GRADING JUSTICE: AN EXPLORING STUDY OF ARAB STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study explored college professors' practices in grading that Arab students perceive to be fair and to what extent they differed from practices identified by Western researchers. Seventy postgraduate teacher students responded to an open-ended questionnaire about professors' justice practices in grading. Then, the structure of grading justice was investigated and compared to Western research. Students identified 144 fair practices, classified in four categories: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice. The structure of grading justice was found to be similar to one found in Western research but differed in its order, meanings, and criteria Results somewhat supported the cross-cultural validity of a four-dimensional model of grading justice.

Keywords: Grading justice, qualitative research in assessment, teacher students, perception.

INTRODUCTION

Grading is an important educational process that teachers practice in colleges and that leads to critical decisions represented in allocating grades to students, based on their performance on tests or projects. Making decisions and judgment of the fairness of these decisions is a vital process practiced every day in the university. Students are targets of these decisions and the typical question they address, following any decision, is, "was that fair?" Students' perceptions of fairness of decisions on grading has various educational and psychological impacts, many of which form the foundation of their success in college. Researchers of grading justice have developed theory, principles, and measures that help professors create a justice environment in classes and ensure high-quality learning by students. This study explored college professors' practices in grading that Arab students perceive to be fair and to what extent they differ from practices identified by Western researchers.

Structure of Organizational Justice

Fairness has been an increasingly attractive notion for social science scientists over the past four decades and received high attention from educators and educational psychologists over the last decade. Justice develops in four forms. Initially, Adams (1965) presented distributive justice as the first component of organizational justice, defined as justice in outcomes. Norms of allocation, whether based on equity, equality, or needs, are considered critical factors in making a judgment. Procedural justice is the second component of organizational justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975) and relates to the processes that lead to decisions about allocating outcomes. When individuals evaluate to what degree allocation decisions are fair, they are assessing procedural justice (Chory-Assad, 2002). According to Leventhal (1980), procedural justice accrues through six criteria: consistency, lack of bias, correctability, accuracy, ethicality, and representation. In educational contexts such as the classroom, teachers make decisions about test grades; if students perceive these decisions to be fair, distributive justice

has occurred. Similarly, some teachers intend to provide students an equal opportunity to perform on tests. If students perceive these processes as fair, procedural justice has occurred. Bies and Moag (1986) presented a third component of organizational justice, termed interactional justice, defined as the interpersonal treatment people receive when procedures are enacted. Treating people with respect and providing reasonable explanations for decisions are two criteria to consider when performing interactional justice. Subsequently, these criteria were converted to two different forms by Greenberg (1993). A third form of organizational justice was termed interpersonal justice and a fourth form is termed informational justice. Interpersonal treatment by decision makers when explaining distributive decisions is interpersonal justice. Through informational justice, people evaluate the adequacy of information needed to explain a procedure.

Outcomes of Grading Justice

Distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice, and informational justice are essential forms of organizational justice. To better understand how these forms of justice function in educational contexts, one must examine their impacts on students' behaviors. Grading justice is an influential practice in classrooms and researchers asserted that relationships exist between students' perceptions of fairness in all its forms and their desired educational and psychological outcomes.

Instructor evaluation is one critical factor in determining quality assurance in higher education. Researchers provided evidence that this variable aligns with grading justice. However, the components of organizational justice have had different effects. Instructor evaluation was influenced by students' perceptions of fairness of grade distribution (Tata, 1999), procedural justice (Tata, 1999; Colquitt, 2001), and instructor–student interactions (Colquitt, 2001; Wendorf & Alexander, 2005). Also, Tata (1999) found that the influence of procedures on instructor evaluation appeared only when grade distribution was perceived unfair.

Grade satisfaction, aggression, and esteem are other variables under the concern of grading justice. Colquitt (2001) and Wendorf and Alexander (2005) found university students' perceptions of distributive and procedural fairness highly influenced their satisfaction with grades. Researchers Horan et al. (2010), Chory-Assad (2002), and Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004) described the aggression and hostility that emerged as a result of unfairness in classrooms, including grading injustice. Chory-Assad (2002) concluded that college students' perceptions of being fairly treated (receiving fair grades and applying fair procedures for grading) by their course instructor decreased their aggressive behavior toward the instructor. Later, Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004) found that procedural justice impacted student aggression and hostility. Also, students' perceptions of informational fairness related to collective esteem. Koper *et al.* (1993) found that fairness of grading procedures and unfair treatment influenced self-esteem.

