

Implementation of John Dewey's Pragmatic Philosophy at the University Level: Perspective of University Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: The purpose of the present study was to know whether John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy was implemented at the university level because students at this level are expected to be problem solvers who can critically analyse things and reflect on logical reasoning and abstract thinking in their daily lives.

Methodology: All university teachers teaching at public sector universities of Lahore were considered the population of the study. A total of (N=160) teachers were selected as participants in the study through a stratified random sampling technique. The descriptive research design was used for the study. An already developed research instrument, "John Dewey's Educational Philosophy Questionnaire" by Khasawneh (2014), was used to collect data from the participants.

Findings: Generally, university teachers perceived that the philosophy of John Dewey was implemented at the university level in terms of the provision of help to students to become responsible citizens, freedom to students' opinions, and emphasizing students to discover knowledge through experimentation. However, teachers were less agreed that the university implements Dewey's pragmatic philosophy in terms of reflecting outside reality in the educational process of the university, considering classes as laboratories rather than lecture rooms, and addressing real needs rather than indulging in the past. Moreover, significant difference found between the perspective of teachers with reference to their teaching experience and different disciplines. However, no significant difference ascertained based on their designation.

Conclusion: Based on the findings of the study, more focus might be given to outside realities because schools are expected to prepare students for accepting the outside realities that exist in society and performing their roles accordingly. Moreover, the educational process might be modified by considering students' present and future needs to bridge the gap between the demands of society and the school.

Keywords: Implementation of John Dewey's Pragmatic Philosophy, University Teachers' Perspective.

Article History

Received:
October 27, 2022

Revised:
December 15, 2022

Accepted:
December 16, 2022

Published:
December 17, 2022

Introduction

History is enlightened with the work of several philosophers who were trailblazers ahead of their time and set the trend for others by presenting their worthwhile ideas on the transformation of education. These philosophers include Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, George Herbert Mead, Herbert Spencer, and John Dewey, who typically exposed crucial issues of education and shifted discussions to a different paradigm, so their followers could grapple through their queries and build on their ideas (Firmanto et al., 2019; Francis, 2020; Popp, 2012). Moreover, they developed notions and theories that transformed the traditional paradigms in their respective domains and opened up new research areas for future researchers. The most influential person of the 20th century, John Dewey, is considered an eminent philosopher among those philosophers who revolutionized the concept of education. According to him, the fundamental purpose of education is to cultivate students' social and moral development, which can be accomplished through problem-solving, discussion, debate, and decision-making among students (Gutek, 2014; Simpson & den Hond, 2022).

John Dewey envisioned teaching and learning methods beyond the standards of his times (rote memorization) and showed the relationship between education and democracy. Dewey argued for progressive education in opposition to traditional subjects, standards, and education methods. He believes traditional education is unsuitable for young children (Farjoun et al., 2015; Simpson, 2017). Therefore, children's education should be based on socially engaging and developmentally appropriate learning activities. Furthermore, he sees education as a way of life rather than a method of preparing students for the future. Dewey dealt with the relationship between education and democracy for most of his life systematically. Dewey made significant contributions to pragmatism, progressivism, instrumentalism, functionalism, aesthetic naturalism, empiricism, and other fields (Flinders & Thornton, 2013; Schiro, 2012; Theobald, 2015). Dewey's ideas set him apart from other philosophers that supported traditional schooling. Dewey believes that successful education stems from social relationships and that schools can fulfill this social function well by emphasizing real-life situations and allowing children to participate in educational activities in various settings (Fairfield et al., 2010; Williams, 2017). To Dewey, institutions should provide a social environment where students can learn better in usual situations. He believes that individuals are unique learners influenced by education in another way. He supported student-centered learning. His educational ideas influenced people all around the world. Many of Dewey's ideas about education, democracy, and the relationships between the two have been studied by many researchers in the field of education. Dewey's social and educational theories were shaped by his views on democracy, society, and problem-solving. Nevertheless, many Dewey academics, philosophers, and educators turned to him for inspiration and guidance (Francis, 2020; Gordon, 2016). Dewey contends that experience does not relate to our mental state. We are within the experience. As a result of the interaction between various spheres of existence, a dynamic society must be adaptable in terms of its institutions, where students can explore new ways to interact with others and express themselves. This way, for the first time, Dewey recognized education as having a significant impact on one's life and society (Khasawneh et al., 2014; Williams, 2017).

