

Original Article

Understanding Implementation of Pragmatism and John Dewey's Educational Philosophy for enabling participation rights in a Special School

Mehek Naeem³, Naeem Zafar², Waleed Farooq³

¹ Director Programs Office, PAHCHAAN (Protection and Help of Children Against Abuse and Neglect), Lahore.

³ Director, Globark Institute of Development and Training (GIDAT), Lahore.

² Head of Department, Child Rights Department, University Of Lahore, Lahore.

Author's Contribution

^{1,2} Conception of study

^{1,2} Experimentation/Study conduction

^{1,2} Analysis/Interpretation/Discussion

^{1,2} Manuscript Writing

³ Critical Review

^{1,2} Facilitation and Material analysis

Corresponding Author

Dr. Mehek Naeem,

Director Programs Office,

PAHCHAAN (Protection and Help of Children Against Abuse and Neglect), Lahore

Email: mehek.pahchaan@gmail.com

Cite this Article: Naeem, M., Zafar, N., Farooq, W. Understanding Implementation of Pragmatism and John Dewey's Educational Philosophy for enabling participation rights in a Special School. *Children Rights Journal of Rawalpindi Medical University*. 2 Aug 2022; 2(1): 26-29.

Conflict of Interest: Nil

Funding Source: Nil

Abstract

Introduction: To set a base for a democratic society where the right to participation is meaningful and engaging, John Dewey argued that a school is a social agency for change. For this, the school needs to provide an enabling environment based on a more hands-on, problem-solving, and experimental approach.

Objective: The current study looks at how educational philosophy such as that of John Dewey and pragmatism is implemented in special schools in Lahore.

Materials and Methods: The study design was quantitative. A sample of 32 participants participated in this study from an NGO-based special school in Lahore. The participants included senior teachers who teach in the elementary section of the school, with at least five years of experience teaching children with disabilities. The sample was selected via convenient sampling. The instrument consists of 21 items that look at John Dewey's philosophy of education.

Results: 59.37% of teachers agreed that the teaching method utilized is based on problem-solving, dialogue, and self-learning. 71.71% of teachers responded that the school gives its students plenty of opportunities to learn via hands-on activities and 74.9% of teachers felt that adequate activities are provided to students so that they can learn through projects.

Conclusion: This study is just preliminary research looking at the implementation of John Dewey's philosophical approach in special schools. It is important to note that with children with disabilities, there is already a reliance on teaching and learning aids. While it may be seen that there is an inclination towards experimentation and experiential learning, there was a mixed opinion about how this approach can bridge the gap and make better, democratic citizens for the future where the rights of children, especially the right to participation is fulfilled.

Keywords: John Dewey, pragmatic, democratic society, children with disabilities.

Introduction

John Dewey is an American philosopher whose work has influenced social reforms and education. His work has contributed to pragmatism and has added value to the educational systems of various countries mainly those in Europe and the US. He believed that a democratic society's nature is to be dynamic and mobile. For this, teachers must understand individual differences between learners and that one strategy may work for a student which may not necessarily work for the other. Each student has his or her own experience. These experiences are not an internal mental state which is inside us but we are within the experience.^{1,2}

Dewey's work emphasized a variety of pragmatism; Experimentalism or Instrumentalism. Via testing his early ideas at the Laboratory School, engaging students in a setting that was collaborative in nature, and engaging the learners in various problem-solving activities, Dewey believed that through a process of different social interactions, human intelligence arises. As pragmatism focuses on experimental learning it encourages a teacher to use instructional methods which focus on problem-solving and are process-oriented.

Dewey believed in "progressive education" which he felt would be possible by experiential learning or "learning by doing". In this critical thinking, problem-solving, dialogue, and collaboration play a very important part. Dewey felt that promoting experiential and collaborative learning lays the foundation of lifelong learning which not only contributes to individual growth but also lays a foundation for a truly democratic society.³

He moved from a traditional approach in education towards progressive education, with a focus on the present rather than the future. He argued that a traditional approach is essentially static as what is taught is taught as a finished product with little regard to the process and the future implication. The students do not have a chance to express or engage in a meaningful manner, not preparing them to think democratically. Alternatively, the education system needs to be progressive, which looks at each learner as a citizen of the society, preparing them for the adjustments and cultivation of individuality.³

Education has an important role in ingraining values and making the student differentiate between rights and wrongs, themselves. It is a tool for cultural transmission. Progressive education in a democratic society focuses on the transition or change in one's

thoughts feelings and internal processes, which would help him/her to be a responsible and active citizen of the society. Hence, Dewey conceptualizes the school's role as a social agency that makes it simple for learners to understand the intricacies of social and cultural heritage, focuses on the positive aspects of society, and builds a link between heritage and culture.

