

Cross-Cultural Classroom Assessment Fairness: Evidence, Conceptual Insights, and Future Directions

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ABSTRACT

This review examines cross-cultural research on students' perceptions of distributive fairness in classroom assessment (CA) in higher education. A systematic search of five databases (EBSCOhost, PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC) covering publications from 1965 to 2023 identified only four empirical studies directly investigating cross-cultural differences in perceptions of CA fairness. This striking lack of research constitutes a major finding of the review and highlights a significant gap in the assessment literature. To provide conceptual context for understanding fairness across cultural settings, a second phase of the review examined 32 cross-cultural studies from the organizational justice literature involving student samples. Findings from the limited CA literature suggest that cultural context may influence students' perceptions of distributive fairness; however, the current evidence base is insufficient to support broad conclusions. The organizational justice literature, while originating from a different context, offers useful insights into how cultural values—particularly individualism–collectivism and power distance—may shape fairness judgments and provide a conceptual foundation for future research in educational settings. By distinguishing between empirical evidence from CA and conceptual insights from organizational justice research, this review identifies key directions for developing a culturally informed understanding of CA fairness and for advancing future assessment research and practice in diverse higher education contexts.

Keywords: cultural values, cross-cultural comparison, perception of fairness, classroom assessments, higher education

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INTRODUCTION

Despite growing attention to fairness and equity in higher education, research on fairness in classroom assessment (CA) remains limited and fragmented (Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2019). Existing studies suggest that students' perceptions of CA fairness are closely associated with academic motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, well-being, and trust in instructors and educational institutions (Baniasadi et al., 2022; Chen, 2022; Chory-Assad, 2002; Holmgren & Bolkan, 2013). Conversely, perceptions of unfairness have been linked to disengagement, reduced effort, withdrawal, and academically dishonest behaviors such as cheating (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004; Horan et al., 2013; Murdock et al., 2007). Given the significant academic and professional consequences attached to CA outcomes, understanding how students evaluate the fairness of assessment practices is of considerable importance in higher education.

Although fairness has become a recurring theme in assessment scholarship, cross-cultural research on students' perceptions of CA fairness remains remarkably underdeveloped (see Falavarjani, 2025). Previous studies have examined fairness within particular educational and cultural settings (e.g., Falavarjani, 2025, 2026; Tierney, 2014), yet little is known about how students from different cultural backgrounds evaluate the fairness of CA outcomes. To address this issue, the present review began with a systematic examination of the literature on cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of distributive CA fairness. However, the limited number of studies is itself a significant finding, revealing a substantial gap in the CA literature and restricting the conclusions that can be drawn regarding the role of culture in shaping perceptions of CA fairness (Falavarjani, 2025, 2026; Falavarjani & Mousavi, 2024; Falavarjani & Yeh, 2026).

The scarcity of CA-specific research raises an important question: how might scholars begin to conceptualize cultural influences on assessment fairness when direct empirical evidence is limited? To provide a broader conceptual context for this question, we turn to the organizational justice literature. Organizational justice theory examines how individuals evaluate the fairness of decisions and outcomes allocated by authority figures, most commonly in workplace settings (Greenberg & Colquitt, 2013). A substantial body of cross-cultural organizational

justice research has explored how cultural values influence fairness judgments across different societies and groups. Although this literature does not directly address CA, it offers potentially useful theoretical insights for understanding how cultural values may shape evaluations of fairness (see, Falavarjani & Mousavi, 2024).

At the same time, important distinctions must be acknowledged. CA occurs within pedagogical and developmental relationships designed to support learning, whereas organizational justice research has traditionally focused on workplace relationships and employment outcomes. Consequently, findings from organizational justice cannot be assumed to apply directly to educational settings. Nevertheless, both contexts involve authority figures making decisions about valued outcomes, operate within unequal power relationships, and require individuals to evaluate the fairness of those outcomes. These shared structural characteristics suggest that organizational justice may serve as a useful conceptual lens for informing future research on CA fairness while recognizing the unique features of educational contexts.

Accordingly, this review was conducted in two stages. First, it systematically examined the available empirical literature on cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of distributive fairness in CA. Second, following the identification of a very limited evidence base, it reviewed cross-cultural organizational justice studies involving student samples to identify concepts, distributive principles, and cultural patterns that may inform future CA research. Rather than treating these two literatures as a single body of evidence, the present review intentionally distinguishes between empirical findings from CA and conceptual insights derived from organizational justice scholarship.

This review makes three contributions. First, it documents and critically examines the limited state of cross-cultural research on distributive fairness in CA, identifying a significant gap in the higher education assessment literature. Second, it clarifies the conceptual relationship between CA and organizational justice by highlighting both their similarities and their important contextual differences. Third, it synthesizes insights from cross-cultural organizational justice research to develop a conceptual foundation and research agenda for future investigations of CA fairness across cultural contexts.

Guided by these objectives, the review addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What is currently known about cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of distributive CA fairness in higher education?
- 2) What conceptual insights from cross-cultural organizational justice research may help inform future research on CA fairness across cultural contexts?

