



JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES DEVELOPMENT

www.jssd.org.pk



PERCEPTION OF STUDENTS REGARDING ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN DERA GHAZI KHAN

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Organizational Politics, Students' Perception, Favoritism, Higher Education, Dera Ghazi Khan	Organizational politics is a prevalent phenomenon in academic institutions that significantly shapes students' experiences, motivation, and trust in university systems. The study was conducted to explore the perception of students regarding organizational politics at university level in Dera Ghazi Khan. The total population consisted of 919 postgraduate students from three universities in Dera Ghazi Khan, from which 300 students were selected through multistage random sampling. The research design was descriptive, based on a survey, and quantitative in nature. Data were collected using a self-developed, close-ended questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale comprising 50 items across six sub-dimensions. The instrument demonstrated strong reliability with a Cronbach alpha of .960. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, mean, and standard deviation, along with inferential techniques including independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA. The findings indicate that students perceived a high level of organizational politics within university settings, prominently manifested through favoritism, unequal treatment, biased grading practices, preferential reward allocation, and reduced motivation among non-favored students. Favoritism, toxic attitudes, unfair practices, and politically influenced behaviors emerged as the most dominant determinants shaping students' perceptions, alongside interpersonal relationships and institutional dynamics. Regarding differences in perceptions across demographic and academic variables, the analysis revealed a largely uniform perception pattern among students, as no significant differences were observed based on gender, age, or study program. However, limited statistically significant variations were identified, particularly in faculty-wise differences in overall organizational politics and semester-wise differences in behavioral aspects, while most other dimensions remained statistically consistent across groups.
ARTICLE HISTORY Date of Submission: 20-07-2026 Date of Acceptance: 25-08-2026 Date of Publication: 27-08-2026	 2026 Journal of Social Sciences Development
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DOI	https://doi.org/10.59075/jssd.v5i6.339
Volume/Issue	5(6), 2026, 343-355

Introduction

Organizational politics" refers to the informal and self-serving tactics that people use to influence decisions, resources and advantages within the organization, which may or may not be connected with formal rules and procedures that are based on merit. The 21st century challenges such as societal, economic, and technological impacts are significant and impact 21st century students' education (Bernate et al., 2024). Various sources like social support from peers (Obeng et al., 2025), tutors and parents, students' motivation and emotions play key roles in successful completion of the personal transition process towards academic institution. Organizational politics are subtle and informal micro-processes that are in opposition to the ideal of a rational, centrally-managed organization (Chinelato et al., 2020). Can include withholding information from a colleague, lax policy and procedure enforcement, flattery for favors, ingratiation, blasting the other team, self-promotion, and management style – make the other look good (Tziner et al., 2024)

Perceptions of organizational politics (POP) is the degree of involvement in believing in the nature of the behavior of the organizational members regarding self-service, bias, injustice or the use of the organization for the benefit of organizational members at the expense of others or for the organization (Koçak, 2020). Despite the advancement of perceptions of organizational politics research in diverse types of institutions including the public sector, private sector, and global virtual organizations (Hochwarter et al., 2020), there has been virtually nothing conducted in an academic institution. Consequently, little empirical research exists on how a "political" perception of the academic environment influences students' attitudes and behavior, and the researcher is unaware of prior studies that could identify factors to the differences in students' perceptions of the "political" nature of the local environment.

The student's perspective of institutional processes can provide good evidence on improving governance, transparency and quality of the academic environment (Nisa et al., 2021). This study critically examines this situation as little empirical attention has been directed at the student level by the national and regional setting. Analyzing differences in demographics, including gender, academic program and age, offers practical and valuable input supporting the creation of policies that are inclusive and equitable. Organizational Politics linked to student attitudes and behavioral outcomes of trust, commitment and satisfaction (Ahmed et al., 2020). In the context of Higher Education (HE) environment in Pakistan, many organizational internal and external factors have been linked with the concept of organizational politics, but their interplay is less studied and less discussed (Asad, 2020; Baig et al., 2022). The picture would be even more stark in the remote areas of Punjab like Dera Ghazi Khan in view of the socio demographic differences observed among individuals in relation to gender, age and the study program. Organizational politics in the context of Derasht those FATA have not been known by studies and is in need of studies as it can be solved in the present study by identifying: students' perception of organizational politics, organizational politics factors and finding out if there are significant difference between organizational politics between different demography.