To set a base for a democratic society, Dewey argues that a school is a social agency for change.⁴ He focuses on experimentation and inculcation of multitasking and collaboration from an early start. To live in peace, within the learning community each member needs to be involved in each process.^{5,6} As written by Ryan, "Dewey's Pragmatism was essentially a peacetime doctrine and credible only in a society that was in most respects harmonious, prosperous, and morally at ease with itself".⁷

With schools as an important social agency, Dewey focuses on bridging the gap between theory and practice. For this, the learner is taken as an active participant in the process. Dewey in his book "Democracy and Education" Dewey argues that educators need to be prepared for their lessons and reflect on how they can "acquire the capacity for wider, deeper and more organic experience and the capacity to communicate it?".⁷

This experience can be reflected in the curriculum. For pragmatics such as Dewey, the curriculum comes from the student's experiences rather than being made in advance by the teacher. The "complete act of thought" takes the person from the initial identification of the problem to acting on it and then testing a hypothesis to solve the issue, inculcated in the activities so that the child may polish his/her problem-solving skills in a scientific manner.⁸

In Pakistan, there are parallel systems of education; public, private, and Islamic. While each system has its own approach to teaching, the curriculum is mainly prepared by policymakers and is implemented via a top-down approach. There is less flexibility in the implementation of the curriculum and the experiences children have under the guidance of the teacher.⁹

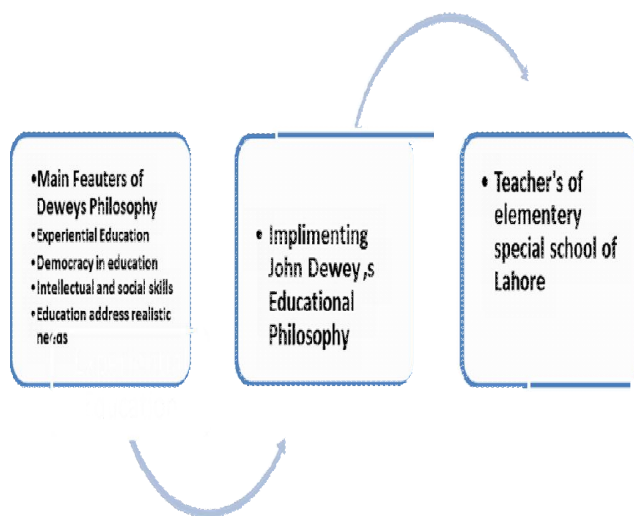
This gives little room for teachers and learners to experiment and experience skills revolving around critical thinking, hands-on approach, and dialogue and hence may not contribute to students who are well equipped to recognize their right to participation and contribute towards a truly democratic society. Implementation of Dewey's philosophy may be used as a tool to re-engineer educational systems.¹⁰ Although students with special needs such as disabilities are marginalized and somewhat neglected

as compared to children in mainstream education implementation of curriculums is a little more flexible and education plans are created keeping individual differences in view.

This study looks at how educational philosophy such as that of John Dewey and pragmatism is implemented in special schools in Lahore. With an emphasis on special schools, which ought to look at their student as an individual, have individual education programs, and are student-driven, this study will see how Dewey's philosophy is implemented in their school.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we examine the incidence of child marriage in Pakistan and the changes that have taken place over time in the profile of the women who marry before turning 18.



Research questions: The main research question of this study addresses:

- To what degree is the philosophy of John Dewey implemented in Pakistani NGO-run special schools?

Materials and Methods

Research Design:

The design of the study was quantitative and a survey research design was conducted to look at how Dewey's philosophy is implemented in schools.

Participants:

As a pilot, a sample of 32 participants participated in this study from an NGO-based special school in Lahore. The participants included senior teachers who teach in the elementary section of the school, with at

least five years of experience teaching children with disabilities. The sample was selected via convenient sampling.

Instrument:

The instrument consists of 21 items that look at John Dewey's philosophy of education using a 5-point Likert scale (1-5) adapted from Khasawneh et al work.¹¹

Results & Discussion

All teachers were females, had done special education training, and had at least 1 year of experience. However, when asked, the teachers did not recall Dewey and his philosophy.

