

The Role of Education in Promoting Social Justice

Kato Bukenya T.

Faculty of Business and Management Kampala International University Uganda

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the pivotal role of education in promoting social justice, with a comparative focus on England and Jamaica. It examines how educators, curricula, policies, and institutions contribute to addressing social, economic, and cultural inequities. Despite national differences, both countries emphasize inclusive access and equitable outcomes, though progress is hampered by underfunding, structural inequalities, and the complexities of implementing policy in diverse contexts. Drawing on theoretical frameworks and the work of Paulo Freire, the paper highlights education's capacity not only to redistribute material goods but to transform mindsets, dismantle systemic oppression, and foster participatory democracy. Key themes include teacher agency, curriculum development, accessibility, community engagement, and global policy implications. The study underscores that social justice in education must be understood as a dynamic, ongoing process that links individual empowerment with structural change.

Keywords: Social justice, Education policy, Equity in education, Curriculum development, Paulo Freire, England and Jamaica, Teacher activism, Cultural capital.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of social justice is as hard to be against as it is to deny, and education professionals, in England and Jamaica, encounter and navigate a range of challenges in their everyday practice as teachers, school leaders and educationalists. Some struggle to meet the basic needs of learners due to limited resources buoyed by ongoing cuts to budgets. Others struggle to create environments where each student, regardless of race, ethnicity, or class, feels equally welcomed. The diverse needs of students, as well as diverse populations, do not make the task of education professionals easier, and some students' needs may be ignored. Arrangements for education and schooling are changing in both countries in response to migration, globalisation, and economic events. England's policy is "Every child matters," and Jamaica's is "Every child can learn, every child must learn," but these are only statements of intent without sufficient funding to support their ambitions. Whilst education cannot resolve all the world's injustices, teachers notice the impact of unequal distribution of social 'goods' in the lives of children and young people. Bringing about social justice can be understood as rectifying this imbalance, involving inclusion and participation in the school. Ofsted's framework emphasizes curriculum planning to provide knowledge, skills, and cultural capital necessary for success and life in modern Britain. Social justice is not only about material redistribution but also about avoiding cultural imperialism, which replaces community values with middle-class norms. Schools in deprived areas may be disadvantaged by a purely distributive model that presupposes certain cultural knowledge, reinforcing power imbalances. Viewing justice as the distribution of commodities ignores questions of value, meaning, and power. Focusing only on increasing opportunities risks devaluing existing cultural knowledge and perpetuating social domination. Education must address experiences of oppression and consider social justice as a process or lived practice rather than just an end goal [1, 2].

Understanding Social Justice

Social justice in education aims to address social, political, and economic inequities affecting human lives, yet it often lacks a clear definition. Responses to educational injustices include combating discrimination,

providing effective programs for disadvantaged groups, advocating for culturally relevant curricula, and enhancing participatory empowerment processes. Interpretations of social justice vary among educators. One principal views it as how managerial duties are fulfilled and morale maintained, while a teacher connects it to inclusion and equal treatment for all students, irrespective of their backgrounds. A university lecturer interprets it as respecting rights, promoting equity, and distributing resources fairly among community members. Teachers notice the consequences of unequal distribution of social goods like wealth and health on children's lives, especially in England. Achieving social justice is viewed as correcting these disparities, fostering inclusion in schools, and ensuring equal access to opportunities, often linked to curriculum planning that equips students for future success in modern Britain. Social justice encompasses more than mere redistribution of resources; it must avoid cultural imperialism that replaces working-class values and recognize that a purely distributive approach can disadvantage children lacking access to certain norms. Defining justice only through commodities neglects the importance of value, meaning, and power dynamics in society. The deficit model could undermine students' existing cultural capital, perpetuating social inequalities. Schools should encourage participation and respect students' identities, distancing from a "banking" education model. Understanding social justice as an ongoing process rather than a final objective entails addressing oppression and domination within the broader educational and social landscape [3, 4].