Instructional Influences on Grading Justice

Some mediators influence the relationship between fairness and outcomes. Many instructional factors that influence perceptions of fairness are preparation for examinations (Gordon & Fay, 2010), grade expectations (Cherry *et al.,* 2003), voice and justifications (Schmidt *et al.,* 2003), instructor credibility (Chory, 2007), relational teaching messages (Young *et al.,* 2013), and trust in instructors (Kale, 2013). Professors' scoring practices and

teaching practices relevant to college student preparation for examinations had positive impacts on students' perceptions of grading fairness (Gordon & Fay, 2010). Instructors' efforts to help students perform well on examinations raised more positive judgments of fairness than curving low student scores upward. Grade expectations are another factor influencing perceptions of grade fairness.

A relationship emerged between expectations and perceptions of fairness (Cherry *et al.,* 2003). If students' actual grades meet their expectations, the grades are judged to be fair outcomes. Also, voice and justifications were important factors governing students' perceptions of fairness (Schmidt *et al.,* 2003). Students' perceptions of instructor credibility including competence, personal, and caring positively associate with their perceptions of fairness in the classroom (Chory , 2007). The instructor's character was the strongest influence on all forms of justice including distributive, procedural, and interactional. Instructor competence only predicted interactional justice. A relationship emerged between relational teaching messages and distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Young *et al.,* 2013). Engaging in enjoyable interactions with students positively influenced perceptions of all forms of justice. Effectively answering student questions is another important factor in creating students' perceptions of procedural and interactional justice. Also, how college-of-education students in Turkey perceived trust in administrators and instructors significantly related to perceptions of organizational justice (Kale, 2013).

Culture Influences and Structure of Justice

Besides educational variables influencing perceptions of justice, social psychology scientists provided evidence that national cultural values and norms play important role in making fairness judgments. Studies conducted by Brockner *et al.* (2001), Pillai *et al.* (2001) and Tata (2005) are obvious examples on the cultural influences on justice and its relationships with other variable such satisfaction and trust. Brockner *et al.* (2001) found that the tendency of people to react unfavorably when they have little voice in a decision-making process was greater in the United States and Germany than in the People's Republic of China, Mexico, and Hong Kong. In same vein, Tata (2005) studied the impact of U.S. and Chinese values on students' perceptions of voice and interpersonal justice and found that U.S. students are more likely to value voice whereas Chinese students are more likely to value interpersonal justice. Also, Pillai *et al.* (2001) found that procedural justice, compared with distributive justice, plays a more important role in predicting satisfaction, commitment, and trust for those in the United States. In contrast, for Indian people, distributive justice plays a more important role in predicting the same variables.

Although social scientists have demonstrated high consent across cultures on the importance of perceptions of justice, they differ about the meanings of justice and its criteria. This variation stems from the varying influences of cultural values on perceptions of justice. According to Greenberg (2001), operationalization of justice standards is highly particularistic and "understanding people's perceptions of fairness requires understanding the norms that prevail in the cultures in which those individuals live" (p. 366). Numerous researchers have called for more cross-cultural investigation of organizational justice (Greenberg, 2001; Cole, 2009; Fischer *et al.,* 2011). Fischer *et al.* (2011) believe fairness criteria proposed by Leventhal (1980) and Bies and Moag (1986) may function differently in places where cultures adopt non-Western values. According to Cole (2009), the investigation of whether components of justice and the criteria of its assessment adopted by Western

culture hold across other cultures will add valuable knowledge about the question of the generalizability of justice.

This study responds to Greenberg's call (2001) for country-specific research to investigate which components constitute organizational justice. This study explored the structure of organizational justice and fairness criteria in Arab Muslim cultures and particularly in the educational context. In addition, this study sheds light on how the Arab structure of organizational justice may differ from that explored in Western culture.

