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Investigating the observance of educational justice in Iranian universities: From students' viewpoints

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Abstract:

BACKGROUND: Educational justice is one of the fundamental dimensions of social justice, and the progress of each society depends on its realization. Since students are engaged in the educational process, recognizing their viewpoints can provide useful guidance to correct existing problems. The purpose of this study is to investigate the observance of educational justice from the viewpoint of medical students in southeastern Iran.

METHODOLOGY: This cross-sectional study was carried out on 200 students of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, southeastern Iran, in 2017 by stratified sampling. The tool for measuring organizational justice was a questionnaire. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by content validity method, and its reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha (0.8). Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage), Chi-square test, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) test were used to analyze data.

RESULTS: The mean age of students was 21.7 ± 2.91 years. Fifty percent of students assessed the educational justice as good to excellent, and based on a general score, educational justice was observed in 73.2% of cases. The one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference between the scores of educational justice from the viewpoints of students in different faculties of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences ($P < 0.001$).

CONCLUSION: According to the results, students' needs for achieving educational justice have been identified in this study. This study can provide useful guidance to correct existing problems and help policymakers in Zahedan University of Medical Sciences to achieve a full educational justice.

Keywords:

Educational justice, Iran, students

Introduction

Justice is a requirement of progress in any society. Nowadays, societies need to promote social justice and create its own culture. By justice-centered teaching, one can change the individual's behavior and consequently promote social justice in society.^[1] Furthermore, when educational justice is governed by an educational system, the culture of that society will be balanced.^[2] Educational justice can

create a balance between members of the community. So that, all the talented people in a country would have equal access to educational facilities according to their needs, and society is progressing toward scientific attitudes.^[2]

Equality refers to the provision of equal opportunities, tailored to the specific needs of each individual. Equal opportunity means the prevention, elimination, or reduction of discrimination between individuals in terms of gender, race, physical status, age, language, social class, and equality of

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opportunity.^[3] Equality of educational opportunities means equal input, equal process, and equal output.^[3] Equity in inputs includes financial sponsor and tax. Equity in the process includes university experience, program, content, and access. Equity in outcomes includes the acquisition of learning and its impact on future life.^[4]

According to the results of studies, the challenges of educational justice are including professors' fair expectations of students and their fair behavior with students, having access to good professors, professional expectations and educational consultancy, gender equity and respect, having respect for sexual awareness, university's disciplinary procedures, having access to culturally based learning resources, attaining appropriate language support, having access to programs and resources tailored to individual abilities, disabilities, interests, talents, special needs, access to technology and sports facilities and programs, participation in educational administration, policymaking, bulletin boards, and advisory bodies.^[5]

On the other hand, educational justice means providing equal educational opportunities for students, which is often related to professors' behavior with students, especially in classes with a great deal of difference between students.^[5] This form of justice refers to a fairness-based existence of interactions, behaviors, and functions; an unbiased approach; guidance in accordance with students' ability; and observance of justice in the students' rating and assessment. These issues are required to increase students' feeling of self-worth and subsequently will create the desired civil and academic behaviors.^[6]

The classroom physical environment plays an important role in the students' academic, psychological, and behavioral performance.^[7] Classroom psychological environment, social climate, emotional aspects, and teacher's support have significant effects on students' learning behaviors, their academic and social motivation, and their academic achievements.^[8] A study entitled "Student Perceptions of the Classroom Environment and their Academic Achievement in Korea" concluded that classroom environment is a good predictor of students' academic achievement.^[9]

Given that universities are less concerned with educational justice and on the other hand, evaluation of educational justice is helpful in future planning. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the observance of educational justice from the viewpoint of students in Zahedan University of Medical Sciences.

Methodology

This study is an analytical cross-sectional study. The statistical population of the study consists of students of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences in 2017. In this study, at the first step, Morgan table is used to determine the sample size, and then, stratified sampling is used to divide the population into separate groups. Using this methodology, 200 people are determined using Morgan table, then, the size of each class is determined, and finally, the samples are selected in the colleges in an accessible way.

The students were entered into the study by observing the ethical codes and voluntary. The data collection tools consist of demographic variables and 46 questions about students' viewpoints about the observance of educational justice based on a tree-item Likert scale with scores between 1 and 3. The validity of the questionnaire has been measured by 10 experts in the present study by content validity method, and its reliability is confirmed by Cronbach's alpha (0.8). After collecting the data, the results are analyzed using SPSS-15 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA) software and frequency distribution tests, including Chi-square test and analysis of variance.

Results

Fifty-five percent of students who were examined were girls and 45% were boys, aged 17–34 years. Their average grade was 16 ± 1.60 , and 60% of students were nontraditional. About half of the students' fathers were employees and had university degrees, and the majority of students' mothers were housewives and had diploma.

The majority of the students agreed that at the first session, the objectives and lesson plans provided and various educational resources introduced considering the resources available in the library by the professors.

