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The Relationship Between Perceived Organizational Injustice and Organizational Silence: The Mediating Role of Psychological Contract Breach Among Employees of Education Departments

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ABSTRACT

Organizational silence can restrict the flow of information needed for sound decision-making and organizational improvement. This study examined the relationship between perceived organizational injustice and organizational silence and tested psychological contract breach as a mediating mechanism among employees of education departments in Isfahan, Iran. A correlational structural equation modeling design was used. The statistical population comprised approximately 3,000 employees, from whom 360 were approached through convenience sampling; after excluding five unusable questionnaires, data from 355 employees were analyzed. Participants completed measures of perceived organizational injustice (distributive, procedural, and interactional), organizational silence, and psychological contract breach. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlations in SPSS 26 and structural equation modeling in AMOS 25. Distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice were positively associated with organizational silence ($r = .33, .47$, and $.29$, respectively; all $p < .001$) and with psychological contract breach ($r = .31, .48$, and $.34$; all $p < .001$). Psychological contract breach was also positively associated with organizational silence ($r = .29$, $p < .001$). In the structural model, distributive (beta = .37), procedural (beta = .64), and interactional injustice (beta = .31) significantly predicted psychological contract breach, which in turn predicted organizational silence (beta = .69). The model explained 24.6% of the variance in psychological contract breach and 27.8% of the variance in organizational silence. Bootstrap results supported full mediation, with standardized indirect effects of .25, .44, and .21 for distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice, respectively. Model fit indices were satisfactory (chi-square/df = 1.54, GFI = .98, CFI = .98, IFI = .98, RMR = .022, RMSEA = .039). The findings indicate that perceived unfairness may foster employee silence primarily by undermining employees' beliefs that the organization fulfills its implicit obligations.

Keywords: organizational injustice; organizational silence; psychological contract breach; organizational justice; employees; structural equation modeling

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Introduction

Organizations depend on employees not only for the execution of formally prescribed duties but also for the communication of observations, concerns, suggestions, and knowledge that may contribute to organizational learning and improvement. Employees frequently possess information about operational inefficiencies, managerial shortcomings, emerging problems, inappropriate practices, and opportunities for

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innovation before these issues become visible to senior decision makers. Nevertheless, possessing relevant information does not necessarily mean that employees will communicate it. In many organizational settings, individuals deliberately refrain from expressing concerns, ideas, or opinions despite believing that such information could be useful to their organization. This phenomenon, commonly conceptualized as organizational or employee silence, has become an important concern in organizational behavior because it restricts upward information flows and may prevent organizations from identifying problems and adapting to changing circumstances. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that silence is not simply the absence of speech; rather, it represents a meaningful behavioral choice shaped by employees' assessment of interpersonal, managerial, and organizational conditions (1, 2). Systematic examinations of silence and voice further demonstrate that decisions to withhold information can emerge from defensive motives, resignation, perceived futility, relational concerns, and assessments of the likely consequences of speaking up (3, 4).

The consequences of organizational silence can extend beyond communication failure. When employees repeatedly suppress information, organizations may lose opportunities for correcting mistakes, improving procedures, challenging ineffective routines, and identifying emerging threats. Silence can also weaken employees' psychological attachment to the organization because continued withholding may gradually normalize disengagement from organizational affairs. Research in different occupational settings has accordingly connected organizational silence with diminished commitment and other unfavorable work-related attitudes (5). More recent research suggests that silence may contribute to broader patterns of alienation and knowledge-related withdrawal. For example, organizational silence has been identified among conditions associated with knowledge hiding and workplace alienation, indicating that withholding voice may coexist with a wider deterioration in constructive organizational participation (6). In educational environments, emerging evidence similarly suggests that silence may have important downstream consequences. Research among teachers has shown that organizational silence can be linked to turnover intentions through employees' experiences of work alienation, emphasizing that silence may constitute part of a process through which individuals progressively distance themselves from their organizations (7). Thus, explaining why employees remain silent requires attention to the organizational experiences that shape whether participation is perceived as worthwhile, legitimate, and psychologically safe.