Cross-Cultural Measurement of Justice

Most extant research has used Western measurement items and scales and has not addressed the possibility that important components and criteria related to justice judgment in other cultures may be missing or that irrelevant aspects of justice are being measured (Cole, 2009). Fischer *et al.* (2011) provided empirical evidence for Cole' statement through their study of the structure of justice across thirteen cultures, including some Arab nations: Egypt, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia. For this purpose, researchers used the widely employed U.S. measure of organizational justice developed by Colquitt (2001), validated in the United States where its values and norms represent Western culture. Colquitt's scale includes items measuring perceptions of distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational fairness (the four components of justice structure). Although the structure of organizational justice was similar across the thirteen nations under study, the psychometric indices of factor intercorrelations and reliabilities varied across cultures. The intercorrelations of the four factors of justice were higher in power distant and collectivistic samples but indices of reliability were lower in collectivistic cultures.

To overcome the problem of measurement emerging from cultural influences, Leung (2005) suggested that more culture-specific instruments be developed. Instead of using quantitative analysis in developing scales and their items, Greenberg (2001) recommended researchers use qualitative analyses, based on systematic field interviews and participant observation studies to determine what constitutes justice in a culture directly from people's minds. Such a descriptive method leads to obtaining real-life scenarios about justice in grades that are more valid than the artificial ones presented in previous quantitative research (Horan *et al.,* 2010). Those investigators added value to the qualitative method of research for justice literature, as the results of the application of such a method would form a knowledge base useful for developing quantitative measurements with items that respond to cultural values.

Research Purposes
This study addresses the following purposes:
>   1. Explore the grading practices of professors in the university that Arab students perceive as fair.
>   2. Explore the categories of fair professors' practices in grading, as perceived by students, and how they are structurally ordered.
>   3. Examine to what extent Arab students perceive justice criteria differently from those addressed in Western contexts.

Method
Participants
Participants were 70 postgraduate students attending a postgraduate program in the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—Professional Diploma in Teaching— during academic year 2014–

2015. All students participating in this study were female preservice teachers. All students had earned bachelor's degrees from various universities in the Gulf area. Areas of undergraduate study comprised the Arabic language (10.20%), Islamic studies (10.20%), social sciences (10.20%), the English language (10.20%), mathematics (10.20%), sciences (10.20%), information technology (10.20 %), and graphic design (10.20%). Ages ranged from 22 to 26 years ($M = 24$, $SD = 5.44$). Of participants, 95% were full-time students and had joined the program immediately after earning their undergraduate degree.

Procedures
Stage 1: Data collection. A one-open-question survey was provided to participants in the Educational Measurement and Evaluation course offered during the first term of the program. Participants were asked to answer the following question: "Were you exposed to some practices that that you perceived to be unfair and others that were fair when instructors awarding grades during your undergraduate study? Describe in detail the situations, as you perceive them, that reflect professors' unfair and fair practices regarding grades and grading procedures." Preservice students were given a set of instructions and information explaining the purpose of study (to identify Arab students' perceptions of justice in grades), emphasizing the importance of the credibility of the responses, the relationship of credible results to validity of study results, and the confidentiality of the information they provide. Participants' completion of the question lasted, on average, 25 minutes. Also, students provided information about their age, nationality, specialization in their bachelor's degree, the college or university that provided the bachelor's degree, and the year of their graduation.

Stage 2: Thematic analysis and categorization. Theme analysis is a method to explore the perceived themes individuals in a society use to establish relationships among domains and how these relationships form within society norms and values (Onwuegbuzie *et al.,* 2012). To understand students' perceptions of the relationship between grading and justice, the researcher derives themes that connect the two domains. This study adopted the five steps of the thematic analytic methodology suggested by Onwuegbuzie *et al.* (2007). These steps follow:

1. Examine all students' 'responses on the open-ended question to identify their feelings about fairness in grading.
2. Code each response a student made.
3. List statements that were unrepetitive, nonoverlapping, and significant. Codes were eliminated if they expressed similar statements. Each coded statement should reflect a unique practice in grading whether fair or unfair.
4. Formulate the meaning of each coded statement.
5. Formulate themes from emerged meanings. Each theme was identified by a set of statements that were similar in meanings.

