

# A Theoretical Exploration of Teacher Credibility and Immediacy as Influential Factors in Learning and Teaching

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Received: 10.08.2023 • Accepted: 25.09.2023 • Published: 17.10.2023 • Final Version: 18.10.2023

**Abstract:** This review study aims to fill a research gap by examining the role of two critical teacher interpersonal behaviours, immediacy and credibility, based on existing evidence. By analyzing the available literature, this study will offer valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers in the field of language education. The empirical and theoretical evidence presented in this review study unequivocally demonstrates the importance of teacher credibility and immediacy in shaping EFL learners' perceptions of classroom justice. These factors significantly impact learners' understanding and evaluation of distributive, interactional, and procedural justice, profoundly influencing their overall satisfaction and engagement in the educational process. Furthermore, the study highlights that teacher credibility is a strong predictor of learners' perceived cognitive, affective, and behavioural learning in the classroom, while teacher immediacy predicts students' perception of interactional justice. Lastly, the review examines the impact of both nonverbal and verbal teacher credibility on learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Theoretical Exploration, Teacher Credibility, Teacher Immediacy, Influential Factors, Learning and Teaching.

## 1. Introduction

Teachers play a central and influential role in shaping the dynamics of the classroom, making them key players in establishing and upholding classroom justice. The way they communicate, behave, and approach instruction significantly impacts students' perceptions of fairness and their overall engagement with the subject matter. Creating an inclusive and respectful learning environment nurtures a sense of trust and belonging among EFL learners, which, in turn, leads to enhanced perceptions of classroom justice and optimizes learning outcomes. The teacher's role in cultivating a just and supportive learning atmosphere is paramount in fostering a successful and fulfilling educational journey (Alexander et al., 2021).

Classroom justice has long been acknowledged as a fundamental principle in educational systems, given its significant impact on learners' perceptions and overall learning outcomes (Burns & DiPaola, 2013; Molinari et al., 2013; Vallade et al., 2014). It encompasses the evaluation of equity in outcomes and processes within the instructional-learning environment, as perceived by learners

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(Paulsel & Chory, 2005). Furthermore, it examines students' perceptions of fairness in classroom interactions, processes, and outcomes (Chory et al., 2017).

Estaji and Zhaleh (2021a) assert that teachers play a crucial role in upholding justice in the classroom as the primary authority figures. They must ensure classroom justice (Sabbagh & Resh, 2014) and exemplify principles of justice and fairness within the learning environment (Mameli et al., 2018). Identifying teacher behaviours that learners perceive as fair is a crucial inquiry in the field of language education. However, despite some research efforts (Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2012; Argon & Kepekcioglu, 2016; Yan, 2021; Yang, 2021), there remains a significant gap in empirical and review research in this area. Therefore, this field of study is ongoing and of utmost importance.

This review study aims to bridge the research gap by shedding light on two key teacher interpersonal behaviors: immediacy and credibility, drawing upon existing evidence. Teacher immediacy involves using both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to foster closeness and belonging among students (King & Witt, 2009; Velez & Cano, 2012). Verbal immediacy includes actions like using students' names, seeking their feedback, and using inclusive language during class (Liu, 2021). Non-verbal immediacy entails gestures such as smiling, eye contact, and a direct body orientation (Nayernia et al., 2020). Combining these actions can enhance student motivation and engagement in the learning process (Zheng, 2021), reducing burnout and disengagement (Derakhshan et al., 2022). Consequently, exploring the impact of teacher immediacy on learners' perceptions of classroom justice and overall learning outcomes becomes crucial.

Furthermore, this review study will contribute to the existing literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the empirical evidence concerning teacher immediacy in language education. Additionally, it will underscore the significance of teacher credibility, another crucial interpersonal behaviour influencing learners' perceptions of classroom justice and engagement in the learning process. Teacher credibility relates to how students perceive their teachers' knowledge, responsiveness, and trustworthiness (Myers & Martin, 2018). Being seen as credible enables teachers to effectively engage learners in learning activities (Derakhshan, 2021) and significantly influences their learning outcomes (Pishghadam et al., 2017). Moreover, a positive impression of the instructor's character fosters a willingness to communicate in the classroom (Pishghadam et al., 2023).

Despite the importance of teacher immediacy and credibility (Pishghadam et al., 2017; Derakhshan et al., 2022), research exploring their potential effects on learners' perceptions of classroom justice remains scarce. Only a few empirical studies have delved into this area (e.g., Kerssen-Griep & Witt, 2012; Argon & Kepekcioglu, 2016; Yan, 2021; Yang, 2021). Additionally, to the best of our knowledge, no review study has thoroughly examined the consequences. Therefore, further research in this domain becomes crucial to better understand how these teacher behaviours positively impact language learners' perceptions of classroom justice and contribute to a more enriching educational experience.

