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Social Justice in Higher Education: Revisited, Practices, and Grievances

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Contents:

Abstract: *Social justice is a fundamental concern for ideal social structure and human rights. To develop social order and philosophical discourses, higher education is one of the holistic approaches to educating it. It elevates the level of idealized modern state formation among students. The present study was designed to examine the contexts of students about practices and malpractices of social justice in higher education. The quantitative approach was adopted to gather the data from 630 university graduates. All the data were gathered through a self-made questionnaire. The findings of the study explained that the participants were not satisfied with practices of social justice in higher education. Most of the participants expressed malpractices of social norms. Especially female students claimed their injustice experiences in higher education. The researcher recommended bold recommendations to uphold the social justice in higher education departments.*

Key Words: Social Justice, Higher Education, Social Oppression, Injustice, Human Rights

Introduction

Educating generations is one of the biggest goals in higher education. Educational inequalities in terms of educating people about justice are risky elements associated with social imbalances. The prior reason for higher education is to provide a sense of intellectuality that demonstrate equality, justice, balance, rights, and marginalized social differences. In this scenario, higher education has multidimensional agendas to provide a better nation after education (Pherali, 2021). At higher educational institutions, all the perspectives focused to practice social justice through action research, transformation, and reflection of pedagogies. In recent, the concept of social justice derived predominantly from critical and post perspectives. Social justice is more than examining the social diversity issues. A deeper review of our social system to privilege social equality. However, there is no single definition of social justice. Yet, there are some characteristics of social justice as democracy, participation, understanding of power, empowerment, oppression, access, lack of equity, and equal rights (Gordon et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2018; Nair & Thomas, 2018). The notion of social justice emerged hundreds of years ago. There is a myriad of concepts to define social justice. Such as social justice is treating citizens equally. It is equal distribution of materialistic and non-materialistic

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resources. Different researchers define the term "social justice" from their perspectives. Some researchers explain social justice as an achievement that cannot be evaluated but can be understood (Gordon, 2017; Nair & Thomas, 2018). These activities of social justice are based on democracy, participatory, and collective capacity of social individuals. Educating students in higher education is a broader term. It is not limited to the classrooms, courses, and teacher-student relationships. It involves increasing awareness, knowledge, and experience, developing skills, and raising critical thinking. Educating social justice underpins in different contexts from lectures in the classrooms to open conversation in presentations (Hoyle, 2017). Globally, higher education has operated mainstream policies in the context of powerful determinations of neo-liberal ideology. The rationale behind this trend is to pay more attention to socio-economic development and advancement. Horizontal coordination among higher education personnel develops a synchronized social harmony. Meanwhile, societal challenges perpetuate socio-economic injustice and inequalities (Pherali, 2021; Tjabane, 2010).

In the last decade, social justice became an integral part of policy, practice, and research in higher education. This term has many uses and connotations according to its ideological application. Social justice in higher education revolves around the support of students to reflect critical understandings of social issues and diversity issues Hytten, & Bettez, 2011). There are opportunities inside the universities for students, teachers, and staff to understand social justice issues. Some universities follow the threefold of teaching, service, and research to promote social justice. However, these three belong to teachers who also engage in teaching workload (Gordon, 2017). The perspective of social justice in tertiary education teas out the contemporary position to educate students (Bari, 2018). The concept of social justice is an extension to recognize the democratic and civil rights of individuals. Although, the environment of the university has the potential to contradict multiple behaviours.