Theoretical Frameworks

Social justice is a significant topic for many education professionals in England and Jamaica, with its widespread use yet continued ambiguity. A social justice orientation influences these professionals to challenge unfair practices across their institutions. Rooted in one's moral compass, this orientation drives a sense of duty to serve and lead individuals and groups fairly. Modellers of social justice work develop interlocking strategies that disrupt practices linked to disparity and exclusion, embodying dynamic activism. Such work is both individual and collective, variously undertaken by participants across settings and levels, involving purposeful action toward equity and positive change. The concept of social justice remains equivocal despite focused attention from educational researchers and instructors. This unresolved ambiguity reflects the character of social justice itself and presents opportunities for meaningful dialogue and deep exploration. Contemporary literature emphasizes an individual orientation, including teacher dispositions, reflection, and behaviors, often overlooking the structural dimension of social justice. A comprehensive framework, therefore, emerges from research, theory, and personal reflection to facilitate a more integrated understanding. Socially just teaching links dispositions, reflection, and teacher behaviors with both individual and structural analysis, aiming for social justice through awareness and change at multiple levels. The framework guides practical implementation and informs teacher educators supporting preservice teachers in developing socially just practices [5, 6].

Education as a Tool for Social Change

Social justice activist Paulo Freire posited that the "emancipation of humanity" should be the primary goal of education. He argued that literacy skills reading, writing, and arithmetic are just the starting point for educational emancipation. The next phase calls for nurturing creativity and a "critical spirit" in students, empowering them to pursue social justice and challenge oppression. Freire's educational theory linked him to the global social justice movement, inspiring academics and educators to engage in activism. The concept of using education to promote social justice is well-recognized, calling educators to reflect on how to achieve this in practice. Education can shape individuals' perceptions of their role in enhancing community conditions. Future teachers play a vital role in fostering social justice among school-aged students, making pre-service training essential for encouraging engagement outside the classroom. Current education systems face significant challenges in providing quality experiences for all students, leading to disparities in knowledge acquisition, skills development, and economic opportunities. Economists cite education deficiencies as a barrier to long-term economic growth and human resource development, making improved educational outcomes a top priority. The educational opportunities available to citizens influence actions and social progress in diverse contexts. Basic elementary education, regardless of location or income, is key to social development, fostering aspiration, innovation, and enterprise. A lack of educational opportunities beyond elementary levels often leads to vulnerability to poverty. The educational system is the essential link between individuals and society, supporting economic activity and social advancement, especially in low-income economies [7, 8].

Barriers to Achieving Social Justice in Education

Accessibility is the central issue in achieving social justice, particularly concerning education. Many individuals, especially in low-income countries, find traditional education inaccessible. Factors beyond a learner's control such as location, disability, gender, cultural background, and economic capacity significantly affect their ability to pursue traditional education. Consequently, many are automatically excluded from standard education pathways and distance learning, which often mirrors traditional methods. Challenges like illiteracy, limited resources, and time constraints hinder effective distance education, leading to high dropout rates. A viable solution must ensure broader access to education at an affordable price. It is vital to challenge the notion that only traditional educational routes merit support, while recognizing learners' existing skills and providing relevant credentials. Enhancing access for adult learners is essential to rectify educational inequalities. Overcoming existing challenges and increasing respect for distance education as a credible methodology is crucial. The effectiveness of distance learning relies on its implementation, and while it is not a standalone solution, it can serve as a strategic tool in promoting social justice, particularly if alternative approaches are considered when addressing specific educational needs [9, 10].

The Role of Educators

The role of educators in promoting social justice is of utmost importance and cannot be overstated, as it plays a critical part in shaping a fair and equitable society. They have an essential obligation to ensure that teaching and learning processes are equitable for all students, regardless of their background or circumstances, enabling every learner to realize and achieve their full potential significantly. Inequity in education frustrates efforts toward social justice, ultimately leading to societal destabilization, unrest, and discontent among individuals who feel marginalized or overlooked. Therefore, educators must actively create classrooms that provide social justice in whatever form is acceptable to the community or nation in which they operate, striving to reflect the diverse needs of their students. Schools should strive to be socially just institutions, although many contemporary educational establishments fall short of this noble ideal due to systemic biases and ingrained inequalities. Consistently establishing and maintaining socially just classrooms, which demand fairness for all learners, fosters a more inclusive and harmonious school community, promoting values of empathy, respect, and understanding. By raising awareness of the importance of social justice, it becomes an incumbent responsibility for educators to remain constantly vigilant and proactive in their approaches, ensuring that schools and classrooms genuinely reflect a socially just environment where every student feels valued, supported, and empowered. This commitment is essential not only for individual students but also for the future of society as a whole, as educated individuals serve as a foundation for progressive change [11, 12].

