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## Social Justice Leadership Capabilities for Pre-Service Teachers in Contemporary Times: An Education Policy Perspective

**Emma Priscilla Barnett**   
University of the Free State  
Bloemfontein, South Africa

**Edwin Darrell de Klerk\***   
North-West University, Mahikeng Campus  
Mahikeng, South Africa

**Abstract.** In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, social justice leadership (S JL) has become more imperative for pre-service teachers in higher education institutions (HEIs). Significantly, HEIs face a serious need for change that encourages the advancement of S JL with the aim to develop knowledge, equitability, accessibility, and connectivity. The problem is that pre-service teachers still find it challenging to assert themselves without rejection, fear, or prejudice, whilst they are uncertain of how to enact S JL during their studies in HEIs. As such, this conceptual paper aims to explore social justice leadership (S JL) capabilities for pre-service teachers in contemporary times from an education policy perspective. An emphasis on S JL capabilities can be directive in terms of pre-service teachers' capacity regarding a leadership style that encourages engagement in school leadership practices. Having employed social justice leadership theory and a conceptual research design, stipulations in the Revised Policy on Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) were analyzed by means of interpretive policy analysis. The significance of policy analysis of this kind is that it can contribute to the empowerment of pre-service teachers on how to enact S JL in HEIs. The findings showed that S JL is vital because it can assist pre-service teachers in constantly questioning if social justice is actively applied in teaching and learning environments. Also, a socially just environment in HEIs can contribute to an awakening of pre-service teachers' S JL abilities, and an application of transformation reflection can assist pre-service teachers to enact S JL. This paper offers a social justice leadership capabilities framework (S JLCF) that recommends that HEIs should advance their understanding of policy options, create dialogue spaces and promote transformative activism so that pre-service teachers can be in a position to enhance social justice practices.

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\* Corresponding author: Edwin Darrell de Klerk; [Darrell.DeKlerk@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Darrell.DeKlerk@nwu.ac.za)

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## 1. Introduction

Social justice leadership (S JL) presupposes an engagement in independent, wide-ranging, and transformative practices to create a just and equal educational environment (Wang, 2018). The expectation is that individuals such as pre-service teachers should act autonomously, and show a critical understanding, knowledge, and leadership skills during and after their years of study in higher education institutions (HEIs) (Caliskan, 2020). This expectation implies that HEIs should promote equity and equal opportunities concerning learning, teaching, and student involvement in decision-making (Jappie, 2021). However, addressing practices related to S JL in HEIs can, unfortunately, be indicated as easier said than done. For instance, a remaining issue seems to be that limited attention is paid to transformation efforts, social justice, and human rights in academic endeavours. Tjabane and Pillay (2011) contend that the pursuit of social justice is critical in the milieu of the narrowing of the policy agenda, the shifting of policy associations, and uncertainties. This is because debates and conversations regarding social justice in policy statements have been slow and leadership outcomes are regarded as unsatisfactory (Jappie, 2021). We, therefore, contend that it is crucial that HEIs consider reimagining what S JL could be, whilst making provision for enacting social justice in contexts where uncomfortable questions are asked with the aim of transforming current unjust practices. We are of the opinion that S JL capabilities can drive meaningful change in HEIs that not only improves pre-service teachers' leadership experiences but may assist them to be active agents of change in their current educational environments and that of the future to come, where there may be injustice and inequity.

From an education policy point of view, we argue that HEIs should imagine new pathways regarding S JL for pre-service teachers. The significance of a policy perspective on S JL can never be overestimated. We hold the view that policies should be regarded as fundamental in the pursuit of the social justice agenda to communicate ideas that may shape the perceptions of pre-service teachers. As the literature about S JL has illuminated, increased attention is being paid to leaders' diverse mindsets and understandings, and a developmental lens remains largely missing from these explorations, as well as the broader social justice literature (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2019). In an attempt to contribute to a renewal of thoughts, the purpose of this paper is to explore how stipulations in education policy can provide innovative capabilities that can be applied by HEIs to equip pre-service teachers with knowledge and skills to enact S JL. We, therefore, ask the following research question: *How can an analysis of stipulations in the Revised Policy on Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) provide innovative capabilities that can be applied by higher education institutions to equip pre-service teachers to enact social justice leadership in contemporary times?*

