

Understanding the Relationship between Justice Perceptions and Attitudinal and Behavioral Reactions: The Education Context

Introduction

Organizational scholars keep on highlighting the role of clients' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in organizationally relevant outcomes. Noteworthy, in a related stream of research in the context of human service professions, such as education, these topics are often neglected. Might students' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors be beneficial or even harmful for the education stakeholders: other students, teachers, and faculty as an institution? If we consider students as faculty clients, based on the research in the organizational context, it seems logical to expect an affirmative answer to the former.

This study aims to address the aforementioned interrogations, by extending the novel streamline of research, which are highlighting the role of clients in the organizational context, to the education context.

Thereby, this study explores the relations between students' perceived multi-foci justice, their work engagement, academic optimism, satisfaction, and their citizenship as well as counterproductive organizational behaviors.

Research hypotheses

H1: Student perceptions about the fairness of their teachers and colleagues directly enhance 1) student work engagement, 2) students' overall satisfaction with their studying, 3) their academic optimism and 4) student citizenship behaviors towards colleagues, teachers, and faculty

H2: Student perceptions about the fairness of their teachers and colleagues directly reduce counterproductive student behaviors

H3: Student work engagement directly enhances 1) students' overall satisfaction with their studying, 2) their academic optimism and 3) student citizenship behaviors towards colleagues, teachers, and faculty

H4: Student work engagement directly reduces counterproductive student behaviors

H5: Student work engagement mediates the relationship between student perceptions about the fairness of their teachers and colleagues and 1) students' overall satisfaction with their studying, 2) academic optimism, 3) citizenship behaviors and 4) counterproductive student behaviors

Method

Sample and research design

In the study, we used a sample consisting of 1513 under-graduate and graduate students from two faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences in Croatia. Of the students, 79% were female, 73% were under-graduate students, with the mean age of 21. After reaching agreement about the students' participation in the study from faculties and teachers, the researchers surveyed one (larger or smaller) group at a time, during regular classes. Teachers were not present while students were surveyed. The researchers gave the same instructions to all participants and guaranteed confidential and voluntary participation. Fulfilling the questionnaires lasted approximately 20 minutes. After each student completed his or her survey, he or she would put it in a box. Data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0 for Windows.

Measures

The students answered all the items using a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree), except from the *Students counterproductive organizational behavior questionnaire*, where they answered all the items from 1 (never) to 5 (every week). Composite scores were defined as mean values of all item estimations.

Students' perceived multi-foci justice questionnaire (Jakopec, Sušanj & Margaretić, 2016) consists of twelve items. Nine items, developed for the purpose of this research, measured three aspects of teachers' justice: distributive (three items, e.g. *My teachers grade me fairly based on effort I make*), procedural (three items, e.g. *My teachers timely provided me with the pre-defined, clear and concise evaluation criteria*), and interactional (three items, e.g. *My teachers take into account my feelings*) justice. Three items measured colleagues' interpersonal justice (e.g. *My colleagues respect me*). Results of CFA suggest that the most appropriate model is the one that consists of four latent, interrelated factors ($\chi^2 [df = 48; N = 1513] = 205.95, p < .001; CFI = .97; TLI = .96; NFI = .96; RMSEA = .05$).

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, Student Version (Schaufeli et al., 2002) consists of nine items and measures three aspects of students' work engagement: vigor (three items, e.g. *When I'm doing my work as a student, I feel bursting with energy*), dedication (three items, e.g. *My studies inspire me*) and absorption (three items, e.g. *I get carried away when I'm studying*). Results of CFA suggest that the most appropriate model is the one that consists of three latent, interrelated factors ($\chi^2 [df = 20; N = 1513] = 163.29, p < .001; CFI = .97; TLI = .95; NFI = .97; RMSEA = .07$).