Educating social justice enables students to understand social diversity issues, oppression, and equality in their lives and society. There is no shortage of issues in higher education like unjust treatment, violence, inequality, and intolerance. Some of the areas are included chronic social struggling like social studies, religious studies, and history. Some of the subjects promote social justice using communication skills like English, Music, Fine-arts, and Urdu. In teacher education programs, teachers help educators to learn rich and motivated practices of social justice. Using various teaching methods and techniques this heritage transmits to educators (Khurshid, 2018). Social justice makes society more polarized through educating future teachers. Despite the push to teach social justice, a wave of social injustice and violence in Pakistani universities blows out day by day (Ali, 2017; Fisher & Fisher, 2020; Nair & Thomas, 2018a). However, there is research regarding the area of educating social justice. In pursuit of educating social justice in universities of Pakistan, the present study investigates the challenges, realities, and prospects that interact with educating students and teachers. In this regard, many researchers studied the programs and practices of social justice in higher education. The present study investigates three areas realities, challenges, and prospects of teaching social justice in the context of universities in Pakistan. Within the practices of social justice, teachers operationalize the social reforms through students. It opens the oppression with free dialogues, a learning environment, advocates for equality, and a safe higher education community. While many examples raised questions about social justice in Pakistan. Though, higher education institutions are not perfect.

Social Justice and Education

The link between social justice and education is based on the triangular association of teaching, learning, and organization (Fisher & Fisher, 2020). These are intended to eliminate inequalities that students face on affiliations. This type of disequilibrium is perpetuated within a social process as marginalization exploitation, cultural imperialism, and violence. In the contemporary age,

diversity issues and versatility in social characteristics have gained much attention in terms of education (Case, 2017). It sparks momentum in educational practices and training. In the case of social justice and education, students' acknowledgment of diversity issues is imperative for a balanced classroom. Cultural, thinking, backgrounds, and opinion differences exist in every classroom (Bunn & Bennett, 2020). The recognition of these diversity issues under epistemological deconstruction and simultaneous demands transform students with necessary revolution. As much as education about social justice can act against injustice. It is mandatory to create a dynamic educational environment. This could break down barriers to equal access to education and understanding of social justice. Walk-in others' shoes can bring harmony and humanity.

Higher Education, and Social Justice in 21st Century

The crucial role of higher education in association with social justice is social inclusion and quality. This is complex in nature with the notion of equal rights and opportunities. The feasible understanding of social justice placement in higher education can be traced to the dominant conceptualization of justice in higher education. What higher education system is adopted in the name of social justice and its practice? The analysis and review of agreed practice are important to recognize social justice training for students (Bunn & Bennett, 2020; Heslop, 2019). We have a wide range of concepts, views, and definitions to justify higher education and social justice. There is a bundle of studies that investigated the interconnection of social justice, higher education, politics, and philosophies (Case, 2017; Heslop, 2019). However, in general, the definition and concept of higher education concerning social justice are not clearly stated. The advanced conceptualization of social justice is based on neoliberalism practices of theory and education at national and international levels. Although, this context is still facing multiple challenges, gaps, and issues to enhance these practices. Previous studies

highlighted the room for improvement to work on sources. A sociological imagination, experiences, and historical span identified the work areas (Fisher & Fisher, 2020; Pherali, 2021). History tells us that preventing mistakes and improvement can do better things toward social equality and justice. Maybe it is hard to centralize social harmony, but it may be feasible in the future (Khan, 2020). Western civilizations have been deeply concerned about the advancement and access to real democracy. They worked hard through social work and activism to promote and shape social justice from generation to generation. The equal and balance access to the resources, services, rights, and materials abandonment of anarchy. The responsibility of the state contributes to a collective history to bridge the gap between social activism and social justice. After the role of the state and social activist, the role modeling of departmental authorities builds the ways for people to live with quality life (Kanadli, 2017; Martinez & Nicholls, 2017).