Stage 3: Documentation of category development. The development of categorization in this study was well described by Constas' model of categorization documentation (1992), based on two domains. The first domain specifies "components of categorization": origination, verification, and nomination; the second domain is called "temporal designation," specifying the temporal aspects of category creation. The description of the two domains demonstrates this study's analytical rigor, making data and explanatory schemes as public and replicable as possible (Constas,1992).
In this research, the literature on justice of grading was the loci of origination and the source of category identification and nomination. To select the most appropriate categories, I consulted the published works by Colquitt (2001), who collected items measuring various

aspects of justice from myriad sources and provided comprehensive justification about selection decisions. Selection of Colquitt's scale aided in making effective cross-cultural comparisons between study results and recent research performed in Western communities. The four primary categories used to describe students' perceptions of fairness in grading were 1) procedural justice (fairness of the decision-making processes used by professors), 2) distributive justice (fairness of the grades students received, 3) interpersonal justice (fairness of interpersonal treatment professors provided to students, and 4) informational justice (fairness of explanations professors provided to students.

The four categories representing the forms of justice were designated by previous research, before the study was initiated. I added subcategories after the data collection and analysis for this study: voice, opportunity to perform, and consistency. These subcategories belong to the main category of procedural justice. Such a step leads to better understanding of students' feelings about the concept of fairness.

Stage 4: Verification of categorization. Verification of the categorization is a necessary element and explains the strategy used to support and justify the creation of categories. The technical approach was the main source of justification used in this study. It included two steps. First, two colleagues faculty members and I independently applied the thematic analytic methodology. Second, I compared the data and the rate of agreement using an inter-rater reliability index, the multirater kappa (Onwuegbuzie *et al.,* 2007). To interpret the kappa coefficient, I followed the criteria suggested by Altman (1991): "> 0.21 = poor agreement, 0.21–0.40 = fair agreement, 0.41–0.60= moderate agreement, 0.61–0.80 = good agreement 0.81–1.00 = very good agreement." The last component in category development was nomination, which concerns the source of naming the categories. Similar to origination, nomination in this study was investigative; the names used to identify categories stemmed from intellectual constructs of previous researchers and the published works of Colquitt (2001).

Stage 5: Prevalence of themes. The main purpose at this stage was to determine to what degree each theme was prevalent and how the hierarchical structure of the obtained themes would appear. First, I created a dichotomized matrix of responses by theme. If a statement indicated a situation reflecting justice in grades was already classified under a certain theme, a score of 1 would be counted for the theme; a score of 0 would be calculated otherwise. Second, I calculated frequency of themes. Third, I converted theme frequencies to percentages referencing the total number of statements in the study. Fourth, I arranged the themes by percentage values obtained to formulate their hierarchical structure.

RESULTS

Every student who participated in the study provided 3–10 statements about their feelings toward justice practices in grading by professors. Students listed a total 144 significant statements describing grading justice. For each statement, I formulated a meaning and derived possible themes from these meanings. Students' responses revealed the following four main themes: procedural justice, distributive justice, interpersonal justice, and informational justice. Also, the procedural justice theme included three main subthemes: opportunity to perform, consistency, and voice. The following sections demonstrate the results for the first purpose of this study: exploring grading practices by professors at the university that Arab students perceived as fair. I selected and introduce significant statements

that reflect the perceptions of grading justice for participating students with each theme and subtheme.

Theme 1: Procedural Justice

Subtheme 1.1: Opportunities to perform. The following citations highlight students' needs to gain fair opportunities to perform. They expected professors would provide fair opportunities not only to demonstrate performance but also to review performance before they make decision about grades. Tests are the most commonly used tool in colleges through which students express their performance, what knowledge they possess, and what skills they have mastered. Well-designed tests provide fair opportunities to perform.