## 2. Literature review

To deepen our understanding of the research topic, we consulted literature that described theoretical perspectives regarding SJL capabilities for pre-service teachers in contemporary times from an education policy perspective. The literature review will cover aspects such as: *why social justice leadership should be regarded as significant; the preparation of pre-service teachers and education policy and social justice leadership development.*

Social justice leaders are individuals for whom the persistent search for greater fairness in educational admission; opportunity; and consequences, are essential principles of their work (Angelle et al., 2016). Such pursuit relates to social justice as praxis, implying that social justice leaders should be willing “to look back and into the future to reflect and act on social justice matters” (Brown, 2004, p. 96). Such actions should not be regarded as externally motivated but necessitate individuals to seriously apply knowledge, whilst examining and deconstructing the taken-for-granted acknowledgment of their personal opinions (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). As such, SJL should be geared toward a leadership style that encourages engagement in leaders’ practices to convert educational settings into spaces where everybody thrives amidst conditions that may be regarded as despairing (Eastern Michigan University, 2021). Social justice leaders should, therefore, use knowledge to fight against intolerance, whilst portraying a willingness to unlearn intolerance and challenge assumptions so that they can become warriors for social justice (Slater et al., 2014). In this regard, an application of SJL requires individuals to use intelligence to identify, accept, and tolerate differences so that, when employed during leadership enactment, they would experience a sense of self-care in terms of leadership empowerment (Kowalchuk, 2017). Social justice leaders should thus have the required understanding and knowledge of the ethos of social justice and the ability to critically reflect on social justice practices. Firstly, an ethos of social justice holds a reference to the empowerment of individuals and systems that demolish obstacles to well-being (Marshall-Lee & Watson-Singleton, 2022). Secondly, critical reflection requires that individuals identify, question, and assess their deeply-held assumptions (Niesche, 2017) about what they know about social justice. The significance of SJL should, therefore, be observed as a deliberate effort to act so that individuals (also pre-service teachers) are empowered through knowledge, an ethos of social justice, and critical reflection. Aligned with the purpose of this paper, the significance of SJL from a policy perspective may contribute to pre-service teachers becoming the “prophetic voice in critique, encouragement, hope, possibility and vision” (Purpel, as cited in Skousen, 2022, p. 2).

Education policy can be considered as an action by the government, through legislation, that the implementation of any policy should hold benefits for a country and its citizens (Hartshorne, 1999). Considering the aforementioned view, indications such as “action” and “hold benefits” (Hartshorne, 1999) call for the implementation of possible policy options. In the case of this paper, possible policy options regarding innovative capabilities were identified that can be applied by HEIs to equip pre-service teachers with capabilities to enact SJL. In higher education, policy perspectives about SJL may assist pre-service teachers to

apply socially just pedagogies within their instruction practices that will support knowledge acquisition, whilst they may obtain an understanding of what it means to undo prevailing oppressive actions and contribute to all-encompassing and socially just learning settings (Case, 2017). Furthermore, policy perspectives may also be used to prepare pre-service teachers on how to become self-governing individuals who may have a sense of personal agency, social answerability, and a desire to be effective implementers of social justice in society (Subreenduth, 2013). Significantly, policy reflects the intentions and strategies for the implementation of its focus (Ohajunwa, 2022). Aligned with this paper, policy intentions and strategies can be regarded as representative of capabilities that can be applied by HEIs to prepare pre-service teachers on how to enact SJL.