Social Justice in Pakistan

Man is looking after social justice since unfairness and inequality are primarily impoverished. An unfortunate dilemma lies to realize the importance of social justice. A general implementation of social justice is not limited to education or any specific department of life. It crosses every domain and dimension of daily life. The practice and implementation of social justice are highly complicated and essential for equal distribution, equal rights, equal opportunities, and freedom of every individual. The gaps in social justice practices result in uninvited repercussions (Fisher & Fisher, 2020; Khurshid, 2018; Martinez & Nicholls, 2017). In Pakistan, higher education is monitored by the higher education commission (HEC). It takes responsibilities, legislation, and evaluation of universities and degree awarding institutes whether public or private. Most universities are limited with resources and inequality in seat allocations. The universities cater hardly fulfill the demands of students and society but chase race of ranking recommendations of HEC (Khan, 2020). This situation itself lays out social injustice (Heslop, 2019; Pherali, 2021). The enrolment statistics, limited

faculty, limited resources, admission issues, dominant grouping, imbalance fund allocation, political interference, corruption, harassment, malfunctioning, and poor funding make social justice education more complicated to be practice. In a detailed review of these challenges and issues, we can find a class system in universities, lack of opportunities, marginalization, disrespect for equal rights and opportunities, and violation of lack of equity. Social justice in Pakistan is not as much participative as it should be explored. People with diversity issues and differences are under the domination of elite groups. A social division can be seen in every sector of daily life (Ali, 2017).

The Present Study

Pakistan is struggling to offer a lack equity and equality in all segments of higher education. There are imbalance divisions in the system of higher education that uplift challenges in teaching social justice. The academic practices are not aligned with their policies. The current study has identified the gaps and differences between practices and perceptions in higher education concerning educating social justice. The major purpose of the current study is to analyze how university students believe in educating social justice in higher education. The integrity, lack of equity, diversity issues, and inclusion in the context of social justice are disseminated in higher education. This study examines the perspectives of participants that identify the ground realities regarding social justice implementations. The other detailed objectives are as follows:

1. To explore the perceptions of university students about existing social justice in higher education.
2. To examine the extent of students' belief in social justice access in higher education
3. To assess the measures of higher education institutions to promote and educate social justice inside universities.

Research Questions

To achieve the research objectives stated above, the researcher formulated the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of students about educating social justice in higher education?
2. To what extent students are satisfied with the access to social justice in higher education?
3. What is the role of the administration to promote social justice in higher education?

Research Method

As per the design of this study, the researcher adopted quantitative methods to gather data from large, targeted population. The researchers followed the survey research design as it is useful for this type of study (Creswell & Clark, 2015). The data were collected from university students through questionnaire.

Sampling and Sample of the Study

The researcher applied a stratified sampling technique for this study. 10 public universities and 7 private universities are selected as a 30% sample of the population size. Only three educational programs; Education, Sociology, and Islamic studies are selected for this research. There were three strata based on the educational program (education, sociology, & Islamic studies). The students associated with graduate degree programs in Education, Sociology, and Islamic studies are randomly selected. The researcher selected 630 students from 17 public and private universities in Punjab.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was used to gather data in this study. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers to collect the data from the students. The questionnaire was comprised of eight factors (56 items) lack of social justice attitudes, racism, sexism, classism (class discrimination/social classes), lack of equity, diversity issues, lack of social positive norms, and practices of social negative norms. The detail is presented in table 1. The research instruments are validated through a panel of experts to confirm content and face validity. This panel has consisted of six experts who were assistant professors of social sciences in public universities. The reliability of instrument was measured through Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 1. Reliability of Questionnaire to Measure Social Justice

Indicators	Items	α
Lack of social justice attitudes	13 items (1–13)	.923
Racism	6 items (14–19)	.879
Sexism	8 items (20–27)	.863
Classism (Class discrimination/Social classes)	7 items (28–34)	.889
Lack of equity	6 items (35–40)	.910
Diversity issues	3 items (41–43)	.908
Lack of Social Positive Norms	6 items (44–49)	.909
Practices Social Negative Norms	7 items (50–56)	.727

All the items were unidirectional and reliable at >.7 alpha values. The overall reliability of the questionnaire was α=.891. The respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the existence of factors that cause social justice. All the items were constructed in negative form. As respondents were asked to rate range from disagreement t agreement on the statement, "teachers make racial jokes around students during class". The more agreement of participants with the injustice statement explains their grievances about social justice practices in higher education. Likert scale was adopted for rating from strongly disagree (1) to strongly disagree (5).

