

INTEGRATING SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Dr. Joseph Moraca¹

¹Professor, Eulogio Amang Rodriguez Institute of Science and Technology, Manila, Philippines

drbongtiwon@earist.edu.ph¹

ABSTRACT

This study presents a systematic review of literature on the integration of social justice in educational management, covering 102 articles published between 2015 and 2025. Guided by the PRISMA framework, the review synthesizes global and local research spanning early childhood, K–12, higher education, and teacher education programs. The findings clustered into four themes: curriculum and pedagogy, teacher education and professional development, leadership and governance, and policy and structural equity.

Results reveal persistent inequities, including limited access for multilingual learners, exclusion of women and minorities in deficit discourses in disadvantaged schools. However, the literature also highlights promising practices such as culturally sustaining pedagogy, critical literacy, teacher preparation, and equity-oriented leadership. While the 2015–2020 studies primarily identified structural barriers and proposed theoretical frameworks, the 2021–2025 research advanced comparative, policy-driven, and context-sensitive strategies, including middle leadership empowerment and research–practice partnerships.

Social justice in educational management is defined as a multidimensional framework encompassing redistribution, recognition, representation, and identity-building. It is operationalized through advocacy-driven leadership, equity-focused curriculum design, inclusive teacher preparation, and culturally responsive governance. Impacts include improved access, student wellbeing, teacher retention, and inclusive school cultures, though risks remain from compliance-driven reforms and symbolic diversity initiatives.

This review contributes to both theory and practice by providing actionable recommendations: embedding social justice across curricula, empowering teachers and leaders as equity actors, aligning policies with fairness frameworks, and ensuring measurable outcomes for student inclusion and success. The study emphasizes that for education systems to serve the present generation effectively, social justice must move from rhetoric to sustained practice.

Keywords: Educational Management, Social Justice, Equity-focused Curriculum, Advocacy driven leadership

INTRODUCTION

Educational management, broadly defined as the systematic planning, organizing, leading, and evaluating of educational institutions, is a cornerstone of school effectiveness and student success (Lynch et al., 2020). Its functions extend beyond administrative efficiency to shaping environments where quality teaching, equitable learning, and institutional resilience can flourish. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, this role has become more complex. Global disruptions highlighted systemic weaknesses in education systems, with school leaders navigating not only learning continuity but also widening disparities in access to technology, resources, and support (Lira & Chalender, 2024; Mendoza-Jimenez et al., 2023).

Within this shifting educational landscape, social justice has emerged as a central framework for reimagining management and leadership practices. Social justice in education emphasizes fairness, inclusivity, and the dismantling of structural barriers that impede learners' full participation, regardless of socioeconomic background, gender, ethnicity, disability, or cultural identity. By integrating social justice into educational management, leaders are called upon not only to oversee instruction and resource allocation but also to ensure that institutional decisions

actively advance equity, cultural responsiveness, and empowerment (Ayanoğlu&Arastaman, 2023; Tran, 2021). This orientation redefines leadership as both an administrative and moral enterprise, positioning educational managers as agents of transformation in the pursuit of more equitable systems.

Recent scholarship illustrates the global momentum of social justice leadership. Studies highlight how distributive justice, inclusive decision-making, and advocacy for marginalized groups are increasingly recognized as essential leadership practices (Murwanto, 2024; Kavrayici, 2024). International frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG 5: Gender Equality, and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities) reinforce this imperative, urging schools to prioritize equity and access in post-pandemic recovery efforts (UNESCO, 2020; Lubguban&Bauyot, 2025). Yet, research also reveals uneven translation into practice, with much of the literature concentrated in Western contexts and limited representation from regions where structural inequalities are most pronounced (Gümüş et al., 2020; Zindi & Majam, 2025).

These concerns resonate strongly in the Philippines, where prolonged school closures, weak digital infrastructure, and entrenched socio-economic disparities magnified existing inequities. Initiatives such as the Department of Education's Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan sought to provide equitable access through varied modalities, including printed modules, online platforms, and broadcast media (Cahapay, 2020; Pagdilao & Paguyo, 2023). While these measures demonstrated resilience and commitment, they also revealed persistent gaps in connectivity, teacher readiness, and resource distribution (Colicol&Colicol-Rodriguez, 2023; Esteron, 2021). Indigenous learners, students with disabilities, and those in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas (GIDA) faced particular risks of exclusion, further underscoring the need for equity-driven leadership at all levels of education.

Despite the growing recognition of social justice as integral to education, the literature on its operationalization in educational management remains fragmented. Existing studies emphasize principles of justice and equity, but their application across diverse contexts—especially in developing countries—remains underexplored. Furthermore, while there is substantial research on curriculum and pedagogy, fewer systematic efforts synthesize how social justice informs institutional governance, resource allocation, quality assurance, and community partnerships. This gap limits both theoretical understanding and practical guidance for leaders striving to build inclusive education systems.