Pre-service teachers are individuals who are registered in a teacher education program with an aspiration to obtain a qualification that will enable them to teach in public schools or private sectors nationally or globally (Van der Merwe, 2022). The professional preparation of teachers should, therefore, be regarded as vital for the qualitative development of education and should be treated as a key area in educational advancement (Mahato, 2022). According to UNESCO (2021), Pakistan used distance training through television and radio in the 1970s to accomplish higher numbers of proficient elementary school teachers, whereas pre-service teachers in Brazil are required to follow an extremely organized curriculum that they implement directly in primary schools. In the South African context, the Norms and Standards for Educators (NSE) (South Africa, 2000) was the primary official policy relating to academic qualifications for teachers. The policy designates the responsibilities, their related set of practical capabilities (standards), and experiences (ethics) for the development of educators (South Africa, 2000). The NSE (South Africa, 2000) has since been replaced by the Revised Policy on Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) (South Africa, 2011) and more recently a revised version of the 2011 document, MRTEQ (South Africa, 2015), was promulgated. Significantly, MRTEQ (South Africa, 2015) requires,

*all teacher education programs to address the critical challenges facing education in South Africa today - especially the poor content and conceptual knowledge found amongst teachers, as well as the legacies of apartheid, by incorporating situational and contextual elements that assist teachers in developing competences that enable them to deal with diversity and transformation... (pp. 8-9).*

The use of “diversity” and “transformation” in the above stipulation (South Africa, 2015), can be regarded as an illustration of a search for SJL in terms of the preparation of pre-service teachers. By preparing pre-service teachers to become perceptive participants in a democratic society, and especially if the development of critical thinking is encouraged, they may be equipped to be active champions of social justice in their contexts (Eidson, 2015). Thus, when scrutinizing education policy to ascertain how SJL might be articulated, it is critical to deliberate how policy ideas could offer indications that social justice is not restricted to singular denotations. Rather, education policy stipulations contain discursive foundations which permit analysts to interpret the meanings of texts so that the creation of advanced viewpoints (Larrabee & Morehead, 2010) regarding SJL can be possible.

### **3. Looking through the lens of social justice leadership theory**

There is no doubt that the world is complex and ever-changing. With particular reference to SJL and concomitant changes in how to think about social justice in HEIs, this paper employed social justice leadership theory (SJLT). According to Cochran-Smith (2010), SJLT is important for teacher preparation and should be understood as more than a process, curricular approach, or singular performance. Significantly, SJL should be thought of as multi-perspectival, uniting, significant, and autonomous viewpoints with commitments to honor the empowerment possibilities that can be found in policy documents. One of the functions of education policy is to produce new knowledge geared toward social justice. Therefore, the implementation of policies should explicitly advance the social justice agenda to ensure that all individuals (also pre-service teachers) are accommodated in a new schooling landscape (Juan et al., 2021). Also, SJL implies that individuals can be empowered in terms of ongoing leadership actions, leadership skills, and competencies that are continually being created, questioned, and refined. Furthermore, the enactment of SJL should be geared toward an awareness that information about pre-service teachers' leadership abilities is not stagnant and that the route toward justice is an enduring obligation of further interrogation and action (Kumashiro, 2015). Thus, research on SJL enactment by pre-service teachers should be geared toward them (pre-service teachers) working for change in their schools, and sustaining the momentum for reform in their own teaching practices.

#### **3.1 Social justice leadership capabilities for pre-service teachers**

Aligned with SJLT as indicated above, pre-service teachers should be made aware of the reality that SJL should include a combination of knowledge, an ethos of social justice, and critical reflection. In this regard, HEIs should be cognizant that pre-service teachers should be capacitated with a renewed sense of critical thinking, collaboration, reflection, and practical skills so that they can be able to enact SJL (Caliskan, 2020). A further explanation is that pre-service teachers should be prepared to have a sense of what social justice "looks like, feels like, and sounds like in teacher education, specifically, and community life, broadly" (Bondy et al., 2017, p. 5). Such knowledge is imperative for pre-service teachers because it may be capacitated so that they will be cognizant of how to be empathic and compassionate, show cultural competence, and are capable of nurturing relationships and building trust with diverse groups of people (Bondy et al., 2017).

