

INCLUSIVE POLICY-MAKING WITH FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN PROTECTING TEACHERS' RIGHTS BY EMPLOYING THE RAWLSIAN LENS

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Abstract

This study examines the persistent disparity between what we want to achieve through policy objectives and what we really achieve despite the stress on equity goals, especially when it's about teachers' rights and freedom. Through the lens of John Rawls' Social Justice Theory, researchers analyze the role of leadership practices in assuring the equal rights of teachers in the policy implementation process. Using a qualitative theory-driven analytical method, researchers show that although teachers are key policy interpreters, their capacity to guarantee fair outcomes is influenced and frequently limited by leadership practices, including uneven institutional support, minimal involvement and limited professional autonomy. However, implementation strategies often fail to favor the least advantaged; these conditions represent inconsistency with Rawls' principles of equal liberty and difference principle. The study highlights the need for more inclusive and justice-driven educational leadership practices by claiming that policy frameworks are unlikely to achieve sustainable fairness in the absence of equity-oriented leadership that actively promotes teachers' rights and agency. Moreover, it contributes to the literature by emphasizing teachers' rights as a fundamental prerequisite for policy execution and by indicating that teacher empowerment is just as important as the realization of educational equity in policy design.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Teachers' rights, John Rawls, Social justice, Difference principle, Equal Liberty

Introduction

Education is a powerful and dynamic process through which people get knowledge, skills, dispositions and beliefs necessary for personal growth and active involvement in society. Contemporary research highlights that education is not only a pedagogical process but an instrument of change that influences individual capacities and broadens opportunities for sustained learning and holistic well-being (Mincu, 2022). Moreover, the education system is anticipated to function as an equity-driven institution for self-development. Equity in education goes beyond simple access, it includes fair access to opportunities and participation. In relation to this, the idea of educational leadership has gained significant attention, seen as a key factor in the effectiveness of an education system. Leadership is an interaction between members and involves framing and reframing the situation and the participants' attitudes and anticipations. In the words of (Ahumada-Figueroa et al., 2016), educational leadership is characterized as the capacity to ensure coordination among stakeholders, allocate roles, foster a unified vision, and facilitate conditions so that the school can attain effective learning outcomes. Societal problems related to the theme axis of equity, inequality and justice are constant hurdles for educational leadership. On the other hand, (Rigby et al., 2019) stated that to combat educational inequalities, leaders require an equity-driven model. Two specific leadership strategies are recommended to bridge achievement gaps: *Supervision to improve equitable instruction* and *developing systemic leadership for equity*. Without educational leaders, radical change cannot

take place. Educational leaders inspire and supervise the emergence of an affective vision for a desired shift through the interactions between school actors (Cordingley, 2015).

Effective leadership is not about positional authority but includes the process of *influencing relationships*, enhancing educational outcomes and sharing leadership resources across the stakeholders. An effective leader can build and maintain the conditions for productive growth by empowering teachers in their needed domains (Lumadi, 2017). Leaders analyze and renegotiate policies based on ground realities, professional perspectives and situational constraints. Burns (2004) argues that an effective leader always supports and ensures teachers' well-being and strengthens the institutional amenities to meet the needs of the school. To effectively lead and manage, an educational leader shows *consideration* by acknowledging the individual diversity, interests and needs of teachers, he encourages teachers to build their confidence. Furthermore, he practices *stimulation* to develop a trusting environment by appreciating instructors to be logical and creative in order to develop innovative concepts and be capable of solving issues. Pedagogical effectiveness increases under leaders who cultivate an innovative culture, foster a shared vision and recognize the efforts of instructors. In these settings, teachers are more inclined to experiment with contemporary pedagogical methods and incorporate policy actions in their classrooms (Fitrianto et al., 2025).

Brighouse (2002) presented two principles that act as guiding principles for social justice: *fair equality of opportunity* and *equality of condition*. Equal opportunity emphasizes considering all individuals equal and offering them equal rights. Equitable policies seek to lessen disparities by distributing opportunities and resources based on requirements. In order to bridge the gap between policy making process and policy implementation, relation between educational leadership and policy equity is necessary. Without strong leadership, policies _regardless of their intent_ cannot deliver the intended outcomes (Leithwood, 2021). Additionally, teachers also have an important impact on equitable education and the establishment of inclusive schools because they use their expertise, values and beliefs to create efficient classrooms (Reynolds, 2001).

