

The Relationship between University Students' Instructors' Credibility and Perceptions of Justice in the Classroom*

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ABSTRACT The present paper examined the relation between university students' instructors' credibility and perceptions of justice in the classroom. Relational screening model was applied and 1439 students participated in the research. Justice in the Classroom and Instructor Credibility Scales were used as the data collection tools. In the analysis of the data, Average, Standard Deviation, and Pearson Correlation Analysis were applied. At the end of this research, it was found that the students were undecided about their feelings on their instructors' competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness. The students' perceptions of distributive and procedural justice in the classroom were found to be fair, but their perceptions of interactional justice in the classroom were found to be neither fair nor unfair. It was found that there was only a very low positive significant correlation between the students' perceptions of instructors' trustworthiness and distributive justice in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

A teacher's essential responsibility is to realize students' learning, which is the main purpose of educational organizations. In this process, some of the criteria teachers should be careful of are communication skills, their manner towards the students, their knowledge of the course, their flexibility and willingness to teach, and the way they organize their lessons in order to encourage students to think and express themselves and to be fair in giving marks (Wotruba and Wright 1975, cited in Burdsal and Bardo 1986). Taking into account all of these above, it can be said that effective learning can only be achieved with successful classroom management since classroom management is made up of relation management, teaching management, physical environment management, time management, and student behavior management. The classroom climate, which is a result of the teacher-student relationship and interactions with other variables, falls within the dimension of student behavior management (Celik 2012) and a good classroom climate has a direct effect on the realization of the educational objectives.

Classroom management and climate also play an important role in the realization of educational objectives in universities, as in all educational organizations. One of the factors that make up

the classroom climate is the instructors' fairness in their practice and communication with the students. In fact, the instructors' unfair behavior towards their students is accepted to be in the school climate (Vieno et al. 2011) and in the classroom climate, which is a sub-dimension of the school climate (Celik 2012; Rodabaugh 1996). The instructors' behavior is one of the factors that make up a fair classroom climate (Rodabaugh 1996). Good classroom management is related to effective communication (Jones and Jones 1998, cited in Celik 2012). Thus, it can be said that instructors' traits indicating their communicative competence, credibility, and fairness have an impact on the quality of the classroom climate. If the instructors' are not perceived as being credible and fair it will lead to problems in classroom management, resulting in harm to the classroom climate and the effectiveness of the education; one of the most important factors that has a negative impact on classroom communication is the instructors' not being perceived as a credible source (Kohen 2006). Instructors' being perceived as credible increases students' motivation and their affective and cognitive learning (Teven and McCroskey 1997, cited in Freeman 2011), and instructors' being perceived as fair increases students' motivation, effort (Rodabaugh and Kravitz 1994, cited in Houston and Bettencourt 1999), and success (Marsh and Over-

all 1980, cited in Rodabaugh 1996). As stated in the literature, in this paper, instructors' credibility and justice in the classroom are variables that enhance the classroom climate, resulting in learning efficiency and this will be discussed according to university students' views.

Instructor Credibility

It is extremely important for instructors to communicate effectively with their students and to create a positive classroom climate in order to reach their educational objectives. One of the fundamental specialties affecting the communication process is how an instructor is perceived by the students, in other words his image. One of the features making up an instructor's image is the instructor's credibility as a source.

Source credibility is a term studied in different areas such as the development of media messages, organizational contexts, and student-teacher interaction (Freeman 1988; Hubbell et al. 2005; Priester and Petty 2003, cited in Dunleavy et al. 2010). According to Petty (1997, cited in Gray et al. 2011) source credibility is influential on convincing thoughts to be learned. In universities, instructors, as one of the main sources, have to convince their students about the information they give, in other words they should have credibility for successful learning because students have difficulty in getting information from sources that have no credibility (Beatty and Behnke 1980, cited in Teven 2007). Hence, it is extremely important for instructors to be perceived as credible for effective communication and learning.

According to McCroskey and Teven (1999), instructor credibility is made up of three sub-dimensions; competence/expertness, trustworthiness/character, and goodwill/care. Instructor competence/expertness refers to what degree he is perceived as trustworthy and comfortable in terms of the information he is giving during the course (Freeman 2011). As well as communicating effectively, instructors who are perceived to be competent have good classroom management skills and the ability to answer students' questions on difficult subjects (Teven and Hanson 2004). Students think that instructors who are perceived to be competent are intelligent, qualified, well informed, and clever (McCroskey 1992; McCroskey and Young 1981, cited in Myers 2001) and they have the tendency to refuse to learn

