

Title

How Korean Elementary Teachers' Perceived Organizational Justice Shapes Their Job Performance: Evidence from a Collectivist Teaching Culture

Research Overview

This study examines how Korean elementary teachers' perceptions of three organizational justice dimensions—distributive, procedural, and interactional—predict their job performance. Drawing on 342 public and private school teachers in metropolitan Korea, the study reveals that only procedural justice significantly predicts performance, offering comparative insights for collectivist teaching cultures worldwide.

Purpose of Study

Work-avoidance and role-aversion among Korean elementary teachers have emerged as a growing concern, with documented declines in applications for head-teacher positions and administrative duties. While previous explanations have focused on workload intensification and the difficulties of student guidance, this study repositions the issue as a problem of perceived organizational (in)justice within the school as an institutional workplace. Grounded in Adams' (1963, 1965) equity theory and its extensions by Leventhal (1980) and Bies and Moag (1986), the study conceptualizes organizational justice along three dimensions—distributive, procedural, and interactional justice—and asks how each dimension shapes the job performance of elementary teachers.

Korea presents a theoretically productive case for worldwide audiences: its teaching profession is unionized and strongly credentialed, rewards are seniority-based and decoupled from individual performance, and the cultural environment is shaped by Confucian collectivism. These features create structural tensions with Western-derived justice theories developed in individualist, performance-based workplaces—tensions that comparative scholarship on teacher motivation has rarely examined. The study therefore pursues three interrelated questions: (1) How do Korean elementary teachers perceive organizational justice, and do perceptions vary by school- and individual-level background characteristics? (2) How do teachers assess their own job performance across seven professional domains? (3) Which justice dimensions exert a statistically significant effect on job performance after controlling for school- and individual-level covariates? Addressing these questions advances culturally-

grounded understanding of organizational justice in collectivist, seniority-structured teaching workforces worldwide.

Research Methods

A cross-sectional survey was administered online to elementary teachers in the Seoul Capital Area (Seoul, Gyeonggi, and Incheon) between April 29 and May 10, 2024. After excluding unreliable responses, 342 valid cases from both public (77.8%) and private (22.2%) schools were retained. The instrument comprised 25 items on a 5-point Likert scale: ten items measuring organizational justice (four distributive, three procedural, three interactional), adapted from Price and Mueller (1986), Leventhal (1980), and Moorman (1991); and fifteen items measuring job performance across seven domains—instruction, student guidance, class management, school curriculum organization, school-management support, professional development, and parent/community relations—adapted from Kim et al. (2005). Internal consistency was acceptable for the justice scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .904$) and the overall performance scale ($\alpha = .895$). Data were analyzed using SPSS 28.0 through descriptive statistics, t-tests and one-way ANOVA with Scheffé post-hoc tests, and hierarchical multiple regression controlling for six background variables (school type, school size, gender, position, career length, highest degree).

Results and Discussion

Three findings emerge. First, teachers' overall perception of organizational justice was moderate ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.88$), with interactional justice rated highest ($M = 3.59$) and distributive justice lowest ($M = 2.84$). Perceptions differed significantly by school establishment type ($t = -5.60$, $p < .001$), gender ($t = 3.75$, $p < .001$), position ($t = -3.09$, $p < .05$), career length ($F = 5.35$, $p < .05$), and highest degree ($t = -2.50$, $p < .05$): private-school teachers, male teachers, head teachers, teachers with 20 or more years of service, and those holding a master's degree reported more favorable perceptions. These differences suggest that perceived justice is shaped not only by formal policies but also by teachers' structural position and accumulated exposure to school governance.

Second, self-reported job performance was generally high ($M = 4.12$), with student-facing tasks (student guidance, class management, instruction) rated higher than organizational tasks (curriculum organization, school-management support)—a pattern consistent with the perceived centrality of instructional work in Korean teaching culture.

Third, multiple regression controlling for background variables showed that only procedural justice had a significant positive effect on job performance ($\beta = .221, p < .01$), while distributive and interactional justice did not. This pattern diverges from Western literature, where distributive justice typically exerts the strongest effect—theoretically consistent with two features of Korean teaching: (a) seniority-based rewards that render distributive comparisons less salient, and (b) a vocational ethic that buffers instructional commitment from compensation grievances. The prominence of procedural justice suggests that, in collectivist school organizations, the legitimacy of how decisions are made matters more for teacher engagement than material outcomes or leadership style.

Three implications follow. For theory, the findings refine the cross-cultural applicability of tri-dimensional justice models. For practice, they redirect school leaders' attention from rewards and interpersonal warmth toward transparent and consistent decision-making procedures. For policy, governance reforms—participatory scheduling, workload allocation, and promotion procedures—may yield greater gains than compensation-focused reforms alone. Limitations include the convenience sample, the metropolitan geographic focus, and the self-report measurement of performance.

Keywords

Organizational justice; Procedural justice; Teacher job performance; Elementary school teachers; Korean teaching culture