One particularly important category of organizational experience concerns perceived fairness. Organizational justice reflects employees' judgments concerning whether organizational outcomes, decision-making procedures, and interpersonal treatment conform to appropriate standards of fairness. Justice perceptions are consequential because employees interpret organizational events not only in terms of their immediate material effects but also as indicators of their status, value, and relationship with organizational authorities. Organizational justice research has therefore developed into a major field concerned with how fairness perceptions influence employee attitudes and behaviors (8). Although justice may be conceptualized in several ways, three dimensions remain particularly central: distributive justice, referring to fairness in the allocation of rewards, resources, workloads, and other outcomes; procedural justice, referring to fairness and consistency in the processes through which decisions are made; and interactional justice, referring to respectful, dignified, and appropriate interpersonal treatment. Employees may integrate these experiences into broader overall fairness judgments, and evidence suggests that both the formation of fairness evaluations and reactions to them can carry important implications across cultural settings (9).

The organizational significance of justice extends substantially beyond immediate satisfaction with a particular decision. Perceptions of fair or unfair treatment affect how employees interpret organizational intentions, whether they regard authorities as trustworthy, and whether participation in organizational processes appears meaningful. Reviews of justice research show that fairness is connected with numerous attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, while unfairness can function as a persistent organizational stressor (8). Research examining organizational justice and employee health has further demonstrated that justice experiences are associated with psychological and health-related outcomes, indicating that unfair organizational conditions may constitute more than an administrative concern and can influence employees' broader well-being (10). Justice processes are also enacted through organizational agents, particularly supervisors and decision makers, whose behavior communicates how fairness standards are implemented in everyday interactions (11). Even research at the inter-organizational level emphasizes that fairness facilitates cooperation and relationship quality, underscoring the broader importance of justice as a mechanism through which exchange relationships are maintained (12).

Perceived injustice may be particularly relevant to organizational silence because fairness judgments help employees determine whether expressing concerns will receive legitimate consideration. When outcomes appear inequitably distributed, organizational procedures seem biased or inconsistent, or authorities treat employees disrespectfully, employees may infer that their viewpoints carry limited weight. Under such conditions, silence can become an adaptive response to an environment in which speaking up is considered ineffective or potentially costly. Early empirical evidence directly identified organizational justice as a predictor of organizational silence, indicating that unfavorable justice perceptions can encourage employees to withhold organizationally relevant information (13). Subsequent research has also connected justice with silence and work engagement, reinforcing the proposition that perceptions of fairness may influence whether employees invest themselves actively in organizational affairs or withdraw from communication (14). Related research demonstrates that organizational politics perceptions can intensify silence alongside cynicism and resistance to innovation, illustrating how unfavorable interpretations of the organizational environment may discourage constructive communication (15). Accordingly, organizational injustice may contribute to silence because employees interpret unfair organizational experiences as evidence that communication is unlikely to produce fair consideration or beneficial change.

The influence of organizational injustice, however, may not operate exclusively through a direct behavioral pathway. Employees interpret experiences of unfairness within the broader exchange relationship they believe exists between themselves and their employer. This relationship is captured by the concept of the psychological contract, which concerns employees' beliefs about reciprocal obligations that extend beyond the explicit provisions of formal employment contracts. Psychological contracts include expectations regarding support, recognition, fair treatment, opportunities, security, advancement, reciprocity, and other obligations employees believe the organization has implicitly or explicitly undertaken. In public organizations, psychological contract conditions have been linked with important employee outcomes, demonstrating that workers respond not merely to formal employment arrangements but also to the perceived fulfillment of implicit organizational obligations (16). In this sense, employees continuously evaluate whether the organization has honored its side of the exchange relationship.

Psychological contract breach occurs when employees perceive that the organization has failed to fulfill one or more of these expected obligations. Such perceptions are consequential because they alter employees' interpretation of the employment relationship itself rather than only their reaction to a single unfavorable event. A systematic review of reviews has shown that psychological contract breach is related to a wide range of detrimental employee outcomes, confirming its central role in explaining reactions to unmet organizational expectations (17). Breach may contribute to poorer performance through processes such as burnout, while previous experiences of breach may also shape the strength of employees' reactions to subsequent contract violations (18). At the organizational level, psychological contract breach has also been linked to innovative performance, suggesting that the consequences of unfulfilled expectations may extend to employees' willingness to contribute behaviors and knowledge that support innovation (19). These findings indicate that psychological contract breach represents an important explanatory mechanism through which negative organizational experiences can be transformed into changes in employee behavior.

