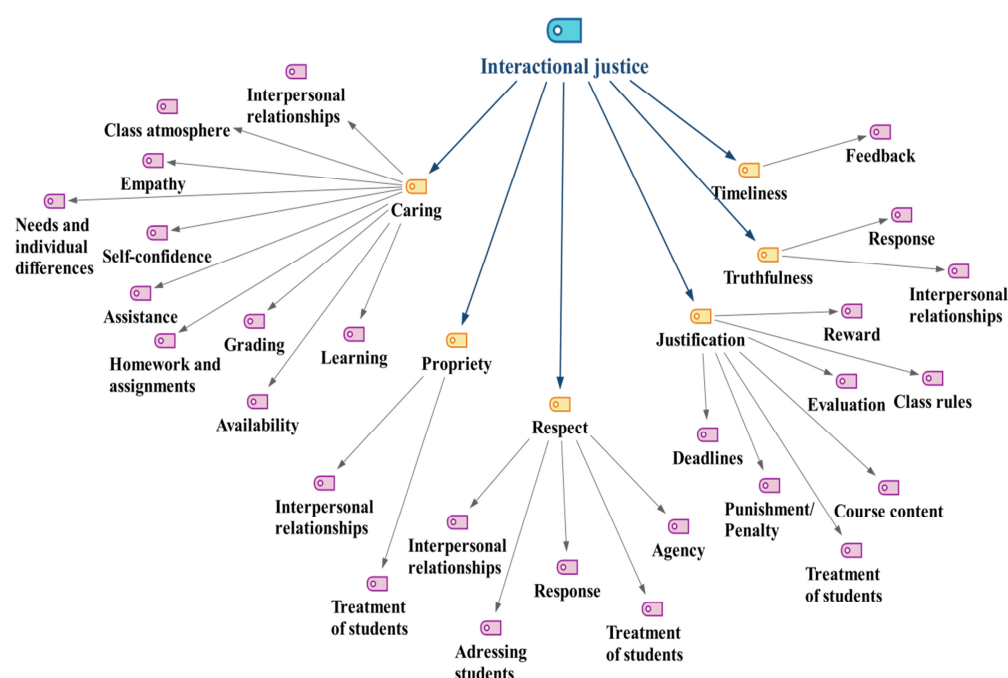
#### **4.5 Interactional Justice**

The last spotted dimension was interactional justice with a frequency of 75 codes (units). Appendix D pertains to the interactional justice dimension and its principles and domains as well as their frequencies. The six principles of caring (N = 39), propriety (N = 13), respect (N = 11), justification (N = 8), truthfulness (N = 2), and timeliness (N = 1) were found for this dimension in relation to the

domains of interpersonal relationships, class atmosphere, needs and individual differences, assistance, empathy, self-confidence, grading, homework and assignments, availability, learning, treatment of students, addressing students, agency, response, deadlines, evaluation, punishment/penalty, reward, course content, class rules, and feedback (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*The Concept Map for the Interactional Justice Principles and Domains as Depicted by MAXQDA*



Interpersonal justice emerged most recurrently on the caring principle in the domains of interpersonal relationships, class atmosphere, and students' needs and individual differences (N = 26).

*I am friendly with my learners. (Participant 5)*

*I try to create rapport in the class. (Participant 20)*

*Just teachers create a safe, friendly, and positive atmosphere in the class!* (Participant 12)

*A just teacher is aware of students' needs, accommodating their specific idiosyncrasies.* (Participant 7)

Similarly, the propriety principle was found in relation to the domains of interpersonal relationships and the teachers' treatment of students (N = 13):

*I try my best not to embarrass or belittle my students for their poor performance.* (Participant 4)

*A just behavior is the one which does not hurt even a single learner.* (Participant 17)

The respect principle also emerged most frequently in the domains of the teacher's treatment of students, interpersonal relationships, and addressing of students (N = 8):

*I address students respectfully.* (Participant 31)

*Teachers should treat their students respectfully.* (Participant 5)

The justification principle was found in various domains such as evaluation, reward, and punishment/penalty.