Dewey's contribution towards the development of pragmatism is an interaction that is a series of activities in which a problem is identified, a solution is proposed, the rationale for the solution is explained, and then the solution is finally tested in action. This process focuses on reflection as an underlying goal of pragmatism. Reflection, according to Dewey, is a technique used to recognize imposed pragmatism, a state of transient happiness and a process of enhancing mental ability. However, teachers and students may find reflection challenging and rewarding even though it involves conditional and firm commitments (Lorino, 2018; Maddux & Donnett, 2015).

Dewey's approach supports many of the ideals of learner-centered educators (Schiro, 2012). Students develop their knowledge through personal meaning in the classes instead of teacher-imposed information. Students are seen learning by doing and solving issues with their hands in these classrooms. When teachers prepare lessons, they evaluate student interests and integrate curriculum subjects with just a concentration

on project learning. The educational experience comprises a child's cognitive, sociological, emotional, and spiritual growth (Bernstein, 2010; Simpson & den Hond, 2022).

In the Pakistani context at the university level, Dewey's theories are less common due to standardized testing that emphasizes academic achievement in today's classrooms (Theobald, 2015). Teacher reform in higher education has focused on shifting teachers' practices from mainstream lecture-style teaching toward student-centered pedagogical approaches. These improvements in learner-centered university education teaching may be encouraging, but they must link responsiveness and imagination properly (Elkjaer & Simpson, 2011; English, 2016). Dewey proposes a new vision of university systems that foster meaningful inquiry by reconstructing knowledge holistically. In his view, curricula should be designed to enable students to personally experience the complex, value-laden, and relationally complex difficulties that define democratic society and disciplines (Maduabuchi & Anowai, 2018; Visser, 2019). This way, students may develop critical self-awareness and creative capacities to participate in a highly complex world. Additionally, it involves students in the procedures that motivate activity as intellectuals and design the questions that will guide their own higher education processes. The pragmatic university must therefore establish an institutional infrastructure that is not only holistic but also connects students' evolving concerns to learning settings that foster real inquiry and reconstructing actions (Francis, 2020; Stoller, 2018).

Consequently, pragmatism provides significantly alternative ways to think and behave in organizational settings; nonetheless, for Pragmatist concepts to thrive in Organizational Research, our institution has to better comprehend the consequences of this perspective for research practice (Maduabuchi & Anowai, 2018; Simpson & den Hond, 2022). Considering the significance of Dewey's pragmatic philosophy for developing abstract and critical thinking in students, sufficient research studies have yet to focus on higher education at the university level. Therefore, the present study aimed to highlight teachers' perspectives regarding the implementation of John Dewey's conception of pragmatism in the context of the public sector universities of Lahore.

Objectives of the Study

1. Know the perspective of university teachers on the implementation of John Dewey's philosophical thoughts in public sector universities of Lahore.
2. Compare the difference between the teachers' perspective on the implementation of John Dewey's philosophical thoughts based on their discipline.
3. Compare the difference between the teachers' perspective on the implementation of John Dewey's philosophical thoughts based on their teaching experience.
4. Compare the difference between the teachers' perspective on the implementation of John Dewey's philosophical thoughts based on their designation.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do university teachers perceive that John Dewey's philosophical thoughts are implemented in public sector universities of Lahore?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in teachers' perspective on the implementation of John Dewey's philosophical thoughts based on their discipline?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference in teachers' perspective on the implementation of John Dewey's philosophical thoughts based on their teaching experience?
4. Is there a statistically significant difference in teachers' perspective on the implementation of John Dewey's philosophical thoughts based on their designation?