### **4. Research design and methodology**

In this conceptual paper, we employ a qualitative methodology that encompasses the collection and analysis of non-numerical data such as texts in documents and policies (Bhandari, 2020). In this paper, texts in the MRTEQ (South Africa, 2015) were analyzed to determine innovative capabilities that can be applied by HEIs to equip pre-service teachers to enact SJL. In the case of conceptual papers, opinions are not resulting from facts in the conventional sense but comprise the integration and grouping of information relevant to previously developed ideas and philosophies (Hirschheim, 2008). This implies that conceptual papers are not without practical understandings but rather elaborate on concepts and theories that are advanced and verified through experimental inquiry (Jaakkola, 2020). In

this paper, we regard a conceptual research design (CRD) as applicable because it is generally referred to as research related to concepts and ideas about a phenomenon under study to solve real-world problems (Hirschheim, 2008). In policy studies, an application of CRD may assist researchers to analyze policy content, enabling them to excavate possible policy solutions to address particular issues (Farrell & Coburn, 2016). In this study, a CRD was useful because it enabled us to explore how stipulations in education policy can provide innovative capabilities that can be applied by HEIs to equip pre-service teachers with capabilities to enact SJL. Furthermore, conceptual research can be useful to go beyond existing ideas in stimulating ways, connect information across fields of specialization, provide innovative understandings, and widen the space of individual thinking (Gilson & Goldberg 2015). In so doing, we believe that knowledge of SJL can no longer be understood, explained, communicated, illustrated, grouped, and told in the same way (Foucault, 1973). We take this view to mean that a CRD assisted us to reject grand narratives about SJL and identifying potential policy options that could address issues of SJL, comparing those options, and then choosing the most effective, efficient, and feasible option to be implemented.

## **5. Data collection**

Stipulations from the MRTEQ (South Africa, 2015) were purposively selected to interpret how they can provide innovative capabilities that can be applied by HEIs to equip pre-service teachers to enact SJL. There were no set rules for deciding on the sample number concerning the total stipulations that were analyzed (Patton, 2002). However, we were cognizant that the number of stipulations would be sufficient to make meaning about the enactment of SJL. We used data saturation as a guiding principle (Polit & Beck, 2014), implying that we analyzed stipulations to the point at which we recognized no new information regarding perspectives about SJL from an education policy perspective. Education policies should be viewed as informal methods, a gathering of objects, actions, practices, and texts that express particular meanings about teaching and leadership (Ball, 2015). As such, understanding education policy texts demands a discussion on the meaning that may be hidden in policy texts (De Klerk & Barnett, 2020). Ball (1993) asserts that policy text is accompanied by a thought of policy as discourse, mainly to explicate what policy text comprises concerning “what can be said, and thought, but also who can speak, where and with what authority” (Ball, 1993, p. 14). To explain what can be said about SJL, we analyzed stipulations in the MRTEQ (South Africa, 2015) through an application of interpretive policy analysis (IPA).

## **6. Data analysis: Interpretive policy analysis**

IPA was applied to analyze stipulations in the MRTEQ (South Africa, 2015) to provide innovative capabilities that can be applied by HEIs to equip pre-service teachers to enact SJL. IPA aims to interpret meanings that can be found in policy discourse to share information and skills to address difficulties that may be experienced by individuals (Yanow 2007). Interpreting education policy discourse is difficult because it is not merely about considering its informative frameworks nor reading it as the announcements of policymakers, but also a consideration that the informal foundations they comprise, await interpretation (Olssen et al., 2004).