Curriculum Development for Social Justice

Curriculum development for social justice grounds the content within a social justice framework and pedagogically highlights critical literacy, inquiry methods, and the articulation of insights, feelings, and arguments regarding social justice problems, causes, and solutions. In curriculum development, instructors are encouraged initially to identify and work with materials that raise core issues most directly with a preference for conceptually clear resources covering thoroughly documented cases. Later texts may be socially, culturally, or politically more complex; that is, they highlight various layers of ambiguity, conflicting interests and motives, clashes of conviction, and the legacies of established power relations. A course on social justice typically includes substantive units on, for example, race and incarceration, poverty and employment, gender and sex, and current events. Comprehension is tested by requiring students to do the following: critically analyze the issues of component parts, discuss and compare contrasting explanations, identify the political stakes involved, propose solutions, and support their arguments with research. Such coursework can be integrated into the curriculum as a skills or substantive thematic course, affording students exposure to social justice concepts such as "discrimination," "exploitation," and "civil rights". Social justice may be defined as a set of laws and policies intended to promote both equity and recognition for particular groups that have traditionally experienced disadvantage; to understand the social and economic injustices confronting these groups, students must therefore be willing to engage in a persistent but critical questioning of the law's putative neutrality and to draw out often with the aid of narrative techniques the historical and ongoing changes that may be necessary in the transition from a hostile to a just and equitable societal order [13, 14].

Community Engagement and Collaboration

Community engagement and collaboration support social justice by facilitating connections among disparate individuals and groups. Education professionals emphasize the value of open dialogue that permits students to voice their concerns within constructive limits. These opportunities improve the general focus on social justice throughout educational institutions by influencing policies and practices. Educators may also require colleagues' cooperation as well as students' willingness to accept guidance in order to maximize the positive outcomes of social justice initiatives. They adhere to two fundamental principles: doing right by others and fighting for rights. Social justice entails activism that is pedagogic in the development of curriculum and programs; emancipatory in the formation of awareness and sensibility; and regulatory in the implementation of compliance mechanisms. In their capacity as teachers, education professionals design activities that foster student learning and align with national policy frameworks such as Every Child Can Learn. They challenge peers to uphold student interests and guide pupils through administrative processes that often prove formidable. Civic participation constitutes a major area for collaboration. The transitional phase of college involves significant personal development through exposure to contrasting perspectives. Since many students have limited experience with persons of colour, this stage functions as an entry point into racial identity. Interaction with individuals of unlike ethnicity promotes increased recognition of one's own racial character. Engagement with community service or service learning provides additional opportunities to confront privilege. Social-justice-oriented activities heighten attention to economic and racial disparities between helpers and recipients. Education, activity, and critical reflection remain essential components of this learning process [15, 16].

Policy Implications

Governmental policies play an important role in fostering social justice; however, the partisan nature of politics is often viewed as an outcome of a fundamentally just democratic system. Public decision making is easier when the set of alternatives is small, yet new ways of solving old problems are difficult to find. Unfortunately, modern policy-making literature mostly assumes a simplistic model of institutional behavior, which posits common objectives, a clear, linear, and unified decision-making process, and an essentially neutral policy environment. Policymakers find it difficult to translate their personal visions of social justice into national policy decisions, and the implementation of these decisions is equally challenging. Responses to crises such as energy shortages or inflation often fail to address the underlying issues, thereby perpetuating injustices for the poor because support programs do not reflect the component problems of social justice [17, 18].