Students’ Perceptions of Distributive CA Fairness

CA evaluates student learning, monitors progress, assigns grades, and provides feedback (McMillan, 2013). These assessments help teachers measure knowledge and competence while also motivating learning (Brookhart & McMillan, 2020). CA includes summative assessments, such as high-stakes university entrance exams, and formative assessments, which guide ongoing learning (Fan et al., 2020; Green, 2009). As education shifts from a test-oriented culture to a learning-focused one, principles such as fairness, reliability, and cultural diversity have gained importance (Brookhart & Nitko, 2008; Kwapong, 2021; Sax, 1974). However, perceptions of fairness vary across student populations, especially in higher education, influencing how assessments are interpreted and received.

To situate the discussion for readers from different disciplinary backgrounds, it is useful to note several parallels between organizational justice and CA contexts. While the two contexts are not identical, both involve the evaluation of performance, allocation of valued outcomes, and judgments about fairness (Table 1). These parallels help explain why organizational justice theory has been influential in CA research. However, important differences remain. Unlike employees, students are simultaneously learners and evaluation recipients, and educational assessments are intended not only to allocate outcomes but also to support learning and development. Consequently, organizational justice theory is applied here as a useful conceptual framework rather than as a direct analogue to CA contexts.

Table 1: *Conceptual parallels between organizational justice and classroom assessment contexts*

Organizational Justice	Classroom Assessment
Supervisor	Instructor
Employee	Student
Compensation	Grades
Performance evaluation	Assessment
Promotion	Academic progression

Using organizational justice theory (Lizzio & Wilson, 2008; Rasooli et al., 2018), CA fairness can be understood through three dimensions: distributive, procedural, and interactional fairness. Distributive fairness refers to the perceived fairness of outcome distribution, shaped by need, equity, and equality. Need-based fairness considers individual student needs, equity emphasizes effort and performance, and equality ensures equal opportunities. Procedural fairness relates to the transparency and consistency of assessment processes, while interactional fairness focuses on the quality of interpersonal and informational exchanges between students and instructors (Wallace, 2018).

These three dimensions—distributive, procedural, and interactional—shape students’ overall perceptions of CA fairness. The key question remains: How

do cultural values influence these dimensions? Addressing this question requires adopting a cultural orientation framework to better understand the role of culture in shaping CA fairness perceptions.

Importantly, organizational justice theory is reviewed not as a direct analogue to CA fairness (e.g., Zhaleh et al., 2025; Goldman & Cropanzano, 2015), but as a theoretically informative body of research that helps explain culturally patterned distributive expectations among students, particularly in higher education classrooms.

Culture, Cultural Orientations, and Perceived Fairness

Culture has been defined in various and sometimes inconsistent ways in the social sciences (for review, see Faulkner et al., 2006). In cross-cultural psychology, culture is typically understood as a shared meaning system passed down through generations within a large social group (Fischer, 2012). Hofstede (1991, p. 4) defines culture as the “training or refining of one's mind from social environments in which one grew up.” These definitions assume that beliefs, values, and norms are commonly practiced among individuals within the same community (for a critical examination of this assumption, see Fischer & Schwartz, 2010). Values, in this context, refer to motivational goals that guide behavior and serve as a framework for evaluating individuals and situations (Fischer, 2013).

Hofstede's cultural framework (1991) describes individuals based on five cultural orientations at the national level. These include: 1) larger or smaller power distance (PD), 2) higher or lower individualism versus collectivism (IC), 3) stronger or weaker uncertainty avoidance vs. acceptance (UA), 4) higher or lower masculinity vs. femininity (MF), and 5) higher or lower Confucian Dynamism (CD or long- versus short-term goal orientations). For example, someone from a culture with high PD values is more likely to accept and expect unequal power distribution in society, believing that higher status, respect, rights, and wealth should be afforded to certain individuals. Conversely, those from low PD cultures are more likely to reject unequal power structures.

A person can also be described by the degree of collectivism versus individualism. This refers to how closely they identify with others in their social community and whether they prioritize collective interests over personal goals. Third, an individual can be defined by uncertainty avoidance (UA), which measures how threatened they feel by ambiguity or unfamiliar situations (Hofstede, 1991; Patterson & Smith, 2001). Those with high UA prefer predictability, written rules, and structured relationships. In contrast, individuals with a low UA are more comfortable with uncertainty and risk-taking. Fourth, an individual may be characterized by masculinity versus femininity (MF), which reflects how they perceive social gender roles. In a high-masculinity culture, men are likely to emphasize confidence, strength, and material success, while women may display shyness, modesty, and focus on quality of life. Finally, individuals

can be described by their orientation toward long-term vs. short-term goals, known as Confucian Dynamism (CD). Those with high CD are future-oriented and prioritize long-term goals, while individuals with a short-term tendency are more inclined to be concerned with the past and present.

According to Hofstede's cultural framework, however, different cultural contexts encompass diverse cultural orientations that shape variations in how individuals perceive and behave across cultures. These orientations influence how people within a culture perceive and engage with the world around them. This area of research has been explored by researchers studying perceptions of justice and fairness in organizational contexts across cultures (see Fischer & Smith, 2003; Lind et al., 1997). In the distributive justice domain, for example, Berger et al. (2015; original work published 1972) were among the first to highlight the limitations of Adams' equity theory (1965) in explaining fairness for individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Given the role of cultural values, it is not surprising that students from different cultural contexts perceive fairness or unfairness in CA differently and may respond in unique ways. Accordingly, this review examines students' distributive perceptions of CA fairness across cultural contexts.