Research Objectives

1. Explore the perception of students regarding organizational politics at university level in Dera Ghazi Khan.
2. Explore the perception of students regarding factors of organizational politics at university level in Dera Ghazi Khan.
3. Find out the significant differences in the perception of students regarding organizational politics at university level on the basis of gender, age, and study program level.
4. Find out the significant differences in the perception of students regarding factors of organizational politics at university level on the basis of gender, age, and study program level.

Significance of the Study

The findings can provide the university leadership with insights into student attitudes towards organizational politics and the fairness and transparency of institutional practices to formulate policies that are transparent, merit-based, and student-friendly. The results have significance, not just for students, but for the teacher in the classroom as it shows his or her students' perceptions about favors provided, the inequity of attention and the differential recognition students feel in the classroom. The study could also provide an insightful base for policy makers concerned regarding the improvement of governance, accountability and institutional climate of the public sector universities at the government and HEC level and can be the basis for future researchers related to organizational behavior, educational management and higher education organizations in Pakistan.

Review of Literature

Three hallmarks of organizational politics (OP) are (a) self-serving in relation to goals regardless of method, (b) exercise of informal influence regardless of results, and (c) using situational methods to attain desired ends (Vigoda-Gadot & Talmud, 2010). The term has been applied to a subjective reality (Ferris et al., 2019), and at its center it is all about the selling of ideas, influencing 'the right to choose', and gaining power or other desired interests at the expense of others. The presence of political activities within the organization despite attempts by management to cut it down has made it visible to the losers that they are involved in politics for personal or collective gains well aware of the existence of the same (Singh et al., 2025). However, in the wider context of Pakistani institutional life politics is known to play a strong part of majority institutional environments extending from the government to institutes of higher education (IHEs) (Sahito & Vaisanen, 2017), and individuals need to have both political will and political skills to operate in the environment characterized by strong presence of the politics (Aslam et al., 2018).

Organizational Politics means a student's and staff's evaluation of the distribution of resources, rewards, and recognition, as well as the fairness of the way institutional processes are managed, in the educational setting (Nisa et al., 2021). There are some common attributes in past research that underlie the perception of an organization's politics. Lack of fairness in treatment due to personal ties and relationships; preferential treatment and unfair treatment has been shown to negatively impact organizational justice and trust (Pearce & Wang, 2024; Pear et al., 2025). Unequal recognition for effort or appreciation, credit, and recognition are examples of biased acknowledgement (Federman, 2020). Political behavior refers to conduct that is self-serving and designed to attempt to influence another for personal benefit, usually at the expense of lack of transparency (Landells & Albrecht, 2017). Toxic attitude is the unhealthy interpersonal behavior that hinders trust, communication and productivity (Mugeet et al., 2023; Sari & Dudija, 2024). According to Herr et al. (2024), unfairness has been associated with lower motivation and commitment, and is defined as a difference in grading, evaluation, and opportunity. On the other hand, interpersonal relationship is a positive dimension as it represents respectful and open communication and interaction between the students, teachers and administration that can shape a positive influence on the others factors (Dlamini et al., 2022).

This study is grounded in several theoretical positions. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958) suggests that positive and respectful relationships between people can lead to cooperation, fairness and loyalty to an institution, whereas a political act may lead to a trust deficit. In the reasoning of Mintzberg (1984) as per Power and Politics Theory, the politics in any organization is a consequence of the power play in the institution at large. Organizational Justice Theory anchors its understanding of institutional trust in the perceptions of distributive, procedural and interactional fairness (Assefa et al., 2026). This is based on the concept of Equity Theory (Stacey, 1965) in which students' responses to acknowledging with bias can indicate they are feeling inequitable, and disheartened while receiving this. How the authority-subordinate or teacher-student relationship affects perceptions of fairness and favoritism is also explained by the concept of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995).