*A just outcome includes evaluation based on criteria already explained to students.* (Participant 23)

*For each penalty or reward that I consider for the students, I inform the students that how much grade belongs to each penalty or reward and the logic behind it.* (Participant 31)

The truthfulness principle was found in terms of the interpersonal relationships and response domains (N = 2): *"I am honest with my learners and respond correctly to students"* (Participant 31). Finally, the timeliness principle was found only in relation to the feedback domain (N = 1): *"a just teacher provides timely feedback to students"* (Participant 8). Appendix D presents the extensive list of all the domains related to interactional justice and their frequencies.

## 5. Discussion

Highlighting the scant attention given to the teachers' perceptions (e.g., Gasser et al., 2018; Sonnleitner & Kovacs, 2020) and qualitative investigations (e.g., Chory et al., 2017; Čiuladienė & Račelytė, 2016) in research on justice in the instructional context, the present study addressed the gaps by exploring Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of classroom justice. Generally, the outcomes of the present study were in congruence with the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the study, which pertain to the social psychology theory of justice in the instructional context (e.g., Argon & Kepekcioglu, 2016; Berti et al., 2010; Chory et al., 2014; Horan et al., 2012; Sonnleitner & Kovacs, 2020; Young et al., 2013). In this regard, the outcomes revealed that Iranian EFL teachers have conceptualized classroom justice in terms of the three main dimensions of interactional, procedural, and distributive justice. Therefore, these outcomes validated and extended the research on the Western social psychology theory of justice to the Iranian EFL context.

The teachers' comments revealed that they were well cognizant of the influence of justice on students' learning and affective, cognitive, and academic outcomes. They expected themselves to behave professionally through being a just English teacher. In line with the assertion of Chory et al. (2017), they reported attempting to uphold academic standards through behaving in a just manner toward their students. Among the three dimensions, distributive justice was the most significantly highlighted one in the teachers' perceptions and accounts, revealing that they considered justice a necessity when distributing outcomes such as grade, reward, feedback, praise, or opportunities among students. On the other hand, interactional justice was the least emphasized dimension among the three, showing that to EFL teachers, being just in interactions and communication of information is not as important as being just when distributing outcomes and employing class policies and procedures.

It is interesting that interactional justice was not the most salient dimension of the teachers' accounts in spite of the notion that just teacher-student interactions and relationships are central to the learning and teaching processes (Frymier et al., 2019). Some qualitative studies have also reported that students had much more interactional than procedural and distributive concerns (e.g., Bempechat et al., 2013; Rasooli et al., 2019). Therefore, we expected the teachers to refer more frequently to them. Furthermore, data analysis revealed various justice principles



within the justice dimensions in line with the theoretical background of the study. More particularly, for distributive justice, the three principles of equality, equity, and need were identified, supporting the findings of previous research (e.g., Adams, 1965; Deutsch, 1975; Jasso et al., 2016). Among these principles, equality was most frequently referred to by the EFL teachers, indicating that they believed outcomes like teacher affect, feedback, care, respect, or opportunities should be distributed equally among all students.

Regarding the procedural justice principles, consistent with the theoretical and empirical literature, the six principles of consistency, voice, transparency, bias suppression, accuracy, and ethicality were detected in the teachers' accounts within the various domains of classroom teaching, learning, assessment, and interactions. However, the two principles of reasonableness and correctability, presented in the previous studies, did not emerge from the data (Leventhal, 1980; Leventhal et al., 1980; Kazemi & Tornbolm, 2008; Rasooli et al., 2019; Thibaut & Walker, 1975), revealing that reasonableness and correctability were not as significant as the other six procedural principles for Iranian EFL teachers' just treatment of their students. To check the credibility and truthfulness of these findings, more research and investigations are required to see if similar outcomes can be obtained in other similar instructional contexts.

Furthermore, among these six principles, consistency was the most recurrently noticed principle, indicating that Iranian EFL teachers perceived being consistent over time or person is important when, for example, evaluating and grading students, employing classroom rules and attendance policy, treating students, and correcting the students' mistakes. The second most significant principle based on the data was voice, meaning that the teachers valued asking for students' opinions when they want to make decisions regarding the course content, discussion topics, exam date, deadlines, and the like. To see if these principles are significant to English language teachers in general, more studies are demanded across culturally dissimilar EFL contexts.

