

International Students' Perceptions of Interactive Academic Justice and Their Relation to Academic Achievement

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Abstract

International learners of Arabic as a second language have a multi-cultural background, which may affect their perceptions toward the way they are treated with their instructors. The current study tries to examine international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice and their relationship to academic achievement. The researcher used the descriptive approach, using a questionnaire of students' perceptions of interactive academic justice, which involved (175) male and female students at the Arabic Language Institute for Non-Native Speakers at Umm Al-Qura University. The results show that there is a high level of international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice. However, there are no statistically significant differences in international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice; in terms of the gender variable (male-female). International students' perceptions of interactive academic justice do not differ according to the period of Arabic language learning. The results indicate the importance of paying attention to teachers of Arabic as a second language, and the necessity of selecting those teachers and providing them with the necessary training continuously. Future research was presented.

Keywords: interactive academic justice, international students, foreign language

1. Introduction

Students look differentially at the fairness of the academic environment, which includes fairness in the distribution of grades, fairness in registering courses and their appointments, and fairness in the methods and rules of evaluation. All of these factors may affect their achievement level. Therefore, this is done without prejudice when dealing with them. These perceptions of academic justice may affect international students more than others, as they live in different conditions and environments when learning a second language. Their perceptions of the level of this justice may differ according to their different views of academic study, sociocultural backgrounds, and their professors and colleagues.

Ali (2015a, p. 61) showed that non-Arabic speakers are of many different cultures, and therefore their preferences and perceptions of the instructors' behavior may vary. Likewise, their perceptions of the level of justice may differ according to their customs and traditions about their colleagues who speak Arabic.

These perceptions of justice may also be about their social or academic aspect. A study (Ali, 2018, p. 22) indicated that the problems related to the academic aspect increase among non-Arabic speakers. A study (Ali, 2015b, p. 18) also showed that attention should be paid to recognizing facts with both mind and emotion, in light of high degrees of interest in relationships with others. The relationship between faculty members and their students, and the student's perception of social and academic justice, are the most important relationships that should be studied.

Furthermore, there is many cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity among learners of Arabic as a second language at the Institute of Teaching Arabic to Non-native Speakers at Umm Al-Qura University (KSA). The students come from over (80) countries from all over the world.

International students' perceptions of interactive academic justice may affect their academic achievement, and the level of this justice may differ for males and females. In addition to this, the period of a student's stay at the university (the period of learning the Arabic language) may affect his/her perception of this justice. Generally, there have been many prior studies that have addressed the students' perceptions of justice. However, studies

that have addressed the perceptions of second language learners are very few. The current study tries to overcome the deficiency by including interactive academic justice among international students of the Arabic programs as a second or foreign language. Therefore, there has been a need to examine international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice and its relationship to academic achievement in light of gender and learning period variables.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1 Classroom Justice

Some researchers have distinguished between fairness which is related to a test taker, and justice which is related to institutions that design, develop, administer, and use a test (Kunnan, 2018). Classroom justice refers to the fairness of perceptions of educational assessment outcomes and the processes that occur in the educational context, namely, the procedures that are employed to arrive at those outcomes (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b, p. 254). There are three different types of classroom justice. They are distributive, procedural, and interactional justice, which will be discussed as follows:

Distributive classroom justice refers to whether students receive the grades they think they deserve based on some standards of comparison to their classmates (Adams, 1965) Cited in Tripp et al. (2019) and (Berti et al., 2010, p. 543). Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004a) found that poor perceptions of distributive justice correlate with behaviors in the classroom, such as revenge against the teacher. Procedural classroom justice refers to the students' perceptions of fairness of the procedures used by their teachers to give grades and evaluate them. These procedures can be explained to students through communication and verbal exchanges (Berti et al., 2010, p. 543).

Interactional classroom justice refers to the perceptions of fairness in the interpersonal relationships received by students in the classroom context (Berti et al., 2010, p. 543; Chory et al., 2017). Learning outcomes do not only depend on teaching hours or doing homework, but they depend on a fair relationship between teacher and student as well. This relationship is very important for the student's attitude toward schoolwork and their performance (Kazemi, 2016, p. 113). Likewise, the way students communicate with their instructors is very important for the dynamics of the classroom. These interactions may influence the student's performance in class. Students may perceive interactional justice based on the way they are treated by their instructors and understand their feelings, concerns, and needs (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a). Horan et al. (2009) found that the most important component of fairness from faculty members' view was interactional justice. Instructors reported that they are in descending order, concerning interactional justice, then procedural justice, then distributive justice. (Horan et al., 2009). Ghani et al. (2020) concluded also that interactional justice plays an important role as it provides a fair environment for studying and research. If the period of learning increases, the student's perceptions of classroom justice may be affected. Arries (2009) found that the student nurses in the fourth year received better justifications from their staff for vital decisions than the third and second-year students. Furthermore, students who engage for a long time in the context of clinical learning perceived their relationships with their clinical staff to be very good in the way they are treated and perceived them to be juster.