These theoretical positions are corroborated by empirical studies, which were carried out at national and international level. Rubaca and Munir (2023) concluded that the perceptions of the organizational politics in higher education institutions (HEIs) had a negative impact on the engagement and performance of doctoral students, with supervisor support serving as a mediator variable. Building upon decades of research about perceptions of organizational politics, Hochwarter et al. (2020) developed a new theory on the development and changing nature of these perceptions in contemporary organizations named 'event systems theory', and found that POPs remain a phenomenon common across organizations continuing much the same as originally described and supported by earlier research. Shrestha (2021) found that in the Nepalese government offices, organizational politics plays a significant role, especially in pay and promotion decisions that negatively impact on individual employee performance. The findings by Yadav et al. (2022) indicated that work spirituality and empathic concern were correlated with employee wellbeing with organizational politics acting as a moderator. The studies collectively

support the idea that organizational politics is an endemic phenomenon where local or contextual expressions of the concept in the context of higher education institutions remain under investigated and less deliberated in comparative terms especially in Pakistan which in light of this call into question the present investigation.

Material and Methods

The descriptive type of quantitative research design was adopted for this study because of its efficiency and cost effectiveness (Creswell & Hirose, 2019). This study comprised the post-graduate boys' and girls' students of Ghazi University, University of Education and Mir Chakar Khan University, Dera Ghazi Khan, totaling 919 students. Two universities and five faculties were selected using multistage random sampling technique and 300 students were selected randomly among males (184) and females (116). The data was gathered by a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire containing 6 dimensions including Favoritism (8), Biased Acknowledgement (7), Political Behavior (7), Toxic Attitude (6), Unfairness (5) and Interpersonal Relationship (17) and items related to the demographic information. Five experts in the field of education validated the instrument and it was pilot tested in two other universities with 30 students. The questionnaire was highly reliable; the overall Cronbach's alpha was .960 with subscale intercorrelations between .699 to .904. (Table 1).

Table 1. Reliability of the Organizational Politics Scale and its Sub-factors

Factor	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Favoritism	8	.807
Biased Acknowledgement	7	.783
Political Behavior	7	.857
Toxic Attitude	6	.841
Unfairness	5	.699
Interpersonal Relationship	17	.904
Overall Organizational Politics	50	.960

The data was retrieved questionnaire mode from all the 300 respondents to this study, that is, 100 per cent of return rate from all the participating universities. Descriptive data (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviations) were used for description of demographics and perception data; while inferential statistics (independent samples t-test and one-way ANOVA) were used to test differences in perception by academic program, faculty, semester and gender.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile

Of the 300 respondents, 221 (70.3%) were female and 89 (29.7%) were male. Most participants (58.3%) were aged 18–22 years, followed by 26.7% aged 23–27 years, 12.0% aged 28–32

years, and 3.0% aged 33 years and above. Academic program-wise, 64.7% of them were studying in Masters, 27.3% were studying in M.Phil and 8.0% of them were studying Masters (Ph.D). The number of faculty members who were professionals in different faculty blocks respectively is as follows: 37.3% in sciences, 20.0% Arts and Humanitarians, 15.7% in management and social sciences, 14.0% in other faculty blocks and 13.0% in agriculture faculty blocks. In terms of semester, 39.3% of respondents were in their 1st–2nd semester, 33.3% in the 3rd–4th, 16.0% in the 5th–6th, and 11.0% in the 7th–8th semester (Table 2).

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 300)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	89	29.7
	Female	211	70.3
Age	18–22 years	175	58.3
	23–27 years	80	26.7
	28–32 years	36	12.0
	33 years and above	9	3.0
Academic Program	Master's	194	64.7
	M.Phil.	82	27.3
	Ph.D.	24	8.0
Faculty	Sciences	112	37.3
	Arts and Humanities	60	20.0
	Management and Social Sciences	47	15.7
	Agriculture	39	13.0
	Other Faculties	42	14.0
Semester	1st–2nd	118	39.3
	3rd–4th	100	33.3
	5th–6th	48	16.0
	7th–8th	33	11.0

Descriptive Findings on Organizational Politics

For all six sub-dimensions, descriptive analysis results demonstrated a high level of POPs in all cases (Table 3). Unfairness recorded the highest mean ($\bar{x} = 4.27$, Std. = 0.89), followed by Interpersonal Relationship ($\bar{x} = 4.36$, Std. = 0.81), Toxic Attitude ($\bar{x} = 4.21$, Std. = 0.95), Biased Acknowledgement ($\bar{x} = 4.18$, Std. = 0.88), Political Behavior ($\bar{x} = 4.02$, Std. = 1.06), and Favoritism ($\bar{x} = 3.97$, Std. = 0.96), with the overall Organizational Politics mean at $\bar{x} = 4.20$ (Std. = 0.90), indicating that students perceived a high level of organizational politics overall.