Leadership approaches that encourage teacher empowerment, teamwork and engagement in decision making process contribute to inclusive and equitable learning outcomes. Teachers play a significant yet frequently marginalized role in both policy design and execution. Traditional top-down policies have excluded teachers by depicting them as inactive participants of pre-determined frameworks; however, contemporary research challenges this perspective by highlighting instructional independence and inclusion rights (Skerritt, 2025). Policies are frequently "reinterpreted" and contextually modified, and studies show that ignoring teacher rights may hinder policy implementation and intensify existing disparities. Teachers are "street-level bureaucrats" and bear crucial responsibilities in the policy's execution phase. However, they use discretion, develop professional networks, and collaboratively assess reforms to correspond with students' needs and structural realities. Likewise, teachers participate in dynamic procedures of comprehension, negotiating and transforming policy mandates into classroom practices while acting as both policy actors and policy subjects (Okechukwu, 2025). Effective policy implementation must find a balance between institutional support systems, accountability procedures and teacher autonomy.

Teachers who are confident and feel secure in their rights are more inclined towards innovative instructional strategies, which lead to better student engagement and academic success (Htun & Lim, 2025). Although equity is continually addressed in policy debates, irregular leadership practices and limited concern for equity-oriented leadership development often restrict the practical success. Moreover, as a result of insufficient teacher resources, restricted participation in the decision-making process and lack of professional development, a persistent gap is created, especially in developing countries. Teachers' ability to successfully implement policy

is greatly influenced by leadership styles and collaboration opportunities (Yakavets et al., 2023). Coalitions and collaboration are perceived as a source of acknowledging expectations and values about the state's function in society, as well as an implementation methodology. Framework development that enables harmonized interaction in organizations and stakeholders is essential for the enactment of educational reforms (Vega & Leiva-Guerrero, 2026).

The role of educational leadership in assuring equal and fair rights is significant since it can help with the perennial problems. Designing a more inclusive and productive educational system requires an understanding of how leaders can promote equity through their actions. Although a lot of research has already been done on equity and leadership, there is still a big gap between policy formulation and execution. Lack of accountability mechanisms, limited institutional capacity, and inadequate resources are the significant challenges faced by the educational system and have been studied, yet little attention has been given to the practical aspects of teachers' rights and roles in policy execution. This study critically explores how teachers' professional rights affect their capability to enact policies effectively. Researchers highlight the participatory and inclusive leadership practices and go beyond the conventional top-down approach. The significance of this study lies in a deeper understanding of the role of leaders who bridge the gap between the formulation and implementation of policies and also consider the rights of teachers by the execution of the equity principles in operationalized settings.

Literature Review

According to Gumus et al. (2018), a systematic bibliometric and content analysis was performed on 743 papers covering educational leadership models from 1980 to 2014. Among the most common models discussed were distributed leadership, instructional leadership, teacher leadership, and transformational leadership; a peak in publications was observed from 2005 due to the growing accountability pressure. This research identified the trend of transitioning from qualitative to quantitative approaches and from studying principal leadership towards exploring more complex models, such as distributed or collective leadership, with an emphasis on the impact of leadership on organization context and student performance. The majority of papers originated in the USA, while other major contributors were the UK, Australia, Turkey, and China. Hallinger, Leithwood, Spillane, and Devos were the main authors (Gumus et al., 2018).

(Hondeghe & Dochy, 2019) the researchers analyzed seventy-five articles relating to school leadership in preschool education and in primary and secondary schools. The authors examine changes in the development of theory of school leadership starting from instructional, situational and transformational leadership, proceeding to distributed leadership and integration of the Leadership for Learning (LfL) model. Effective leadership is associated with such aspects as focus on curriculum/instruction; communication/relations; school climate/culture; vision/mission; staff recognition/talent management. Professional development of principals should take into account such characteristics as context and experience learning; transfer of learning to practice; networking; ongoing engagement in professional development activities.

According to Hallinger (2013), a meta-review was carried out using 38 reviews done on EDLM in 9 major journals within the period between 1960 and 2012. A conceptual framework and an 8-criteria rubric were used, which indicated that the number of reviews rose considerably after the year 2000. However, the use of systematic methodologies such as conducting searches, extracting data, synthesizing the results, and discussing limitations in the reviews varied. There were eight outstanding reviews (Hallinger, Leithwood, Robinson, Witziers among others) which served as exemplary models (Asia, 2013).