Organizational justice and psychological contract breach are conceptually intertwined because fairness represents a fundamental expectation embedded in many employment relationships. Employees may interpret equitable rewards, transparent procedures, and respectful treatment as evidence that the organization is meeting its responsibilities toward them. Conversely, perceived injustice can signal that organizational obligations have not been honored. Empirical research has linked justice with psychological contract processes and indicates that normative understandings of reciprocal obligations shape employees' reactions to organizational treatment (20). Research among nurses likewise demonstrates that the state of the psychological contract, justice, and engagement jointly contributes to employee performance behavior, highlighting the interdependence of fairness perceptions and exchange expectations (21). In higher education, organizational justice and trust have been shown to play mediating roles in the relationship between psychological contract-related conditions and retention practices, further illustrating how fairness judgments help employees evaluate the quality of their relationship with the institution (22). The interaction between justice and psychological contract perceptions is also evident in leadership research, where psychological contract and justice perceptions have been found to influence how leadership translates into employee work outcomes (23).

The direction of these relationships can be understood through reciprocity and social exchange reasoning. When employees perceive that their organization acts fairly and fulfills expected obligations, they are more likely to regard the exchange relationship as legitimate and reciprocate through engagement, cooperation, and constructive participation. Conversely, unfair organizational treatment can be interpreted as a violation of implicit obligations, leading employees to reduce discretionary contributions. Evidence concerning job insecurity and performance demonstrates that justice perceptions can mediate employee responses to adverse employment conditions and that these processes may differ according to contractual circumstances (24). Likewise, conceptual work examining organizational justice, psychological contract breach, and workplace deviance proposes that injustice may generate breach perceptions that subsequently alter employee behavior (25). Emotional consequences are also relevant: psychological contract breach and organizational justice have been linked to employees' emotional well-being, indicating that perceived failures in organizational reciprocity can generate affective as well as behavioral responses (26). Consequently, employees who perceive injustice may first cognitively redefine their relationship with the

organization as one characterized by unfulfilled obligations and then respond by withholding discretionary communication.

This mechanism is particularly plausible in the case of organizational silence. Speaking up commonly requires discretionary effort and may expose employees to interpersonal or career-related risks. Employees who believe that the organization has already failed to meet important obligations may therefore perceive fewer reasons to assume those risks. Empirical evidence directly supports an association between psychological contract breach and organizational silence (27). Research in tourism companies similarly indicates that psychological contract breach contributes to job silence, with adverse workplace experiences such as bullying potentially operating within this process (28). These findings suggest that silence may constitute one form of withdrawal following perceived organizational failure: rather than openly contributing ideas, corrections, or criticism, employees may limit themselves to formally required responsibilities. The psychological contract perspective therefore provides a theoretically meaningful bridge between perceptions of injustice and the behavioral decision to remain silent.

Recent research further suggests that silence is embedded in relational and knowledge processes rather than functioning as an isolated behavior. In higher education institutions, organizational silence has been examined in relation to management support, interpersonal trust, and organizational commitment, demonstrating that employees' communication behavior is closely connected to the quality of their relationships with organizational authorities and colleagues (29). Related work in higher education has linked organizational silence with cynicism through knowledge-donating and knowledge-collecting processes, suggesting that silence may constrain the reciprocal circulation of knowledge and thereby contribute to increasingly negative evaluations of the organization (30). Such evidence is especially relevant to educational organizations, whose functioning depends heavily on knowledge exchange, administrative coordination, problem identification, and the willingness of personnel to communicate difficulties before they escalate.

Despite these advances, an important explanatory gap remains. Much of the existing research has examined organizational justice, psychological contract breach, and silence in separate relationships or has investigated them in sectors such as healthcare, tourism, hospitality, sport, and higher education. The literature establishes that injustice can predict silence (13), that psychological contract breach is associated with a broad range of negative outcomes (17), and that breach can be related specifically to employee silence (27, 28). However, fewer studies have simultaneously examined whether employees' perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice contribute to organizational silence through psychological contract breach, particularly within public educational administration. Distinguishing among the three forms of injustice is important because employees may interpret unfair resource allocation, defective decision procedures, and disrespectful interpersonal treatment differently, and these experiences may therefore differ in their capacity to generate perceived breach. Examining the mediating mechanism also moves beyond documenting whether injustice and silence are correlated by addressing how employees cognitively translate unfair organizational experiences into withdrawal from communication.