Global Perspectives on Education and Social Justice

Education professionals in England and Jamaica conceive social justice as 'doing right by others' and see themselves as collaborators in social justice work with students, communities, and wider society. Despite marked differences in socio-economic context, education policy, and the structure of the respective education systems, practitioners in both England and Jamaica demonstrate understanding of social justice work that is consistent across time and space. The educators approach social justice work through three forms of activism: pedagogic activism, emancipatory activism, and regulatory activism. Pedagogic activism involves delivering learning experiences that promote participatory democracy and address injustice. Emancipatory activism aims to build meaningful relationships, develop learner agency, foster inclusive environments, and enable social mobility. Regulatory activism focuses on maintaining safe and ordered environments that support fair treatment for all. The enactment of social justice work is challenged by persistent structural inequalities, limited resources, and the need to serve diverse learner populations fairly and effectively. At the national level, both England and Jamaica have education policies designed to advance social justice through equal access and opportunity. In England, objectives include widening participation in higher education, supporting inclusion and progression through additional funding mechanisms, and enhancing attainment via school improvement practices. In Jamaica, policies seek to equalize access to high-quality pre-school education, improve the quality of teaching throughout the system, and provide alternative pathways for continuing education programmes. The attainment of these aims depends heavily on the availability of funding and resources [19, 20].

Future Directions for Research

Potential future directions for research are becoming increasingly clearer and significantly indicated by the pressing, urgent, and growing need for a greater number of in-depth studies that employ robust, comprehensive, and reliable quantitative measures to effectively assess, evaluate, and understand the multifaceted impacts of a wide range of diverse initiatives aimed at fostering profound social change. This

acute need is particularly significant and pressing in the current complex, dynamic, and often challenging landscape of social research and should not be understated, overlooked, or neglected in any capacity. Furthermore, the pursuit of additional inquiries into the possible, intricate tensions that might exist between individual, personal conceptions of social justice and broader, collective enactments of these foundational principles could prove to be immensely illuminating, insightful, and valuable to the broader and ongoing discourse of social equity. Gaining a deeper, more nuanced understanding of these dynamics and interactions can lead to more comprehensive, layered, and sophisticated insights into how social justice is perceived, articulated, and actively engaged with in various diverse contexts across society at large. By systematically exploring these intricate and often complex relationships between individual beliefs, values, and collective actions, researchers can provide better-informed practices and policies that promote equitable, fair, and just outcomes for all members of society. Such an endeavor ultimately contributes to fostering a more just, inclusive, and equitable future for everyone involved in the social fabric of our communities [21, 22].

CONCLUSION

Education remains a foundational pillar for achieving social justice, acting as both a mirror and a lever of societal transformation. In England and Jamaica, educators and policymakers alike recognize the need for equitable learning environments that respect diversity, challenge oppression, and promote democratic values. However, achieving these goals requires more than good intentions it demands sustained investment, structural reform, and inclusive pedagogy. By embracing social justice as both a guiding principle and a lived practice, education can empower individuals, bridge societal divides, and advance collective well-being. Ultimately, fostering social justice in education is not a destination but a continuous journey one that requires the committed collaboration of teachers, communities, and governments across the globe.