Table 3. Section-wise Descriptive Statistics of Organizational Politics (N = 300)

Section	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	Std. Deviation
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Favoritism (FAV)	3.97	0.96
Biased Acknowledgement (BA)	4.18	0.88
Political Behavior (PB)	4.02	1.06
Toxic Attitude (TA)	4.21	0.95
Unfairness (UF)	4.27	0.89
Interpersonal Relationship (IR)	4.36	0.81
Overall Organizational Politics (OP)	4.20	0.90

Favorability regarding personal connections as a source of favorable treatment, more attention for some students, and low favorability of few students as favas points towards a perception of favoritism among respondents because of personal connections, and high among students that influence of favorableness or unfavored treatment depends on a few students or others. In Biased Acknowledgement, more than 80% of respondents indicated they were more than somewhat agree that there is an unequal acknowledgment of people with their agreement that this has an impact on motivation and self-esteem. In Biased Acknowledgement, more than 80% of respondents were over somewhat agree that there is not an even acknowledgment of people and there was strong agreement that an unequal acknowledgment impacts motivation and self-esteem.

When asked about the Political Behavior, close to 78-89% said that it hampers transparency and makes a bad environment. The majority of respondents (85-88%) indicated that toxic behavior causes academic environment to be stressful, hinders communication and lowers team spirit for Toxic Attitude. The agreement on unfair practices was in the realm of the highest agreement in the scale, considering the concern given to fairness, 86-91% of respondents agreed that unfair practices occur in grading and academic evaluation. The Interpersonal Relationship dimension was rated relatively high, but orientation was generally more positive, with study participants expressing a high degree of agreement that open communications, mutual respect, and joint working and cooperative relationships between students, teachers, and department heads fosters trust and a positive learning environment.

Inferential Findings

Similarly, the independent samples t-test results revealed that there were no significant gender differences in terms of perceptions of organizational politics or organizational factors ($p > .05$) with males having a nearly similar mean score (209.30) of overall organizational politics compared to the females who had a mean score of (210.49). The results of the one-way ANOVA tests indicated no significant difference among age groups (18-22, 23-27, 28-32, and 33+ year olds) or academic-level (Masters, M.Phil., Ph.D.) for overall organizational politics and its sub-dimensions ($p > .05$), meaning organizational politics is perceived similarly across age and academic levels. A significant difference was though noted between faculty groups for overall organizational politics ($F = 2.814$, $p = .026$), with a higher mean score reported in the Management Faculty (212.79) compared to the Arts and Humanities faculty (206.70); sub-dimension differences between the faculty groups were not significant. Only behavioral aspect factor showed significant difference

amongst the semesters ($F = 3.913$, $p = .009$) while other factors did not show any significant difference when compared from semester to semester (Table 4).

Table 4. Inferential Statistics for Overall Organizational Politics across Demographic Variables ($p < .05$)*

Demographic Basis	Test	df	t / F value	Sig.
Gender	Independent t-test	298	-0.928	.353
Age	One-way ANOVA	3, 296	1.088	.354
Academic Program	One-way ANOVA	2, 297	1.602	.203
Faculty	One-way ANOVA	4, 295	2.814	.026*
Semester	One-way ANOVA	3, 296	0.314	.815

Discussion

The findings show that students value organizational politics as a phenomenon of importance when defining various areas of influence related to their views on fairness, satisfaction with the university and relationships with others there. The findings on students' perceptions of favoritism align with Yusof (2025) which revealed that teachers' favoritism level affects organizational justice by giving certain students privileges that they do not deserve, and Habaza et al. (2025) which showed favoritism is a visible aspect of organizational politics, which reduces organizational trust and satisfaction of the learners.