This issue is particularly consequential for education departments, where administrative effectiveness depends on the timely communication of implementation problems, resource constraints, procedural weaknesses, employee concerns, and opportunities for organizational improvement. When employees

perceive unfairness but choose not to communicate their concerns, managers may receive an incomplete representation of organizational conditions, making corrective action less likely. At the same time, initiatives that merely encourage employees to speak may be insufficient if silence is rooted in a more fundamental belief that the organization has violated expectations of fairness and reciprocity. Understanding psychological contract breach as a mediating process can therefore provide a more precise explanation of why organizational injustice may culminate in silence and can identify whether interventions should focus not only on communication channels but also on restoring procedural integrity, equitable treatment, respectful interactions, and confidence in the organization's fulfillment of implicit obligations.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to examine the relationships between distributive, procedural, and interactional organizational injustice and organizational silence and to determine the mediating role of psychological contract breach among employees of education departments in Isfahan, Iran.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

A correlational design based on structural equation modeling was used. The statistical population consisted of approximately 3,000 employees working in the six education departments of Isfahan, Iran, in 2026. Based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table, 360 employees were approached to allow for unusable responses. Convenience sampling was used across different administrative sections. Five questionnaires were excluded because they were incomplete or unusable, resulting in a final analytic sample of 355 employees.

Questionnaires were administered in self-report format. Participants received brief instructions before completing the measures. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, informed consent was obtained, and employees were informed that they could decline participation. Responses were used only for the stated research purposes. Completed questionnaires were checked for usability before data entry.

Data Collection Tools

Perceived Organizational Injustice. Perceived distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice were assessed using three 3-item subscales derived from Kim and Leung (2007), for a total of nine items. Responses were recorded on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), with scoring oriented so that higher values indicated greater perceived injustice. The three dimensions assess unfairness in outcomes and rewards, decision-making procedures, and interpersonal treatment by supervisors. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .76 for distributive injustice, .81 for procedural injustice, .80 for interactional injustice, and .85 for the total scale.

Organizational Silence. Organizational silence was assessed with the 30-item instrument developed by Van Dyne et al. (2003). The measure covers six domains: acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial silence at organizational and individual levels, with five items per domain. Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores represented greater organizational silence. Cronbach's alpha for the total scale in the present study was .87.

Psychological Contract Breach. Psychological contract breach was measured using a 3-item scale attributed to Tekleab et al. (2005). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7

(strongly agree); the relevant reverse-keyed items were recoded so that higher scores represented greater perceived breach. Cronbach's alpha in the present study was .71.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics included frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine the first three hypotheses. Structural equation modeling was then used to test the hypothesized mediation model. SPSS version 26 was used for descriptive and correlational analyses, and AMOS version 25 was used for the structural model. Indirect effects were evaluated using bootstrap procedures. Model fit was evaluated using the chi-square/degrees-of-freedom ratio, GFI, CFI, IFI, RMR, and RMSEA.

Findings and Results

The sample was predominantly educated at the associate or bachelor level (82.0%), and 70.1% were men. The largest age group was 21-30 years (42.0%), followed by 31-40 years (38.3%). Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables. The reported normality tests were nonsignificant for all variables, supporting the use of parametric analyses.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Education	Diploma or lower	35	9.8
Education	Associate/Bachelor degree	291	82.0
Education	Master/Doctoral degree	29	8.2
Age	20 years or younger	19	5.3
Age	21-30 years	149	42.0
Age	31-40 years	136	38.3
Age	41 years or older	51	14.4
Work area	Administrative	111	31.3
Work area	Financial	104	29.3
Work area	Logistics/support	140	39.4
Marital status	Single	77	21.7
Marital status	Married	278	78.3
Gender	Women	106	29.9
Gender	Men	249	70.1

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for study variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Distributive injustice	11.61	4.66
Procedural injustice	13.32	5.29
Interactional injustice	9.88	4.55
Organizational silence	122.68	25.19
Psychological contract breach	15.44	3.99

All three dimensions of perceived organizational injustice were positively and significantly associated with organizational silence and psychological contract breach. Psychological contract breach was also positively related to organizational silence. Procedural injustice had the strongest bivariate relationship with both silence and breach.

Table 3. Pearson correlations relevant to the hypotheses

Predictor	Outcome	r	p

Distributive injustice	Organizational silence	.33	.001
Procedural injustice	Organizational silence	.47	.001
Interactional injustice	Organizational silence	.29	.001
Distributive injustice	Psychological contract breach	.31	.001
Procedural injustice	Psychological contract breach	.48	.001
Interactional injustice	Psychological contract breach	.34	.001
Psychological contract breach	Organizational silence	.29	.001

The structural model showed that distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice significantly predicted psychological contract breach, and psychological contract breach significantly predicted organizational silence. Procedural injustice was the strongest predictor of psychological contract breach. Together, the three injustice dimensions explained 24.6% of the variance in psychological contract breach, while psychological contract breach explained 27.8% of the variance in organizational silence.