METHOD

Search Strategy and Study Selection

This scoping review employed a systematic search strategy to examine cross-cultural research on students' perceptions of distributive CA fairness in higher education. Searches were conducted across five major databases in psychology and education—EBSCOhost, PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC—and covered publications from 1965 to 2023. The year 1965 was selected as the starting point because it marks the publication of Adams' (1965) equity theory, a foundational framework in fairness and justice research.

The review was conducted in two sequential phases. The primary objective of Phase 1 was to identify empirical studies directly addressing cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of distributive fairness in CA. Search terms included combinations of *fairness*, *justice*, *classroom assessment*, *assessment fairness*, *cross-cultural*, and *multicultural*. To ensure comprehensive coverage, a second search incorporated related terms such as *grading*, *teacher fairness*, *school fairness*, and *standardized testing*. Following screening and application of the inclusion criteria, only four empirical studies were identified. Studies were excluded if they did not involve cross-cultural comparisons, did not focus on student perceptions of fairness, or examined contextual differences unrelated to cultural values (e.g., socioeconomic or institutional variation). The identification of only four eligible studies constituted a major finding of the review, highlighting the limited state of cross-cultural CA research.

Given the scarcity of CA-specific evidence, Phase 2 was undertaken to provide conceptual context rather than additional direct evidence regarding CA fairness. This phase examined cross-cultural studies from the organizational justice literature that employed student samples. The decision to include this literature was based on three considerations. First, cross-cultural research on fairness judgments is substantially more developed within organizational justice scholarship. Second, both organizational justice and CA involve evaluations of outcomes allocated by authority figures. Third, many organizational justice studies utilize student samples, providing insight into how students from different cultural backgrounds evaluate distributive fairness. Search terms included combinations of *organizational justice*, *fairness*, *students*, and *cross-cultural*. This search identified 72 studies, of which 32 met the inclusion criteria following screening.

Across both phases, studies were included if they (a) were published in peer-reviewed journals, (b) were written in English, (c) involved student participants, and (d) examined distributive fairness or justice in cross-cultural contexts using Hofstede's cultural dimensions or comparable cultural frameworks. Duplicate records were identified and removed using EndNote software. The study selection process is summarized in Figure 1 using a PRISMA-style flow diagram.

Data Analysis

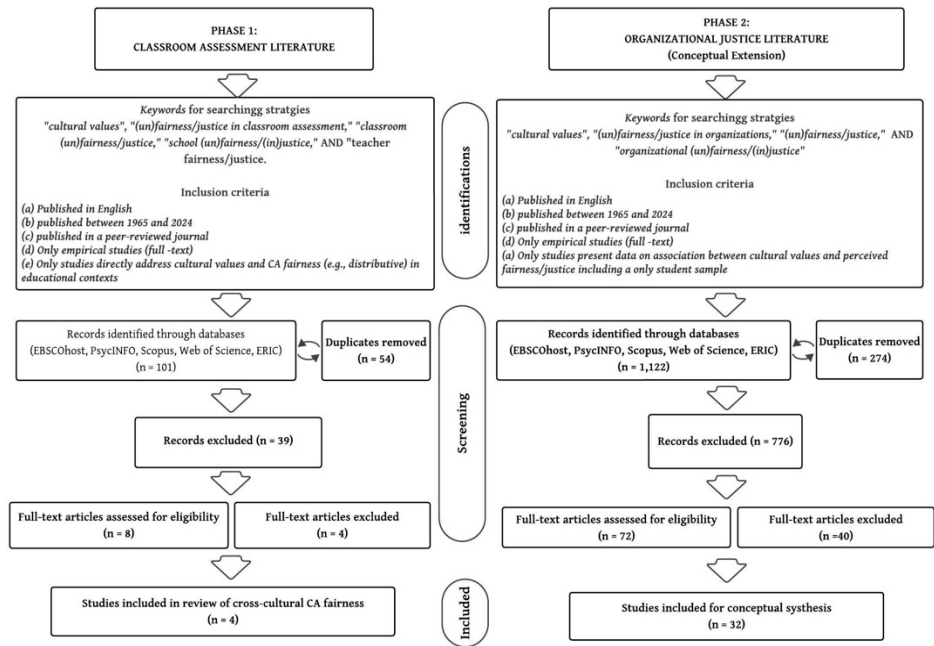
The review was guided by two objectives. The first was to synthesize the limited empirical evidence regarding cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of distributive fairness in CA. The second was to examine whether insights from cross-cultural organizational justice research could inform future theorizing and research on CA fairness.

To address the first objective, the four CA studies were analyzed separately to identify patterns in students' distributive fairness perceptions across cultural contexts. Particular attention was given to reported fairness judgments, distributive principles (e.g., equity, equality, need, and seniority), cultural influences, methodological approaches, and limitations of the existing evidence base. Given the small number of studies, the analysis focused not only on substantive findings but also on areas of convergence, divergence, and unresolved questions within the literature.