Massouti (2019) conducted a literature review on teacher education for inclusion based on policy enactment theory, this study reviews literature related to teacher education for inclusion in Canada and internationally. The study identifies problems associated with the implementation of inclusive policies, financial considerations, and the necessity for a coherent curriculum, placement opportunities, multimodal pedagogies, and cooperation. This study stresses the importance of nurturing positive attitudes and beliefs among prospective teachers for effective inclusion and recommends conducting empirical research to enhance teacher education in Ontario and elsewhere (Massouti, 2019).

Alexiadou and Essex (2015) look at the experiences of a single teacher training program in an English university with regard to the preparation of student teachers in science for inclusive practice. Using policy texts, lectures, and interviews, the authors examine the interaction of national inclusion policy, mediation at the institutional level, and classroom practice. Results include a limited understanding of inclusion (ability groupings and diversity), high performance pressure from Ofsted and league tables, and a prevalent practice of ability differentiation, which can restrict access to the curriculum for students with lower abilities. The authors propose pedagogies of praxis that transcend national policy into socially just practices of inclusion (Alexiadou et al., 2015).

According to Done & Andrews (2019), inclusive education policies in England are no longer centered around full inclusion but rather around selective segregation, using notions of parental choice and child voice in the Children and Families Act of 2014 and SEND Code of Practice in 2015. Using Deleuzian concepts of 'images of thought' and biopolitics from Foucault, the authors demonstrate how neoliberalism through performativity, marketization, academization, and accountancy have led to greater exclusionary practices such as more placements in special schools, exclusions, and PRUs while placing responsibilities of teaching SEND children with teachers, which have increased their workloads and created conflictual roles between them and inclusion (Done & Andrews, 2019).

In his analysis, Du Plessis (2013) evaluates the development of South Africa's legislation and policy on inclusive education, based on the country's Constitution (1996), the South African Schools Act (1996) and White Paper 6 (2001). In discussing the six-pronged strategy of inclusion in South Africa, the author relates them to international standards like those of the Salamanca Statement and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Despite the stated commitment to the issue of inclusive education, Du Plessis notes that actual practice has not moved far from the drawing board; full-service schools remain undeveloped, teachers lack training and have negative attitudes towards inclusion, and curricula have been inadequately adapted, among others (Plessis, 2013).

In De Beco's critical review of the resistance against realizing the right to inclusive education through the CRPD, he is able to separate its ideal concept, which is based on the social model of disability, from its practical difficulties. Through his analysis of the development of normative ideals from Salamanca towards the unambiguous call for an inclusive education system in the CRPD, he is able to point out the following challenges to achieving complete inclusiveness: neoliberal performative processes, hierarchical ordering based on standards, and contextual limitations (e.g. Autism), thus rendering full inclusion impossible at times. In addition, drawing on capabilities theories and recognition theories, the author proposes that inclusion should be seen as a perpetual process which includes the concept of realizability in the idea, together with continual education system transformation for humanity and social justice (Beco, 2018).

An integrative literature review conducted by Tkachenko, Hahn, and Peterson (2017) of the research-practice gap in the domains of management, applied psychology, and human resource development highlights seven core themes, namely rigor vs. Relevance debate, Mode 2

research, knowledge creation/transmission and magnitude of the gap, roles of scholars and practitioners, engaged scholarship and alternatives, evidence-based practice, and education as a means of reducing the gap. Based on this synthesis, the researchers put forward a comprehensive knowledge production framework for applied disciplines focusing on the interaction between research and practice and involving processes, products, personal characteristics of the scholars and practitioners, as well as organizational/institutional factors (Tkachenko et al., 2017).

According to Miles (2017), there exists a seven-item taxonomy for research gaps that can be used by both novice and expert researchers to analyze gaps in the course of doing a literature review. This taxonomy was developed based on Robinson et al.'s (2011) five-gap PICOS approach, as well as the six-gap model put forward by Muller-Bloch and Kranz (2014). These are combined in one concept to develop seven different types of gaps including evidence gap, Knowledge gap, practical-knowledge conflict gap, methodological gap, empirical gap, theoretical gap, and population gap complete with definitions and characteristics. The taxonomy is outlined using a visual model and summarized using tables alongside writing templates (Miles, 2017).