Methodology

Research Design

The descriptive research design was used for the study. The study was quantitative in nature, and a survey method was used to collect the data from participants.

Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the study included all university teachers teaching at public sector universities of Lahore. A total of 160 teachers were selected as a sample for the study from three public sector universities of Lahore: (i) University of Education, Lahore, (ii) University of the Punjab, Lahore, and (iii) Lahore College for Women University. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select the participants for the study.

Research Instrument, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

Researchers used John Dewey's Educational Philosophy Questionnaire, developed by Khasawneh in 2014, to collect data from the study participants. The questionnaire included 21 items to know about the teachers' perspective on the implementation of Dewey's educational philosophy in educational institutions. The format of the questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree. Permission was obtained from the author to use the questionnaire. The questionnaire was pilot tested on 50 teachers (25 male and 25 female) before collecting the data from the participants of the study. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability on 21 items was .79 in the pilot study, which showed that the instrument was reliable and could be used to collect data from the study's participants. After pilot testing, the questionnaire was administered to 160 university teachers to know their perspectives on the implementation of John Dewey's philosophy at the university level. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of SPSS software. Frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, *t*-test, and ANOVA were used to analyze the data.

Table 1: *Detail of Teachers' Demographic Characteristics*

Variables	Groups	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	72	45%
	Female	88	55%
Qualification	MPhil	70	43.7%
	PhD	90	56.3%
Teaching Experience	1-5years	43	26.8%
	06-10years	41	25.6%
	11-15years	46	28.8%
	Above 15 years	30	18.8%
Designation	Lecturer	85	53.2%
	Assistant Professor	40	25%
	Associate Professor	35	21.8%
Disciplines	Social Sciences	43	26.8%
	Sciences	40	25%
	Management Sciences	41	25.6%
	Arts and Humanities	36	22.6%

The table shows that in the total sample of 160 teachers, 72 (45%) were male and 88 (55%) were female, according to the table. M.Phil was the qualification of 70 (43.7%) teachers, while PhD was the qualification of 90 (56%) teachers. 43 (26.8%) teachers had 1 to 5 years of teaching experience, 41 (25.6%) had 6 to 10 years, 46 (28.8%) had 11 to 15 years, and 30 (18.8%) had more than 15 years. The majority of the teachers, 85 (53.2%), were lecturers, while 40 (25%) were assistant professors and 35 (21.8%) were associate professors. 43 (26.8%) of teachers studied social sciences, 40 (25%) studied sciences, 41 (25.6%) studied management sciences, and 36 (22.6%) studied arts and humanities. The discipline of 43 (26.8%) teachers was social sciences, 40(25%) was sciences, 41(25.6%) was management sciences, and 36(22.6%) was arts and humanities.

Table 2: *Teachers' Perspective on the Implementation of John Dewey's Philosophy at the University Level*

Sr.No	Statements	Mean	SD
I perceive that the university implements John Dewey's philosophy at the university by the:			
1	provision of ample opportunities by the university for hands-on activities	3.31	0.91
2	use of pragmatic teaching methods such as dialogue, problem-solving, and self-learning in university	3.55	0.89
3	provision of opportunities to students for acquiring intellectual and social skills.	3.59	0.55
4	setting goals which foster individuals and a democratic society	3.20	0.84
5	provision of activities for students to practice learning through projects.	3.90	0.56
6	freedom to students for expressing opinions and making decisions.	3.93	0.76
7	provision of help to students in becoming disciplined and responsible citizens.	3.99	0.66
8	having a model environment that promotes harmony and solidarity is the University's goal for the youth	3.75	0.77
9	provision of an atmosphere to produce democratic citizens.	3.90	0.56
10	emphasis on individual differences by the teachers.	3.65	0.75
11	provision of opportunities for students to become active students rather than to be passive.	3.40	0.76
12	focusing on the training of teachers as guides for students' learning rather than a source of knowledge.	3.65	0.75
13	emphasising students to discover knowledge through experimentation.	3.71	0.93
14	considering classes as laboratories rather than lecture rooms.	3.22	0.81
15	preparation of students for conceptualizing social life.	3.73	0.83
16	avoiding making students fully obedient or performing imposed duties.	3.30	0.96
17	provision of help to students in utilizing their maximum potential.	3.75	0.77
18	reflecting outside reality in the educational process of the university.	3.20	0.83
19	addressing realistic needs rather than indulging in the past.	3.38	0.86
20	focusing on the learners' present needs.	3.66	0.73
21	giving priority to the learners' interests and needs.	3.55	0.86
Overall		3.59	0.48