IPA, therefore, requires researchers to interpret stipulations in education policies (Yanow 2000) by identifying texts in policies that have particular reference to SJL, analyzing and interpreting relevant texts, and describing meaning that is relevant to SJL. We applied the following steps (Yanow, 2000) to conduct an IPA in an attempt to derive meaning as to how stipulations in the MRTEQ (South Africa, 2015) can provide innovative capabilities regarding the enactment of SJL by pre-service teachers. We identified texts that carry messages about SJL. These messages were analyzed and interpreted so that specific capabilities for the enactment of SJL by pre-service teachers could be highlighted. We then indicated the implications for the implementation of each capability for HEIs. The reading of education policy is not merely about considering its scholastic conditions or reading it as declarations of policy-makers, but to be cognizant that the broad configurations they contain, wait on interpretation (Olssen et al., 2004). As such, using IPA, we decoded stipulations in the MRTEQ (South Africa, 2015) to explore how education policy can provide innovative capabilities that can be applied by HEIs to equip pre-service teachers with capabilities to enact SJL. Drawing from the literature review in this paper, social justice leaders should have the required information and understanding of the ethos of social justice and have the ability to perform critical reflection on social justice practices. Firstly, “knowledge” should be regarded as a means to unchain social justice from excessively far-reaching or narrow depictions and to locate justice and equity at the center of SJL (Moll & Gonzalez, as cited in Bacon & Byfield, 2018). Secondly, an “ethos of social justice” refers to a characteristic spirit that motivates individuals according to the requirements of justice (Zala, 2018). Thirdly, “critical reflection” implies that individuals are guided into a depth of thinking that tests fundamental beliefs and ideas (Owen, 2016). Significantly, knowledge of SJL, ethos of social justice, and critical reflection are indicated as SJL capabilities for pre-service teachers and will henceforth be discussed.

### **7. Social justice leadership capabilities for pre-service teachers**

The problem regarding pre-service teachers’ ability to enact SJL is exacerbated by narrow thoughts on policy directives, shifting of policy associations, and uncertainties as to how social justice can be enacted. As a consequence, pre-service teachers lack an understanding of and ability to enact SJL. Arguably, SJL capabilities, as policy directives, may contribute to an advancement of pre-service teachers’ confidence to not only become better learners but to also gain an understanding of how to apply such leadership practices during their studies and possibly when they will be appointed as teachers in the future. SJL capabilities such as knowledge of SJL, ethos for social justice, and critical reflection are indicated in Figure 1, followed by an explication of each of the proposed capabilities. During this explication, the finding in each section will be highlighted and briefly discussed.