There is a fourth type of classroom justice. This type is informational justice, which refers to the fairness of the information of the procedures and outcomes of an evaluative event (Wallace, 2018, p. 1054). Kazemi (2016) concluded that informational justice significantly predicts school grades. The result also showed that there is no difference in terms of informational justice between students according to gender (male/female) in their perceptions of their teachers. However, there is a significant difference between male and female students in terms of motivation in favor of female students. Moreover, female students informed higher scores than male students (Kazemi, 2016, p. 112).

Previous studies have shown the importance of classroom justice and its benefits to both students and teachers. It increases students' motivation toward studying and makes them effectively engaged in the classroom. It is known in school contexts that the way teachers and students interact influences shaping the environment of learning and reinforcing students' positive behavior and motivation towards learning (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). Howell and Buck's research (2012) asserted that explaining procedures of grading and course policies, flexibility in scheduling exams, and providing feedback predict a higher level of student satisfaction. In their study about students' perceptions of instructor unfairness (Chory et al., 2017) concluded that anger and opposition were the strongest emotional responses to injustice among a sample of 397 students from three universities in the United States.

Most faculty members want their students to perceive them to be fair to prevent negative student reactions, particularly when giving them lower teaching evaluations (Chory, 2007). Berti et al. (2010) concluded that

unjustly treating students by their instructors, affects their psychological involvement in school. The personal experience of fair treatment by teachers plays a vital role in illustrating students' perceptions of a positive school context (Peter & Dalbert, 2010). Alonge et al. (2019) concluded that there was a significant correlation between teachers' equity and the academic performance of high school students (Alonge et al., 2019). Justice, in general, has a positive effect on student achievement (Burns & DiPaola, 2013).

Motivation is very important for facilitating students learning, as it gives them the energy to learn, work effectively, and realize their potential at school (Gilman & Anderman, 2006; Martin, 2004). In language classrooms, there is a relationship between motivation and perceptions of language assessment. If a student sees his language assessment is unfair, he may lose motivation to learn, which in turn may harm his language acquisition and ultimately, academic performance (Wallace, 2018, p. 1052). The findings of Rodriguez's study (2012) indicated that high school students' perceptions of justice differed by ethnicity, high school grade, academic subject, and achievement status, but not by gender.

Although instruction and methods of assessing student performance are very vital at higher education institutions, there are significant variations among departments at the same university. In the social sciences, student performance is generally assessed by essay questions and by examinations, such as multiple-choice questions (Neumann et al., 2002; Simpson, 2016). The effects of assessment and instruction methods on student perceptions of the fairness of the evaluation process were demonstrated in a study by Burger (2017). It was found that the procedural justice of the students is greatly influenced by the method of assessment.

To make learners in language classrooms feel that their grades and scores are just, the procedures of the language exam should be administered equally to all exam takers, and the exam should be conducted in a practical way (Song, 2016). Kunnan (2018) and Song (2016) have noted that fairness in language assessment involves ensuring the procedures in which an assessment is administered are applied equally to all applicants.

In language testing, procedural fairness is fostered when students perceive the procedures in which a test is administered as being equally applied to all test takers (Wallace, 2018, p. 1053). On the other hand, interactional fairness is fostered when the social entity administering a test (e.g., instructor, language program, testing organization, etc.) communicates with the test taker in a fair, respectful manner throughout a testing event; including prior to, during, and after test administration (Wallace, 2018, p. 1053). However, informational fairness is fostered when the information about the test procedures is thoroughly and reasonably explained, and feedback from the test is provided on time and specific for each test taker (Wallace, 2018, p. 1054).

The Arabic Language Institute for Non-Native Speakers at Umm Al-Qura University receives annually many learners from all over the world. They are coming to study Arabic as a second language for two years. Those learners differ in their mother tongue, culture, socioeconomics background and the level and methods of education they received. All these aspects affect their view of the way they are treated by their instructors.

2.2 Purposes of the Study: The Current Study Tries to:

- 1) Investigate international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice.
- 2) Prepare a tool to measure international students' perceptions of academic interactive justice.
- 3) Identify the relationship between international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice and academic achievement.
- 4) Identify the differences among international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice according to the gender variable (male-female).
- 5) Identify the differences among international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice according to the variable of the learning period (less than a year - from one year to less than three years - more than three years).