In summary, teacher credibility is a pivotal component of learners' perceptions of classroom justice, warranting further exploration of its impact on language learners' educational experiences. By examining the potential effects of teacher immediacy and credibility, educators and policymakers can develop effective strategies to promote a just and supportive learning environment.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Teacher Credibility**

Teacher credibility plays a vital role in student motivation and learning outcomes. According to Hattie's (2012) meta-analysis, teacher credibility has an effect size of more than twice that of a standard classroom influence, highlighting its significant impact. Students' perception of their teachers as credible is essential for enhancing their overall learning experience (Fisher & Frey, 2013). Trust, competence, dynamism, and immediacy are the four key components that contribute to teacher credibility (ASCD, 2018). Teachers can establish credibility by adopting transparent communication, setting clear learning goals and strategies, and actively seeking feedback from students (ASCD, 2018).

In a broad sense, credibility refers to how the audience perceives the speaker's believability. This concept has been extensively researched by scholars such as McCroskey et al. (2006) and Bolkan and Goodboy (2009). In the context of education, teacher credibility specifically pertains to the level of trust students place in their teachers, as pointed out by Zhang (2009). This concept finds its theoretical roots in Aristotle's theory of rhetoric, where credibility is regarded as a potent persuasive tool comprising three primary dimensions: "intelligence," "character," and "goodwill" (Santilli et al., 2011).

To put it simply, credibility involves the audience's perception of the speaker's trustworthiness and expertise. In academic settings, it is closely linked to the confidence students have in their teachers, and it significantly influences the learning process. Aristotle's influential theory highlights three essential aspects of credibility that contribute to effective persuasion: the speaker's intelligence, their ethical character, and their goodwill or benevolence towards the audience. The first dimension, intelligence, is closely associated with how teachers are perceived in terms of their knowledge and expertise in the subject they teach (Derakhshan, 2021). The second aspect, character, revolves around the level of trustworthiness exhibited by teachers during their interactions with students (Ledbetter & Finn, 2018). Lastly, the dimension of goodwill, or caring, pertains to the extent to which teachers demonstrate genuine concern for students' emotions, interests, and well-being (Won et al., 2017).

Teacher credibility, in its entirety, hinges on students' unwavering faith in their teachers' character, intelligence, and goodwill. As emphasized by Xie and Derakhshan (2021), a teacher perceived as knowledgeable, caring, and trustworthy can effectively motivate students to attend classes diligently and actively participate in the learning process. By acknowledging the multifaceted aspects of credibility, educators can endeavour to strengthen these dimensions and foster a positive and influential learning experience for their students.

In summary, teacher credibility holds a vital significance in education, as it significantly impacts students' perceptions and engagement. The dimensions of intelligence, character, and goodwill together form the foundation of a teacher's credibility, emphasizing the importance for educators to nurture these qualities in order to cultivate effective learning environments. By doing so, teachers can inspire trust, enhance student motivation, and ultimately contribute to positive learning outcomes.

### **2.2. Classroom Justice**

In the realm of education, the concept of "Classroom Justice" emerges as a captivating and innovative approach to enhancing student engagement and fostering a positive learning environment. Drawing

inspiration from the principles of social justice, Classroom Justice advocates for fairness, equity, and inclusivity within the educational setting. Similar to how societal justice seeks to address disparities and promote equal opportunities, Classroom Justice aims to eliminate discrimination, bias, and favouritism that may hinder students' academic progress.

Distributive justice, the first facet, focuses on learners' perception of fairness in the distribution of grades or rewards (Horan et al., 2010). This aspect is driven by the principles of equity, need, and equality, instilling in learners the belief that their academic achievements, contributions, and performance determine the outcomes (Cropanzano et al., 2015; Ehrhardt et al., 2016; Estaji & Zhaleh, 2022).

The second facet, interactional justice, centres on learners' perceptions of fairness in their interpersonal treatment, particularly in terms of communication and relational aspects with their teachers (Berti et al., 2010). Learners feel this facet is preserved when they experience a respectful atmosphere, where they are treated with politeness, and information is conveyed in a consistent, honest, and rational manner (Kazemi et al., 2015; Estaji & Zhaleh, 2021b).

Lastly, procedural justice, the third facet, pertains to learners' impressions of the mechanisms employed to allocate outcomes (Claus et al., 2012). Learners consider this facet to be maintained when the methods used are unbiased, based on accurate and sufficient information, consistently applied to all individuals over time, adjustable, and implemented truthfully (Kazemi, 2016; Rasooli et al., 2019).