Table 4. Structural path coefficients

Path	B	SE	beta	p	R2
Distributive injustice -> psychological contract breach	.32	.05	.37	.001	.246
Procedural injustice -> psychological contract breach	.48	.06	.64	.001	.246
Interactional injustice -> psychological contract breach	.27	.05	.31	.001	.246
Psychological contract breach -> organizational silence	.11	.05	.69	.001	.278

Table 5. Standardized and unstandardized indirect effects on organizational silence

Indirect pathway	Unstandardized	Standardized	p
Distributive injustice -> breach -> silence	.03	.25	< .01
Procedural injustice -> breach -> silence	.05	.44	< .01
Interactional injustice -> breach -> silence	.03	.21	< .01

Bootstrap testing indicated that psychological contract breach fully mediated the relationships between distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice and organizational silence. Overall model fit was satisfactory: chi-square/df = 1.54, GFI = .98, CFI = .98, IFI = .98, RMR = .022, and RMSEA = .039.

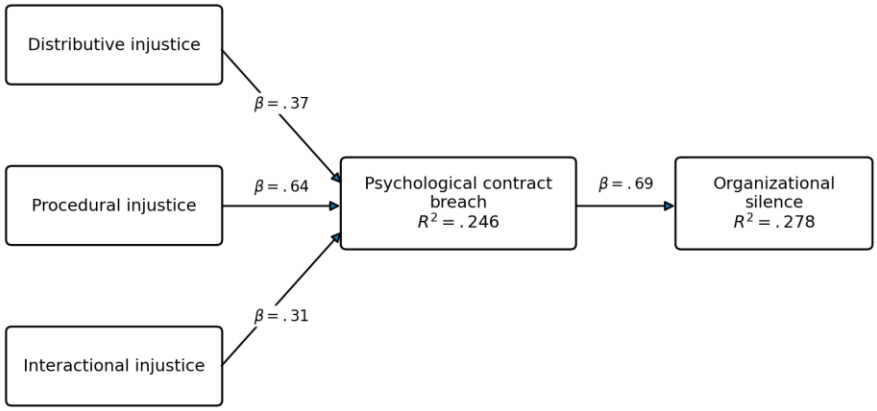


Figure 1. Standardized structural model

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between perceived organizational injustice and organizational silence among employees of education departments in Isfahan, Iran, with particular attention to the mediating role of psychological contract breach. The findings supported the proposed relationships

and provided a coherent explanation of how employees' perceptions of unfair organizational treatment may be translated into silence. At the bivariate level, distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice were all positively and significantly associated with organizational silence, with correlation coefficients of .33, .47, and .29, respectively. The three dimensions of injustice were also positively related to psychological contract breach, with procedural injustice again demonstrating the strongest association. Psychological contract breach was positively related to organizational silence. The structural model further showed that distributive injustice (β = .37), procedural injustice (β = .64), and interactional injustice (β = .31) significantly predicted psychological contract breach, which in turn significantly predicted organizational silence (β = .69). Bootstrap analysis indicated that psychological contract breach fully mediated the relationships between the three dimensions of organizational injustice and organizational silence, with standardized indirect effects of .25 for distributive injustice, .44 for procedural injustice, and .21 for interactional injustice. Collectively, these findings indicate that perceived organizational unfairness may foster silence primarily when employees interpret such unfairness as evidence that the organization has failed to fulfill its implicit obligations toward them.

The positive relationship between perceived organizational injustice and organizational silence is consistent with the broader organizational justice literature, which emphasizes that fairness judgments serve as important signals regarding whether employees are respected, valued, and likely to receive fair consideration from organizational authorities. When employees perceive that organizational outcomes, procedures, or interpersonal treatment are unfair, they may become less willing to communicate concerns, suggestions, or criticism because they doubt that their input will receive impartial consideration. This interpretation is consistent with Tan, who identified organizational justice as a significant predictor of organizational silence and demonstrated that perceptions of unfairness may discourage employees from communicating openly with organizational authorities (13). Similar evidence was provided by Pirzada et al., who linked organizational justice with employee silence and work engagement, suggesting that perceptions of fairness influence both active participation and withdrawal from organizational communication (14). The present findings therefore reinforce the argument that organizational silence is not merely an individual communication preference but may reflect employees' broader evaluation of the fairness of the organizational environment.