Moreover, about a quarter of the students agreed that faculty members deal with students according to their conditions. Furthermore, one quarter believed that professors did not devote all the class time to the course contents and advisors were available. Almost one-third of students pointed out to an unfair evaluation, inappropriate internet access, unavailable professors, and chairs of the faculty. In addition, about one-third of students pointed out inappropriate access to sports facilities and ignorance of cultural issues by officials.

According to Table 1, half of the students rated the observance of educational justice in Zahedan University of Medical Sciences as good to excellent.

According to Table 2, the mean score of student justice was 101 ± 13.90 , which was 73% of the total score of

educational justice observance in the present study. The average score obtained from the total score was from 66.6% to 80.0%.

Moreover, the Chi-square test did not show a significant statistical difference in terms of the sex of students ($P = 0.07$). However, the results of one-way analysis of variance showed a significant difference between the scores of educational justice observance from students' point of view in different faculties of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences ($P < 0.001$).

Discussion

The results of the study indicated that the status of educational justice was higher than average. Regarding the observance of educational justice, there was a significant difference between colleges. So that, the most positive view of educational justice observance was identified among rehabilitation and health-care students and the least was identified among nursing students.

Educational justice refers to fair interactions, behaviors, and performances; indiscriminate behaviors; adequate guidance in accordance with students' abilities; observance of justice in assessment; and award of privileges. Experiencing each of the educational justice principles provides satisfaction for students.^[10] The importance of educational justice for students is its impact on their lives. Educational justice plays an important role in increasing self-esteem, improving job opportunities, enhancing social status, and getting socialized.^[11]

The process of educational justice starts with respect to the student's personality and individuality. This is the point that professors admit to it, but it may actually be ignored. In the study of Sanagoo *et al.*, students also believe that each student has his own position. If these

criteria are not involved in students' evaluation and learning, it would challenge the education justice.^[12] An unfair evaluation has negative psychosocial effects on students; moreover, their values and social norms will be affected.^[13]

The study conducted by nursing students in Kerman University of Medical Sciences showed a moderate educational justice. The most negative attitudes of students were related to the lack of equal attention paid to all students by the professors, and the highest positive attitude was related to the general access of students to library facilities and the Internet. The researchers concluded that to improve the current status of educational justice by professors, educational justice should be considered as one of the factors in their educational assessment.^[14] In this regard, the study of Kermanshah paramedical students indicated that there were discrimination and lack of respect for students' attitudes toward faculty members.^[15] One of the problems in the present study is not dealing with students according to their conditions. However, various studies point to the importance of the fair behavior of professors on students' academic achievement, interest and motivation in the course, and their choice to continue their studies in the current field or change their field of study.^[16-18]

Studying the nursing students' perception of educational justice in Golestan University of Medical Sciences indicated that professor's fair evaluation and the presence of capable and professional professors were among the most important concerns of students.^[19,20] In the study of Mazlumi and others, characteristics of a good professor in students' viewpoint are having a lesson plan and mastery of the subject matter.^[21] In the present study, one-third of students noted that classes were not scientifically beneficial.

Aligned with the results of this study, Jalalvandi *et al.* found a significant relationship between the field of study and students' perception of educational justice.^[15] This is very important because the existence of interdisciplinary inequality causes some students to lose their motivation in some fields of study. The results of Peter and Albert's study showed that social and educational behavior of teachers in the classroom is among the main factors for creating students' mentality toward education.^[22]

Table 1: Frequency of observance of educational justice from students' viewpoints in Zahedan University of Medical Sciences

Educational justice	Frequency
Weak	28.6
Moderate	21.4
Good	26.5
Excellent	23.5

Table 2: Observance of educational justice from students' viewpoints in Zahedan University of Medical Sciences in different colleges

Educational justice	School						Total
	Medical	Dentistry	Paramedical	Nursing and midwifery	Rehabilitation	Health	
Mean±SD	101.6±12.2	96.7±11.8	95.8±10.7	91.9±16.6	110.2±10.0	110.2±14.5	101±13.9
Percentage of total score	74.0	70.1	69.0	66.6	80.0	80.0	73.2

SD=Standard deviation

Conclusion

In the present study, the status of educational justice was higher than average. However, the most important concern was the students' perception of not dealing with students according to their conditions; ineffective use of all the class time in terms of educational purposes; the inaccessibility of the professors, consultant professors, and officials; limited access to the Internet; and lack of attention to sports and cultural issues.

Therefore, more planning is suggested to be done to establish fair behaviors among students according to the needs mentioned above. It is also suggested that more studies should be carried out across the country to highlight the needs and deficiencies in the educational system and help to improve the laws and policies in universities.

Limitation

To measure educational justice, a self-report questioner was used, which can sometimes not be precise; therefore, the qualitative study was recommended for a more accurate evaluation of educational Justice.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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