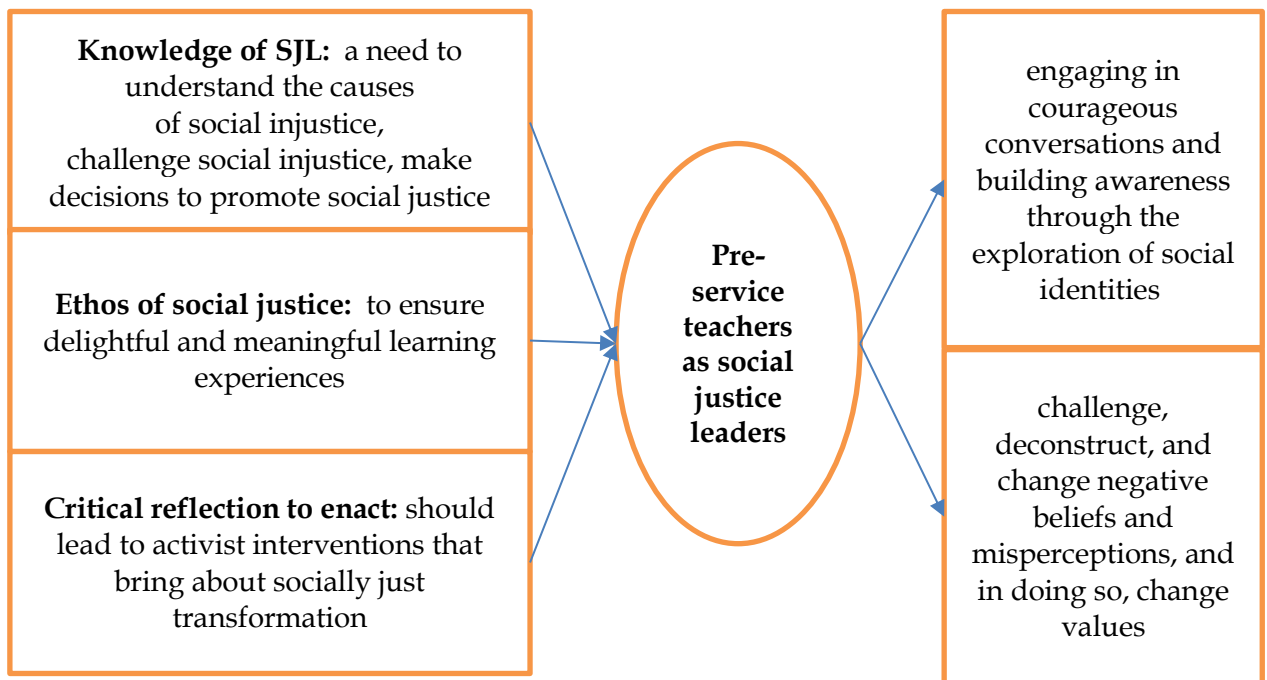


Figure 1: Social justice leadership capabilities framework (SJLCF)

### 7.1 Knowledge of social justice leadership

Moss and Schwab (2019) assert individuals' engagement with the known and the unknown is at the core of the notion of knowledge. To enable HEIs to engage with the known and the unknown regarding SJL, the MRTEQ emphasizes that focus should be placed on "the ability of teachers to draw reflexively from integrated and applied knowledge" (South Africa, 2015, p. 11) and "the explicit placing of knowledge...in the foreground, it gives renewed emphasis to what is to be learned and how it is to be learned" (South Africa, 2015, p. 11). Whilst integrated knowledge requires people to have the capability to leverage and build on individual know-how and experience (McIver et al., 2019), applied knowledge can be associated with the capability of applying intelligence and skills to understand and perform in an advanced manner (Davis, 2020). In this regard, HEIs should deliberately provide pre-service teachers with the know-how of how to be architects of social justice (Canli, 2020). Such know-how has reference to the motivation and training of pre-service teachers on how to question existing policies, expectations, and cultures so that they will be able to identify oppressive and unfair practices and replace such practices with ones that are suitable and fair (DeMatthews, 2015). Pre-service teachers should thus "be well educated" (Shulman, 1987, p. xiii) so that they will have renewed knowledge about what to learn and how to learn about enacting SJL.

Aligned with the literature in this paper, the acquisition of knowledge regarding SJL should be accompanied by an application of a social justice framework that favors meanings, norms, values, beliefs, and rules about SJL (Linnér et al., 2020). Social justice contexts provide a channel for linking institutions, issues, and policies (Ferman, 2020), thereby strengthening the preparation of pre-service teachers in terms of SJL. Considering the analysis above, the finding is that SJL is



vital because it can assist pre-service teachers in constantly questioning if social justice is actively applied in teaching and learning environments. In questioning whether they actively apply social justice, individuals should take the position of the original person (Rawls, as cited in Pogge, 2021). An original position implies that individuals such as pre-service teachers should investigate, and question their knowledge about SJL and to what extent they actually apply it (Pogge, 2021). Arguably, when pre-service teachers would take the original position, they use intelligence, strength, and commitment to create new knowledge of social justice in an attempt to address unequal circumstances in schools.

## **7.2 Ethos of social justice**

An ethos of social justice can be assumed as a straightforward approach, an attitude related to standardizing responsibilities, and the generation of a character to think, feel, act, and talk in certain ways (Cohen, 2001). From a social justice perspective, this implies that individuals (pre-service teachers) would express themselves about particular habits. Through this, they reveal a character toward identifying and eliminating all systems of subjugation and disparity existent in the policies and practices of institutions so that fair and equal opportunities can be provided to everyone (Murrell, 2006). Thus, to cultivate particular SJL habits and dispositions, HEIs should, according to the MRTEQ, “assist teachers in developing competencies” (South Africa, 2015, p. 11) because “professional attitudes and values constitute key elements of all teacher education programs” (South Africa, 2015, p. 13). This will assist pre-service teachers to “work in nuanced ways in confronting the diverse challenges faced by children in schools and the communities they serve” (South Africa, 2015, p. 13). Policy directives such as “developing competencies, attitudes and values” and “confronting diverse challenges” (South Africa, 2015) are indicative of an ethos for social justice. In this regard, HEIs should incorporate contemporary global perspectives and a better understanding of social justice in pre-service teacher programs, and train pre-service teachers on what it means to ground personal and educational commitments in social justice. In so doing, HEIs may create mindsets and attitudes in an attempt to inspire pre-service teachers to take a stand against injustices and inequalities (McLaren, 2003).