The association between injustice and silence can also be interpreted in relation to employees' evaluation of the anticipated consequences of speaking. Organizational silence frequently emerges when employees believe that raising concerns will not produce meaningful change, may be ignored, or could create interpersonal or occupational costs. Reviews of the silence literature have emphasized that employee silence is shaped by perceived risk, anticipated futility, managerial responsiveness, relational concerns, and organizational climate (1, 2). Ullah and Asghar similarly argued that unfavorable organizational conditions may lead employees to suppress opinions and subsequently develop negative job attitudes (4). The findings of the present study fit this perspective: employees who perceive greater injustice may interpret their organizational environment as less receptive to dissenting views and therefore conclude that silence is a safer or more rational strategy. Evidence from other organizational contexts also supports this explanation. Lee et al. found that perceptions of organizational politics were associated with greater organizational

silence, cynicism, and resistance to innovation, indicating that adverse interpretations of the organizational environment can undermine employees' willingness to communicate constructively (15).

The separate positive relationships of distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice with organizational silence further suggest that employees may respond to multiple forms of unfairness through communication withdrawal. Distributive injustice concerns perceptions that rewards, resources, opportunities, or other outcomes are allocated unfairly. When employees believe that their contributions are not adequately recognized or that organizational resources are distributed inequitably, they may reduce discretionary contributions such as offering suggestions or identifying problems. Procedural injustice concerns the processes through which organizational decisions are made. Unclear, inconsistent, biased, or nonparticipatory procedures may lead employees to conclude that their opinions have little influence on organizational decisions. Interactional injustice concerns disrespectful, insensitive, or inappropriate treatment by organizational authorities and may create interpersonal conditions in which speaking openly appears unsafe. These interpretations correspond with contemporary justice research showing that employees react not only to final outcomes but also to the procedures and interpersonal behaviors through which those outcomes are produced (8, 11). The health-related consequences associated with persistent organizational injustice further demonstrate the psychological significance of fairness perceptions and support the view that injustice can function as a meaningful organizational stressor (10).

The finding that all three forms of organizational injustice significantly predicted psychological contract breach constitutes another important result. Psychological contracts represent employees' beliefs regarding reciprocal obligations between themselves and their organizations. Although many of these expectations are not explicitly stated in formal employment contracts, employees may nevertheless expect equitable treatment, recognition, support, procedural integrity, respect, and reasonable reciprocity. When these expectations are not fulfilled, employees may perceive that the organization has violated the exchange relationship. The present results indicate that perceived unfairness in outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment may all serve as cues from which employees infer that the organization has failed to meet its implicit obligations. This interpretation is consistent with evidence showing a close relationship between organizational justice and psychological contract processes (20). Cassar and Buttigieg likewise demonstrated that psychological contract breach and organizational justice are linked with employees' emotional well-being, suggesting that unfair treatment can shape employees' evaluation of the broader employment relationship (26).

The association between justice and psychological contract breach is also compatible with studies emphasizing the centrality of reciprocity in employment relationships. Bera showed that psychological contract processes in public organizations are associated with important organizational outcomes, indicating that employees evaluate their work environment partly through whether organizational obligations are fulfilled (16). Rodwell and Johnson found that the state of the psychological contract, organizational justice, and engagement jointly contributed to nurses' performance behaviors, further illustrating the interdependence of perceived fairness and reciprocal employment expectations (21). Similarly, Snyman et al. demonstrated that organizational justice and trust played important roles in psychological contract-related retention processes within higher education (22). The present findings extend this reasoning to

employees of education departments by suggesting that injustice may weaken the perceived psychological contract before it is expressed behaviorally through organizational silence.

Psychological contract breach was also found to be positively associated with organizational silence and to strongly predict silence in the structural model. This finding is theoretically meaningful because employees who believe that the organization has failed to fulfill important obligations may reduce behaviors that go beyond minimum formal role requirements. Communicating suggestions, reporting problems, challenging questionable procedures, and offering corrective feedback are frequently discretionary behaviors. Employees who perceive the exchange relationship as breached may therefore feel less obligation to provide these additional contributions. This interpretation is consistent with systematic evidence showing that psychological contract breach is associated with a broad range of undesirable employee outcomes (17). Yu et al. further showed that psychological contract breach can undermine employee performance through job burnout, illustrating how breach perceptions may translate into withdrawal and reduced organizational contribution (18). Similarly, Zhang demonstrated that psychological contract breach can affect organizationally important innovation-related outcomes, underscoring the broader consequences of weakened reciprocal relationships (19).