Special education is more student-driven, looking at the child's individual performance and potential. The teacher looks at how each student is different and has his/her own experiences which shape them.¹² 43.8% of teachers disagreed that individual differences are taken into account while raising individuals who are actively contributing to society. 37.5% agreed that individual differences are taken into account. Similarly, there was a mixed view about whether the schools neglect student needs. Around 56.25% of teachers believed that schools do not neglect the needs whereas around 40.93% believed that schools do neglect the needs of students. Around 43.43% of teachers believed that schools do not guide the student's expertise for him/her to achieve maximum growth, and 56.23% of teachers believed that elementary schools do not provide opportunities for students for decision making and expression of opinions.

Dewey believed that students should be active participants in the process. Hence, the teaching methodology should be such that it engages the student. 59.37% of teachers agreed that the teaching method utilized is based on problem-solving, dialogue, and self-learning. 71.71% of teachers responded that the school gives its students plenty of opportunities to learn via hands-on activities and 74.9% of teachers felt that adequate activities are provided to students so that they can learn through projects. These findings show that there is an inclination toward experiential learning or that more hands-on approach.

As Dewey believed in a strong relationship between human intelligence and the process of social interactions, a school provides a platform for these interactions.³ 67.21% of teachers felt that the school provides its students with opportunities to acquire

intellectual and social skills. The other 33.55 % of teachers partially disagreed and 3.125% of the teachers strongly disagreed.

Dewey's philosophy focused on how students need to be given the space to experiment, experience, and discover themselves.³ 59.37% of teachers reported that in school, teachers become more of a guide than a knowledge source. 59.36% of teachers believed that through experimenting teachers can discover knowledge. 43.76% of teachers believed that schools process themselves as an experimenting ground or laboratories rather than just lecture halls.

Dewey tried to build a link of how by guiding students in a way that encourages critical thinking, hands-on approach, and dialogue they can become better democratic citizens who may become agents of change and may help in working towards a better community.^{8,10} In this research it was seen that there was a mixed opinion on how schools prepare students to move towards being better, more socially responsible, and democratic citizens. 56.25% of teachers felt that elementary schools in Lahore help their students to be good citizens whereas 40.6% of teachers felt that schools do not provide an adequate environment for students to become good citizens who are also disciplined.

Dewey believed in progressive education. 53.12% of teachers felt that the schools address realistic needs rather than be absorbed in the past.

Conclusion

This study is just preliminary pilot research looking at the implementation of John Dewey's philosophical approach in special schools. It is important to note that with children with disabilities, there is already a reliance on teaching and learning aids. While it may be seen that there is an inclination towards experimentation and experiential learning, there was a mixed opinion about how this approach can bridge the gap and make better, democratic citizens for the future. Future research needs to look at a more diverse group and how we can make students agents of the change via engaging school education.

References

1. Sleeper, R. The necessity of pragmatism: John Dewey's conception of philosophy. New York: Yale University Press; 1987.
2. Welchman, J. Dewey's ethical thought: Ithaca: Cornell University Press; 1995.
3. Dewey, J. Experience and Education. New York: Touchstone Books; 1938.

4. Jacoby, B. The New Student Activism: Supporting Students as Agents of Social Change. Journal of College and Character, 18(1), 1-8 ;(2017).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2194587x.2016.1260479>
5. Johnson, T. Discipleship or pilgrimage? State University of New York Press; 1995.
6. Rorty, R. Philosophy and the mirror of nature. Princeton: Princeton University Press; 1979.
7. Ryan, A. John Dewey and the high tide of American liberalism. New York: London; 1995.
8. Dewey, J. Democracy and education. New York: the Free Press; 1944.
9. Vazir, N. Curriculum as practiced in Pakistan. Karachi: The Agha Khan University; 2003. Retrieved from: https://ecommons.aku.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com.pk/&httpsredir=1&article=1125&context=pakistan_ied_pdck
10. Mirza, Zoaib. What Can Pakistan Learn from John Dewey? "My Lord! Enrich me with knowledge..." International Management Review. 2021, Vol. 17 Issue 1, p37-41.5p; 2021
11. Khasawneh, O. M., Miqdadi, R. M., & Hijazi, A. Y. Implementing pragmatism and John Dewey's educational philosophy in Jordanian public schools. Journal of International Education Research, 10(1), 37; 2014.
12. Ahmad, S., & Yousaf, M. Special Education in Pakistan: in the perspective of educational policies and plans. Academic Research International, 1(2); 2011.