

Challenges of Implementing Social Justice in University Classroom

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges that university teachers face while implementing social justice in their classrooms. It also examined teachers' conceptions regarding social justice teaching. Implementation of social justice in stereotypical classrooms is a task that needs examination at both the micro and macro scales. This study pursued to find out the answer to the question: what are the challenges of university teachers while implementing social justice in their classrooms? This study investigated the perspectives of 18 university teachers from nine public sector universities in Punjab. A qualitative technique was used that included semi-structured interviews and a thematic analysis process. According to the findings, university teachers encounter numerous challenges like raising voices against institutional policies, lack of professionalism, lack of social justice knowledge, stereotypical classroom, grade-oriented mindset, and lack of uniformity in education. In the light of these findings, the study entails that university teachers need to be trained according to global demands and defined methodology embedded with their motivation to teach for social justice. The written curriculum must be linked with the social justice agenda. Teachers must play a part in improving the classroom environment for effective learning by putting social justice values into practice.

Keywords: Challenges, Identification of Challenges, Implementing Social Justice, Teaching for Social Justice, University Teachers, University Classroom

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Introduction

Higher education has a role to play in both supporting and contributing to the attainment of social justice in society. Education is the only sector that enables youth to support, promote, and contribute to a just society (Welton, 2015). Universities, in particular, have a vital role in the context of social justice because they can provide understanding to the students to face social justice challenges. Universities must support and contribute to the social justice agenda by ensuring that education programs are socially inclusive and trying to impart social justice values (Haq et al, 2020).

Teaching for social justice is a technique to promote social fairness and prepare students for real-world situations (Anderson, 2019). In other words, it is a method of teaching pupils how to speak up, and to have an inclination toward recognizing and eradicating all types of discrimination practices (Andrew, 2017). Social justice teaching entails incorporating democratic ideas through an independent approach that allows teachers to exercise fairness, as well as offering a classroom where students can speak up and passionately participate in the learning process (Dover, 2017).

Teachers must be aware of individual disparities in terms of color, class, sexual identity, gender, and ability, as well as the necessity to teach using techniques that are appropriate for students with diverse needs (Kubat, 2018). It is critical for teachers to select instructional approaches that cater to a wide range of students, from those who work hard to learn to those who are creative thinkers (Gilham & Tompkins, 2016).

Several studies (Ali, 2017; Ashraf, Hafiza, 2016; Ahsan, 2003) have been conducted in Pakistan to examine social justice education. These studies relate to policy documents, five-year plans, reforms, and programs associated with social justice education. Many guidelines have the purpose of character-building the nation from the standpoint of Islamic doctrine. An economically disadvantaged country like Pakistan has to increase equity in the educational sector in order to build a fairer society.

Review of Literature

Teaching in higher education entails teaching at colleges and universities from graduation to post-graduate levels (Riaz et al., 2017). There is no doubt that teaching at the university level entails more than just knowledge transfer, it also involves facilitating students' aspirations. Students must put those aspirations to achieve learning tasks by connecting new knowledge to previous knowledge and real-life to good use for the sake of society (Chaudhury, 2016). Teachers can assist students to combine their cultural and intellectual identities in a good way, rather than thinking of them as separate entities.

It is necessary to critically evaluate unjust treatment as it manifests in day-to-day encounters in order to improve social fairness (Al-Zubi, 2018). As educators working to achieve fairness in classrooms, they must ensure that each student understands the importance of their own experience. Equity encourages students and teachers to broaden their horizons and open their hearts to new experiences and people. It promotes discussions about privilege and bias, as well as the sharing of personal stories about inequity and identities (Anderson, 2019).

Students' participation in classroom activities can be transformed by these motives for teach (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Students have the opportunity to open up and share their personal

experiences with unfairness while also informing others about injustices they have seen or experienced when encouraging equity debates.

Challenges of Implementing Social Justice in University Classroom

In many ways, social justice education is entirely opposed to our society's traditional educational methods (Welton et al., 2015). In a system defined by a hierarchical structure, student voice and choice do not match well. Students, teachers, and the institution as a whole face numerous challenges when it comes to implementing social justice in the classrooms.