The table presents the mean scores of the responses of teachers on each item related to the implementation of John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy at the university level. The analysis of mean scores shows either teachers were highly agreed that university implements Dewey's pragmatic philosophy in terms of provision of help to students in becoming disciplined and responsible citizens ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.66$), freedom to students for expressing opinions and making decisions ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.76$), provision of activities for students to practice learning through projects ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.56$), Provision of an atmosphere to produce democratic citizens ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.56$), Having a model environment that promotes harmony and solidarity is the University's goal for the youth ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.77$), provision of help to students in utilizing their maximum potential ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.77$), and emphasising students to discover knowledge through experimentation ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.93$). However, teachers were less agreed that university implements Dewey's pragmatic philosophy in terms of reflecting outside reality in the educational process of the university ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.83$), considering classes as laboratories rather than lecture rooms ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 0.81$), avoiding making students fully obedient or performing imposed duties ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.96$), addressing realistic needs rather than indulging in the past ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 0.86$). It

reveals that these practices are less implemented as compared to other practices related to pragmatic philosophy.

Table 3: *Comparison of Teachers' Perspectives about the Implementation of Dewey's Philosophy at the University Level Based on Different Disciplines*

	Variables	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Disciplines	Social Sciences	43	3.75	.490	7.118	.000
	Science	40	3.59	.393		
	Management Sciences	41	3.20	.400		
	Arts and Humanities	36	3.85	.508		

One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the perspectives of teachers from different educational disciplines on the implementation of John Dewey's educational philosophy at the university level. The analysis of variance showed that there was a significant difference among the perspectives of teachers from different disciplines on the implementation of John Dewey's educational philosophy at the university level ($F= 7.118, p= .000$). The mean score of teachers from Arts and Humanities ($M = 3.85$) was higher than the teachers from other disciplines. It implies that they were more agreed that John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy was implemented at the university as compared to teachers from management sciences and social sciences.

Table 4: *Comparison of Teachers' Perspectives about the Implementation of Dewey's Philosophy at the University Level Based on their Teaching Experience*

	Variables	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Teaching Experience	1-5 years	43	3.37	.403	10.54	.000
	6-10 years	41	3.87	.486		
	11-15 years	46	3.44	.190		
	Above 15 years	30	3.57	.506		

One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the perspectives of teachers on the implementation of John Dewey's educational philosophy based on their teaching experience at the university level. The analysis of variance showed that there was a significant difference among the perspectives of teachers on the implementation of John Dewey's educational philosophy based on their teaching experience at the university level ($F= 10.58, p= .000$). The analysis of mean scores shows that teachers having 6-10 years of teaching experience more agreed on the implementation of John Dewey's educational philosophy at the university level ($M = 3.87$) as compared to other groups of teachers with different teaching experience.

Table 5: *Comparison of Teachers' Perspectives about the Implementation of Dewey's Philosophy at the University Level Based on Different Designations*

	Variables	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Designation	Lecturer	85	3.66	.461	4.02	.021
	Assistant Professor	40	3.36	.449		
	Associate Professor	35	3.57	.506		

One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the perspectives of teachers on the implementation of John Dewey's educational philosophy based on their different designations at the university level. The analysis of variance showed that there was no significant difference among the perspectives of teachers on the implementation of John Dewey's educational philosophy based on their designations at the university level ($F= 4.02, p= .021$). However, the analysis of mean scores shows that lecturers and associate professors

were more agreed on the implementation of John Dewey's educational philosophy at the university level as compared to assistant professors.

