

Fairness Matters: Organizational Justice and Creative Self-Efficacy in Educational Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Educational institutions increasingly rely on teachers and academic staff to demonstrate creativity and innovation in teaching, curriculum development, and problem-solving. However, the psychological and organizational conditions that foster creative capability among educators remain insufficiently explored. This conceptual paper examines the relationship between organizational justice and creative self-efficacy within educational institutions, including primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Drawing on Social Cognitive Theory and Organizational Justice Theory, the paper proposes that perceptions of fairness within institutions, namely, distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice play a key role in fostering educators' beliefs in their ability to produce creative outcomes. Creative self-efficacy represents educators' confidence in their capacity to generate innovative teaching practices and solutions. The paper synthesizes prior empirical and theoretical literature to develop a conceptual framework linking organizational justice to creative self-efficacy among educators. The study argues that fair organizational practices enhance psychological empowerment, trust, and motivation, thereby strengthening creative confidence among educators and academics. The paper concludes by outlining implications for educational leadership, institutional governance, and future empirical research aimed at improving innovative capacity in educational systems.

Keywords: Creative self-efficacy, educational innovation, higher education, organizational justice, teachers

INTRODUCTION

Educational systems worldwide are undergoing rapid transformation due to technological advancements, changing learner expectations, and the increasing demand for innovative teaching approaches. Teachers and academic staff are no longer expected merely to deliver knowledge but are also required to design creative learning experiences, integrate digital technologies, and address complex pedagogical challenges (OECD, 2020). Consequently, fostering creativity among educators has become an important research priority in education and organizational studies.

One important psychological factor influencing creativity is creative self-efficacy (CSE), which refers to individuals' beliefs in their capability to produce creative outcomes (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Individuals with high creative self-efficacy are more likely to engage in innovative behaviours, experiment with new ideas, and persist when facing challenges. In educational settings, teachers with strong creative self-efficacy are more inclined to develop innovative instructional strategies, design unique learning materials, and implement creative problem-solving approaches in the classroom (Huang et al., 2020).

While psychological factors are important, educators' attitudes and behaviours are also strongly influenced by their organizational environment. One critical aspect of the organizational environment is organizational justice, which refers to employees' perceptions of fairness within workplace processes, decision-making, and

interpersonal interactions (Greenberg, 1990). Fair treatment within organizations influences employee trust, motivation, and engagement, which subsequently shape work attitudes and performance (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Previous research has extensively examined organizational justice in business organizations, linking fairness perceptions to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance outcomes. However, relatively limited attention has been given to how perceptions of fairness influence educators' creative confidence. Creativity often requires psychological safety, autonomy, and support from leadership, suggesting that fair organizational environments may play a crucial role in strengthening teachers' belief in their creative abilities (Bao, 2024; Huang et al, 2024; Yang, 2024).

Furthermore, most studies examining creativity in education focus on pedagogical competence, leadership styles, or innovation climate, while the role of organizational justice as a potential antecedent of creative self-efficacy remains underexplored. This gap is particularly evident across different educational levels such as primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions.

To better illustrate the limitations of previous studies and highlight the research gap addressed in this study, Table 1 summarizes key findings from prior literature.

Table 1: Research Gaps in Previous Studies on Organizational Justice and Creativity in Education

Previous Studies	Research Focus	Key Findings	Research Gap
Colquitt et al. (2001)	Organizational justice theory	Identified four dimensions of organizational justice (distributive, procedural, interpersonal, informational).	Focus mainly on workplace attitudes and performance outcomes, not creativity.
Newman et al. (2018)	Creative self-efficacy in organizations	Creative self-efficacy influences innovative work behaviour	Limited focus on educational institutions
Huang et al. (2020)	Creativity in teaching	Identified factors influencing creative teaching practices	Focus on pedagogical factors rather than organizational fairness
Zhang & Bartol (2010)	Leadership and employee creativity	Leadership practices influence creativity through psychological empowerment	Limited examination of fairness perceptions
Sopiah et al. (2021)	Organizational justice and teacher performance	Organizational justice affects motivation and performance	Relationship with creative self-efficacy remains underexplored

Based on the review of previous studies, three main research gaps can be identified. First, the contextual gaps shown by most studies examining organizational fairness have focused on corporate or business organizations, with limited attention paid to educational institutions. Second, conceptual gaps that are previous research have largely examined the relationship between organizational fairness and outcomes such as job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment, while its influence on creative self-efficacy has not been adequately explored. Finally, the education level gap explained by several studies has examined how perceptions of fairness affect educators' creativity across different levels of education such as primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions.

Therefore, this conceptual paper aims to develop a theoretical framework explaining how organizational justice influences creative self-efficacy among educators. By integrating perspectives from organizational behaviour and educational psychology, this study provides insights into how fairness within educational institutions can foster educators' creative capabilities.