REFERENCES

1. Jones SE, Eady S, Craig L. Considering social justice: Lived experiences of education students during the first course year. *EducatiOn, citizenship and social justice*. 2024 Jul;19(2):218-35.
2. Minott D, Minott G. In pursuit of a sustainable future for Jamaica: values, critical consciousness, and the pre-service teacher. *Environmental Education Research*. 2023 Jul;29(7):998-1009.
3. Miller P, Hill-Berry NP, Hylton-Fraser K, Powell S. Social justice work as activism: The work of education professionals in England and Jamaica. *International Studies in Educational Administration (ISEA)*. 2019 Aug 1;47(1):3-19.
4. Hordatt Gentles C. Reorienting Jamaican teacher education to address sustainability: challenges, implications and possibilities. *Caribbean Quarterly*. 2018 Jan 2;64(1):149-66.
5. Roofe C, Ferguson T, Gentles CH, Bramwell-Lalor S, Cook LD, Sweeney AE, Thompson C, Cummings E. Infusing education for sustainable development (ESD) into curricula: Teacher educators' experiences within the School of Education at The University of the West Indies, Jamaica. In *Handbook on teaching and learning for sustainable development 2021 Jun 22* (pp. 133-151). Edward Elgar Publishing.
6. Minott D, Minott G. In pursuit of a sustainable future for Jamaica: values, critical consciousness, and the pre-service teacher. *Environmental Education Research*. 2023 Jul 3;29(7):998-1009.
7. Downey H, Spelten E, Holmes K, MacDermott S, Atkins P. A green social work study of environmental and social justice in an Australian river community. *Social Work Research*. 2023 Sep 1;47(3):207-19. [researchgate.net](https://www.researchgate.net)
8. Keddie A. Gender equality reform and police organizations: A social justice approach. *Gender, Work & Organization*. 2023 May;30(3):810-25.
9. Saborío-Taylor S, Rojas-Ramírez F. Universal design for learning and artificial intelligence in the digital era: Fostering inclusion and autonomous learning. *International Journal of Professional Development, Learners and Learning*. 2024 Jul 1;6(2):ep2408. [ijpdll.com](https://www.ijpdll.com)
10. Hasan S. Philanthropy and social justice in Islam: Principles, prospects, and practices. *Prospects, and Practices (January 30, 2024)*. 2024 Jan 30.
11. Mirra N, Garcia A. Civics for the world to come: Committing to democracy in every classroom (equity and social justice in education). WW Norton & Company; 2023 Jul 25.
12. Adams M, Briggs RR, Shlasko D. Pedagogical foundations for social justice education. In *Teaching for diversity and social justice 2022 Aug 17* (pp. 27-55). Routledge. [HTML]

13. Ross D. Ethic of love. In *Encyclopedia of Sustainable Management* 2023 Nov 22 (pp. 1507-1512). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
14. Mulvaney TM, Singer JW. Essential Property. *Minn. L. Rev.*. 2022;107:605.
15. Damaševičius R, Sidekierskienė T. Virtual worlds for learning in metaverse: A narrative review. *Sustainability*. 2024 Feb 29;16(5):2032.
16. Blanchet Garneau A, Bélisle M, Lavoie P, Laurent Sédillot C. Integrating equity and social justice for indigenous peoples in undergraduate health professions education in Canada: a framework from a critical review of literature. *International Journal for Equity in Health*. 2021 May 21;20(1):123. [springer.com](https://www.springer.com)
17. Akhtar J. Social Justice and Equality in the Qur'ān: Implications for Global Peace. *Edinost in Dialog: Revija Za Ekumensko Teologijo in Medreligijski Dialog*. 2024;79(1):23-45. uni-lj.si
18. Stensaker B, Hermansen H. Global, Nordic, or institutional visions? An investigation into how Nordic universities are adapting to the SDGs. *Higher education*. 2025 Feb;89(2):293-309.
19. Roofe C. Curriere and Teacher Professional Development. In *The Lived Curriculum Experiences of Jamaican Teachers: Curriere and Decolonising Intentions* 2022 Aug 9 (pp. 53-68). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
20. Roofe C. Curriculum Implementation Leadership and Equity in Education: Curriculum Struggles and Hopes in Jamaica During the Post-independence Era. Taylor & Francis; 2024 Dec 13.
21. Acciarini C, Borelli F, Capo F, Cappa F, Sarrocco C. Can digitalization favour the emergence of innovative and sustainable business models? A qualitative exploration in the automotive sector. *Journal of Strategy and Management*. 2022 Jul 22;15(3):335-52. [emerald.com](https://www.emerald.com)
22. Azzaakiyyah HK. The impact of social media use on social interaction in contemporary society. *Technology and Society Perspectives (TACIT)*. 2023 Aug 31;1(1):1-9. [literasisainsnusantara.com](https://www.literasisainsnusantara.com)

CITE AS: Kato Bukenya T. (2025). The Role of Education in Promoting Social Justice. EURASIAN EXPERIMENT JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, 7(3):80-85