To address the second objective, the organizational justice studies were synthesized as a distinct body of literature. Rather than treating these studies as direct evidence of CA fairness, the analysis examined how they conceptualized distributive fairness across cultures and what insights they offered regarding the potential influence of cultural values on fairness judgments. Particular attention was given to Hofstede's cultural dimensions, especially individualism–collectivism and power distance, as well as to the distributive principles emphasized across different cultural contexts.

Finally, findings from the two phases were compared to identify conceptual connections, points of divergence, and gaps requiring further investigation. This approach enabled the review to distinguish between what is empirically known about cross-cultural CA fairness and what can be inferred from adjacent organizational justice scholarship to guide future research in educational settings.

Figure 1: *PRISMA-style flow diagram of the study selection process*



RESULTS

The findings are presented in two distinct sections because the included studies serve different purposes. First, the four CA studies provide the only empirical evidence that directly addresses the review's research questions regarding cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of fairness in educational assessment contexts. Second, the 32 organizational justice studies do not examine CA directly but offer conceptual and theoretical insights into how cultural values shape distributive fairness judgments more broadly. This distinction is important because the organizational justice literature informs interpretation of assessment fairness, yet it should not be treated as direct evidence regarding CA practices.

Students' perceptions of CA fairness in higher education contexts

Only four studies were identified that explicitly examined cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of fairness within educational settings, all of which were conducted in higher education contexts. Overall, these studies reveal three overarching observations.

The first observation is that cross-cultural research on assessment fairness remains extremely limited. The most striking finding is the scarcity of research directly examining cross-cultural perceptions of CA fairness. Across the four studies identified, fairness was explored through diverse topics, including grading procedures, grade distributions, perceptions of teacher quality, and students' overall fairness experiences. Most studies relied on scenario-based designs, reflecting a preference for hypothetical rather than authentic assessment contexts. The small number of studies limits the extent to which firm conclusions can be drawn regarding whether and how students' distributive fairness judgments differ across cultures in educational settings. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics and findings of these studies.

Second, cultural values have been only minimally examined. In fact, only one study, Tata (2005), directly investigated CA fairness using established cultural dimensions derived from Hofstede's framework. Comparing Chinese and American undergraduate students, the study found significant differences in perceptions of grading fairness that were associated with individualism–collectivism and power distance. Similarly, Erkan and Walker (2016) reported differences in fairness perceptions between Muslim and non-Muslim students, suggesting that cultural and religious values may influence fairness judgments.

However, the remaining studies did not explicitly examine cultural values as explanatory mechanisms. Liu and Meng (2009) reported no significant differences between Chinese and American students in perceptions of desirable teacher qualities, while Resh and Dalbert (2007) found no significant differences in justice perceptions regarding grades across their comparison groups. Consequently, cultural values remain largely underexplored rather than systematically tested within the assessment literature.

Third, existing findings are inconsistent and insufficient to support strong conclusions. Although two studies reported significant cross-cultural differences and two reported non-significant findings, the evidence base remains too small and conceptually fragmented to support definitive conclusions. The studies differ substantially in their definitions of fairness, assessment domains, cultural comparisons, and methodological approaches. As a result, it is unclear whether inconsistencies reflect true cultural variation, differences in CA contexts, or limitations in study design.

Overall, the available evidence suggests that cultural values may influence students' perceptions of assessment fairness, but current research is insufficient to determine the nature, magnitude, or consistency of these effects. Rather than

demonstrating the absence of cultural influences, the findings highlight the need for more systematic investigation of distributive fairness within assessment contexts.

Theoretical findings: Fairness in CA contexts

A second notable finding is the absence of assessment-specific theoretical frameworks. All four studies drew primarily on concepts originating from organizational justice research rather than theories developed specifically for educational assessment. For example, Tata (2005) employed Hofstede’s cultural dimensions alongside organizational justice concepts such as procedural justice and voice, while Erkan and Walker (2016) similarly adapted organizational justice principles to higher education contexts.

This reliance on workplace-derived frameworks suggests that the study of assessment fairness remains theoretically underdeveloped. Existing research largely treats students as recipients of outcomes rather than participants in pedagogical processes, potentially overlooking dimensions of fairness that are unique to teaching, learning, feedback, and evaluation. Furthermore, the studies conceptualize fairness in markedly different ways, ranging from grading procedures and grade distribution to teacher characteristics, making cumulative knowledge building difficult.

Overall, these findings indicate that the limited assessment literature has relied heavily on imported organizational justice concepts while lacking a coherent framework that integrates cultural values, assessment practices, and student learning. The scarcity of studies should therefore be interpreted as evidence of an underdeveloped research area rather than evidence that cultural influences on CA fairness are unimportant.