Considering interactional justice, as highlighted in the social psychology theory of justice literature, the caring, propriety, respect, justification, truthfulness, and timeliness principles were detected in the data (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1993; Rasooli et al., 2019). The teachers

reported these principles to explain teachers' just behavior in terms of, for instance, how they show affect toward students, teach in the classroom, assess students, provide learning opportunities, set expectations, praise students, set class demands, and respond to students. Among these principles, caring was the most outstanding one to the teachers, reporting that just teachers try to show their caring toward their students by showing empathy, providing a relaxed classroom atmosphere, attending to students' individual needs, helping learners, boosting their self-confidence, and being available to them in and outside the class, among others.

On the whole, the previous research has argued that although the exploration of students' justice perceptions is important, it differs from those of instructors and cannot adequately reflect the teachers' practices (Chory et al., 2017). Hereupon, the outcomes of the present study provided empirical backing for the perceptions that EFL teachers have had of justice in their educational contexts. The findings suggested that in the Iranian EFL context, one of the main concerns of teachers is the enactment of classroom justice, and that consideration of justice must be taken into account in any aspect of education, including teacher-student relationships, outcome distribution, and classroom procedures.

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

This study has shown that Iranian EFL teachers consider justice a crucial component of their professional practice, not only in the domain of classroom assessment, but also in classroom teaching, learning, and interactions. Their perceptions empirically reinforced the present theoretical conceptualization of classroom justice (Chory et al., 2014; Sabbagh & Resh, 2016), resting on the three main dimensions of interactional, procedural, and distributive justice. The outcomes of the present study redound to the benefit of various stakeholders in the realm of language education. First of all, as justice is a rudimentary element of any healthy education system, and that stakeholders make top-down decisions affecting the quality of education, language policymakers may benefit from the outcomes of this study.

By enforcing justice enactment as one of the responsibilities of quality teachers, language policymakers can encourage teachers' amelioration of their own justice practice. Second, unfortunately, teachers mainly receive instruction

regarding content in their specialized area during teacher education programs, and their need for pedagogical knowledge is disregarded (Horan & Myers, 2009). Therefore, the ideal situation is when the teachers' repertoire contains an amalgam of various types of knowledge enabling them to perform effectively in the classroom and take care of various needs of the learners, one of which is being treated fairly. Furthermore, the findings of this study can be effective for the continuing professional development of pre- and in-service teachers.

Taking this point into account that teachers' behaviors are indeed changeable (Derakhshan et al., 2020; Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005), by becoming aware of how they perceive justice in their own instructional practice, teachers may take the initial strides toward enhancing their fair treatment of students, and consequently, increase their effectiveness. In addition, the current study may shed light on the understanding and modification of the contemporary classroom justice models. As a thorough review of the extant studies shows, the main concern of the previous classroom justice studies and models has been mostly the students' perceptions. Following the present study findings, future classroom justice models, therefore, can include teachers' perceptions of and reflections on their classroom justice behavior as an important piece of the classroom justice enactment puzzle.

Like any other study, there are some limitations in the present research undertaking. First of all, factors such as the researcher's biases, beliefs, experiences, communication skills, familiarity and relationship with the participants, and dominance over the present study may affect the results. The instruments used in the present study were limited to the open-ended questionnaire and one-on-one semi-structured interview. Future studies can use other instruments such as close-ended questionnaires, focus group interviews, the narrative writing, diary writing, or audio journal to unravel English language teachers' perceptions of justice through other data collection tools and triangulate the data obtained in the present study.