The research by Byrne (2022) examines through content and critical policy analysis the concluding Observations by the CRPD Committee on Article 24 for all 72 nations studied during the period from 2011 to 2018, with the Convention being used as the basis for inclusive education. Though acknowledging that the issue of the right to inclusive education has come into focus worldwide, the researcher points out several challenges, such as excessive reliance on segregated services (found in 69% of observations), inadequate teacher preparation and reasonable accommodation, absence of data, strategy development, and budgetary funding, as well as other barriers, either structural or physical. The conclusion is drawn that the disability rights regime on an international level needs to address these issues in order to make sure that inclusion truly benefits all disabled children instead of only certain ones.

Bansal, Bertels, Ewart, MacConnachie, and O'Brien (2012) reflect on their experiences with the Network for Business Sustainability (NBS), an intermediary organization in Canada established in 2005 in order to bridge the ongoing divide between research and practice in management, particularly in business sustainability. Utilizing evidence-based management, engaged scholarship, and relational scholarship, Bansal et al. (2012) provide personal accounts of the culture Project—a systematic review of organizational culture—with the emphasis on intrinsic paradoxes (such as time orientation, rigor versus Relevance, and language) that hinder an individual's ability to bridge the research-practice divide. They suggest that intermediary organizations such as NBS can more effectively mediate the divide by convening various stakeholders, fostering communication through Guidance Committees and systematic reviews, communicating information in practitioner-oriented forms, and implementing pilot project that are action-oriented (Bansal et al., 2012). The authors conclude that the gap should not be closed (to preserve critical distance) but bridged, offering a model of boundary-spanning activities to better align research and practice.

Research Methodology

The present study establishes the methodological framework on John Rawls' theory of *justice as fairness* as enunciated in his 1971 book "*A Theory of Justice*" to analyze the concept of equivalent and unbiased human rights for teachers as considered by the educational policy makers in the educational policy constructions (Rawls, 1971). The notion of justice as pointed out by Rawls offers a wide-ranging normative groundwork that accentuates fair-mindedness, ethical perceptive, and organizational correctness. Employing this methodological structure, the research expands further than apparent notion of equality, it rather advocates the agenda of whether the policies are designed in such a manner that they are necessarily just and all-

encompassing. Rawls claims that fairness comes out to be the primary feature of societal organizations (pp. 3–4). This notion is fundamental aspect of the current study, which considers educational policies are the ethical and moral paradigms. These paradigms should be assessed significantly beside moralities of equality. In this context, the research positions teachers as not purely the actors of policy but as rights-carrying characters whose professional self-respect, sovereignty, and operational situations must be fairly protected contained by policy agendas. A significant operational device contained by this research is Rawls' perception of the *original position*. This concept functions as a supposed tool to guarantee the fairness in policymaking (pp. 11–17). In this framework, legislators are supposed to function wearing a *veil of ignorance*, a situation that withdraws the right of familiarity regarding their personal communal position, organizational command, or professional character. In the framework of this exploration, this construct is applied to the development of educational policies, where policy designers are expected to be ignorant of whether they are going to subjugate places as leading legislators, administrators of the school, or disadvantaged teachers in countryside or downgraded settings. This guarantees that policies are analyzed lacking unfairness or bestowed advantages, by this means it highlights justice as a foundational benchmark. By employing this theoretical framework, the research examines whether current policies and practices would still be well thought-out fair if policymakers themselves were positioned in the utmost underprivileged teaching situations.

Furthermore, the study takes into consideration the *two principles of justice* presented by Rawls in order to develop a central evaluation and measuring benchmarks for evaluating policies related to teachers (pp. 52–65). The very first of Rawls' principles assures equivalent straightforward autonomies for all personages. The application of this principle is to evaluate if equal, fair, and just professional rights as liberty of speech, inclusion in policy-making process, security of job, and safety from exclusion and discrimination are granted to the teachers or not. This principle emphasizes the notion that some basic rights are fundamental and that they cannot be violated, these fundamental rights must be disseminated fairly irrespective of social status or social position. The difference principle, which is the second principle of Rawls is applied to evaluate critically the injustice and unfair distribution of rights in teaching profession. These inequalities include, discrimination in salaries, equal approach to resources, distribution of labor and work balance, and professional progression prospects. In the point of view of Rawls, disparities are only vindicated if they profit the least privileged fellows of the general public (pp. 66–73), the current research applies this benchmark to define whether the prevailing inequalities amongst teachers work for a productive or manipulative meaning.