the information given by the instructors who are perceived to have no credibility (Hurt et al. 1977, cited in Freeman 2011). The second dimension of instructor credibility is caring or goodwill (McCroskey and Richmond 2000; McCroskey and Teven 1999, cited in Myers 2001), which refers to the state that instructors care about the well-being of their students (McCroskey 1992, cited in Myers 2001). Instructors who are perceived to have goodwill are student-centered, empathetic, have their students' best interests at heart (McCroskey 1992; Teven and McCroskey 1997, cited in Myers 2001), care about their students, and are nice to them (Teven and Hanson 2004). The last dimension of instructor credibility is instructor trustworthiness or character, which refers to instructors' being perceived to be nice, trustworthy (Frymier and Thompson 1992, cited in Chory 2007), honest, faithful (Freeman 2011), kind, and responsible (McCroskey 1992). Highly trustworthy instructors come up with rational explanations for the marks they give, treat everyone fairly, give feedback to their students, and do not insult or embarrass them (Teven and Hanson 2004). If the instructors are not perceived to be trustworthy, the students are likely to hesitate in believing the information given by them (Hurt et al. 1977, cited in Freeman 2011). As stated above, instructor credibility is essential for effective learning.

Justice in the Classroom

Justice, in the most general sense, is "to distinguish what is fair from unfair" (Titrek 2009) and it is considerably outstanding in the educational environments. Justice in the classroom is related to the perception of justice in the processes and results in the educational environment (Chory-Assad and Paulsel 2004b). Justice in the classroom consists of three dimensions; distributive justice in the classroom, procedural justice in the classroom, and interactional justice in the classroom (Rodabaugh 1996; Berti et al. 2010). Distributive justice in the classroom is about whether the distribution of marks are fair or not (Rodabaugh 1996), that is to say the students are interested in to what degree the marks they have been given are fair (Kravitz et al. 1997). Procedural justice in the classroom refers to the students' concern about the procedures used in the grading techniques (Kravitz et al. 1997), thus it is about whether the grading process in the

school is fair or not. In other words, procedural justice in the classroom is if the criteria used by the instructors when grading as result of the students' performance is perceived as fair or not by the students (Berti et al. 2010). Interactional justice in the classroom refers to what extent the instructor is respectful, polite, and open in their communication with the students (Chory-Assad and Paulsel 2004a). In university lessons interactional justice in the classroom is defined as the relationship between the instructor and the students (Rodabaugh 1996). Classroom justice seems to be very remarkable for students (Young et al. 2013). Students' behavior and attitudes can change in accordance with fair or unfair communication and interaction between the students and the instructor, thus justice in the classroom constitutes a substantial element in the formation and development of the learning environment.

The Aim of the Paper

Instructors' competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill are thought to have an effect on students' perceptions of justice in the classroom. If an instructor is perceived to be competent, he will be likely to explain the learning practices in the classroom in accordance with his knowledge and qualifications. Since the instructors who have goodwill are perceived to be trustworthy, honest, and responsible, students will not consider that their classroom practices are not well intentioned. Instructors who are perceived to be trustworthy give explanations for their grading, resulting in making their feedback fair and increasing their credibility, so the students will not hesitate in believing in their classroom practices and the information they are given. As it seen, instructor credibility can have a positive impact on justice in the classroom, bringing about meaningful and effective learning. In this direction, in this study the researchers aim to find out if there is a significant relationship between instructor credibility and justice in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

The population of this research, which is based on a relational survey model, is made up of 5755 students attending the 3rd and 4th grades at several faculties associated to Abant izzet Baysal University in Turkey. In determining a research sample that represents the population,

the researchers aimed to reach a maximum representation rate, so the sample from each faculty is chosen for twenty-five percent common representation by using stratified sampling, and the scales were applied to a total of 1439 students. In this study, to determine instructor credibility, Instructor (Source) Credibility Scale developed by McCroskey and Teven in 1999 and adapted into Turkish by Kepekcioglu (2015) was used. To determine justice in the classroom, Justice in the Classroom Scale was used. The Justice in the Classroom Scale was formed by combining the Distributive and Procedural Justice in the Classroom Scales developed by Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004b) and the Interactional Justice in the Classroom Scale developed by Chory (2007); it was adapted into Turkish by Kepekcioglu (2015). The validity and reliability studies of the scales were done by Kepekcioglu (2015). According to the results of the reliability analysis, for the sub-scales of the Instructor Credibility Scale, the Cronbach-Alpha coefficient of consistence was found to be .79 for Instructor Personal Competence and .71 for Instructor Professional Competence, which were the sub-dimensions of the Instructor Competence sub-scale. The Cronbach-Alpha coefficient of consistence was found to be .79 for Instructor's Environmental Goodwill and .78 for Instructor's Affective Goodwill, which were the sub-dimensions of the Instructor's Goodwill sub-scale. The Cronbach-Alpha coefficient of consistence was found to be .78 for Instructor Personal Trustworthiness and .73 for Instructor Environmental Trustworthiness, which were the sub-dimensions of the Instructor Trustworthiness sub-scale. Applying a 7-point Likert scale to the items in the Instructor Credibility Scale, numbers 1 and 7 indicate a very strong feeling, numbers 2 and 6 indicate a strong feeling, numbers 3 and 5 indicate a fairly weak feeling, and number 4 indicates being undecided. The point average was obtained by dividing the total score into the item numbers, which is as follows, the 1.00-1.85 range indicates a very strong feeling, the 1.86-2.72 range indicates a strong feeling, the 2.73-3.59 range indicates a fairly weak feeling, the 3.60-4.46 range indicates that the participants are undecided about their feelings, the 4.47-5.33 range indicates a fairly weak feeling, the 5.34-6.20 range indicates a strong feeling, and the 6.21-7.00 range indicates a very strong feeling. According to the results of the reliability analysis, for the sub-scales