Challenges Related to Institutions

Traditional educational institutions are also significant hurdles to the implementation of just practices. Attempts by teachers to bring democracy to previously undemocratic locations may face challenges unless the entire institution is democratic (Dover, 2017). One such challenge is the "deep structures" of schools, which are generally held preconceptions about what schools are for and how they should operate. The traditional schools believe that knowledge exists outside and apart from human mediation and creation (Chaudhary, 2016). Building institutional structures and practices that give time to investigate the concepts of negative and positive freedom can address the valid concern (Anderson, 2017).

The traditional grading system is another institutional restriction. How grades might lead students away from establishing personal meaning and toward simply performing for the sake of achieving a goal e.g., diploma, college acceptance, scholarships, praise, lack of penalty, etc (Dover, 2017). This performance focus confuses the teacher-student communication; students tend to feel helpless in regard to the teacher and subsequently act servilely to earn high scores. Students' obsequiousness manifests itself in a failure to question or criticize the teacher in any meaningful way; in other words, students have learned that in order to succeed in the classroom, they often leave their democratic rights at the door. Grading has unknowingly concentrated many students weak and dependent. (Gorski & Dalton, 2020).

The aim of this research was to identify the social justice challenges in the university classroom. Teaching for social justice encourages students to identify prejudice, injustice, and biases. It also allows pupils to see their own preconceptions toward others, helping them to become closer to those around them. The aim of this research was to explore social justice challenges that university teachers face while implementing social justice knowledge in classrooms.

Globally, social justice is the main focus of university education to promote an equitable society. On the other hand, teaching social justice is the least focused in developing countries due to many hurdles. Teachers are the main source at the university level who provide training to future teachers but periods passed away and progress is still very slow. The challenges that stand in the way of implementing the social justice agenda need to be addressed.

Challenges Related to Teachers

Students are not the only ones that resist change; teachers are as well. Few instructors have any prior experience with social justice education, thus attempting to integrate democratic approaches in their classrooms is a significant risk (Marylin, 2020). Teachers may be afraid

of the unknown, worrying that including students' voices and choices in course administration may lead to misunderstanding. Teachers have gotten accustomed to viewing most students as lazy and uninterested, people who must be pushed into doing "what's best for them," and as a result, they are concerned that students will effort to escape issues by taking the easy way out. (Sanchz, 2021).

There are numerous examples of social justice education being used in the classroom. Many of the research looked at how various issues are presented in various educational contexts (Evans et al., 2017). Whatever the classroom's demographics, the teachers and students both bring their own histories and socially, culturally and politically built experiences in the classroom, which form the dynamic forces.

Teachers must not be reluctant to engage in meaningful debates about social issues in diverse classrooms, given the potential for racial politics to emerge. It is difficult to discuss racism and privilege, but it is essential if we want to attain equity (Chaudhary, 2016). There is less research that provides instructional resources for teaching about social justice in the classroom and even fewer studies that reveal real challenges and issues. (Flynn, 2012).

Challenges Related to Students

One of the most fundamental problems with social justice education is students who have spent most of their lives in traditional schools (Welton, 2013). Because allowing students to express themselves and make choices in the classroom goes against our society's educational norms. The majority of the students are accustomed to being told what to do and passively perform in the classroom. They are seen as safe-deposit boxes awaiting information deposits, and they may regard themselves as such. (Feris, 2012).

It might be difficult to locate concrete examples of social justice implications in university classrooms. It necessitates an analysis of systems of oppression and power, as well as a sustained focus on social change (Hui et al, 2021). Students get the knowledge to address social injustices by mastering the content and contextual information. By acquiring justice knowledge, students can begin to see how the topic is linked to larger societal challenges at the micro and macro levels (Ahsan, 2019).

Students who go from traditional schooling to democratic classes or institutions may feel unsettled or even fearful of jeopardizing their only way of life (Bengtsson & Fynbo, 2018). They may become "Siberians," who move to the periphery of society, sitting silently and disconnected from democratic processes. They may be stumped when asked to contribute to content development (e.g., explain what they are generally interested in studying or a specific topic), as many have never studied their own interests (Hui et al., 2021).

Significance of the Study

Education for social justice is transformative. It is delivering education that has the potential to transform people's values and behaviors, encouraging them to live more just lives. It can also help to stop the poverty cycle. With the help of teacher education, the successful implementation of social justice values could take place. For achieving a just agenda teachers must be responsible and accountable for educational reform and long-term development. Literature reports that teachers face challenges in implementing social justice knowledge in students (Hui et al, 2021). For achieving social justice agenda, university teachers need to

address many challenges. This study examined university teachers' challenges while implementing social justice knowledge in the classroom. The findings could help to develop a strategy how to overcome these challenges.