An additional vital aspect of the methodological approach of this study is the utilization of Rawls' idea of *fair equality of opportunity*, an idea that prolongs further than recognized fairness to speak about organizational and operational obstructions (pp. 73–78). The present research applies this principle to evaluate the employment, upgrading, and specialized improvement workshops inside the department of education. The study analytically looks whether the education system and the educational policy-makers provide fair and equal access to the fundamental rights such as professional development and improvement to all the teachers regardless of their gender, social status, economic background, and regional and local disparities. Rawls gives emphasis to the idea that job positions must not merely be announced in official logic, rather they need to be approachable in situations that guarantee fair and equal professional practices. With the integration of this principle, the research brings-forth out of sight disparities inside education sector, such as inequalities amid metropolitan and countryside educators or among regular and visiting faculty members, in this manner the study yields a

more enhanced and deeper knowledge of inclusion in the process of policy making as well as implementation.

Furthermore, the research methodology is centered upon the concept of Rawls' *distribution of primary goods*, which comprises privileges, freedoms, profits, capital, and the public ideals of dignity (pp. 79–85). In the framework of this exploration, these major goods and chattels are inferred as indispensable assets and circumstances essential for instructors to carry out their performance successfully and uphold respect for their career. It further includes just pays, equitable reach to coaching resources, utilitarian funding, acknowledgement, and openings for constant professional growth. The research analyzes the possible ways in which these provisions get circulated among multiple classifications of instructors and also examines if this circulation is fair, equal, and according to the principles of justice and inclusion. A special focus of the study is put on the marginalized group of teachers who do not get sufficient resources to fight against the disparities, hence demonstrate Rawls' claim of enhancing the circumstances of the disadvantaged groups.

As a final point, this research integrates a *normative and ideological methodical approach*, aligning with Rawls' theoretical practice (pp. 15–19, 100–108). Instead of being dependent on exclusively on first-hand data, the study delves into a deeper understanding and theoretical evaluation of educational policies from the perspective of social justice theory. By developing the foundation of analysis on Rawls' theory, the study not just simply analyzes the current educational policies of Pakistan, instead, it also puts-forth an evaluating benchmark for rethinking about education sector in such a manner that advocates for equality, justice and fair-mindedness, and a system that is inclusive in its foundation. In this way it yields a more consistent comprehension of the process of designing the educational policies and ensuring the inclusive practices. The study holds a special focus for the marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

This theoretical methodology of the research is further strengthened by modern-day intellectual analyses of social justice by modern scholars and theorists that stays consistent with the Rawls' charter implemented in this exploration. For example, Smetaniak et al. stress that while interpreting and evaluating social issues like injustice, inequalities, and unfair approach, the ideological basis of justice and equality must remain central to the foundation of the study. The way they align with the claims raised by John Rawls with other scholars, stresses the assumption of *justice as fairness* as a collective approach (Smetaniak et al., 2024). Especially, the scholarly reasoning and interpretation assists Rawls' declaration that persons are authorized to vital societal resources obligatory to follow their personal pursuits, on the contrary, disparities are validated only if they are beneficial to the most marginalized people of the society. This perception aligns straightforwardly with the methodological approach of the *difference principle* and *fair equality of opportunity* in this paper, reinforcing the qualitative analysis of the ways in which educational policies are formulated to distribute equal rights, chances and goods to the teachers.

Moreover, the interpretation of Hatfield et al. strengthens the methodological framework of the study by emphasizing the importance of justice and fair-mindedness in the professional settings. The Equity Theory aims to demonstrate the way people measure equality and fairness in the society. The claim that people look for justice and balance between their efforts and the payments, echoes well with the present study's analysis of rights, work distribution and professional acknowledgement (Hatfield et al., 2011). This idea supports the Rawls' apprehension of fair-mindedness not merely at a peripheral level but in shared practices of fairness inside institutes as well. Correspondingly, Buettner-Schmidt and Lobo hypothesize that equal and fair dissemination of benefits, workloads, autonomy, and goods is considered as social justice. They also emphasized the importance of inclusive practices for better human

development. Equality is merely a commencing point, while social justice is a relatively complex and broader concept that requires deep understanding. (Buettner-Schmidt & Lobo, 2012). Both these perspectives when combined together enhance the methodological perspective of the research by aligning Rawls' conceptual principles with the real world aspects of social justice in educational context.