More specifically, the relationship between psychological contract breach and silence aligns directly with evidence reported by Balikci and Ugurlu, who found that psychological contract breaches were associated with organizational silence (27). Samir Al-Romeedy et al. likewise reported that psychological contract breach contributed to job silence among employees in tourism companies, with workplace bullying acting as an explanatory mechanism within that relationship (28). These findings support the interpretation that silence may function as a withdrawal response following perceived organizational failure. Rather than openly confronting the organization, employees may reduce communication, avoid volunteering information, and withhold concerns as a way of limiting additional investment in an exchange relationship they perceive as unbalanced. Such a reaction is consistent with social exchange reasoning, whereby unfavorable treatment reduces employees' motivation to reciprocate through discretionary contributions.

The most important finding of the present study was that psychological contract breach fully mediated the relationships between all three dimensions of organizational injustice and organizational silence. This result suggests that perceived injustice may not necessarily produce silence simply because employees experience an unfair event. Instead, unfairness appears to influence silence through employees' interpretation of what that event means for the organization–employee relationship. When unfair rewards, procedures, or interpersonal treatment are interpreted as evidence that organizational promises and reciprocal obligations have been violated, employees may subsequently withdraw from communication. This mechanism is consistent with conceptual work proposing psychological contract breach as an explanatory link between organizational justice and adverse employee behavior (25). It is also consistent with Bibi's findings that psychological contract and justice perceptions jointly shape the relationship between leadership and employee work outcomes, suggesting that fairness and reciprocal expectations operate together in determining behavioral responses (23). Thus, the present mediation result provides a more specific explanation of why injustice is associated with silence: the critical issue may be the meaning employees attach to unfair treatment as a violation of the psychological exchange relationship.

The full mediation finding also helps reconcile justice and silence research by identifying a cognitive mechanism between organizational conditions and employee behavior. Organizational justice research emphasizes that employees use fairness information to interpret organizational intentions and evaluate their standing in the organization (8). Psychological contract theory adds that employees compare organizational behavior with implicit expectations concerning what the organization owes them. Silence research, in turn, emphasizes employees' decisions regarding whether they should contribute information or withhold it (1). The present findings integrate these perspectives: injustice provides the organizational experience, psychological contract breach constitutes the employee's interpretation of that experience, and silence represents a subsequent behavioral response. This sequence is also compatible with research showing that justice perceptions mediate employee reactions to adverse employment circumstances such as job insecurity (24). It therefore appears that fairness judgments and psychological contract evaluations may jointly determine whether employees remain behaviorally engaged with the organization.

Among the three injustice dimensions, procedural injustice emerged as the strongest predictor of psychological contract breach and produced the largest indirect effect on organizational silence. This is an important finding because procedures often communicate more durable information about organizational intentions than individual outcomes. A single unfavorable distribution may be attributed to temporary resource constraints or situational factors, whereas repeatedly unfair procedures may suggest that inequity is embedded within the organization's decision-making system. Employees may therefore interpret procedural unfairness as a more fundamental violation of expectations concerning consistency, impartiality, transparency, and opportunities for participation. Organizational justice research indicates that procedures have particular importance because they influence employees' expectations about how future decisions are likely to be made (8). The stronger effect of procedural injustice observed in this study may therefore reflect employees' sensitivity to whether administrative decisions are governed by legitimate and predictable processes.

The importance of procedural injustice may be especially pronounced in public educational administration, where numerous decisions concerning responsibilities, resources, promotion opportunities, evaluations, workload, and administrative coordination are governed through formal procedures. If employees perceive those procedures as biased or inconsistent, they may regard unfairness as systemic rather than episodic. In such circumstances, speaking up may be viewed as unlikely to alter outcomes because the mechanisms responsible for handling employee concerns are themselves perceived as unfair. This may explain why procedural injustice exhibited both the strongest association with psychological contract breach and the largest mediated effect on silence. The finding also corresponds with the broader argument that justice perceptions influence whether employees believe organizational structures can be trusted to process their concerns fairly (9). Accordingly, procedural fairness may be particularly important for preserving employees' confidence that organizational authorities will honor reciprocal obligations.

The findings additionally contribute to emerging research connecting organizational silence with trust, commitment, knowledge processes, alienation, and cynicism. Panagiotounis showed that organizational silence in higher education is connected with management support, interpersonal trust, and organizational commitment, suggesting that silence occurs within a broader relational environment (29). In related work, organizational silence was associated with cynicism through knowledge-donating and knowledge-collecting

mechanisms, emphasizing that silence may gradually disrupt constructive knowledge exchange and worsen employees' perceptions of the institution (30). Sulphey and Jasim similarly identified organizational silence and workplace alienation among antecedents associated with knowledge hiding, indicating that communication withdrawal can extend to employees' willingness to share valuable organizational knowledge (6). Moreover, recent evidence showing that organizational silence may contribute to teachers' turnover intention through work alienation demonstrates that the consequences of silence can extend beyond immediate communication behavior (7). These studies strengthen the practical relevance of the present model, particularly in educational settings where organizational learning depends heavily on employees' willingness to share information and professional knowledge.

