

Constructing a Social Justice Curriculum Policy in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

In the dynamic and ever-changing educational landscape, it is crucial to rethink and construct social curriculum policy in the 21st Century. At the same time considering integrating skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving into the curriculum, and reflecting the evolving needs of a dynamic society. The endeavour of developing a robust social justice curriculum policy requires a clear understanding of the diverse and ever-changing needs of learners and education practitioners, as well as the commitment to fostering inclusivity, equality, equity and empowerment within educational systems. There are twelve articles published in this special issue. We believe that these articles will assist policymakers in various countries, provinces or states, and districts to frame and construct the socially justice curriculum policy for 21st Century.

KEYWORDS

Curriculum policy; curriculum; curricular and instructional policies; educational policies and social change; social justice.

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic and everchanging educational landscape, it is crucial to rethink and construct social curriculum policy in the 21st Century. At the same time considering integrating skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving into the curriculum, and reflecting the evolving needs of a dynamic society. The endeavour of developing a robust social justice curriculum policy requires a clear understanding of the diverse and ever-changing needs of learners and education practitioners, as well as the commitment to fostering inclusivity, equality, equity and empowerment within educational systems.

The above argument is advanced by Sibanda in his article that mathematics education curriculum should allow students to construct their own problems, as this is a crucial activity in social justice mathematics education curriculum. Also, answering problems that have been given to the class by the teacher or from a textbook. Again, Du Toit clearly ventilated the social justice entrepreneurship education in her article that education should not just enable learners to pass a written exam, as is currently the case in the South African school system. Instead, it should entail benefits that would have comprehensive life-long benefits for learners in life and work and would create value for others. Hence, developing entrepreneurship social justice curricula for the 21st Century focused on the attitudes and skills necessary for creating social, economic, or cultural value for others is recommended

On the other hand, Tsakeni, Munje and Jita showed that educational and instructional leadership themes is the key for social justice curriculum in building knowledge on how distributed leadership practices from the perspective of a developing African country influence efforts to improve learners' attainments in science and mathematics. Tapping into distributed leadership as an organisational resource played a major role, when engaging in activities concerned with the teaching and learning of science and mathematics, enabling all stakeholders to stay focused on the same goal of school improvement.

Furthermore, a foundational understanding of social justice in education is crucial for constructing and developing curriculum policy. de Silva, Gleditsch, Job, Jesme, Urness and Hunter (2018) provide insightful thoughts in *Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory and Implications*, highlighting the historical context and theoretical underpinnings that shape educational disparities in the curriculum. This work of de Silva, Gleditsch, Job, Jesme, Urness demonstrated the importance of reimagining and constructing social justice curriculum policy in the 21st Century. Again, Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) contend that professional development is necessary for educators to implement a socially just curriculum. This argument is taken forward by Mokotjo in her article that there is a need to empower teachers with technological and content knowledge in the integration of GeoGebra as a form of ICT tool in mathematics education social justice curriculum. Similarly, Baas and Tsoetsi show the importance of reconstructing the social justice Agricultural school curriculum to empower teachers to address challenges in the teaching of agricultural sciences.

In addition, the contention by Nkambule and Ngubane opined that operating in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) implies that schools need to reinvent their role (administratively, pedagogically and otherwise) to ensure that they become catalysts for transferal of context-specific knowledge, problem-solving skills and creative thinking. Also, amidst a growing call by indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) scholars, governments, and tribal authorities throughout the continent, African organisations should consider infusing indigenous epistemologies into their daily professional practices. These are the issues that need to be considered for a social just society in the everchanging educational landscape.

By and large, the articles presented in these special issues demonstrated the lineage of humanising curriculum rooted in Freirean approach, which are underpinned by issues of social justice. This is demonstrated by Langeveldt, Pietersen and Van Wyk in their article that by using Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy framework, student teachers should be conscientized to become agents of change in the classroom and promote social justice while adhering to legal guidelines in their teacher training. Furthermore, by incorporating critical pedagogy into pre-service teacher education programmes, future teachers can be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to create learning environments that are democratic and inclusive while promoting critical thinking and reflection. In his paper, Van Wyk argued that teachers can mitigate and promote social justice in South African schools. It is alarming to note that school violence not only brought headaches for teachers but also for principals in the leadership and management domain.

Consequently, Mapuya pointed out that higher institutions are transforming at a very slow pace. Due to the lack of transformation and the practical implementation of policies, higher education is still significantly entrenched in Eurocentric epistemologies, which expose students to a learning environment that does not represent their social identities. This has led to the intensification of discourses on decolonisation epistemologies. At the centre of these decolonisation epistemologies is their advocacy for the recognition of indigenous epistemologies and ontologies in the learning environment. Of importance to these discourses is social justice issues that influence the 21st-century curriculum. In his article, he explored social justice issues that inform the 21st-century curriculum from a lecturers' perspective framed within critical theory of education. Steyn and Vanyoro, in their paper articulated how Critical Theory (CT) is used as a critical pedagogical banister for the social justice problems we face in the 21st Century. Post-apartheid South Africa faces many challenges, and Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS) at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa (Wits) aims to meet those challenges through social justice interdisciplinary postgraduate education. Moreover, Sebolao argued that higher education institutions advocate for the inclusion of students in curriculum co-creation, but in practice, this has not been easily implemented. In the paper, she explored the experiences of academic staff and students on their engagement in curriculum co-creation with a specific focus on developing a study guide for the newly developed module, which is part of the decolonisation process. The emphasis on meta-cognitive skills and the social

justice element in the curriculum development process ensures a responsive curriculum that meets the needs of society, students and staff in a cohesive and integrated manner

Furthermore, Chimbi and Jita succinctly pointed out that the tripartite critical policy historiography has shown that post-colonial curriculum reforms in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and South Africa are a response to a shared legacy of injustice, inequality, underdevelopment, and a largely irrelevant curriculum inherited from British colonial rule, where the attainment of social justice largely remains a mirage in the three nations. Only children of the new Black elite are enjoying the fruits of post-colonial curriculum reform by attending expensive and generously resourced former White-only schools. Children of the poor Black majority and other minority races remain marginalised in overcrowded and poorly funded educational institutions.

In conclusion, these articles will assist policymakers in various countries, provinces or states, and districts to frame and construct the socially justice curriculum policy for 21st Century. We would like to thank everyone and express our special appreciation to the people who contributed to make this issue ready for you. We especially would like to thank all authors and reviewers for their contribution to this special issue.

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