The recognition gap, significant impact on students' motivation, confidence and self-esteem is consistent with Stacey (1965) Equity Theory which states that individuals are less motivated, dissatisfied and demotivated when they feel that there is a lack of balance between what they put in and the recognition they receive. Political behavior was a major concern again, as found by Kamran et al. (2025) that describes organizational politics as a self-serving act, and causes conflict, distrust and poor organizational performance, resulting a loss of organization credibility and student trust in organizational fairness. Concerning toxic attitudes, the respondents' experiences corroborate findings that negative interpersonal attitudes lead to stress in school environments, negatively affect collaborative and social learning (De Clercq & Pereira, 2021; Shahid et al., 2022).

In the present study, unfairness was the most prominent dimension such that the students felt that inequalities of opportunities and unfair treatment reduce the morale of hardworking students and impact their performance, findings that were also supported by the study conducted by Herr et al. (2024), which concluded that student perception of injustice had the most significant impact on

academic motivation, trust and organizational commitment among university students. By contrast, a protective factor identified has been positive interpersonal relationships with colleagues, where communication between colleagues, students, and department heads was open, respectful, and professional, as confirmed by Blau's theory of social exchange (1964) whereby cooperation and institutional dedication in interpersonal exchanges is reinforced through respect and openness.

Organizational politics is found to be more a structural, cultural than a demographic phenomenon in the university, as the perceptions of students on academics, gender, and age are relatively low that the authors from the equatorial region of Iran suggest that organizational politics is not seen differently by university students of various academic programs and academic years at the equator, which is in line with what Khan and Hussain (2022) reported. The faculty-wise variation in the present case can also be attributed to the differences in perception on politics in terms of size and varying politic nature across different faculty, which in turn may be due to the faculty culture and competitiveness; and the semester-wise difference in behavioral perceptions may be due to the increase in experience in the institutions which leads to early budding of inconsistency in the reward and recognition systems (Haines et al., 2024). Overall, the findings are consistent with the organization theory perspective that view transparency, justice, and administrative work as key aspects of the perception of organizational politics in higher education settings (Assefa et al., 2026).

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the students' perception of university level organizational politics in Dera Ghazi Khan focusing on the aspects of favoritism, biased recognition, political inclinations, negative attitudes, unfairness and interpersonal relations. Concerning the first goal, results show that students had a high sense of organizational politics in universities, mostly in the form of favoritism, unequal treatment, biased grades, hiring someone's relatives and lowering someone's motivation. In the case of the second objective of "favoring", political behavior, toxic attitude, toxicity and unfair practice were identified as major influences on perceiving the favoring, and experience of cooperation, open communication and teamwork were seen as positive perceptions for enhancing the academic environment. As for the third goal, gender, age, or program of study did not show any differences in theory and experiences of organizational politics, meaning there was little variation in opinion among groups on this issue. With regard to the fourth objective, there were no significant differences noted except for a variation in the overall organizational politics column (faculty-wise) and behavioral aspects (semester-wise), with most other measures being statistically the same across categories. In general, students had a negative perception on organizational politics, and this perception would be equally shared by the students, which means that this perception needs attention of the institutions and led to the need to make sure transparency and fairness would be done within this organization.

Recommendations

- 1 Perceptions of interpersonal conflict amongst students may be positively impacted when favoritism is effectively reduced by ensuring there are equal opportunities, transparent reward systems, and uniform treatment are provided by the universities.
- 2 Behavioral dimensions of organizational politics can be positively influenced through fair (and equitable) appreciation, comparable recognition, fair interpersonal transaction, thus resulting in highly motivated students and high self-esteem.
- 3 Positive and ethical practices of political behavior in universities can be encouraged by transparently establishing and restricting manipulative political reactions, and by nurturing inclusive academic interactions.
- 4 Toxic attitude in the university setting may be attributed to some of the following interventions: awareness raising session, positive counselling, promotion of positive relationships between colleagues in the classroom.
- 5 Standardized grading processes, transparent grading criteria, and accountability systems can be established to oversee and counteract unfair trading practices and academic evaluations, as well as to improve academic justice.
- 6 More effective interpersonal relationships can be achieved via team-learning, joint projects and open communication (trust, cooperation, mutual exchange of knowledge) between students and teachers.
- 7 Regular monitoring of university-level organizational politics can be achieved using institutional feedback systems and policy reviews to provide an insight into whether any differences in policies or attitudes within universities exist among the faculties or the specific dimensions of politics.

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