We, therefore, argue that the cultivation of an ethos of social justice should strengthen SJL. This is because, without a social justice mindset, pre-service teachers may turn a blind eye to disparities, enforce standardization, disregard experiences and autonomous views, and dampen the formation of socially just teaching and learning opportunities. In terms of the analysis in this section, the finding is that a socially just environment in HEIs can contribute to an awakening of pre-service teachers’ SJL abilities and how they may apply them in their own lives as well as that of others. Sanjakdar and Premier (2023) explain that individuals’ awareness of their ontology, that is, realities of being and knowing should feed their understanding, meanings, and experiences of SJL. Such awareness should inspire them to investigate why and how SJL should be enacted, thus influencing their work, thinking, and choices as social justice agents. Arguably, this kind of awareness is cardinal for catalyzing pre-service teachers’

critical consciousness and devotion to educational fairness and social justice aims, thus enabling them to see themselves anew in this world (Kraehe & Brown, 2011).

### **7.3 Critical reflection to enact social justice leadership**

Jacoby (2014) purports that critical reflection is the process of investigating, reviewing, and probing individual experiences within a broad framework of issues because it may guide pre-service teachers into a depth of thinking that challenges fundamental beliefs and assumptions about SJL. In terms of education policy, the MRTEQ advises that HEIs should explicitly “place knowledge, reflection, synthesis, and research in the foreground, it gives renewed emphasis to what is to be learned and how it is to be learned” (South Africa, 2015, p. 11). Thus, to prepare pre-service teachers on how to enact SJL, HEIs should consider an emphasis on reflection by education policy as a way to rethink

*the types of service activities in which students are engaged, as well as organizing projects and assignments that challenge students to investigate and understand the root causes of social problems and the courses of action necessary to challenge and change the structures that perpetuate those problems (Mitchell, 2008, p. 53).*

Such rethinking, engagement, understanding, and action (Mitchell, 2008) should not merely be for the sake of reflection but should be connected to how the world can be transformed, thus working toward making the world a social justice space. In this regard, HEIs should provide pre-service teachers with SJL tools (Owen, 2016). Firstly, critical reflection should be linked to experience and action, implying that SJL should be an active enactment of what it means to lead. Secondly, pre-service teachers should be taught how to reflect on the activist policy context and practices of social justice. This may position them to transform the values, beliefs, culture, and capacity of the school communities they will be involved with. When HEIs would thus create dialogue spaces for critical reflection, pre-service teachers may be empowered to reverse oppressive actions and contribute to socially just learning settings (Subreenduth, 2013). Significantly, in line with the analysis, the finding is that an application of transformation reflection can assist pre-service teachers to enact SJL. Carter and Nicolaides (2023) assert that a transformative stance toward reflection hinges on the idea that individuals would experience an emotional revolution, that is, knowing and seeing SJL from a new perspective. We are of the opinion that such a revolution may enhance new lines of inquiry regarding what SJL might be and how it should be enacted, thus motivating pre-service teachers to build skill and self-assurance to encourage change and collaborative mindsets.

## **8. Implications of the social justice leadership framework**

We are of the opinion that the impact of the proposed social justice leadership framework (SJLF) can be articulated in terms of three fundamental views. Firstly, knowledge of social justice implies that pre-service teachers can be provided with social justice intelligence that can enable them to build their leadership potential for promoting social change. This view aligns with the notion that pre-service teachers can use knowledge to cultivate critical mindsets, identify opportunities to influence each other, and subsequently become involved in social justice issues. The policy implication for HEIs is that they should include social justice

information in their curriculum frameworks, with a focus on the interplay between what must be done, and what should be done in the further strife for justice and equity. The leadership implication for HEIs is that students should be empowered in how to cultivate critical mindsets so that they can be able to evaluate power dynamics, identify opportunities to influence each other, become involved in social justice issues, and create new characteristics through learning and active participation. With reference to the mentioned implications, HEIs should create dialogue spaces where policy messages and social justice activities are freely discussed.