METHODOLOGY

This study involves a literature review that investigates the relationship between organizational justice and Creative Self-efficacy. To achieve this purpose, a thorough review of pertinent literature and past research is carried out, gathering information from credible scholarly journals, books, conference proceedings, reports, websites, and numerous commentaries. The following sections offer an overview of relevant studies organized by organizational justice (procedural, distributive, informational, interpersonal) and the relationship between these components and creative self-efficacy. The research findings are summarized and discussed in the final remarks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Justice

Organizational justice refers to employees' perceptions of fairness within organizational processes, interactions, and outcomes (Greenberg, 1990). The concept has evolved into four primary dimensions: distributive justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice, and informational justice (Colquitt, 2001).

Distributive justice concerns the perceived fairness of outcome distributions such as rewards, promotions, or workload allocations (Adams, 1965). Procedural justice refers to the fairness of the processes used to allocate resources and to determine these outcomes (Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Greenberg, 2017). Interpersonal justice reflects the degree to which individuals are typically treated with dignity and respect by authorities, while informational justice relates to the adequacy and transparency of explanations provided regarding decisions (Colquitt et al., 2001).

In educational institutions, organizational justice can manifest through fair workload distribution among teachers, transparent promotion criteria, respectful leadership communication, and equitable decision-making processes. Research indicates that perceptions of justice positively influence job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work engagement among teachers (DeConinck, 2010; Simons & Roberson, 2003).

Creative Self-Efficacy

Creative self-efficacy refers to individuals' confidence in their ability to produce creative ideas or solutions (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). Rooted in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy beliefs influence how individuals think, feel, and behave when facing challenging tasks (Bandura, 1986).

In educational contexts, creative self-efficacy plays a critical role in encouraging teachers to develop innovative instructional strategies, adopt new technologies, and experiment with novel teaching methods (Huang et al., 2020). Teachers with strong creative self-efficacy are more likely to engage in creative teaching behaviours, including designing unique learning activities, adapting curricula, and promoting student creativity (Cayırdağ, 2017).

Several studies have demonstrated that creative self-efficacy predicts innovative work behaviour and creative performance in organizations (Newman et al., 2018). However, research examining the organizational antecedents of creative self-efficacy primarily focused on business enterprises and organizations, with remains relatively limited coverage in educational institutions (Fang & Chang, 2023).

Organizational Justice and Creative Self-Efficacy

Organizational justice may play an important role in shaping creative self-efficacy through multiple psychological mechanisms. When educators perceive their institutions as fair and supportive, they are more likely to experience psychological safety, motivation, and trust in leadership. These conditions are essential for developing confidence in creative abilities.

Fair procedures and transparent communication can strengthen employees' sense of control and autonomy, which are key antecedents of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Finally, interpersonal justice fosters respectful interactions between leaders and staff, creating a supportive environment where individuals feel encouraged to express new ideas (Adamska & Jurek, 2021). Conversely, perceptions of inequity regarding decision-making or the distribution of resources may diminish teachers' motivation and inhibit their willingness to experiment with novel pedagogical approaches (Sopiah et al., 2021). High levels of creative self-efficacy serve as a crucial motivational state, enabling teachers to translate their confidence into consistent creative performance and the implementation of original instructional solutions (Zhang & Huang, 2023). By fostering an environment where teachers feel supported, institutions can mitigate the uncertainty associated with pedagogical change, thereby enhancing their persistence in solving classroom challenges (Etikariena & Widyasari, 2020). Moreover, a supportive academic climate characterized by administrative backing and professional development opportunities has been identified as a critical factor in augmenting teachers' self-belief and their capacity to adopt innovative teaching strategies (Hayati et al., 2023; Liu & Wang, 2019). Furthermore, the role of school leadership is instrumental in establishing an organizational climate that encourages risk-taking and provides the necessary resources to nurture these innovative behaviours (Susanti & Ardi, 2022).

Previous research in organizational psychology suggests that fair treatment enhances employees' intrinsic motivation and psychological empowerment (Colquitt et al., 2013). These factors are closely linked to creativity and innovative behaviour in the workplace (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). In educational environments, fair leadership practices may therefore encourage teachers to believe in their ability to innovate in teaching and curriculum development.

Although empirical studies linking organizational justice directly to creative self-efficacy are still emerging, existing research on workplace creativity suggests that fair and supportive organizational climates significantly enhance employees' creative confidence (Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Theoretical Foundation

Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding creative self-efficacy. According to the theory, individuals develop self-efficacy beliefs through mastery experiences, social persuasion, and environmental influences (Thi & Duong, 2024). Organizational contexts that provide supportive feedback, fair evaluation, and opportunities for participation can strengthen employees' confidence in their abilities.

Within educational institutions, fair administrative practices may serve as positive environmental cues that reinforce teachers' perceptions of competence and capability.

Organizational Justice Theory

Organizational Justice Theory explains how perceptions of fairness influence employees' attitudes and behaviours within organizations (Greenberg, 1990). When employees perceive fairness in procedures and interactions, they develop greater trust in leadership and stronger commitment to organizational goals.

In educational institutions, fair leadership practices can encourage teachers to engage more actively in innovation and collaborative problem-solving, thereby strengthening their creative self-efficacy.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature reviewed, this study proposes that organizational justice positively influences educators' creative self-efficacy.

The conceptual model suggests that the four dimensions of organizational justice: namely, distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice serve as antecedents of creative self-efficacy among educators.