Overall, the findings indicate that organizational silence among employees of education departments should not be interpreted merely as passivity or unwillingness to participate. Silence may instead represent a meaningful reaction to perceived injustice and, more specifically, to the belief that the organization has failed to meet the reciprocal obligations embedded in the employment relationship. The mediation model therefore shifts attention from asking only why employees do not speak to examining what organizational experiences make speaking appear inconsistent with employees' perceptions of reciprocity. The results also highlight the particular importance of procedural injustice, suggesting that employees' confidence in fair and transparent decision-making may be central to maintaining the psychological contract and encouraging open communication. In this respect, the present study integrates organizational justice, psychological contract, and organizational silence perspectives and provides evidence that psychological contract breach is a key mechanism through which unfair organizational experiences may be transformed into communication withdrawal.

1. Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study used a correlational, cross-sectional design; therefore, although the structural model was theoretically specified and the indirect effects were statistically supported, causal relationships cannot be established. It cannot be concluded with certainty that perceived injustice precedes psychological contract breach or that breach necessarily causes organizational silence. Second, the participants were employees of education departments in Isfahan, Iran, and convenience sampling was used. These characteristics may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions, organizational sectors, occupational groups, or cultural contexts. Third, all constructs were assessed using self-report questionnaires administered to the same respondents, which may increase the possibility of common-method variance, response tendencies, and socially desirable responding. Fourth, the study examined overall organizational silence rather than testing whether acquiescent, defensive, or prosocial forms of silence respond differently to organizational injustice and psychological contract breach. Finally, although the model explained meaningful proportions of variance in psychological contract breach and organizational silence, substantial unexplained variance remained, indicating that additional individual, relational, leadership, and organizational factors are likely to influence these constructs.

Future studies should employ longitudinal designs to establish the temporal ordering of organizational injustice, psychological contract breach, and organizational silence and to determine whether repeated experiences of unfairness progressively weaken employees' psychological contracts. Experimental and quasi-

experimental designs could also examine whether improvements in procedural transparency or interpersonal treatment reduce breach perceptions and subsequent silence. Replication in private organizations, universities, schools, healthcare institutions, industrial organizations, and governmental agencies would help assess the generalizability of the proposed model. Probability sampling and multisite studies across different provinces and countries would further strengthen external validity. Future research should also distinguish among different forms of organizational silence and investigate whether distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice predict acquiescent, defensive, and prosocial silence differently. Additional mediators, such as organizational trust, psychological safety, organizational cynicism, emotional exhaustion, work alienation, or perceived organizational support, may be incorporated into more comprehensive models. Moderators such as leadership style, organizational tenure, employment status, power distance, personality, and previous experiences of psychological contract breach should also be examined to identify the conditions under which perceived injustice is most likely to lead to silence. Finally, collecting information from supervisors, peers, administrative records, or repeated observations could reduce dependence on single-source self-report data.

Education administrators should view employee silence as a possible indicator of perceived organizational unfairness rather than simply as a lack of motivation or participation. Particular attention should be directed to procedural fairness because it showed the strongest relationship with psychological contract breach in the present model. Education departments should establish transparent decision-making procedures, communicate clear criteria for promotions, evaluations, workload allocation, rewards, and access to opportunities, and apply organizational rules consistently across employees. Managers should provide employees with meaningful opportunities to express concerns before decisions are finalized and should explain the reasons underlying important administrative decisions. Fair distribution of resources and responsibilities should be accompanied by respectful, dignified, and timely interpersonal treatment. Managers should also avoid creating expectations that cannot realistically be fulfilled because unmet promises may intensify perceptions of psychological contract breach. Reliable and confidential channels for upward communication, complaint review, and employee feedback should be established, and employees should receive evidence that constructive input is considered seriously and does not lead to retaliation. Periodic assessments of perceived justice, psychological contract fulfillment, and silence could help administrators identify emerging problems before they become institutionalized. Management training should therefore emphasize procedural transparency, consistency, respectful communication, promise management, and constructive responses to employee voice as interconnected components of a work environment in which employees are more willing to communicate problems, ideas, and recommendations.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. This article was derived from the first author's doctoral dissertation in psychology at the Central Tehran Branch of Islamic Azad University. The study received ethical approval under code IR.IAU.CTB.REC.1404.191.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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