This study addresses these gaps through a systematic review of literature on the integration of social justice in educational management. By synthesizing global and local scholarship, it identifies recurring strategies, challenges, and levers of change, while highlighting regional disparities in research coverage. Particular attention is given to the Philippine context, where social justice imperatives intersect with unique socio-economic and cultural realities. The findings contribute to both theory and practice: they deepen understanding of equity-driven leadership and offer actionable insights for embedding social justice in governance frameworks, policies, and educational reforms.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do the selected research articles differ or relate in terms of their research objectives and methodology, results and conclusions, as well as recommendations and overall impact?
2. How social justice has been defined and operationalized in educational management research

3. What strategies, policies, or frameworks have been implemented to integrate social justice in school leadership and administration?
4. What challenges and barriers have been identified in the integration process?
5. What are the outcomes and impacts of integrating social justice into educational management?

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a systematic review approach guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework, an internationally recognized set of evidence-based guidelines that ensures transparency, rigor, and replicability in systematic reviews. PRISMA provides a structured process that begins with the identification of studies through comprehensive database searches, followed by screening to remove duplicates and apply initial inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The next stage, eligibility, involves full-text reviews to confirm whether the studies meet the defined standards, and finally, the inclusion phase finalizes the set of studies to be analyzed and synthesized. A PRISMA flow diagram will be employed to document this process, presenting the number of studies identified, screened, excluded, and ultimately included in the review.

III. RESULTS

A total of 102 articles (2015–2025) met the inclusion criteria for this systematic review. These studies span multiple geographical contexts (North America, Europe, Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Oceania) and educational levels (early childhood, K–12, higher education, and teacher education programs). They employed diverse methodologies, including systematic reviews, theoretical analyses, qualitative case studies, quantitative regressions, mixed-methods, and bibliometric reviews.

The studies clustered into four thematic categories: Curriculum & Pedagogy (n = 33), Teacher Education & Professional Development (n = 22), Leadership & Governance (n = 26), and Policy & Structural Equity (n = 21). These themes represent the principal avenues through which social justice has been conceptualized and operationalized in educational management.

Table 1 Theme 1 and Theme 2

Theme 1. Curriculum & Pedagogy Total:33 articles Themes observed: Curricula are framed as sites of struggle; emphasis on culturally sustaining, critical, and interdisciplinary approaches; equity of representation in STEM and language.	Theme 2. Teacher Education & Professional Development Total:22 articles Themes observed: Teacher prep remains uneven; transformative dispositions develop when equity and reflection are embedded structurally; intersectionality is under-addressed.
• Rodriguez (2015) – science curriculum & STEM access • Breunig (2016) – critical pedagogy • Hazari & Cass (2017) – physics education barriers • Martin et al. (2019) – STEM equity review • Xenofontos et al. (2020) – math SJ systematic review • Popp et al. (2021) – transforming social	• Goins (2018) – leadership program perceptions • Andrews et al. (2018) – middle grades teacher ed redesign • Pugach et al. (2019) – intersectionality gaps in teacher ed • Banda et al. (2024) – critical race mixed-methods in PST programs • Mills & Ballantyne (2016) – systematic

studies curriculum • Agarwal-Rangnath (2015/2013) – literacy & CCSS guide • Misco & Shiveley (2016) – social studies dispositions & controversial issues • Souto-Manning (2016) – early childhood play & narratives • Degener (2017) – critical language pedagogy • Janks (2019) – critical literacy in English teaching • Misiaszek (2021) – pedagogies of hope/resistance • Mocco & Mocco (2025) – SJ in Philippine math classes	review of teacher ed • Goodwin & Darity (2018) – what teacher educators need • Lucas & Milligan (2019) – uncertainty in SJ teaching • Hosseini et al. (2024) – scoping review of SJ teacher ed • Wronowski et al. (2022) – QuantCrit preservice study
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Theme 3 Leadership & Governance • Total:26 articles • Themes observed: Leadership is pivotal but context-dependent; principal values and community engagement often outweigh policy; Western models don't always fit global contexts.	Theme 4 Policy & Structural Equity • Total:21 articles • Themes observed: Policy interpretation shapes equity outcomes; structural gaps (technology, EL status, race, resources) remain pervasive; equity frameworks must be embedded in monitoring/accountability.
• Theoharis & Scanlan (2015) – systematic review of SJ leadership • Wang (2016, 2018) – principals' perceptions and practices • Oplatka & Arar (2016) – adapting Western models • MacDonald (2020) – principals in disadvantaged schools • Trujillo et al. (2021) – principals in California & Norway • Lavadenz et al. (2021) – COVID-19 EL equity leadership • Flood et al. (2023) – ISLDN systematic review • Alajmi (2024) – Kuwaiti principals & resource constraints • Shaked (2025) – middle leaders' justice roles • Wang & Nguyen (2025) – 120 years of SJ school leadership	• Callahan & Shiffrer (2016) – EL access to advanced courses • Selwyn (2016) – technology reinforcing inequities • Mavrogordato & White (2017, 2020) – EL reclassification & policy interpretation • Cimpian et al. (2017) – district-level EL outcomes • Gewirtz (2020) – theorizing SJ in education policy • Yosso (2020) – community cultural wealth • Kubota & Lin (2020) – racial justice in ELT • Bartlett et al. (2024) – external factors in equity policies • Weddle et al. (2024) – RPP partnerships for multilingual equity • Karina (2024) – systematic review of