Research Question

1. What are the challenges university teachers face while implementing social justice in their classrooms?

Methodology

The interpretivism paradigm was used in this investigation. For this study, a qualitative research approach was applied. Qualitative research requires obtaining and analyzing non-numerical data in order to grasp concepts. The qualitative research approach encourages the kind of flexibility that is essential for a researcher who needs to be able to adjust their line of inquiry and go in new areas when new facts and knowledge become available. Its major goal is to obtain in-depth information about a situation (Bengtsson & Fynbo, 2018).

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to obtain data. The target population was university teachers working in education department of teacher education universities in Punjab. Purposive sampling was used as sampling technique (18 university teachers). The interviews were audio-taped and lasted between 15-20 minutes. The interviews were informal and open-ended, and were done in a conversational style. The data was analysed using the theme analysis technique. The goal of the thematic analysis is to uncover themes in content, as well as significant or fascinating patterns, and then apply these themes to the research study. Thematic analysis is more than just a summary of the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Campus	Department	Faculty Members	Designation
1: Bank Road Campus, Lahore	Education	1	Lecturer
2: DG Khan Campus	Education	2	Lecturer Assistant Professor
3: Faisalabad Campus	Education	2	Assistant Professor
4: Joharabad Campus	Education	3	2 Lecturer 1 Assistant Professor
5: Lower Mall Campus, Lahore	Education	2	Lecturer Assistant Professor
6: Multan Campus	Education	3	Assistant Professor
7: Township Campus, Lahore	Education	3	Professor Associate Professor Assistant Professor
8: Vehari Campus	Education	2	Assistant Professor

Table 1: Participation demographic

Interpretation and Data Analysis

The themes were emerged during data analysis based on teachers' considerations of the challenges of teaching for social justice in their classrooms. These themes were grouped into three categories: (1) Institution related challenges; (2) Teachers related challenges; and (3) Student related challenges. The thematic analysis technique was followed to analyse the data. All of the interviews were initially transcribed. For analysis, the researcher used Braun and Clarke's steps for thematic analysis (2017).

The respondents were asked to share which challenges they face in practicing social justice. Their views regarding challenges were analyzed under three main domains set under social justice. Social justice in this study was characterized by democracy, diversity, and equity. The themes were derived under three main categories i.e., institutions, teachers, and students. These themes are discussed below:

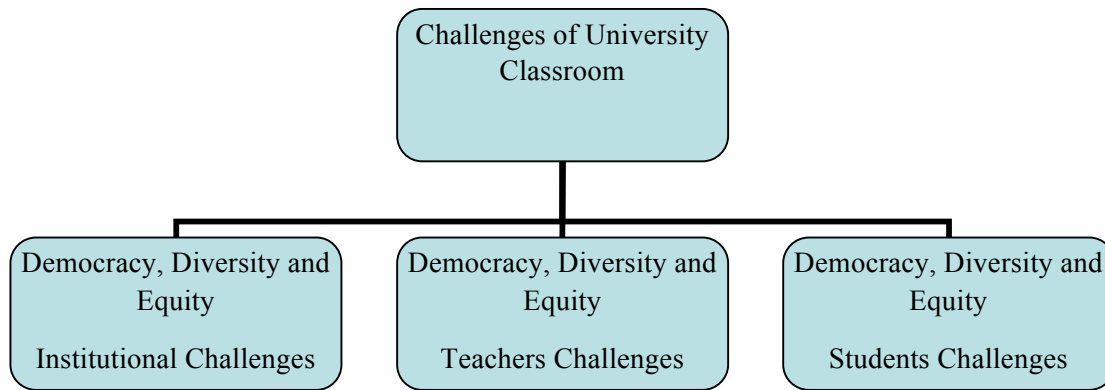


Figure 1: Interpretation and data analysis

Challenges Related to Institution

The participants' views related to institutions emerged in the below themes:

Raising Voice Against Institutional Policies

Eleven participants emphasized that there is a need to raise their voices against injustice. Some participants reported that restricted administration policies are a hurdle to employing a just agenda. The most significant statements were as follows:

Participant 9 said *"I think nothing is impossible for teachers. If they have sense of social justice, they can tackle every situation related to social justice at any time. One more thing I want to add is this please speak up against injustice because no one knows about your experience, you have to tell, I also advise my student that be aware of admin policy to take any step."*

Like other participants, p14 also highlighted that *"in my opinion, if you do not feel comfortable to ask for your right so it is fair with you to be unprivileged. The logic behind is embedded with your silence, break your silence but be careful of policies."*

P2 stated *"I feel no change so my thinking is the same since my childhood. I am sorry to say but yes it happens sometimes teachers are bound by the policies of the administration. They cannot take decisions by their selves. For example, if a teacher asks the student to raise their voice against injustice sooner or later, he will catch by the administration."*

Challenges Related to Teachers

The demographic divide between teachers and students is widening and is likely to widen further. Of course, the demographic divide is not the issue. The issue is that the majority of teacher candidates entering teacher education programs have inadequate knowledge of the democratic environment, cultural differences, and inequalities. As a result, they have little ability for working with a varied group of students and frequently encounter many challenges:

Lack of Professionalism

Like individual differences in students' teachers do have different capabilities. Many teachers commented on this challenge:

P5 stated *"Teacher's excellence in performance requires training. Teaching is a most challenging profession especially when you training future teachers. In our country there are rare opportunities for teachers to have training."*

P9 stated *"for me the actual challenge is to address the technological competencies, I have experienced that student are more aware of technology being used in classrooms besides then teachers. The Covid 19 days remind me the difficulties we as a teachers face during online sessions. I think it is not justice with students. As a teacher educator I strongly recommend that technology competencies must be part of teachers training."*

P13 mentioned *"I observed many teachers force students to memorise their materials. They want to see the handwritten photocopy (laugh) in exams. It is non-professional. Our students are unconscious of the importance of libraries in educational settings they are more competent in using cell phones."*

Lack of Interest and Motivation

A noteworthy challenge of social justice teaching is lake of interest and motivation in teachers. There are several reasons behind like fulfilment of course outline before semester, time constraints and many more. The weightiest comments were:

P3 revealed *"you wouldn't have any motivation to teach for social justice if you skipped social injustice, create a welcoming and inclusive environment for students in the classroom. We must build a culture that accepts all of them if we want to create an inclusive classroom where students care for one another."*

The p5 specified *"the primary challenge, I believe, is the requirement for a mentality shift because students also are resistant to change. I mainly run into this problem when I am trying to raise student understanding on social justice, such as when I give them tasks about to write words on justice. Students argued that this was not related to our course outline."*

P18 stated *"I don't have enough time to discussed social justice issues, with the passage of time students learn such things. It is not mandatory to elaborate it in classroom. I have to finish my course outline in given period because exams are taken from it. Rest are the only leisure time topics."*

Lack of Social Justice Knowledge

It was frequently noted during interviews that even many senior teachers are unaware of the term social justice and especially its application in classroom. After probing they understand it and reply.

Participant 7 who was a senior teacher stated *"truly I never heard about teaching for social justice and you are asking about how challenging is to address this in classroom?"*

P3 commented *“being a teacher it is our duty to bring justice in our classrooms, but to be honest social justice in classroom is new to me. I do believe that indirectly we are observing it but direct application of social justice knowledge is rare.”*

P16 highlighted *“to be very honest I know the term social justice but in context of classroom I don’t know how to translate it in real sense.”*

Many other participants have same comments that they are not so familiar with the term teaching for social justice.

Challenges Related to Students

Many challenges related with students attributed with social justice practices:

Grade Oriented Mindset

Almost 11 participants discussed that students only involved in marks-oriented activities. It is due to our exams system which deals with high or low grades with awarded marks. The students pay attention to gain marks instead of actual learning which is mandatory for their social life. Most frequent replies are noted as:

P3 discussed *“The main goal of assessment is to assess students' performance. Our examination system is not only out-dated, but it also deficiencies the ability to properly assess student attainment. This grading system only assesses students' memory. It does not measure them in all elements of their learning. Unfortunately, our students are use to of this exercise.”*

P1 stated *“many times I try to go out of box to involve students in other learning activities but they pay attention only marks related actions. I think our education system nurturing our students to take part only in marks race.”*