Findings

Table 2. Mean Score of Students Perception about Social Justice Dimensions

Indicators	M	SD
Lack of social justice attitudes	3.97	.777
Racism	4.18	.871
Sexism	4.85	.846
Classism	3.75	1.16
Lack of equity	3.06	1.10
Diversity issues	4.19	1.25
Social Positive Norms	3.84	1.12
Social Negative Norms	4.12	.778
Overall	4.01	.682

The cumulative mean scores of participants' perceptions about social justice under eight dimensions are presented in table 2. All the mean scores of participants' perceived social justice are greater than the average mean value of 3.5. The higher mean score is found at sexism (M = 4.85, SD = .846), diversity issues (M = 4.19, SD = 1.25), racism (M = 4.18, SD = .871), and social negative norms (M = 4.12, SD = .778). While the overall mean score of students' perception of social justice is not as positive as it should be. The majority of participants exhibited greater agreement with the lack of social justice practices.

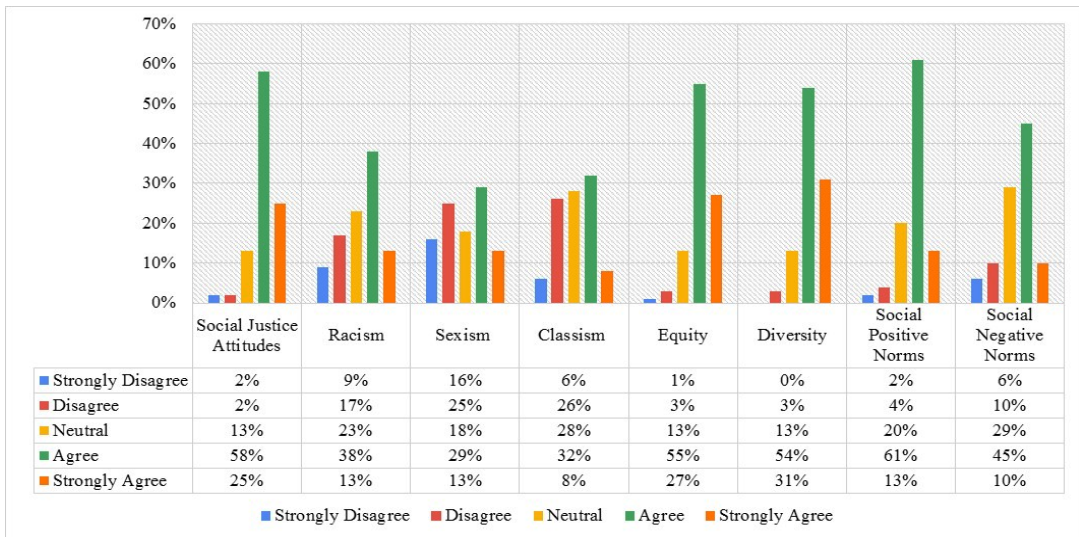|	Social Justice Attitudes	Racism	Sexism	Classism	Equity	Diversity	Social Positive Norms	Social Negative Norms
Strongly Disagree	2%	9%	16%	6%	1%	0%	2%	6%
Disagree	2%	17%	25%	26%	3%	3%	4%	10%
Neutral	13%	23%	18%	28%	13%	13%	20%	29%
Agree	58%	38%	29%	32%	55%	54%	61%	45%
Strongly Agree	25%	13%	13%	8%	27%	31%	13%	10%

Figure 1 exhibits the perceptions of participants about lack of social justice attitudes, racism, sexism, classism (class discrimination/social classes), lack of equity, diversity issues, social positive norms, and social negative norms in percentage. A higher degree of percentage is associated with agreement of grievances about social justice practices. as 61% of participants there is a lack of positive social norms and 45% admitted that they face negative social norms. While 58% of respondents believe that society does not have a lack of social justice attitude. Whereas the vast majority agreed that they faced racism, sexism, classism, lack of equity, and diversity issues during their higher education journey.