of Justice on the Classroom Scale, the Cronbach-Alpha coefficient of consistence was found to be .91 for Distributive Justice on the Classroom sub-scale, .94 for Procedural Justice on the Classroom sub-scale, and .82 for Interactional Justice on the Classroom sub-scale. Applying a 5-point Likert scale to the items ranging from strongly fair to totally unfair on the Justice in the Classroom Scale, the point average is as follows, the 1.00-1.79 range indicates totally unfair, the 1.80-2.59 range indicates unfair, the 2.60-3.39 range indicates neither fair nor unfair, the 3.40-4.19 range indicates fair, and the 4.20-5.00 range indicates strongly fair. In the analysis of the data, in order to obtain the students' perceptions of instructor competence, instructor goodwill, instructor trustworthiness, distributive justice in the classroom, procedural justice in the classroom, and interactional justice in the classroom, average and standard deviation were applied, and to find out whether there is a significant relationship between instructor credibility and justice in the classroom, Pearson Correlation Analysis was applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The average and standard deviation on instructor credibility is shown in Table 1. According to Table 1 it was found that the students were undecided about their feelings on the instructor competence ($\bar{X}=3.63$), instructor goodwill ($\bar{X}=3.67$), and instructor trustworthiness ($\bar{X}=3.96$) sub-scales. When the arithmetic means were analyzed in detail, it can be seen that students' feelings on instructor trustworthiness were higher than their feelings on instructor competence and instructor goodwill. The fact that the students were undecided about their feelings on instructor competence, instructor goodwill, and instructor trustworthiness shows that the students have neither positive nor negative feelings on instructor credibility. This result may stem from various reasons. The students' expectations about their instructors' traits indicating

Table 1: The descriptive statistics on instructor credibility

<i>Instructor credibility sub-scales</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Ss</i>
Instructor competence	1439	3.63	0.61
Instructor's goodwill	1439	3.67	0.61
Instructor trustworthiness	1439	3.96	0.66

their competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness may not match with the real condition or even if the instructors have traits that make them to be perceived as having credibility, they may fail at being perceived as credible. This result shows consistency with the study by Chory (2007). Chory (2007) found that students think that instructor trustworthiness is more important than instructor competence and goodwill. The related literature states that if students perceive their instructors as not having credibility, they have the tendency not to listen to and learn from them (McCroskey et al. 1974, cited in Banfield et al. 2006); on the other hand, in the event that students perceive their instructors as having credibility causes an increase in their motivation (Teven and McCroskey 1997, cited in Freeman 2011) and predicts their cognitive and affective learning (Finn and Ledbetter 2014). Hence, it can be said that students being undecided about their feelings on instructor credibility can affect the students' motivation, their cognitive and affective learning, and the learning environment in a negative way, and can also lead to the students being on the fence about the information given by the instructor.

The average and standard deviation on justice in the classroom is shown in Table 2. According to Table 2 the students' perceptions on distributive justice in the classroom ($\bar{X}=3.49$) and procedural justice in the classroom ($\bar{X}=4.17$) were found to be fair, but their perceptions on interactional justice in the classroom ($\bar{X}=3.24$) were found to be neither fair nor unfair. Hence, it can be said that students perceive distributive and procedural justice in the classroom to be fair. This finding can be interpreted that the marks the students get from the courses in exchange for their contributions are fair and they think that their instructors treat and communicate with them equally in the classroom. This result of the research is consistent with the study by Chory-

Table 2: The descriptive statistics on justice in the classroom

<i>Justice in the classroom sub-scales</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Ss</i>
Distributive justice in the classroom	1439	3.49	1.01
Procedural justice in the classroom	1439	4.17	0.93
Interactional justice in the classroom	1439	3.24	1.02

Assad and Paulsel (2004b), in which the students' perceptions on distributive and procedural justice in the classroom were found to be high. On the other hand, in this research it was found that the students' perceptions on interactional justice in the classroom were found to be neither fair nor unfair. This finding can be interpreted as the students think the way their instructors interact with them and inform them about the procedures used in the classroom are not as efficient as distributive and procedural justice in the classroom.