P7 argued that *“unfortunately our university students are also playing number games, their only asset is their achieved marks, on the basis of these marks they get grads to found better jobs. So, their ambition is only achieving good marks. You get surprised that even my PhD students in course work do same exercise.”*

P16 held a belief that *“I had an experience of teaching in abroad, where social justice in classroom mater a lot the reason is diversified nature of classroom. But in Pakistan students looks forward only obtain marks other then any activity. Many times, by utilising my abroad experience I try to held different activities but, students do ask “mam is k marks hain?” For this reason, I usually avoid to do novel things.”*

Stereotypical Classroom

Many decades have been passed to argue about bring change in stereotype classroom but the situation is nearly same with same arguments. Almost every participant highlighted that we are following the lecturing methodology. Although they mentioned different strategies or self-efforts to bring change in typical classroom. Some of these participant views recorded as:

P3 stated *“We have the potential to show our children that the world is wider, more complex, and more beautiful than they realise, one small step at a time. There are genuine difficulties, but there are also people who choose to work together to overcome them.”*

P16 commented *“our students are habitual of lecture method or you can say traditional methods. They relate every thing with exams point of view. For them scoring high marks in every subject is only criteria of success. They do not welcome the new topics or any change. Only few of them accept change.”*

Discussion

The major goal of this study was to comprehend the social justice challenges in university classroom. Pakistan is a developing country, and social justice is a relatively a blur concept there. The participants in this study were the 18 university teachers. To better understand the challenges of social justice in university classroom, 18 teachers were chosen at random from the University of Educations campuses.

The debate has highlighted that social justice matters genuinely in education. According to the majority of university teachers, they are under pressure due to work load, research, and syllabus fulfilment. They stated that some modifications in the current academic setting are essential for equal teaching approaches. However, they are limited by time in this aspect. Equity pedagogy is necessary to address students' educational requirements and to relieve teachers of non-academic responsibilities (Kubat, 2018).

After gaining information via interviews, the category lack of motivation was emerged. Teachers consider less motivated to be the most important factor in keeping pupils on task and achieving their goals. Students are more content and inclusive when they have a sense of being useful. Studies undertaken by Alkis, etic, De Castella, and Dover (2015), as well as Marilyn and Abdullah (2019), back up the findings. Social justice pedagogy entails providing students with learning experiences that are equally significant and beneficial to them. This study discovered a strong link between equity pedagogy and satisfying students' needs in order to foster an inclusive institutional culture.

To describe the logical breadth of social justice challenge in higher education in Pakistan, findings from various literature have proven that educational policy does not play a significant role in fostering social justice in Pakistani education. According to a study, educational policy played an adverse role in promoting educational equity from 1947 to 2000 (Siddiqui, 2019). As a result, social roles may believe in an unequal educational environment. Nevertheless, equality policies in higher education are defined in such a way that institutions can grasp them.

Conclusion

The study concluded that practicing social justice in university classroom is difficult tasks. The topic is not only an important aspect of research, but also a significant part of policy. One positive element of higher education is that various academics have characterized equity issues from a different perspective, which was really useful in understanding this study. Furthermore, difficulties have been addressed using facts and information so that important outcomes might provide a direction for improvement.

However, this study reveals a problem with social justice in higher education, indicating that equity ensures equality in the educational system. It can be defined as scientific research that can assist in policy reform so that research gaps can be filled in Pakistan, which is confronted with numerous issues. Finally, fostering fairness in higher education is a challenging, but necessary, undertaking.

The findings stated that university teachers as such do not implement social justice pedagogy directly. It is also extracted that many university teachers were unfamiliar with the term of social justice. Additionally, they have idea of its values like democracy, diversity and equity indirectly but the direct concept of social justice in classroom was ambiguous to them. Social justice is seen as an abstract and complex topic. The main challenges were found based on exploration stated as; discrimination in society, need to raise voice, disparate competencies, fear of administration, time constraints, lack of social justice knowledge, stereotype classroom, development of cross-cultural awareness and need of more equitable education system.

In nutshell, social justice education must implement in a wide range, in both depth and breadth. Education for social justice is less focused in our universities. Governments and universities must plan and establish plans to handle the challenges mentioned above to successfully adopt social justice values. To ensure consistent social justice implementation across the universities, these challenges would be tackled at all levels.

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