Table 2: *Cross-cultural comparisons of students’ fairness perceptions in educational contexts*

Author	Culture	Evaluation Task	Research Question	Fairness Dimension	Cultural Values	Result
Erkan & Walker (2016)	Muslim and non-Muslim in Canada	The perceptions and experiences of fairness using both qualitative and quantitative studies	Do Muslim and non-Muslim students in Canada differ in their perceptions of fairness?	All four dimensions	Religious values	S
Liu & Meng (2009)	The US and China	A list of qualities of a good teacher	Do Chinese and American students differ in what they value in a good teacher?	Perception of a good teacher quality (a fair person)	IC	NS

Author	Culture	Evaluation Task	Research Question	Fairness Dimension	Cultural Values	Result
Resh & Dalbert (2007)	Germany and Israel	The sense of justice about grades using scenario-based design	Do men and women differ in their sense of justice across countries?	Grade distribution	Systemic Difference	NS
Tata (2005)	The US and China	Perceived fairness of grading procedures using a scenario-based study	Do US and Chinese students differ in their perceptions of grading fairness?	Procedural and interpersonal fairness	IC, PD	S

Note. IC: Individualism-Collectivism, PD: Power Distance

Students' Perceptions of Distributive Fairness in Organizational Contexts

To complement the limited CA literature, 32 studies from the organizational justice field were examined (Table 3). These studies used student samples from universities across multiple countries and investigated distributive fairness judgments in resource-allocation contexts such as pay, awards, budgets, and rewards. Although these studies do not directly examine CA, they provide valuable insight into how culture shapes fairness preferences.

Across the literature, one consistent pattern emerged: students' distributive fairness judgments vary systematically across cultural contexts. Most studies reported significant differences in preferences for alternative allocation principles, including equity, equality, need, and seniority. Students from more individualistic contexts, particularly North America, generally showed stronger support for equity-based allocations that link outcomes to contribution and performance. In contrast, students from collectivistic contexts more frequently endorsed equality-, need-, or relationship-oriented allocation principles. However, preferences were not uniform across collectivistic cultures, suggesting that cultural influences operate through multiple values rather than through a simple individualism–collectivism distinction.

Theoretical findings

The organizational justice literature demonstrates an important theoretical evolution. Early distributive justice theories emphasized equity as the primary basis of fairness (Adams, 1965). Subsequent scholarship expanded this perspective by incorporating alternative distributive principles, including equality, need, and seniority (Deutsch, 1975; Leventhal, 1976; Hundley & Kim, 1997). Together, these studies challenged the assumption that equity represents a universally preferred fairness norm and instead showed that fairness judgments are culturally contingent.

A second theme concerns the role of contextual influences. Research consistently suggests that distributive fairness preferences are shaped not only by culture but also by individual characteristics, group relationships, and situational conditions (Fişek & Hysom, 2008). Factors such as social relationships, contribution differences, gender composition, status expectations, and anticipated social consequences can shift preferences between equity-, equality-, and need-based allocations.

Overall, the organizational justice literature provides strong evidence that fairness judgments are culturally situated and informed by broader social values. Nevertheless, these findings originate primarily from hypothetical resource-allocation tasks rather than educational assessment contexts. Consequently, they should be viewed as conceptual guidance rather than direct evidence regarding classroom assessment fairness.

Table 3: *Cross-cultural perceptions of distributive justice/fairness among students in organizational contexts*

Author	Culture	Evaluation Task or Domain	Research Question	Cultural Values	Result
An et al. (2001)*	China and Canada	Scenario-based questionnaire-based behaviors	Do complaint-handling strategies vary across cultures?	IC	S
Berman & Murphy-Berman (1996)	The US and Germany	Scenario-based resource allocation	Do distributive principles guide reward allocation differently across cultures?	IC	S
Berman et al. (1985)	The US and India	Scenario-based awards allocation	Do perceptions of fairness vary across cultures?	IC	S
Bond et al. (1992)*	Israel and Hong Kong	Scenario-based resource allocation	Do valence-expectancy justice models vary across cultures?	IC	S
Bond et al. (1982)*	The US and Hong Kong	Scenario-based award allocation	How does collectivism manifest fair distribution across cultural contexts?	IC	S
Chen et al. (1998)*	The US and Hong Kong	Allocation decisions assessed through a case vignette-based design	Do individuals with varying degrees of collectivism respond similarly to situational demands?	IC	S
Finkelstein et al. (2009)*	French and Turkish	Questionnaire-based assessment of organizational justice perceptions	Do perceptions of organizational justice vary across cultures?	IC	S
Fischer (2004)*	UK and Germany	Questionnaire-based assessment of reward allocation across situations	What principles guide resource allocation decisions?	IC	S
Frey & Powell (2005)*	Jamaica and New Zealand	Internal and external attributional bias in distributive justice judgments	To what extent are these conceptions applicable across political and cultural contexts?	IC	S