	education policies promoting SJ • Serin & Bozdağ (2025) – combating xenophobia with SJ leadership
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DISCUSSION

RQ 1 How do the selected research articles differ or relate in terms of their research objectives and methodology, results and conclusions, as well as recommendations and overall impact?

For 2025-2020, research objectives and methods varied: some were conceptual or theoretical (Rodriguez, 2015; Breunig, 2016; Degener, 2017), others were systematic reviews synthesizing trends and gaps (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015; Mills & Ballantyne, 2016; Anderson & Esmonde, 2018; Martin et al., 2019), while several employed empirical approaches such as quantitative analyses of course access (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Cimpian et al., 2017) and qualitative interviews or case studies (Wang, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2016; Goins, 2018).

Results consistently pointed to structural inequities—English Learners’ limited access (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Cimpian et al., 2017), exclusion of women/minorities in physics (Hazari & Cass, 2017), and technology reproducing inequities (Selwyn, 2016). Yet, some studies highlighted transformative potential, such as culturally sustaining pedagogy in early childhood (Souto-Manning, 2016) and leadership preparation fostering critical consciousness (Goins, 2018).

Recommendations emphasized systemic change: embedding critical pedagogy (Breunig, 2016; Janks, 2019), using intersectional frameworks (Pugach et al., 2019), localizing justice leadership for non-Western settings (Oplatka & Arar, 2016; Gümüş et al., 2020), clarifying reclassification policies (Mavrogordato & White, 2017, 2020), and preparing leaders for advocacy (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015; Wang, 2018). Collectively, these works broaden the discourse on social justice by mapping inequities and proposing reform frameworks.

For 2021–2025, objectives clustered around transforming curricula/pedagogy (Popp et al., 2021; Gerdin et al., 2021; Misiaszek, 2021), preparing and evaluating teachers (Allee-Herndon et al., 2021; Wronowski et al., 2022; Banda et al., 2024), and advancing leadership and policy (Trujillo et al., 2021; Emerick, 2021; Lavadenz et al., 2021; Flood et al., 2023; Chaaban et al., 2025). Methods included conceptual pieces, curricular design, qualitative case studies, QuantCrit, comparative analyses, and systematic/scoping reviews.

Findings again showed persistent inequities, such as tokenistic diversity in CTE (Emerick, 2021) and inequities deepened by neoliberal reforms (Fittock et al., 2021). They revealed that context and politics matter—for instance, democracy was understood differently in California and Norway (Trujillo et al., 2021), and principals in Kuwait faced systemic constraints (Alajmi, 2024). Promising practices included articulated pedagogies (nine HPE pedagogies, Gerdin et al., 2021; hope/resistance, Misiaszek, 2021), critical literacy in language education (Mortenson, 2021; Kubota & Lin, 2020), teacher preparation that builds critical dispositions (Wronowski et al., 2022; Banda et al., 2024), and collaborative research–practice partnerships (Weddle et al., 2024). Reviews stressed Western dominance (Gümüş et al., 2020; Chaaban et al., 2025) and urged more global/decolonial perspectives. A Philippine study (Mocorro & Mocorro, 2025) demonstrated locally adapted justice practices in mathematics education.

Recommendations converged on embedding social justice throughout curricula (Popp et al., 2021; Rentzi, 2024), equipping teachers with critical and culturally sustaining pedagogies (Souto-Manning, 2016; Hosseini et al., 2024), empowering principals and middle leaders as

equity actors (Shaked, 2025; Lewis-Durham et al., 2025), aligning policies to equity frameworks (Mavrogordato et al., 2022; Bartlett et al., 2024), and supporting cross-level collaboration (Hopkins et al., 2022). Overall, these studies advance actionable strategies that link classroom practices, teacher education, and leadership to systemic reforms.

The 2015–2020 literature largely identified inequities and proposed frameworks, while the 2021–2025 research expanded into comparative, context-sensitive, and policy-driven approaches. Despite methodological differences, both periods relate in emphasizing that education must be reshaped into a more equitable and inclusive system, with leadership, curricula, and teacher preparation aligned to the principles of social justice.