Secondly, an ethos of social justice implies that pre-service teachers may be in a position to create a community of conscience, implying that they can be stronger educationists whose opinions and ideas can be respected and valued. This view aligns with the ethos of social justice in that pre-service teachers can be in a position to create mindsets and attitudes to take a stand against injustices and inequalities. The implication for HEIs leadership is that they should deliberately work toward changing traditions, expectations, and behaviors of mind that have been so thoroughly instilled in lecturers and students so that the enactment of SJL will become second nature. The policy implication is that HEIs should ensure that there is consistency in terms of policy regulations and opportunities to enact social justice.

Thirdly, pre-service teachers can become advocates of hope, thus individuals who act as transformative agents that can look back and anticipate future opportunities to provide equal and supportive environments in schools. This aligns with the idea that pre-service teachers should be critical reflectors, thus individuals who can be able to transform the values, beliefs, culture, and capacity of the school communities they will be involved with. The policy implication is that HEIs should provide information about policy sensemaking and implementation literature to inform pre-service teachers on how to promote and practice social justice. The leadership implication is that HEIs should be cognizant of how policy shapes decision-making and actions during the implementation of social justice activities.

Aligned with the indicated impact and implications, we hold the view that this paper contributes to academic theory in that it provides a deeper understanding of how education policy can contribute to the enactment of SJL. Furthermore, pre-service teachers may be in a position to navigate entrenched abilities for their own well-being, and sense of belonging, whilst maintaining positive and meaningful relationships with others in schools.

## 9. Conclusion

This paper aimed to answer the research question: *How can an analysis of stipulations in the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ) provide innovative capabilities that can be applied by higher education institutions to equip pre-service teachers to enact social justice leadership?*

Significant insights from the literature review have revealed that social justice leaders should understand and apply knowledge to critically reflect and enact social justice practices. Also, education policy can be used to equip pre-service teachers with support to understand and undo unjust practices and to create socially just learning settings. Consequently, we applied IPA to derive meanings about SJL from stipulations contained in the MRTEQ (South Africa, 2015). Firstly, pre-service teachers should be taught how to take the position of the original position so that they will be able to investigate and question their knowledge about SJL and to what extent they actually can apply it in real-school situations. Secondly, an ethos of social justice implies that HEIs should create an environment where pre-service teachers would experience an awakening of their SJL abilities and how they may apply them in their own lives as well as that of others. Thirdly, for pre-service teachers to effectively enact SJL, they should be trained by HEIs on how to take a transformative stance toward social justice issues so that they will be able to see and apply SJL from a new perspective.

The findings in this paper have implications for the preparation of pre-service teachers in HEIs. For example, HEIs should consider strengthening SJL so that pre-service teachers can and will reach proficiency, without exceptions or excuses, with the conviction that they will be social justice activists when they are appointed in schools after their studies. Another implication is that pre-service teachers should be taught how to interpret education policies so that they can be able to identify SJL practices that may assist them and others to work toward a more equitable learning environment in schools.

This paper excludes the voices of pre-service teachers who might have had different opinions regarding the experiences of SJL in HEIs. We, therefore, would like to indicate that an important avenue for future research could be an empirical study on the implementation of SJL by teachers. We also propose that HEIs and researchers consider exploring the conditions required for SJL to thrive. Another possible research opportunity may be to place a spotlight on the advancement of whole-person SJL, and human capital attributes of SJL. It needs to be mentioned that the significance of this conceptual research can be found in the innovative capabilities of SJL that were highlighted through an analysis of the MRTEQ (South Africa, 2015). This was important because new information and theory regarding SJL assisted us to prepare a follow-up article regarding the implementation of SJL practices in schools. We, therefore, invite other researchers to join us in strengthening the search for more innovative perspectives regarding SJL.

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