Author	Culture	Evaluation Task or Domain	Research Question	Cultural Values	Result
Giacobbe-Miller et al. (1998)*	The US and Russia	Scenario-based pay allocation decisions	Do Russian and U.S. students differ in their preference for equity-based versus equality-based pay allocation?	IC	NS
Hui & Au (2001)*	China and Canada	Scenario-based analysis of customer questionnaire-based behaviors	Do questionnaire-based strategies vary across cultures?	IC	S
Hui et al. (1991)*	The US and China	Monetary reward allocation between self and partner	Do reward allocation decisions between self and partner vary across cultures?	IC	S
Hundley & Kim (1997)	The US and Korea	Scenario-based pay fairness study	What cultural factors affect perceptions of pay fairness?	IC	S
Hysom & Fişek (2011)*	Turkey and the US	Scenario-based reward allocation	How does reward allocation differ across cultural groups?	IC	S
Kashima et al. (1988)*	Japan and Australia	Scenario-based reward allocation using equality, equity, and need principles	Does the interpretation of distributive justice vary across cultures?	IC	S
Kim et al. (1990)*	Japan, the US, and Korea	Scenario-based reward allocation	Do reward allocation patterns differ across cultures?	IC, MF	NS
Leung & Bond (1982)*	The US and China	Scenario-based in-group and out-group reward allocation	Do in-group and out-group reward allocations differ across cultures?	IC	S
Leung & Iwawaki (1988)	The US, Japan, and Korea	Scenario-based in-group and out-group reward allocation	Do reward allocations to in-group and out-group members differ across cultures?	IC	S
Leung & Park (1986)	The US and Korea	Scenario-based assessment of the fairness of allocation rules	Do allocation rules for achieving interactional goals differ across cultures?	IC	S
Lilly et al. (2022)*	The US and China	Questionnaire-based study of cross-cultural differences in perceptions of organizational justice	Do perceptions of organizational justice vary across cultures?	IC	S
Lin et al. (1991)*	The US and Taiwan	Scenario-based salary allocation	What explains cross-cultural differences in salary allocation?	IC	S
Lucas et al. (2016)*	The US, Canada, India, and China	Analysis of the structure, endorsement, and well-being functions of distributive and procedural justice	Do the structure and functions of justice beliefs vary across cultures?	IC	S

Author	Culture	Evaluation Task or Domain	Research Question	Cultural Values	Result
Marin (1985)	The US and Indonesia	Scenario-based assessments of fairness judgments in reward allocation	How do preferences for distributive justice principles vary across cultures?	IC	NS
Murphy-Berman & Berman (2002)	Indonesia and Hong Kong	Scenario-based examination of merit and need-based distribution	Are perceptions of distributive justice similar across non-Western collectivist cultures?	Both IC	S
Murphy-Berman et al. (1984)*	The US and India	Scenario-based reward allocations	How are resources allocated according to need versus merit?	IC	S
Murphy-Berman et al. (2012)	Turkey and the US	Scenario-based examination of need and merit-based distribution	How does resource distribution vary across cultures?	IC	S
Otto et al. (2011)*	German and Canadian	Material vs. symbolic benefit allocation	Do cultures differ in how material and symbolic benefits are allocated?	UA	S
Rusbult et al. (1995)	The US and Taiwan	Scenario-based seniority-based reward allocation	To what extent is seniority-based reward allocation a culture-specific value?	IC	NS
Steiner et al. (2006)*	France and the US	Experimental budget allocation	Does distributive justice vary across cultures?	IC	S
Törnblom et al. (1985)*	The US and Sweden	Questionnaire describing various resource-allocation scenarios and preferences	What principles guide individuals' resource-allocation decisions?	IC	S
Weng (2009)	Taiwan and the US	Service recovery reactions assessed using the Critical Incident Technique	How do responses to service recovery vary across cultural values?	IC, UA, CD	S
White et al. (1995)	The US and Korea	Scenario-based reward allocation	To what extent are rules of justice culturally specific versus universal?	IC, PD, UA, MF, Paternalism	S

Note. 1. The asterisk identifies references not cited in the manuscript; 2. S = significant; NS = nonsignificant, 3. IC: Individualism-Collectivism, PD: Power Distance, UA: Uncertainty Avoidance, MF: Masculinity/Femininity, and CD: Confucian Dynamism

Taken together, the findings reveal a significant imbalance in the literature. Direct evidence regarding cross-cultural perceptions of CA fairness is extremely limited, theoretically fragmented, and insufficient to support strong conclusions. In contrast, organizational justice research provides substantial and consistent evidence that distributive fairness judgments vary according to cultural values and contextual conditions. The central contribution of this review, therefore, is the identification of a major research gap: while cultural influences on distributive fairness are well established in organizational contexts, they remain largely unexplored within educational contexts. This gap highlights the need for culturally responsive and education-specific frameworks that explicitly incorporate distributive fairness into CA theory and practice.

DISCUSSION

This review examined cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of distributive classroom assessment (CA) fairness in higher education. The most striking finding was not the discovery of consistent cross-cultural patterns, but rather the limited amount of research available to examine this question.

The limited evidence available suggests that students' fairness judgments may vary across cultural contexts and that cultural values likely influence how assessment outcomes are evaluated. However, the small number of studies, differences in research designs, and variation in cultural contexts make it difficult to draw strong conclusions regarding the nature or magnitude of these differences. Consequently, the current CA literature provides only preliminary evidence that culture matters in shaping perceptions of distributive fairness.

