

## Introduction

The statement “It is unfair” appears frequently in dialogue among pupils. Pupils often use the word unfair to express their judgments on situations (Hill, 2006), such as learning (Gorard, 2011; Harden & Laidlaw, 2013; Kozol, 1992), disciplinary practices (Evans, Galyer, & Smith, 2001; Konstantareas & Desbois, 2001), taking turns (Damon, 1977), academic requirements (Hishinuma & Fremstad, 1997; Richardson, 2012), educational experiences (Dovemark, 2013), tests and assessments (Ford & Helms, 2012), social structure (Hancock, Waites, & Kledaras, 2012), and college admissions exams (Walpole, McDonough, Bauer, Gibson, Kanyi, & Toliver, 2005). In classroom practices, the contradiction of unfairness perceptions may occur between teachers and students. Students may argue that teacher decisions, made under teacher perceptions of fairness, are unfair. For instance, under teacher perceptions of fairness, teachers considered it fair to distribute different homework to students with different abilities. However, students typically think such a distribution of homework to be unfair under student perceptions of unfairness, in which they do not welcome the differentiation (Hill, 2006; Morgan & Morris, 1999). Thus, it is important for teachers and educators to understand student perceptions of unfairness to achieve better classroom management or teaching that is more effective.

### Integrated Framework of Student Conceptions of Unfair Reported in Empirical Literature

Unfair, similar to fair, is a short word with a long meaning. Unfair in its broadest sense encompasses injustice, inequity, inequality, favoritism or bias, inconformity, asymmetry, irrationality, impropriety, inhumanity, and immorality (Dictionary.com, 2012; Merriam, 1981; Online Etymology Dictionary, 2001). Although the conceptions of fairness have been intensively studied (Smith & Gorard, 2006; Thomson, 2007; Thorkildsen, 1989, 1993, 1994, 1997; Thorkildsen, Sodonis, & White-McNulty, 2004; Thorkildsen & White-McNulty, 2002), the literature seldom reports the unfairness conceptions of students.

Evans et al. (2001) reported that unequal and unreasonable are the two explanations of pupils in response to the reasons why a given treatment for a given student is unfair. In the study, four stories were read to 110 pupils aged 9 to 11 years who made judgments regarding the degree of unfairness. Unequal means that the treatment of a particular student is distinct from that of other students. For example, a pupil interviewed by Evans et al. indicated that it is unfair for all students to get their turn to play, but a given student lost her/his opportunity simply because the time to play ran out. In addition to the unequal conception, pupils also perceive unreasonable, which refers to treatment of something that does not obey the general rules. For example, it was believed to be an unreasonable event when a person doing the rewarding or punishing did not take greater care to understand the situation (Evans et al., 2001).

Injustice, which means the treatment of something does not benefit social and economic inequalities, is another unfair perception besides unequal and unreasonable perceptions. According to the theory of justice (Rawls, 2003), social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all. This indicates that unequal distribution is advantageous for everyone. Injustice, then, is simply inequalities that are not beneficial to all (Rawls, 2003).

Empirical research has indicated that some students emphasize the justice perception when they judge the fairness of classroom practices. In the study of the views of students on justice in the classroom, Thorkildsen (1989) interviewed students (ages 6-29) to determine their perceptions of fairness. The judgments and justifications students proposed were analyzed and identified according to five levels involving progressive perceptions of fairness. The conception of level five, wherein those capable of doing so learn more than the others, is equity of learning. Such a conception is a typical example of justice based on difference in learning capability. By a survey of 5,432 students in five countries, Smith and Gorard (2006) found that most students, particularly in the England, reported favoring an egalitarian system where all students were treated the same. However, teachers did not always treat students fairly and consistently, rewards and punishments were not always applied fairly, and certain groups of students were treated less fairly than others were. This is a clear and strict application of the principle