2.3 Terminology of the Study

The researcher defined the Terminology of the study procedurally as follows:

- 1) Students' perceptions of interactive justice fall within the components of students' perceptions of social justice and include the professors' understanding of their student's feelings, concerns, preferences, needs, and fairness based on mutual respect between the students and the professors.
- 2) Academic achievement is a tool for measuring the students' learning level in all subjects they study (Molinari et al., 2013, p. 61). The researcher can define it as "The academic average of the student during the period of learning Arabic as a second language". The maximum end of this average is four degrees. It is calculated by the

total of the student's grades in all subjects during their study at the Institute of Teaching Arabic for Non-Native Speakers at Umm Al-Qura University.

3) Learning period: The number of years a student spent learning the Arabic language as a foreign language at Umm Al-Qura University.

2.4 Hypotheses of the Study

Throughout the previous presentation, the researcher formulated the study hypotheses as follows:

H1) There is a high level of academic interactive justice perceptions among international students at the Institute of Arabic Language for Non-Native Speakers, Umm Al-Qura University.

H2) There is no statistically significant correlation between international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice and academic achievement.

H3) There are no statistically significant differences in international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice, due to the gender variable (male-female).

H4) international students' perceptions of academic interactive justice do not differ according to the period of Arabic language learning.

3. Methodology

The study aims to study international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice. Therefore, the descriptive approach is the most appropriate for the objectives of the present study.

3.1 Sample

The study included all undergraduate students at the Institute of Teaching the Arabic Language for Non-Native Speakers in the Departments of Teaching Arabic Language and Teacher Preparation, Umm Al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia. The students in the first and second levels in the Department of Teaching Arabic were excluded, due to the novelty of learning Arabic, and the possibility of falling into errors in understanding the questionnaire. The number of students after excluding the first and second levels was (322) male and female students; distributed among over (80) nationalities. The questionnaire was carried out in the first semester of the academic year 2020/2021. The researcher divided the sample into two of the following categories:

1) The Pilot Sample

The pilot sample included (100) students, with an average age of (22.93) years, a standard deviation of (3.63), an academic cumulative average of achievement (3.36), and a standard deviation of (0.53). The researcher applied the questionnaire to the pilot sample of international students to verify its validity and reliability.

2) The Basic Sample

The basic sample included (175) male and female students at the Institute of Teaching the Arabic Language for Non-Native Speakers, Umm Al-Qura University, with an average age of (23.07) years, a standard deviation of (3.55), an academic cumulative average of achievement of (3.46), and a standard deviation of (0.49). The basic sample is illustrated in the Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the basic study sample according to the gender variables and the learning period.

Variables	Number of students	Percentage
Gender	Male	114
	Female	61
Period of Learning Arabic	less than one year	38
	one year-less than three years	76
	more than three years	61
Total		175
		100%

3.2 Instruments and Procedures

3.2.1 The Study Tool

The study tool includes a questionnaire of international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice (Prepared by the researcher). The following is a presentation of the questionnaire.

The researcher developed a questionnaire to measure international students' perceptions of interactive academic

justice. It has been constructed based on other instruments, likewise (Chory, 2007), which consisted of eight items, and did not include dimensions. The researcher also benefited from Wallace (2018), Chory et al. (2017) and Paulsel (2005). The researcher found that these questionnaires are not sufficient enough for international students' definition of interactive academic justice. Table 2 clarifies the distribution of the items of the questionnaire on international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice in both dimensions.

Table 2. The distribution of the items of the questionnaire on the international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice in both dimensions:

Dimension	Numbers of items
1. Interactive Justice	1-10
2. Academic Justice	11-19

3.2.2 Psychometric Characteristics of the Questionnaire of International Students' Perceptions of Interactive Academic Justice