In essence, classroom justice holds immense significance within the learning environment, exerting a profound impact on learners' satisfaction and engagement. This influence stems from their perceptions of fairness regarding reward distribution, interpersonal treatment, and procedural methods. As educators and institutions grasp the importance of this aspect, they can take proactive measures to address its dimensions and foster a supportive and conducive learning atmosphere. Additionally, acknowledging and addressing classroom justice can lead to a more enriching educational experience for all involved.

### **3. Empirical Related Studies**

#### **3.1. 3.1 The Influence of Teacher Credibility and Immediacy on EFL Learners' Perceptions of Classroom Justice**

According to Paulsel et al. (2005), teacher credibility significantly impacts EFL learners' perceptions of classroom justice, particularly concerning distributive justice. A credible instructor can effectively uphold fairness in instructional-learning contexts by instilling confidence in learners regarding their assessment of academic performance. When students have trust in their teacher's competence, they are more likely to perceive the assigned scores as fair. Therefore, positive impressions of teachers' knowledge positively influence EFL learners' perceptions of distributive justice.

Furthermore, Chory (2007) emphasized that reliable instructors can proficiently implement the principles of procedural justice. Learners may extend their perceptions of the instructor's expertise in the subject matter to their understanding of the best teaching procedures for that subject. Consequently, positive perceptions of teacher competence by EFL learners seem to have a beneficial impact on their views of procedural justice.

Similarly, Lankiewicz (2014) suggested that credible teachers excel in maintaining interactional justice in the classroom. This is because credible teachers possess not only subject matter expertise but also skills in interacting with learners (Schrodt & Finn, 2011; Witt et al., 2014). Consequently,

competent and knowledgeable teachers significantly enhance EFL learners' perceptions of interactional justice.

Regarding the impact of teacher immediacy on EFL learners' perceptions of classroom justice, Kerksen-Griep and Witt (2012) asserted that both verbal and non-verbal cues from teachers play a crucial role in predicting learners' perceptions of fairness. Immediate teachers foster an intimate and respectful instructional-learning atmosphere, which aligns with the core principles of interactional justice.

To conclude, teacher credibility strongly influences how EFL learners perceive distributive and procedural justice, whereas teacher immediacy significantly predicts learners' perceptions of interactional justice in the classroom setting. Recognizing the impact of these teacher behaviours on classroom justice is crucial for establishing a conducive and equitable learning environment for language learners.

#### **4. Pedagogical Implications**

As educators in various instructional-learning settings, especially in English language classes, become familiar with the implications of these research findings, they must pay close attention to the pedagogical consequences. Teachers are advised to utilize effective verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to create an environment that promotes interactional justice, thereby fostering a respectful and supportive learning atmosphere where students feel valued and engaged.

Moreover, teachers' continuous efforts to improve their instructional skills and subject knowledge will enhance their credibility, resulting in a greater impact on students' perceptions of procedural and distributive justice. Demonstrating expertise and trustworthiness lays the foundation for fairness and equality in the distribution of rewards and implementation of procedures. These implications not only apply within the classroom but also extend to teacher educators. Since learners' perceptions of fairness are significantly influenced by verbal and non-verbal behaviours, teacher educators need to prioritize training and development in these crucial areas. Equipping teachers with effective communication strategies and cultivating their credibility can contribute to creating just and equitable learning environments for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

To conclude, this theoretical review establishes the crucial role of teacher credibility and immediacy in shaping EFL learners' perceptions of classroom justice. By conscientiously acknowledging and implementing these insights, educators have the potential to create environments where students' perceptions of fairness are positively influenced, leading to increased satisfaction and engagement in the educational process. Consequently, students are more likely to be motivated and actively participate in their studies.

#### **5. Concluding Remarks**

This theoretical review thoroughly examines the concepts of teacher credibility, teacher immediacy, and classroom justice, elucidating their critical roles in educational settings. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing research and their interrelations, the review provides a profound understanding of how these factors influence learners' perceptions. Furthermore, it concisely outlines the established premises regarding the impact of teacher credibility and immediacy on learners' perceptions of justice, serving as a solid basis for further exploration.

The empirical and theoretical evidence presented unequivocally demonstrates the significance of teacher credibility and immediacy in shaping the perceptions of EFL learners concerning classroom

justice. These factors have the potential to significantly enhance EFL learners' comprehension and evaluation of distributive, interactional, and procedural justice, profoundly affecting their overall satisfaction and engagement in the educational process. Hence, recognizing and actively fostering these elements can lead to a more fulfilling and rewarding learning journey for EFL learners.

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