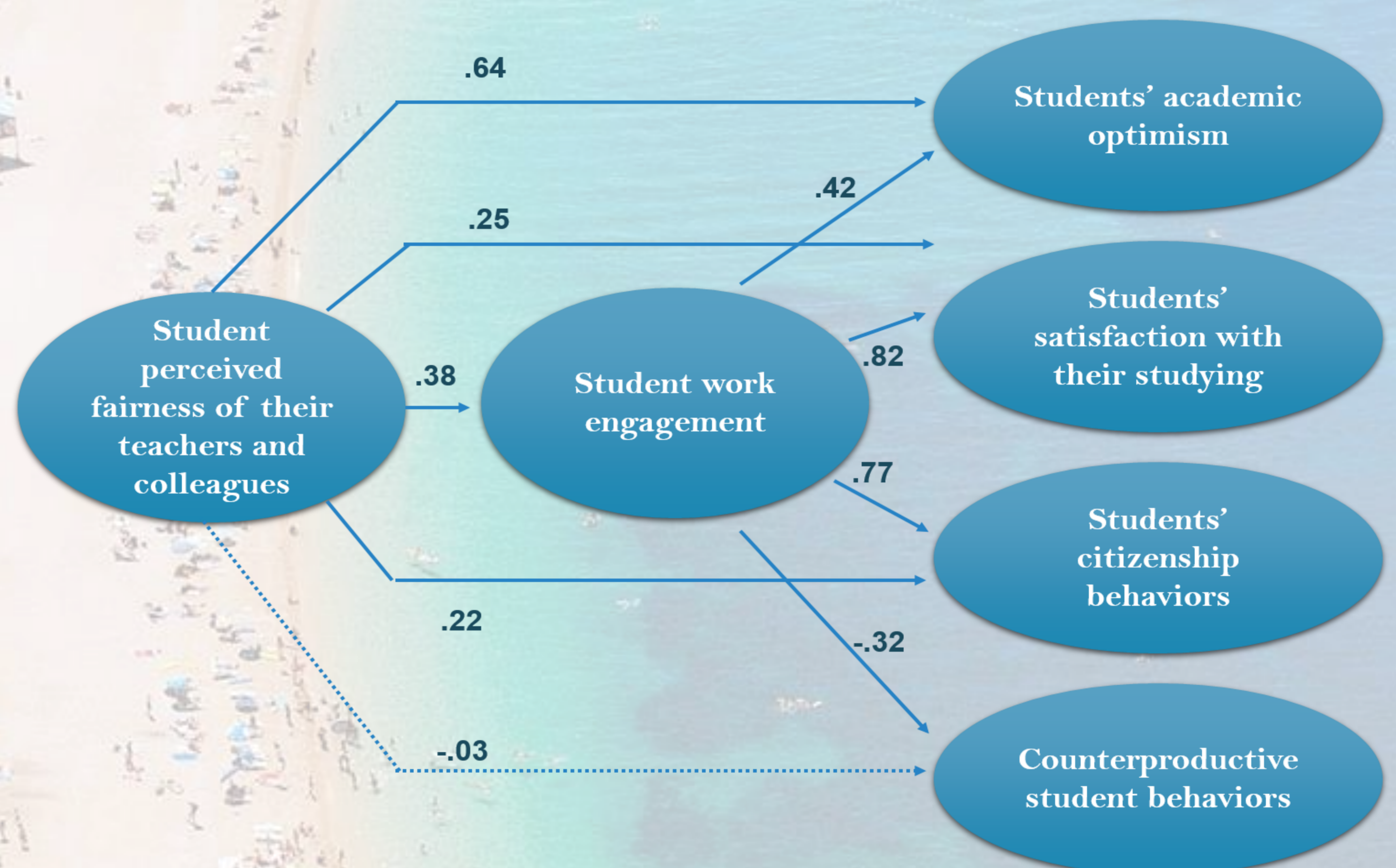
Student Academic Optimism Questionnaire (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2013) consists of 28 items and measures three aspects of student academic optimism: student trust in teachers (ten items, e.g. *Teachers always do what they are supposed to do*), student identification with faculty (ten items, e.g. *I feel proud of being part of my faculty*) and students' perception of academic press (eight items, e.g. *Students work hard to get good grades*). Results of CFA suggest that the most appropriate model is the one that consists of three latent, interrelated factors ($\chi^2 [df = 341; N = 1513] = 2614.58, p < .001; CFI = .88; TLI = .89; NFI = .88; RMSEA = .07$).

Student satisfaction questionnaire (Smojver-Ažić & Bajšanski, 2016) consists of seven items and measures students' satisfaction with their study program (e.g., *The study program satisfied my expectations; I would recommend this study program to the other students*). Results of CFA suggest that the most appropriate model is the one that consists of one latent factor ($\chi^2 [df = 13; N = 1513] = 73.20, p < .001; CFI = .99; TLI = .98; NFI = .99; RMSEA = .05$).

Students' desirable behavior questionnaire (Margaretić, 2016) consists of nine items measuring students' desirable behavior towards faculty (three items, e.g., *I defend my faculty when others criticize it*), towards teachers (three items, e.g., *I would recommend my teachers to the other students*) and towards colleagues (three items, e.g., *Even when I am overloaded, I help my colleagues in carrying out their study obligations*). Results of CFA suggest that the model consists of three latent, interrelated factors ($\chi^2 [df = 24; N = 1513] = 157.7, p < .001; CFI = .97; TLI = .96; NFI = .97; RMSEA = .06$).

Students' counterproductive organizational behavior questionnaire (Tomišić et al., 2014) consists of 18 items measuring students' organizational (nine items, e.g., *How often have you been absent from faculty without a valid reason?*) and interpersonal deviance (nine items, e.g. *How often have you offended a colleague related to their study failure?*). Results of CFA suggest that the model consists of two latent, interrelated factors ($\chi^2 [df = 129; N = 1513] = 616.01, p < .001; CFI = .92; TLI = .90; NFI = .90; RMSEA = .05$).

Main results



$\chi^2 [df = 196; N = 1513] = 1407.41, p < .001; CFI = .92; TLI = .90; NFI = .91; RMSEA = .08$

Indirect effects of student perceived fairness of their teachers and colleagues on:

- student academic optimism ($\beta = .16, p < .01$);
- students' satisfaction with their studying ($\beta = .31, p < .01$);
- students' citizenship behaviors ($\beta = .29, p < .01$);
- counterproductive student behaviors ($\beta = -.12, p < .05$)

Conclusions

- Student perceptions about the fairness of their teachers and colleagues enhance student **work engagement** — the positive, fulfilling emotional state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption.
- That enhanced work engagement further enhances students' **overall satisfaction with their studying**, as well as their **academic optimism** — an overarching construct that unites efficacy, trust, and academic emphasis.
- Moreover, student work engagement advances their **citizenship behaviors** — voluntary, self-driven behaviors that are beneficial to their targets (colleagues, teachers, and faculty); while simultaneously reduces **counterproductive student behaviors** — intentional behaviors aimed to harm the same targets mentioned above.
- That is, fairness of teachers and colleagues perceived by a student, increases student desirable attitudes and behaviors, both directly, and indirectly, by increasing student work engagement
- Fairness of teachers and colleagues perceived by a student, indirectly reduces undesirable student behaviors, by increasing student work engagement
- The results of this research provide valuable insights and implications for both, science and practice, by highlighting the role of fair treatment and work engagement in increasing students' desirable attitudes and behaviors and decreasing students' counterproductive behaviors targeting their colleagues, teachers, and faculty.

References

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