However, substantial questions remain unanswered. A central contribution of this review is the identification of a substantial gap in the CA literature. Although assessment fairness has received increasing attention in educational research, cross-cultural perspectives remain largely absent. As a result, many important questions remain unanswered. For example, little is known about how students from different cultural backgrounds prioritize distributive principles such as equity, equality, need, or seniority when evaluating assessment outcomes. Similarly, there is limited evidence regarding the extent to which cultural dimensions, such as individualism–collectivism or power distance, influence students' perceptions of grading fairness in real educational settings.

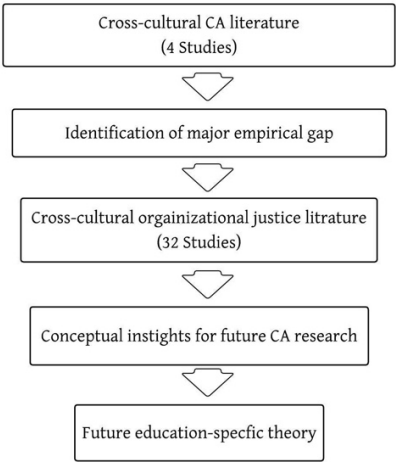
The scarcity of empirical studies also limits opportunities to examine how contextual factors—including institutional practices, disciplinary differences, assessment formats, and teacher–student relationships—interact with culture to shape perceptions of fairness. Thus, the review highlights not only a gap in the literature but also a broader need for theory-driven research that explicitly positions culture as a relevant factor in CA.

To better conceptualize this gap, the review examined cross-cultural organizational justice studies involving student samples as a secondary source of conceptual insight.

Importantly, these studies were not treated as direct evidence regarding CA fairness. Rather, they provide a broader scholarly context for understanding how cultural values may shape fairness judgments.

Across the organizational justice literature, substantial evidence suggests that distributive fairness perceptions are influenced by cultural values, particularly individualism–collectivism and power distance. These studies consistently demonstrate that preferences for distributive principles vary across cultural contexts and that assumptions regarding universal standards of fairness may be overly simplistic. Although these findings cannot be directly generalized to classrooms, they offer useful theoretical propositions that can be explored within assessment research.

Figure 2: *Research synthesis process informing future theory development in cross-cultural CA contexts*



In this respect, organizational justice serves as a conceptual resource rather than an explanatory framework for CA fairness. It offers language, constructs, and theoretical perspectives that may inform future educational research while highlighting the importance of considering cultural variation in fairness judgments. However, it is important to note that educational contexts require their own framework. While organizational justice provides useful conceptual insights, the findings of this review also underscore the need for frameworks that are specifically designed for educational contexts. CA differs from workplace environments in several important ways. Assessment serves pedagogical purposes, supports learning and development, and occurs within ongoing relationships between students and instructors. Grading decisions are therefore embedded within educational processes that extend beyond the allocation of outcomes.

Consequently, CA fairness cannot be fully understood through theories developed primarily to explain workplace relationships. Educational contexts introduce unique considerations, including learning goals, feedback processes, student development, and instructional responsibilities. Future theoretical work should therefore seek to integrate insights from organizational justice with educational theories of assessment, learning, and student engagement to develop a more contextually appropriate understanding of fairness in higher education.

Future Research

The findings of this review point to several priorities for future research. First, there is a clear need for additional empirical studies directly examining cross-cultural differences in CA fairness. Researchers should move beyond single-country investigations and include culturally diverse samples across a range of educational systems.

Second, future studies should examine cultural values at the individual level rather than relying solely on national or regional classifications. Such an approach would provide a more nuanced understanding of how culture shapes fairness perceptions and avoid treating countries as homogeneous cultural entities.

Third, research should investigate how students evaluate different distributive principles within authentic assessment contexts. Most existing evidence from organizational justice relies heavily on hypothetical scenarios, making it difficult to determine how students respond when assessment decisions have real academic consequences.

Finally, future scholarship should focus on developing and testing educationally grounded theories of assessment fairness that account for both cultural diversity and the distinctive characteristics of teaching and learning environments.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this review. First, many of the studies incorporated in the review relied on Hofstede's cultural dimensions or related cultural frameworks. Although these models have contributed substantially to cross-cultural research, they may oversimplify complex cultural realities and risk obscuring within-culture variation (Murphy-Berman & Berman, 2002). Accordingly, the findings should not be interpreted as suggesting that any particular cultural orientation is superior to another.

Second, several studies examined differences at the national level and used nationality as a proxy for culture. While such studies often drew upon Hofstede's framework, culture and nationality are not equivalent constructs (Leung et al., 2005). Future research should place greater emphasis on directly measuring cultural values to better understand how culture influences fairness perceptions.

Third, most studies included in the review drew samples from a single institution within each country and relied primarily on self-report measures, questionnaires, or scenario-based methodologies. These methodological characteristics limit the generalizability of findings and may not adequately capture the complexity of fairness judgments in authentic educational settings.

Finally, although the organizational justice studies included student participants, they were originally designed to investigate fairness in organizational contexts. Therefore, their findings cannot be assumed to apply directly to CA. This limitation reinforces one of the central conclusions of the review: the need for a stronger empirical foundation and more context-specific theoretical frameworks for understanding cross-cultural fairness in higher education assessment.

