

Education For Social Justice: A Comparative Study of University Teachers' Conceptions and Practice

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Abstract : This comparative study seeks to develop a deeper understanding of what is meant by “education for social justice” (ESJ) - an aspiration articulated by universities, though often without much definition. The research methodology involved thematic analysis of data from in-depth interviews with academics (voluntary participants) in different disciplines and institutions in the UK, Czech Republic and other EU countries. The interviews explored lecturers’ conceptions of ESJ, their practice of it, and associated challenges and enabling factors. Main findings are that ESJ is construed as provision of equitable and conscientising education opportunities that run across the whole higher education (HE) journey, from widening access to HE to stimulating critical learning and awareness that can empower graduates to transform their lives and societies. Teaching practice featured study of topics related to social justice; collaborative and creative learning activities, and assignments offering choice and connection to students’ realities. Student responses could be mixed, occasionally resistant, but mostly positive in terms of gaining increased confidence and awareness of equality and social responsibility. Influences at the macro, meso and micro level could support or limit scope for ESJ. Overall, the study highlights the strong, values-based commitment of HE teachers to facilitating student learning engagement, wellbeing and development towards building a better world.

Keywords : higher education, social justice, inclusivity, diversity

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