Furthermore, variables such as age, gender, educational background, and experience of the teachers were not the main concerns as these were not among the variables determined in this research. Future studies can control for any of these variables or examine their potential effect on the justice perceptions that

Iranian EFL teachers hold. In this study, only 31 Iranian EFL teachers participated. Although generalizability is not a concern in qualitative research, the smallness of the sample size can be justified by mentioning that many EFL teachers are reluctant or may not have the time to take part in research studies. Finally, only teachers' perceptions were explored in this study. To reach more comprehensive results, future researchers can concurrently examine English language teachers' and students' perceptions in a single study.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### ***The Open-Ended Questionnaire and Interview Items/Prompts***

1. Is the idea of being a just teacher important to you in your daily work? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. How do you define the teacher classroom justice behavior generally in your own terms?
3. In what classroom aspects do you think teacher justice can be implemented?
4. Explain how teachers can employ justice when distributing educational outcomes such as grades, feedback, reward, help, time, or punishment among their students.
5. Explain how teachers can incorporate justice when enacting classroom procedures and policies.
6. Explain how teachers can apply justice in their interpersonal relationships with students and communication of information to them.

## Appendix B

*The Distributive Justice Dimension, Principles, and Domains and their Frequencies*

Dimension	Frequency	Principle	Frequency	Domains	Frequency
Distributive	173	Equality	90	Treatment of students	18
				Opportunities	16
				Affect and attention	15
				Assistance	7
				Feedback	6
				Praise	3
				Addressing students	3
				Care	2
				Respect	2
				Assessment	2
				Instructional practice	2
				Reward	2
				Expectations	1
				Teaching materials	1
				Duties	1
				Access to class resources	1
				Decisions	1
				Punishment/Penalty	1
		Need	43	Interpersonal relationships	1
				Grading	1
				Response	1
				Evaluation	1
				Affect and attention	6
				Instructional practice	6
				Homework and Assignments	5
				Assessment	4
				Opportunities	3
				Interpersonal relationships	2
				Expectations	2
				Evaluation	1
				Teaching materials	1
				Grading	1
				Praise	1
				Class rules	1
				Class demands	1
		Equity	40	Grading	6
				Treatment of students	4
				Reward	4
				Affect and attention	3
				Praise	3
				Opportunities	3
				Assessment	2
				Assistance	2
				Punishment/Penalty	1



## Appendix C

*The Procedural Justice Dimension, Principles, and Domains and their Frequencies*

Dimension	Frequency	Principle	Frequency	Domain	Frequency
Procedural	77	Consistency	20	Attendance policy	5
				Class rules	3
				Grading	3
				Exam content	2
				Materials presentation	1
				Interpersonal relationships	1
				Student cheating	1
				Institution rules	1
				Evaluation	1
				Correcting students' mistakes	1
		Voice	16	Decision making	3
				Course content	3
				Exam date/time	2
				Learning process	1
				Evaluation	1
				Deadlines	1
				Grading (criteria)	1
				Class rules	1
				Ethical conventions	1
		Transparency	15	Grading (criteria)	5
				Class rules	3
				Attendance policy	1
				Expectations	1
				Evaluation	1
				Exam content	1
				Syllabus	1
				Course content	1
		Bias suppression	11	Grading	5
				Teacher treatment	2
				Assessment	2
		Accuracy	9	Class rules	1
				Assessment	3
				Grading (criteria)	2
				Evaluation	2
				Curriculum	1
		Ethicality	5	Class rules	1
				Course design	1
				Student behavior	1
				Student cheating	1
				Grading	1

## Appendix D

*The Interactional Justice Dimension, Principles, and Domains and their Frequencies*

Dimension	Frequency	Principle	Frequency	Domain	Frequency
Interactional	75	Caring	39	Interpersonal relationships	15
				Class atmosphere	6
				Needs and individual differences	5
				Assistance	3
				Empathy	3
				Self-confidence	2
				Grading	2
				Homework and assignments	1
				Availability	1
				Learning	1
		Propriety	13	Interpersonal relationships	11
				Treatment of students	2
		Respect	11	Treatment of students	3
				Interpersonal relationships	3
				Addressing students	2
				Agency	1
				Response	1
				Treatment of students	2
				Deadlines	1
				Evaluation	1
		Justification	8	Punishment/Penalty	1
				Reward	1
				Course content	1
				Class rules	1
				Interpersonal relationships	1
				Response	1
		Truthfulness	2	Interpersonal relationships	1
				Response	1
		Timeliness	1	Feedback	1
				Feedback	1