Moreover, Parvin highlights that the current speculations about social equality and fairness, especially ones inspired by the works of Rawls, focus on equality and fairness as more significant aspects than freedom and equal distribution of goods (Parvin, 2018). In a likely manner, Killen (2018) stresses that only being fair is not the foundation of a just society, the society needs commitment to equal rights, equal moral responsibilities, and equal distribution of resources and services to develop a system where people are liberal enough to enjoy the rights and challenge at the same time if they face injustice (Killen, 2018). This view reverberates the critical qualitative approach of the current study in order to bring to light, and interrogate the injustices inserted inside the frameworks of educational policies. As a result, the intellectual statements of these scholars combine together to reinforce the theoretical and methodical foundation of the study by positioning the perspective of Rawls in a wider multidisciplinary literature on justice, impartiality, and social righteousness, resultantly improving the deepness and consistency of the study.

Data Analysis

The study analyses the national education policies of 1992, 1998, 2009, and 2017 of Pakistan in terms of the rights and provisions granted to the teachers.

National Education Policy 1992

The policy grants only the marginal provisions related to curriculum reforms, examination and assessment procedures, and evaluation criteria. The policy offered limited teacher training programs, limited access to teachers in assessment process, and justice policy for teachers. The policy lacks criteria for pre-service training, hiring based on merit, salary proposals, or professional authorities as a teacher. The policy stood teachers to be the implementing actors rather than the right holders. (Aziz, 2021) questions this ambiguous policy behaviour highlighting the fact that the policy demanded the teachers to use new pedagogical techniques but offers no supporting mechanisms, training new methods, lowering the professional burden, ultimately resulting into the failure of the proposed vision. (Dildar & Naz, 2017) also witness that similar to its forerunners, the 1992 policy focuses only on compulsory education targets and enrolment targets, neglecting the need for training the teachers and raising the voice for just and fair rights of the educators. This leads to implementation gaps pertaining to political and economic barriers. (Ahsan & Ahsan, 2010) supports that the policy was designed weakly and it badly failed to speak for issues being faced by the teachers in their professional life.

National Education Policy 1998

The policy sustained a constricted perspective towards education of teachers and teacher training programs. The policy proposed only limited training sessions focusing on peripheral improvements, short term training programs for female teachers during their service, and development of basic skills according to the changing curriculum. However the policy clearly remained deficient in requirements for continuous proficient development (CPD), standard based certification of teachers, allowances for hardship postings, ensuring no political interference in teacher recruitment and transfers, and provisions to enhance the social status and salaries of teachers. (Aziz, 2021) underscore that the policy only focused on the basic curriculum education sector reforms related to assessment and evaluation neglecting the development of necessary professional competencies of teachers to foster good education system and the salaries associated to raising the teaching status. (Tahira, 2020) highlights that despite the fact that a rich policy pomposity since 1947 exists, the teacher education quality in

the public sector continued to diminish cultivating a gap for private sector while undermining the value and education of public teachers. (Taylor & Hunzai, 2009) demonstrate that the policy of 1998, just like its predecessors, ignored the requirement of a professional ECE teacher. The policy considered teachers as a source of increasing school admission rather than improving the quality of education

National Education Policy 2009

The first policy to address, in a relatively detailed manner, the issues related to teacher training, teacher salaries, the issue of merit based selection, and teacher involvement in policy formulation. Professional training programs for subjects like training for subjects such as mathematics and languages was also proposed (Government, 2009). However the assurance of just remunerations, professional security, and responsible implementation still remained unaddressed in the policy. (Ali, 2011) describes that despite the policy advocates the international doctrines on teacher education, the approach in Pakistan remained limited only to the development of technical skills rather than personal and social development of teachers. The policy centred its attention on promoting equality in education, increasing enrolment rate, reducing gender disparities, and curriculum reforms (Development, 2017) (Dildar & Naz, 2017) and (Ahsan & Ahsan, 2010) demonstrate political interference and economic constraints as the key factors for policy failure.