> *Once I had exam, the material was huge, so I spent a lot of time studying and preparing for it. In the end, the exam had questions only about the first 2 lectures of the whole course.*
>
> *Our professor does not make long exams because he want us to revise our answers and not to be rushed.*
>
> *I like my exam paper to include a question that makes me think, because that's how I know that I will get higher marks than others, because the exam is designed for all levels in the class.*
>
> *I like open questions. I can express what I understood from the course, but what makes me worry is how the instructor is going to correct and understand my answer. I wish I could get chance to explain my answer before grading.*
>
> *Once I had a low mark in a midterm test so I went to the professor's office and we reviewed the paper together. Then I felt that I deserved the mark he gave me and I was more satisfied.*
>
> *I had a literature exam last year. I did not like it. The questions were all the same, and all reflected a type of question. I was writing the same idea in different words.*
>
> *University courses are most of the time unrelated to each other and the professors are not the same: each one has his style. When the professor gives us sample questions, we do better in exams; and we feel more relaxed.*

Subtheme 1.2: Voice. Voice was another important subtheme of procedural justice to for students. Statements implied two aspects of voice: participation in making decisions regarding grading procedures and having the opportunity for appeal. Students voiced these procedures in the following ways: some students wished they had been given the opportunity to inquire about the examination questions, their responses on examination papers, and grades awarded. Some students believed professors are fair if they encourage students to express their opinions regarding grading procedures and if they accept dissenting views.

> *Once our professor asked us to give him some questions that we would like to be asked about in the exam, so he shared them with us and got some of them on the test. It was a nice idea and we felt more relaxed during the exam.*
>
> *I remember one professor let us suggest the form of questions we preferred on the exam.*
>
> *Whenever I visit [the professor] in the office to ask about my grade on the exam paper, he is glad to answer.*

> *[The professor] always says there is no time to listen to [students] views about exams.*
> *Not all instructors that taught me were lenient. Once I tried to go and discuss my grade with one of them and I was told that he would not change it because it is already in the system.*

No response to our e-mails that we sent to get explanations about the grade received.

Subtheme 1.3: Consistency. From students' statements, consistency is another central subtheme for fairness of procedures. Consistency refers to one procedure for all students and overtime. Some students wished professors would apply similar procedures to all students when testing or awarding grades.

> *I do not like when professors act in an unfair way and treat the students that are related to them (friendship with parents, relatives, etc.) in a different way from other students, especially during the exam.*
> *Me and other classmates feel comfortable during testing if we all are equally subject to the same conditions, especially the time of the exam and the noise in the hall room.*
> *One time I received my exam paper and I previously assumed that I would have the same grade as my friend because we compared our answers and they were the same. The shock was that I got a lower grade than her and that is when I knew this professor does not like me.*

Also, students desired professors to stick to one grading procedure over time and to announce any change to students in advance.

> *We had a literature exam and this subject is difficult. It had difficult words so we were used to using our dictionaries during the exam, and that is what we thought we are going to do during the final exam, but the shock was that our doctor did not allow us to use it.*
> *In the first test I did not do so well, so I said it is okay; I will try to do better in my second test and I will push my grade up since the second test had a higher grade, but the professor, out of nowhere, decided not to do a second test and to multiply the grade of the first test by two.*

Theme 2: Distributive justice. Distributive justice is a central concept for justice. Students judge fairness of professors by the ways they assign grades. Professors assign grades in different ways: some are restricted to performance on test, others consider effort, and others use curves in assigning grades.

> *It is not fair to rely on a curve in the distribution of grades. One time my professor was distributing the exam papers with the grades, and we are used to him distributing in order from highest to lowest; he did not mention my name until the end; I was so worried I had a low mark.*

> *I wish my professor gave everyone in the class the grade she really deserves.*
> *I got to a point now that when doing any activity, I do not worry about the grade anymore. I worry about trying to do the activity and to look for information because I know how fair my professor is and that he will appreciate my effort.*

Theme 3: Interpersonal justice. Students evaluated their professors as interpersonally just if they perceived the professors' dealings illustrated respect for their feelings. Respect involves treating students politely, observing their feelings, and easing disturbed behaviors. The following quotations imply that perceived interpersonal justice is a central theme in students' narratives describing a fair professor.

> *Professors deal with the students politely and honesty while performing the exam.*
> *Professors observe the feelings of students while performing the exam. My friend was very sick during final examination period and she already feels so anxious during exams, so her situation was horrible, but thank God the instructor was very nice and made sure to calm her down and he got her a cup of tea.*
> *Our professor is the best. Whenever we have an exam, he enters the class full of energy and he writes some motivational quotes on the board and then starts the exam. This action helps us reduce our anxiety.*

Theme 4: Informational justice. Informational justice is another theme students perceived as key to fairness in grades. Justice in grades exist when professors communicate accurate and justified information to students about the style of tests, topics tests contain, and how they award grades. Students have the right to be informed in advance about how to prepare for an exam and show their best performance. As the following quotations reveal, students expected explanations provided by professors to be transparent and reasonable.