Table 3. Gender Wise Comparison of Students about their Experience of Social Justice

Indicators		M	SD	t	$*p$
Lack of social justice attitudes	Male	3.9305	.93132	−.855	.013
	Female	3.9861	.75287	−.730	.006
Racism	Male	4.0481	1.06441	−2.213	.020
	Female	4.2093	.83862	−1.853	.005
Sexism	Male	4.1952	.82820	−1.016	.010
	Female	4.8668	.84230	−1.029	.001
Classism	Male	2.0841	.92769	−7.980	.000
	Female	3.8554	1.18268	−9.560	.000
Lack of equity	Male	3.2628	1.07931	−8.807	.000
	Female	4.1178	1.17009	−9.356	.010
Diversity issues	Male	3.7628	1.19022	−4.212	.000
	Female	4.2042	1.25977	−4.395	.000
Social Positive Norms	Male	3.2413	.99556	−7.005	.000
	Female	3.8896	1.11969	−7.649	.000
Social Negative Norms	Male	3.4435	.93578	−6.688	.000
	Female	3.8726	.73875	−5.609	.000
Overall	Male	3.6027	.26949	−6.601	002
	Female	4.9775	.37921	−6.673	

*p< .05

Table 3 demonstrates an independent t-test to examine the mean score difference between male and female perceptions of social justice in higher education. The participants were asked to rate their experience of social justice practices in higher education. Significant mean scores differences are found in all the factors. The greater mean score differences are found in racism and sexism. The mean scores of female students are greater on racism (M = 4.2093, SD = 83862) and sexism (M = 4.8668, SD = .84230) in comparison to male students (M = 4.0481, SD = 1.06441, and M = 4.1952, SD = .83862 respectively). The famous students confirmed that they have faced gender issues and racism more than the male student in higher education institutions.

Discussion and Conclusion

The quest for social justice in higher education is complex in its nature. This complexity is due to differences in conceptualizing social justice (Heslop, 2019; Pherali, 2021; Robinson & Randall, 2016). A universal concept of social justice is "nebulous" (Khan, 2020). Definition of social justice is based on robust convicted democracy. The tangible existence of social justice in higher education is unclear Hoyle, 2017; Hytten & Bettez, 2011). The fundamental purpose of this study is to investigate how tertiary education educates social justice and to what extent university students are satisfied with its practices Hill et al., 2018. Along with the root causes of social injustice, this study highlights the perspectives of social justice from the eyes of graduate students. Their experience to face lack of social justice attitude, racism, sexism, classism (class discrimination/social classes), lack of equity, diversity issues, lack of social positive norms, and practices of social negative norms. The findings of this study explained that the participants are found to be socially oppressed in higher education (Gordon et al., 2017). The majority of participants agreed that they face a lack of social justice attitude, racism, sexism, classism, lack of equity, and social positive norms in higher education (figure 1). Substantially, the context of female students was more intensive in comparison to male students (Ali, 2017; Abdullah & Chaudhry, 2018). They claimed that they face more injustice in terms of male opportunities and acceptance. The structure of society in Pakistan is sort of complex and has boundaries (Heslop, 2019; Pherali, 2021). The ruling and domination operationalized to promote male roles more than females. Consequently, this study expressed that social inequity and injustice are practiced in higher education. Understandably, society influences educational institutes (Hoyle, 2017; Khan, 2020; Tjabane, 2010). Whereas the role of an educational institute in promoting and educating social justice is questionable. Effective measurement of policy, practices of social justice, and spirit in the system to transmit social justice features are required. The traditional mindset of students may misalign the social fluency of living (Fisher & Fisher, 2020; Kanadli, 2017; Martinez & Nicholls, 2017; Pherali, 2021). It is highly recommended that rethinking policy, reconstruction practices, and attitude of higher education providers are necessary to educate social justice in higher education.

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