- 1) The validity of the questionnaire of international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice:
 - The Face validity: The researcher presented the questionnaire of international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice to five professors specializing in education and psychology, to ensure the face validity of the questionnaire. A group of items was deleted, and the items that obtained the approval of 80% of mediators were considered acceptable.
- 2) The Reliability of the questionnaire on international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice:
 - The Reliability of the Items: The researcher calculated the reliability of the items by the alpha coefficient, for each of the two dimensions on the questionnaire of international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice by the number of items for each dimension separately. The alpha coefficient items were limited between (0.921) and (0.929).
 - The Reliability of the two dimensions: The researcher calculated the reliability of the two dimensions by calculating the alpha coefficient for each dimension, so it was (0.932) for interactive justice, and (0.931) for academic justice. The reliability coefficient of the two dimensions is considered good.
- 3) The alpha coefficient of the questionnaire as a whole: The alpha coefficient of the questionnaire as a whole is equal to (0.933), which is a high value for Reliability, and it is greater than the reliability coefficients of the two dimensions of the questionnaire. That is, if we delete one dimension, it reduces the reliability of the questionnaire, which indicates the reliability coefficient of the two dimensions.
- 4) Internal consistency: The researcher calculated the correlation coefficients between the degree of each item and the dimension that this item falls under. The correlation coefficients were limited between (0.35) and (0.77), all of which are statistically significant at the level of (0.01), which indicates the reliability of the items of the questionnaire on international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice. The researcher also calculated the coefficients correlation between the degree of each dimension and the total score of the questionnaire. The coefficients correlation was (0.92) between interactive justice and the total score of the questionnaire, and (0.91) between academic justice and the total score of the questionnaire. They are statistically significant at 0.01 level.

It is clear from the above, that the questionnaire of international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice is valid and reliable.

3.2.3 Description of the Questionnaire in Its Final Form

The questionnaire of international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice consists of (19) items distributed on two dimensions. Participants rated the items on a Likert scale with response options ranging from 5 (very fair) to 1 (very unfair). The total score of the questionnaire ranges between (19-95) degrees. Table 2 shows the item's distribution of the questionnaire on international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice in its final form on two dimensions. The Appendix contains the revised academic interactive justice questionnaire. The researcher used means, standard deviations, hypothetical means, correlation coefficients, alpha coefficients, "T" test for one sample, "T" test for two independent samples, and analysis of variance.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Results of the First Hypothesis and Their Discussion

The first hypothesis states that “there is a high level of international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice among the sample”. To verify the validity of this hypothesis, the mean, standard deviation, hypothetical mean, and the “T-value” were calculated for one sample; to examine international students’ perceptions of academic interactive justice for the basic sample of (175) male and female students. This is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. The mean and standard deviation of the international students’ perceptions of academic interactive justice

Variables	M	SD	No. of items of the questionnaire	Average Questionnaire items	Students’ perceptions level	The hypothetical average*	t- value	The significance level
Interactive justice	42.88	6.47	10	8.29	High level	34	18.17	0.01
Academic justice	38.25	6.24	9	4.25	High level	30.6	16.79	0.01
Academic Interactive Justice	81.41	12.50	19	4.28	High level	64.6	17.78	0.1

Note. *The hypothetical average was calculated at a rate of (3.4) for each item of the international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice, in the case of the “high” level.

It is clear from Table 3 that international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice are very high, which achieves the validity of the first hypothesis.

The researcher can explain the high level of international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice, as a result of the efforts made by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for student scholarships. As well as Umm Al-Qura University and its professors. Every year, Umm Al-Qura University tries to polarize specialized and distinguished faculty members from many Arab countries. They are from Egypt, Sudan, Yemen, Jordan, and Tunisia in addition to their Saudi colleagues. They all spare no effort in caring for students, nor do not distinguish between them based on race, origin, color, or the country to which the student belongs.

It has been observed from more than eight years of affiliation with the Institute of Teaching Arabic for Non-Native Speakers, that many faculty members and learners are teaching/learning Arabic for religious purposes. Therefore, there is a high level of an interpersonal relationship between faculty members and the students. We can also explain the result in the light of where the campus is located, namely Makkah and The Holy Mosque. In our discussion with the students, they mentioned that their dream was to obtain a scholarship to study at Umm Al-Qura University.

4.2 The Results of the Second Hypothesis and Their Discussion

The second hypothesis states that “there is no statistically significant correlation between international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice and academic achievement among the sample”. To verify the validity of this hypothesis, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice and academic achievement. Its value was (0.034), and the significance of this coefficient was (0.65). This means that it is not statistically significant at the level of (0.05); which achieves the validity of the second hypothesis.

This result is not consistent with the results of (Tata, 1999) study, who found that if a student receives an acceptable grade, he may be more inclined to perceive his instructor fair regardless of how his instructor communicates with him. And the results of (Chory-Assad, 2002) study found that students might perceive distributive justice based on the grades they receive (Chory-Assad, 2002).

The researcher can explain this result by that the high level of international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice does not differ according to the effort made by the student, and this effort is not affected whether the academic achievement is high or low. Students’ perceptions of the level of academic interactive justice do not change with change in achievement.