> *My professors transparently tell the students the things that pertain to the examinations and corrections in class.*
> *Professors never provide explanations about grades.*
> *He never recognizes his mistakes after correcting our exam papers.*
> *The professor offers reasonable and justified explanations about his decisions regarding the grades he awarded me.*
> *Students must know of any change in the grading policy made by the professor during the course and the reasons for this alteration.*
> *My professor is sincere and frank with me. I admit that, at some point during my third year, I felt so bored and started to neglect my responsibilities, and this affected my grades and my performance. So one day [the professor] told me that she wants to see me in her office; I went there and she told me frankly that she was noticing some changes in me and she wanted me to be like I was before.*

Structure of Grading Justice

The results in Table 1 relate to the second purpose of the study and present the hierarchical structure of themes and subthemes by percentage. A percentage is an index for the ratio of the number of statements about situations reflecting a certain theme to the total number of statements in the study. According to the obtained percentages, the categories are ordered as follows: procedural justice, 55%; distributive justice, 21%; interpersonal justice, 15%; and informational justice, 9%.

For procedural justice, three criteria received attention from students and are ordered as follows: opportunity to perform; 27%, consistency; 20%, and voice, 8%.

| | Table 1. | Structure of Justice |
Categories	Number of significant statements	Percentages
Procedural Justice	79	55
Opportunity to perform	39	27
Consistency	29	20
Voice	11	8
Distributive Justice	30	21
Interpersonal Justice	22	15
Informational Justice	13	9
Total	144	100

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to identify fair practices in grading by professors, as Arab students perceive, and to assess the cross-culture validity of these fair practices. Students reported that their professors were engaged in 144 fair practices in grading and these practices were classified into the four categories previously identified in Colquitt's scales (2001): distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice, and informational justice. These results provide qualitative evidence of the validity of four-dimension model of grading justice.

How students view the importance of justice categories was another question to be answered in this study. Results indicated that the number of statements on procedural justice was almost three times the number of comments provided for the other three categories. From students' points of view, procedural justice is the most important form of justice. This is in line with results from Horan *et al.* (2010) that students' perceptions of procedural justice are highest compared with distributive justice and interactional justice, but contrasted with views of college instructors who reported that interactional justice is the most important form of justice (Horan & Myers, 2009).

The following sections discuss the nature of practices in each category and subcategory and how they relate to Western practices mentioned in the research. Emerging differences aid in understanding the cross-culture validity of Western measures of fairness, that is, the degree to which culture factors impact students' perceptions of fairness.

Procedural Justice

Opportunity to perform. Cole and Zieky (2001) identified three points to consider when demonstrating performance. First, the content of tests should represent the topics or skills taught that have been rehearsed during the course. Second, the test contents should measure only achievement in course subjects rather than intellectual ability. Third, different formats of assessment are necessary. In this line, results from this study indicated that appropriate representation of course content in tests, measurement of performance rather than talent, and use of multi test formats are critical criteria to ensure fairness in grading procedures. More than 50% of practices Arab students perceived as procedural justice related to the criteria of opportunity to perform: 39 out of 79 statements. Although this facet was of high concern in the present study, criteria of opportunity to perform were not obvious in Colquitt's (2001) scales.

Consistency. For students participating in this study, the theme of students being subjected to similar conditions has received considerable attention; comments showed that consistency is perceived as an important indication of procedural justice. Most previous research, including Colquitt's (2001) study regarded consistency in procedures as a sign of fairness.