This result of the research does not show consistency with the study by Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004a), in which the students' perceptions on interactional justice in the classroom were found to be high. Justice in the classroom has great importance in learning outcomes because injustice in the classroom causes the students' success rates to be low (DeMore et al. 1988, cited in Rodabaugh 1996), but securing the justice increases the students' learning outcomes (Walsh and Maffei 1994, cited in Houston and Bettencourt 1999) and makes them feel satisfied with the school (Rodabaugh 1994, cited in Rodabaugh 1996). Furthermore, students' perceptions of justice on instructors' remedial communication contributes to positive long-term classroom outcomes (Holmgren and Bolkan 2014). Accordingly, it can be said that the fact that the students' perceptions of distributive and procedural justice in the classroom were found to be fair and their perceptions of interactional justice in the classroom were found to be neither fair nor unfair can affect the students' learning outcomes in parallel with those perceptions of justice in the classroom.

The relationship between instructor credibility and justice in the classroom is shown in Table 3. When Table 3 was analyzed, it was found that between the instructor credibility sub-dimensions and justice in the classroom sub-dimensions,

there is only a positive significant relationship at a low level between the instructor trustworthiness and distributive justice in the classroom sub-scales ($r=0.08$, $p<.01$) but there is no significant relationship between the other sub-scales of instructor credibility and justice in the classroom.

This finding can be interpreted as there being no relationship between students' perceptions of instructor credibility and justice in the classroom, or the fact that the instructors are perceived as having credibility has no effect on their being perceived as being fair by the students. This result was not an expected finding because during the planning process of the study it was assumed that fair classroom practice is an important element in instructor credibility resulting in students' learning effectively. On the other hand, it was found that there is a positive significant relationship at a low level between instructor trustworthiness and distributive justice in the classroom sub-scales. This finding can be construed that the students attach more importance to their marks and explanations for them that are the indicators of instructors' trustworthiness and they see them in a more concrete way than other forms of practical justice.

In fact, in the Turkish education system, students beginning from secondary school are constantly preparing for exams to enroll schools providing first-class education. The fact that the exam results are very important causes students to give more importance to their marks than any other educational attainments and makes them to focus on the marks. This finding is not consistent with the study by Chory (2007), in which the students' perceptions of instructor credibility affect their perceptions of justice in the classroom in a positive way. The fact that the results of the studies are different may come from the participating students' universities' and instructors' having different properties and their being

Table 3: Pearson correlation analysis on the relationship between instructor credibility and justice in the classroom

<i>Sub-scales</i>		<i>Distributive justice in the classroom</i>	<i>Procedural justice in the classroom</i>	<i>Interactional justice in the classroom</i>
Instructor competence	r	0.03	-0.01	-0.40
Instructor's goodwill	r	0.04	0.04	0.03
Instructor trustworthiness	r	0.08**	0.04	0.01

** $p<.01$

from countries, which have different social, cultural, and legal characteristics.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded that the students were undecided about their feelings on the instructor competence, instructor goodwill, and instructor trustworthiness sub-scales. The students' perceptions of distributive justice in the classroom and procedural justice in the classroom were found to be fair, but their perceptions of interactional justice in the classroom were found to be neither fair nor unfair. It was found that between instructor credibility and justice in the classroom sub-dimensions, there is only a positive significant relationship at a low level between the instructor trustworthiness and distributive justice on the classroom sub-scales, but there is no significant relation between the other sub-scales of instructor credibility and justice in the classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To increase their credibility, instructors should give importance to their image management by going better prepared to the classroom, being consistent in their communication, and caring about their students' learning. In order to increase students' perceptions of justice in the classroom to the desired level, instructors should clearly express their expectations on how much effort the students must make to be successful in the lessons, they should be careful in grading students according to the students' efforts, they should inform the students about the procedures used in the classroom, and they should be careful in their application, as well as being respectful and gentle in their interaction with the students. The instructors should pay attention to the results related to personal variables, for example, students who have a low level of perception of distributive justice in the classroom can be informed clearly about the procedures used when grading. To increase the perceptions of students of procedural justice in the classroom, the procedures must be applied in the classroom without any privileges. To increase the perceptions of students of interactional justice in the classroom, instructors should use an appropriate communication style, they should be respectful and gentle in their behavior toward their students, and they should be attentive in informing

them about the procedures. The relationship between teacher credibility and justice in the classroom can be studied in other education organizations such as secondary schools. Researchers can study on the relations between justice in the classroom and motivation.

NOTE

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