4.3 The Results of the Third Hypothesis and Their Discussion

The third hypothesis states that “there are no statistically significant differences in international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice; this is due to the gender variable (male-female) among the sample”. To verify the validity of this hypothesis, the researcher calculated the t-test for two independent samples of the significance of differences between the mean scores of the students of the basic sample according to the gender variable. This is illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. T-values and levels of statistical significance by Gender in the two dimensions of the survey and its overall score

The Interactive Academic Justice	M=114		F=61		t-value	The significance level
	M	SD	M	SD		
The Interactive Justice	42.25	6.31	44.06	6.24	-1.7	0.07
The Academic Justice	37.96	6.33	39.57	5.97	-1.63	0.10
The Interactive Academic Justice	80.21	15.52	83.63	15.25	-1.75	0.08

It is clear from Table 4 that there are no statistically significant differences in international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice, this is due to the gender variable (male-female) among the sample, which achieves the validity of the third hypothesis. This result is not consistent with the results of the study by (Berti et al., 2010) which found a difference between boys and girls, in favor of girls in their perceptions of classroom justice. The researcher can explain that there are no differences between international male and female students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice, as the effort provided to the student in the academic aspect is not affected according to the gender of the student. Therefore, international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice are unaffected by gender (male or female).

4.4 The Results of the Fourth Hypothesis and Their Discussion

The fourth hypothesis states that “international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice do not differ according to the “Period of Learning Arabic as a second language”. To verify the validity of this hypothesis, the differences between the mean scores of the sample according to the variable of “Period of Learning Arabic” were calculated using the Analysis of Variance, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Analysis of variance between the mean scores of the sample according to the variable “Period of Learning Arabic”

Variable	Variance source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	P-value	The significance level
The Interactive Justice	Between groups	96.39	2	48.19	1.53	0.32
	Within groups	7187.31	172	41.78		
	Total	7283.71	174			
The Academic Justice	Between groups	92.91	2	46.45	1.19	0.30
	Within groups	6688.72	172	38.88		
	Total	6781.63	174			
The Interactive Academic Justice	Between groups	376.67	2	188.33	1.21	0.30
	Within groups	26821.71	172	155.94		
	Total	27198.37	174			

It is clear from Table 5 that the two dimensions of international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice and their overall scores do not differ, according to the variable of “Period of Learning Arabic”.

The researcher can explain that there are no differences between international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice due to the variable of “Period of Learning Arabic” (less than one year—from one to three years—more than three years), as the effort provided to the student in the academic aspect is not affected by the period in which the students received their Arabic language learning. The students receive support when they come to Umm Al-Qura University. Therefore, international students’ perceptions of interactive academic justice are not affected by the learning period.

5. Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted with undergraduate students at one university in Saudi Arabia, which limited the

generalizability of the results. There are many international students engaged at least at four universities in Saudi Arabia. In addition, the current study was carried out in the first semester of the academic year 2020/2021, whereas all the processes of education were completely online due to the Coronavirus pandemic. This may be another limitation to generalize the results. Further studies on this topic are encouraged.

6. Conclusion

The results indicate that there is a high level of interactive academic justice among the Arabic language learners at Umm Al-Qura University, and they feel they are treated fairly by their language instructors. The study confirms that classroom justice is very important for both students and instructors. The administration should continue in training for teachers of Arabic as a second language.

7. Suggestions for Future Research

- 1) The effect of a training program based on social activity in improving high school students' perceptions of interactive academic justice.
- 2) The international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice in the light of the Corona pandemic.
- 3) Arab and international students' perceptions of interactive academic justice: a comparative study.

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Appendix A**The Interactive Academic Justice and international Students' questionnaire items**

- 1) The professor's communication with his students in the classroom.
- 2) The professor's communication with his students outside the classroom.
- 3) The professor considers his students' opinions.
- 4) The professor's treatment with his students who disagree with him.
- 5) The way the professor talks with his students.
- 6) The way the professor listens to his students.
- 7) The professor's consideration for his students' feelings.
- 8) The professor's respect for his students' tendencies.
- 9) The professor's appreciation for his students' needs.
- 10) The professor's respect for his students' customs and traditions.
- 11) The professor links the new concepts with the previous ones according to the culture of each student.
- 12) The professor's interest in applying what his students learn according to the culture of each student.
- 13) The professor links his course with other courses according to the culture of each student.
- 14) The professor's care of the required information that enables his students to succeed.
- 15) The professor's care to help his students get high scores.
- 16) The professor's care to help his students in the parts they did not understand well to be fluent.
- 17) The professor accepts his students' opinions during academic discussions.
- 18) The professor's care of the results of his students' learning during the study.
- 19) The professor's evaluation for the academic level of his students.

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