Voice: Results from this research indicated that criterion of voice is the least concern for Arab students and they do not intend to react unfavorably when they have little voice in a decision-making process. Few statements indicated that students view professors as fair if they let students participate in decision making about testing and grading procedures as well as if they listen to students' views about grades received. Arab students' perceptions of voice justice are consistent with people's perceptions in the Republic of China (Tata, 2005), Mexico, and Hong Kong (Brockner *et al.,* 2001). The present study did not align with results in the Schmidt *et al.* (2003) study, which showed a positive relationship between voice and perception of fairness. Also, in this study, students introduced more cases reflecting the fairness of voice procedures than statements included in the justice tool suggested in Colquitt's (2001) scales. From the cultural perspective, Western and Arab students agree about the importance of voice in the judgment of professors' fairness but vary in the level of importance they assign to it, compared with other forms of justice.

Distributive Justice

Two forms of distributive rules of grades, as practiced by teachers, are meritocratic and particularistic (Gordon & Fay, 2010). The former rules distribute grades based on what students achieve academically on tests or assignments. In contrast, particularistic rules distribute grades based on personal considerations including individual characteristics or the need to pass a course to graduate or to maintain a study assistantship. Sabini and Monterosso (2003) examined college grading to explore whether student consider the moral domain when assessing fairness. For college students, when instructors assign grades, they should reward effort, provide opportunities to retake an examination because a student could not study, and should provide accommodations for students with learning disabilities.

Speaking in the language of organizational justice, Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004) clarified that students, when assessing fairness, compare the grades they received with a standard, such as expected grades, deserved grades, or grades of others students. In this study, students perceived the following practices as unfair: grading on a curve, retaking tests, discarding the lowest grade, and grading on the basis of improvement. Rather than these grading practices, students placed high emphasis on the concept of equity and distribution of grades based on

achievement. In Korea, proportional grading and absolute grading are accepted practices in schools, but instructors mark more stringently when they use proportional grading (Life, 2012).

Interpersonal Justice

Results from this study showed that professors' treatment of students based on respect is central. This result agrees with Colquitt's (2001) concept of respect as a criterion of interpersonal justice. However, Colquitt's concept of propriety—refraining from bad comments or prejudicial remarks—was ignored in this study. Because of high restrictions regarding this behavior in the university environment, students did not describe such behavior. Tata (2005) studied the impact of U.S. and Chinese values on students' perceptions of voice and interpersonal justice and found that concern with voice is greater among U.S. students than among Chinese students. In contrast, concern for interpersonal justice is greater among Chinese than U.S. students. Students in this study were more likely to value interpersonal justice than voice.

Informational Justice

Although informational justice received the fewest comments from students, the results of this research approximate those of Colquitt's (2001) study. Arab students perceive fairness in grades if professors are candid in delivering accurate and justified details to students about testing processes and award outcomes in a timely manner. However, Colquitt's concern with communication of individuals' specific needs is missing in this research. For Arab students and professors, culturally addressing individuals' specific needs is weak because very few students with special needs join universities. Also, informational justice relates to professors' responses to explanations. According to their statements, students indicated that some professors do not provide justification but others provide either appropriate or inappropriate justification. Similarly, Schmidt *et al.* (2003) found that these levels of justification align with perceptions of fairness: no justification increases levels of perceptions of fairness, appropriate justification has a higher influence than inappropriate justification.

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study should be interpreted taking into consideration the following limitations. The main purpose was to explore Arab students' perceptions of grading fairness. The sample was restricted to female Arab preservice teachers who studied to attain postgraduate professional diplomas in teaching. A more representative and larger sample of Arab students would help in making more confident generalizations about fairness in grading at higher education institutions.

Another limitation relates to the qualitative method. Results from this study were outcomes of the application of the qualitative method. The bias response problem emerged when students expressed their perceptions about fairness. The majority of students centered on unfair and extreme experiences in grading. During continuation of this study, researchers should apply a quantitative method, measuring the qualitative results to explore fair and unfair practices and extreme and moderate cases of professors at the university. Using multimethods like focus groups would be another way to attain a deeper understanding and support the validity of data obtained in this study.

Previous research on justice in grading showed that fairness is a critical concept for university students and professors. Similarly, fairness is an important issue for Arab students as well as

Western students. However, results showed variation in opinions about criteria: what is important to Arab students is not important to students from other cultures. The values of culture impact conceptualizations of the concept of fairness.

Results of this research are significant in converting practice to theory. These results, in addition to the results of previous research, could contribute to the development of a theory on justice in an educational context.

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