National Education Policy 2017

The policy of 2017 comprised of a complete chapter (11) for the discussion of teacher education, pre-service trainings and in-service development courses, aligning teachers' competencies with national development goals, and associating CPD with promotion and upgradation (Education & Government, 2017). The policy established National Professional Standards for Teachers, proposed merit-based employment, and suggested for increasing the number of teacher training institutions with reformed curriculum for ECE and TVET. Recognition rewards, enhancing social status, and monetary security also grabbed the policy focus (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Government of Pakistan, 2017). However, the policy persisted aspiration, it remained deficient in funds and resources for implementation. Tahira (2020) criticizes the sustained dependence on disjointed programs deprived of speaking of administrative disinclination, exploitation, or the requirement for minimum 4% of GDP provision to education sector. (Ahmed et al., 2021) observe that although policy advancement up to 2020, elements like political dogmas, confrontations, and knocked down governments have steadily weakened teacher-centred improvements.

Summarizing the education policies of 1992, 1998, 2009, and 2017 we observe a sustained pattern of injustice and lack of teacher inclusion in policy making. Teachers are only considered as the agents of implementing the policies and increasing enrolment and literacy by the policy makers. Teachers have remained deprived of their just and fair rights of dignity, social respect, handsome wages, and professional competencies development. Even if the provisions are made in the policies, they remain unimplemented due to poor resource allocation, weak accountability structures, and excess of political and feudal involvement. This tenacious mistreatment—apparent in the lack of healthy income constructions, trained sovereignty, and honest participant conference—has propagated weak teacher enthusiasm, insufficient training, and banishment of the schooling society, eventually interrupting the very instructive excellence the plans purport to progress.

Discussion

Rawlsian Theory analyzes the role of educational leadership as it plays a key role in bridging the gap between policy intent and equitable practices. According to Rawls' framework, institutions should grant equal liberties (the liberty principle) and tolerate inequality when it assists the least advantaged (the difference principle). The findings of this study emphasize that

leaders should implement John Rawls' theory by highlighting how the school policies on equal rights, such as equal access to resources and inclusive discipline, often disintegrate in the absence of school leadership.

Teachers as Policy Actors

Teachers are active policy actors who analyze, negotiate, and implement policies in ways that significantly influence the assurance of equal rights. Regardless of their design, educational policies acquire meaning when they are implemented and it is largely dependent on teachers' professional expertise, values and situational adaptations. The policy implementation process is a socially constructed activity shaped by local actors rather than just a linear process. The value of teachers can be understood through Rawls' lens of justice as fairness, which requires that organizational structure functions in a way that ensures justice in field practices rather than just in formal forms. Freedom of thought, association, and speech are the basic liberties that are essential to foster fair teaching methods without reprisal. By challenging prejudiced practices, those teachers who have authority as policy actors operationalize the liberty and uphold fairness in opportunities for equality as well as schools also play role in sustaining justice. Rawl's analysis shows that the teachers' rights are fundamental to social justice in education and justice rely on both equitable rules and their execution (Kim, 2025). Liberty here includes academic freedom, fair remuneration, workplace safety, and contribution to rights-focused policies like anti-bullying measures, as Rawls considers this as "*fair value of equal liberty*." (Pijanowski, 2015). Therefore, for fair education system, teachers should play mediator and value-laden role in promoting the justice.

Teachers' Rights

To do a meaningful job, teachers must have specific rights; these rights include participation in decision-making, professional autonomy and an unbiased working environment. However, teachers find difficulty in their jobs when they are bound to just classrooms and do not enjoy their rights. In the words of Rawls, every person has an equal right as others in this world, which strengthens the concept that teachers have the right to freedom of speech and they are not just employees but right-holding professionals (Rawls, 1971). Despite the organizational goals, the system as a whole may become unjust if it violates the basic rights. Respect, acknowledgement and inclusion are the rights that help teachers to achieve and create the policy goals. Teachers can do their jobs and attain the policy objective more effectively if they feel appreciated and valued. Moreover, the alignment between ethical codes and operational methods (*Justice principle*) is crucial for proper execution; otherwise, it creates a paradox in policy discourse. Written documents of 2009 and 2017 policies encourage the fairness, participation and inclusion, but in reality, these work in a bureaucratic structure that overlooks the teachers' rights. According to this perspective, guaranteeing teacher rights should not be considered simply as a code; rather should be seen as a necessary tool and a basic need of the system to ensure the policy execution.