Implications

The findings of this review have important implications for theory, research, and practice. Most notably, the review reveals a substantial gap in the literature on cross-cultural CA fairness. Despite the central role of assessment in higher education, only four empirical studies were identified that directly examined cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of distributive fairness. This finding suggests that researchers have paid relatively limited attention to how cultural values may influence students' evaluations of assessment outcomes.

From a theoretical perspective, the review highlights the need for educationally grounded frameworks of assessment fairness. Although organizational justice research offers valuable concepts for understanding distributive fairness, CA involves pedagogical goals, developmental processes, and ongoing instructor–student relationships that distinguish it from workplace contexts. Consequently, existing organizational justice theories should be viewed as providing conceptual resources rather than comprehensive explanations of fairness in educational settings. Future theoretical work should seek to integrate insights from organizational justice with theories of assessment, learning, motivation, and student engagement to develop more contextually appropriate models of CA fairness.

The findings also identify several priorities for future research. First, there is a clear need for more empirical studies directly examining cross-cultural differences in CA fairness across diverse higher education contexts. Researchers should investigate how students from different cultural backgrounds interpret and evaluate assessment outcomes in authentic educational settings rather than relying primarily on hypothetical scenarios (Falavarjani, 2025).

Second, future studies should examine whether distributive principles commonly discussed in organizational justice research—such as equity, equality, need, and seniority—are relevant to CA and, if so, how students prioritize these principles across cultural contexts. While seniority is often a meaningful basis for allocation decisions in organizational settings, its relevance to educational assessment remains unclear. More generally, little is known about the distributive principles students consider when judging the fairness of grades and other assessment outcomes.

Third, future research should explore how cultural values interact with educational and interpersonal factors, including student motivation, prior achievement, socioeconomic background, classroom climate, assessment practices, and instructor–student relationships. Findings from organizational justice research suggest that fairness judgments may be shaped by anticipated future interactions and relational considerations (e.g., Cropanzano et al., 2001). Whether similar dynamics operate in CA contexts remains largely unexplored.

The review also identifies several theoretical perspectives from organizational justice that may provide useful directions for future research. For example, Törnblom's (1992) conflict model of social justice suggests that individuals may evaluate fairness differently depending on the distributive principles applied in particular contexts. Similarly, Fişek and Hysom's (2008) equity–equality equilibrium model proposes that preferences for equity or equality vary according to situational goals and relational priorities. Although these frameworks were developed outside educational settings, they may offer useful starting points for examining how students interpret assessment practices across cultures.

Finally, the distinction between perceptions of fairness and perceptions of goodness identified in organizational justice research (Murphy-Berman et al., 2012) may be particularly relevant for CA. Students may perceive an outcome as beneficial or supportive without necessarily viewing it as fair according to their preferred distributive principles. Future research should explore this distinction within educational settings and examine how different cultural contexts shape expectations regarding both fair and supportive assessment practices.

Implications for Practice in Higher Education

Although direct empirical evidence remains limited, the findings suggest several considerations for higher education practice. First, instructors should avoid assuming that all students interpret assessment outcomes according to the same fairness principles. Students from different cultural backgrounds may bring different expectations regarding what constitutes a fair distribution of grades and academic rewards.

Second, transparency in assessment design and grading practices is particularly important in culturally diverse classrooms (Caingcoy, 2026). Clearly communicating assessment criteria, grading policies, and rationales for evaluation decisions may help reduce misunderstandings and support students' perceptions of fairness (Falavarjani, 2025).

Third, institutions should recognize that assessment fairness may have cultural dimensions that are often overlooked in discussions of equity and inclusion. Faculty development initiatives may benefit from encouraging reflection on how assessment practices are experienced by increasingly diverse student populations.

At the same time, these implications should be interpreted cautiously. Given the limited amount of direct research on cross-cultural CA fairness, more empirical evidence is needed before specific assessment practices can be recommended with confidence (Falavarjani, 2026).

Conclusion

This review examined the literature on cross-cultural differences in students' perceptions of distributive fairness in higher education CA. The most significant finding was the remarkable scarcity of research directly addressing this topic. Despite the growing internationalization of higher education and the central role of assessment in students' academic experiences, only four empirical studies were identified that explicitly investigated cross-cultural differences in CA fairness.

As a result, current knowledge regarding how culture influences students' perceptions of assessment fairness remains limited. While the available CA studies suggest that cultural factors may shape fairness judgments, the existing evidence base is too small to support strong conclusions. This review therefore identifies a major gap in the assessment literature and highlights the need for further empirical investigation.

To provide conceptual context for this gap, the review examined cross-cultural organizational justice research involving student samples. Although findings from organizational justice cannot be directly generalized to educational settings, they suggest that cultural values such as individualism–collectivism and power distance may influence fairness judgments and provide promising directions for future research. At the same time, the review emphasizes that CA differs in important ways from workplace settings and requires theoretical frameworks that reflect the distinctive goals and relationships of education.

Ultimately, the primary contribution of this review is not the identification of definitive cross-cultural patterns in CA fairness, but the recognition that such patterns remain largely unexplored. As higher education becomes increasingly diverse and globally interconnected, developing a stronger empirical and theoretical understanding of culturally informed assessment fairness represents an important priority for future scholarship, policy, and practice.

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