Proposed relationship:

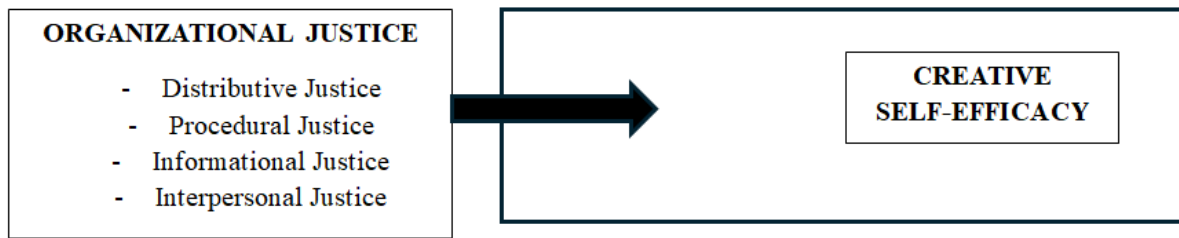


Figure 1: Proposed Research Framework

This study establishes a research framework as a foundation for its objective. The study's conceptual framework encompasses an independent variable, namely: organizational justice, which includes distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal justice with creative self-efficacy serving as the dependent variable; the independent variables and dependent variables exhibit a direct correlation within the model. The study will adopt the Social Cognitive Theory and Organizational Justice Theory as its conceptual framework.

Figure 1 presents a visual representation of the conceptual framework, showcasing the independent and dependent variables of the study at hand. This relationship is expected to hold across different educational levels, including primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. Fair treatment practices by administrators in these institutions are likely to create psychological conditions that enhance educators' confidence in their creative abilities. In addition, fair treatment is not only a moral necessity but also a strategic tool for administrators to build a psychological safety net that allows teachers to feel confident enough to take creative risks (Bao, 2024; Osman & Mohamad, 2024).

These relationships are expected to occur across different educational levels including primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions.

Theoretical Contributions

This conceptual study offers several theoretical contributions to the literature on educational innovation, organizational behaviour, and educators' creativity. The study extends organizational justice theory by examining its role in shaping educators' creative self-efficacy. Previous research on organizational justice has primarily focused on outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions (Colquitt et al., 2001; Cropanzano et al., 2007). However, relatively limited attention has been given to how fairness perceptions influence educators' psychological confidence in generating creative outcomes. By positioning organizational justice as an antecedent of creative self-efficacy, this study expands the theoretical application of justice theory within educational contexts.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the literature on creative self-efficacy by identifying organizational justice as a potential organizational antecedent of creative confidence among educators. Existing research on creative self-efficacy has largely emphasized individual level factors such as personality, motivation, and leadership support (Tierney & Farmer, 2002; Newman et al., 2018). Thus, this study introduces fairness perceptions within institutions as an important contextual factor that may influence educators' beliefs in their creative capabilities.

Moreover, this study integrates Social Cognitive Theory and Organizational Justice Theory to provide a comprehensive explanation of how organizational environments influence creative self-efficacy. Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the role of environmental signals in shaping individual efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1986). Fair organizational practices can serve as a positive environmental signal that reinforces educators' perceptions of competence, thereby strengthening their creative self-efficacy.

Additionally, this conceptual framework contributes to the emerging literature on creativity in educational institutions by bridging research from organizational psychology and educational leadership. While previous studies on teacher creativity have often focused on pedagogical practices or leadership styles, this study highlights the importance of institutional fairness as a foundational organizational condition that supports creative teaching.

Finally, the proposed framework provides a foundation for future empirical studies that can examine the mechanisms through which fairness perceptions influence educators' creativity and innovation. By highlighting the relationship between organizational justice and creative self-efficacy, this study opens new avenues for research on how educational institutions can foster innovation through fair and supportive organizational practices.

Implications

The proposed framework offers several implications for educational leadership and institutional management:

Theoretical Implications

This study extends organizational justice theory by linking fairness perceptions with creative self-efficacy in educational contexts. The proposed framework contributes to the literature by highlighting fairness as an important organizational antecedent of educators' creative confidence.

Practical Implications

Educational administrators should ensure fairness in decision-making processes such as workload distribution, performance evaluation, and promotion systems. Transparent procedures and respectful communication can strengthen educators' trust and motivation, which may subsequently foster creativity in teaching.

Policy Implications

Education policymakers may incorporate fairness-based leadership practices into teacher development policies to promote innovation and creativity within educational institutions.

CONCLUSION

Creativity among educators is essential for addressing the evolving challenges of modern education. This conceptual paper proposes that organizational justice plays a critical role in shaping creative self-efficacy among educators across primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. By integrating Social Cognitive Theory and Organizational Justice Theory, the study highlights how perceptions of fairness within educational institutions can foster creative confidence among teachers and academic staff. The development of more adaptive and innovative educational systems may be shaped by strengthening teachers' creative self-efficacy through fair institutional practices.

Future empirical studies should test the proposed framework using quantitative approaches across different educational contexts. Such research may provide deeper insights into how fairness within institutions can enhance creativity and innovation in education.

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