Inequality in Policy Implementation

The study of policies from 1992 to 2017 shows that there is still significant diversity in how educational policies are carried out even though there were promises of fairness. These diversities cause unequal distribution, different levels of support and unfair treatment, which leads to mixed results in the policy evaluation system. Is educational system truly support fairness? To answer this question, Rawls' *difference* principle is applied, which argues that administrative and social inequalities are only justifiable if they work to the advantage of the most vulnerable members of society. In accordance with this principle, the situation of marginalized groups, such as under-resourced schools, underprivileged students and teachers with limited support, should improve with a change in policy implementation. Without creating disparities, everyone should have equal rights (p.2). Furthermore, policies are designed to

provide equal opportunities, yet they don't consider the contextual differences during implementation, create the resistance for disadvantaged groups. To create an environment where everyone has a chance to succeed, it is necessary to prioritize justice in the education system (Zupanc, 2023). Cyclic evaluation and monitoring are essential to operate the fair principles, to examine whether we are making progress in reality or not. The *difference* principle is an important means for scholars and decision-makers to find out whether policies are reducing disparities or just pretending.

From a critical view, adhering to universal problems is not enough to achieve fairness in policy implementation; periodic evaluation of how these principles operate in reality is essential. In this regard, the difference principle is an important tool for evaluation that assists scholars and decision-makers in determining whether educational policies significantly reduce disparities or just reproduce them under the guise of equity.

Leadership Role

The results of this research demonstrate that educational leadership is essential for implementing teacher policies efficiently. Despite the fact that the latest policies, such as the 2009 and 2017 policies, focus on teacher education, the meritocratic selection process, and professional development programs, their influence is not considerable. This situation could be explained by the fact that the majority of leaders in the education sector are involved in administrative activities rather than participation-oriented leadership styles. According to the current body of literature, efficient leadership requires collaboration and support from participants who seek improvements in their capabilities and organizational processes (Gumus et al., 2018; Daniels et al., 2019). Based on this theory, one can conclude that if educational leadership becomes more participatory, its goals will be achieved successfully.

Policy and Practice Gap

The first significant problem identified through the analysis is a consistent mismatch between the process of policy creation and the process of its implementation. Although the education policies for the period from 1992 to 2017 have shown steady improvement concerning the problems associated with teachers, the implementation of these policies has been rather weak. Various regulations about teacher training, development, and rights have been incorporated in policy documents; however, their actual implementation remains weak. The reason behind this can be explained by several factors, including political pressure, financial constraints, and lack of responsibility. Such mismatches between theory and practice have also been mentioned in literature (Tkachenko et al., 2017; De Beco, 2018). Thus, one can conclude that there is no need for new policies because they are already available, but their implementation is ineffective.

Implications for Policy and Practice

First and foremost, it is necessary to go past symbolism and focus on creating policies that ensure equity for teachers. From this point of view, the theoretical perspective of John Rawls may prove to be very useful. The concept of justice, equal rights and opportunities is emphasized in this approach. Thus, by applying this approach, it becomes possible to acknowledge teachers as professionals who have certain rights which include protecting their dignity and providing them with better working conditions. In practice, ensuring higher levels of motivation among teachers depends upon appropriate funding, ongoing professional training, and minimizing the influence of politics on educational processes. Previous research also shows that inclusive and equitable reforms are required in order to enhance education systems (Byrne, 2022; Bansal et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The study concludes that teachers have remained a marginalized group in the policy formulation in Pakistan. Teachers have only been placed as implementers of the policy. The

study demonstrates that despite of the inclusion in the recent policy of 2017, the rights of teachers have still not been accomplished. Although some provisions of the recent policies underscore the issues like teachers' salaries, hardship appointments, and professional training, still many issues related to basic human rights remain unaddressed. These rights include the limit of working hours, digital availability pressure, timely salaries, and difficulties faced during examination and election duties. The study highlights the need of addressing teachers' problems, their opinions, and their suggestions in the policymaking process. The study offers implications for future researchers in the field of teachers' professional development and professional overload. The study leaves the gap of rights for novice teachers and internees in schools and colleges, as it seen in many institutions that they are put under the burden of extra work that they are not even responsible of, hence suffering violation of rights. The same concept can be studied through a Marxist approach and Butler's theory of precarity.

Recommendation

The study recommends that teachers must be represented in the policymaking process. Their representatives should be included while making propositions not only for teachers but for the whole education department. Teachers being the most active implementers of the policies must be included in the process of formulation as well. They are not only professionally qualified, but are also aware of the ground realities and the fieldwork. The study recommends that basic human rights must be guaranteed for the teachers which include handsome salaries, appointments in the places near hometown, just and fair division of work, etc. and an assurance of strict action against the violation of these rights.

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