Discussion

John Dewey's philosophical thoughts influenced educational institutions by focusing on the learners and society. It suggested a flexible learning environment that may facilitate them to adjust themselves by keeping in view the changing environment (Ferraro et al., 2015; Misak, 2013). The purpose of the present study was to know whether this philosophy was implemented at the university level to prepare students as problem solvers and critical thinkers. The study revealed that university teachers perceived that the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey was implemented at the university level in terms of the provision of help to students in becoming disciplined and responsible citizens, freedom to students for expressing opinions and making decisions, provision of activities for students to practice learning through projects, provision of an atmosphere to produce democratic citizens, having a model environment that promotes harmony and solidarity is the university's goal for the youth, provision of help to students in utilizing their maximum potential, and emphasizing students to discover knowledge through experimentation. However, teachers were less agreed that the university implements Dewey's pragmatic philosophy in terms of reflecting outside reality in the educational process of the university, considering classes as laboratories rather than lecture rooms, avoiding making students fully obedient or performing imposed duties, and addressing real needs rather than indulging in the past. Hence, it is evident that these practices were less implemented as compared to other practices related to pragmatic philosophy at university level. The study's finding related to implementing Dewey's philosophical thoughts is consistent with the study results of Soraty (2008) who revealed in his study that pragmatic thought was implemented in the universities of Arab in the form of teaching methods, textbooks, and educational research. The finding is also aligned to some extent with the study results of Khasawneh et al. (2014) and Jarrah et al. (2020), who found that teachers believed pragmatic educational ideas were adopted to a modest extent in educational institutions. The study showed a significant mean score difference between teachers' perspectives on implementing Dewey's philosophy at the university level based on their disciplines. The teachers of Arts and Humanities agreed more that Dewey's philosophical thoughts were implemented at university than the teachers of other disciplines. This finding is somewhat inconsistent with the findings of Kovarik et al. (2013) and Radu's (2011) study, which showed that science teachers were more practical and pragmatic in making abstract ideas less challenging for learners. A key goal of mathematics and science teachers was to help students acquire knowledge through experimenting. Moreover, the study's findings showed a significant mean score difference between the teachers' perspective on implementing John Dewey's educational philosophy at the university level and their teaching experience and designation. Teachers with 6-10 years of teaching experience have higher beliefs about implementing John Dewey's educational philosophy at the university level. This study found that the lecturers have higher beliefs about implementing John Dewey's educational philosophy at the university level. These findings contradict the findings of Khasawneh et al. (2014), where no significant difference was found.

Conclusion

Based on the results, the researchers realized that in Pakistan, this study is very important as Pakistan is under the pressure of political and economic changes, and a pragmatic approach helps in shaping a democratic society. Through the teachers' results, the researcher reached a certain point that in Pakistan, more emphasis should be given to Pakistani universities' teachers about the use of Dewey's approach in terms of democracy of the teachers and students. The conclusion drawn from this study is that policymakers, administration, curriculum makers, and teachers might use Dewey's Pragmatic approach at institutes to its fullest extent. This task might be done by designing a learner-centered curriculum and providing freedom to the teachers so that they may engage students in problem-solving activities, experimentation, and research-based projects rather than promoting a teacher-centered classroom.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are given:

- The administration might focus more on reflecting outside reality in the educational process of the university by modifying curriculum and teaching methods.
- The university administration might engage learners in the teaching and learning process by considering classes as laboratories rather than lecture rooms.
- Teachers might provide freedom and flexibility to students rather than making students fully obedient or performing imposed duties.
- Teachers might focus on addressing the real needs of the present and future rather than indulging in the past.

Acknowledgments

None

Conflict of Interest


Authors have no conflict of interest.

Funding Source

The authors received no funding to conduct this study.

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