RQ2 Result 2 How social justice has been defined and operationalized in educational management research?

Based on the selected articles from 2015–2025, educational management research defines social justice as a multidimensional effort to redress inequities in access, representation, identity, and power. Early studies framed it around redistribution and recognition (Rodriguez, 2015; Wang, 2016; Breunig, 2016; Degener, 2017), while later works extended it to wellbeing, culturally responsive practice, and ecological issues (Popp et al., 2021; Gerdin et al., 2021; Misiaszek, 2021). Reviews affirm that social justice is system-wide and context-dependent, not limited to classroom interactions (Karina, 2023/2024).

Operationalization occurs in multiple domains. In leadership, justice is enacted through advocacy, inclusive decision-making, and equity-oriented climates (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015; Wang, 2018). Leaders interpret and implement policies affecting multilingual learners, guided by frameworks such as *Castañeda v. Pickard* and ESSA (Mavrogordato & White, 2020; Weddle, Hopkins, & Goldstein, 2024). In curriculum and pedagogy, it appears in critical and culturally sustaining approaches, from reflective social studies (Misco & Shiveley, 2016; Popp et al., 2021) to justice-oriented STEM and language teaching (Hazari & Cass, 2017; Martin et al., 2019; Mocco & Mocco, 2025). Teacher preparation further cultivates dispositions and critical consciousness, though effectiveness varies across identities and contexts (Wronowski et al., 2022; Banda et al., 2024; Hosseini et al., 2024).

At the system and community level, justice is reinforced by culturally localized leadership (Ezzani et al., 2021; Alajmi, 2024), principals' equity-driven values (Flood, Angelle, & Koerber, 2023), and recognition of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2020/2025). Reported outcomes include gains in access, engagement, identity, and teacher retention (Popp et al., 2021; Gerdin et al., 2021; Shaked, 2025), though achievement and long-term equality remain uneven (Karina, 2023/2024).

In summary, social justice in educational management is operationalized through leadership, policy, curriculum, preparation, and community systems. Progress is evident, but the field must resist compliance-based reforms, avoid symbolic diversity, and expand comparative, decolonial, and globally diverse approaches (Chaaban, Badwan, & Arar, 2025; Wang & Nguyen, 2025).

RQ 3 What strategies, policies, or frameworks have been implemented to integrate social justice in school leadership and administration?

Strategies, policies, and frameworks used to integrate social justice in school leadership and administration (2015–2025)

Across the decade, schools and systems have moved from broad commitments to actionable levers that leaders can implement. Core strategies include:

- Leadership practice & preparation. Embed advocacy, equity-oriented decision-making, and inclusive governance in leader training and day-to-day practice; build relational climate and guard against deficit discourse (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015; Wang, 2018; MacDonald, 2020; Goins, 2018). Elevate middle leaders as autonomous equity actors and extend justice to **teacher-facing** policies via distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Shaked, 2025).
- Policy implementation for multilingual learner (MLL/EL) equity. Review and standardize course placement and reclassification to expand access; use Castañeda v. Pickard's three-pronged test (sound theory, adequate resources, evaluation) as a roadmap; build capacity through research-practice partnerships (RPPs) plus resources, networks, and monitoring (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Mavrogordato & White, 2017, 2020; Mavrogordato, Callahan, & Bartlett, 2022; Weddle, Hopkins, & Goldstein, 2024; Bartlett, Callahan, & Mavrogordato, 2024).
- Curriculum & pedagogy leaders can champion. Integrate critical/controversial inquiry, critical literacy, and culturally relevant/sustaining approaches; apply transportable blueprints such as historical-inquiry principles, nine HPE pedagogies for wellbeing, and hope/resistance in environmental education; localize in subject areas (e.g., math) through differentiation, relevant materials, and student empowerment (Misco & Shiveley, 2016; Janks, 2019; Mensah, 2019; Popp et al., 2021; Gerdin et al., 2021; Misiaszek, 2021; Mocerro & Mocerro, 2025).
- School culture & climate mechanisms. Formalize diversity-climate goals and promote meaningful intergroup contact to reduce xenophobia; align justice work to local political and organizational contexts (Serin & Bozdağ, 2025; Trujillo et al., 2021; King, Travers, & McGowan, 2021; Alajmi, 2024).
- System leadership & guardrails. Reclaim systems leadership from neoliberal logics to reduce stratification; monitor against compliance drift and performative diversity (pipeline audits, transparent metrics), especially in CTE access for emergent bilinguals (Fittock, Cunningham, & Striepe, 2021; Yurkofsky, 2021; Emerick, 2021; Terra Glowach, 2025).
- Frameworks that reframe equity assets. Use Fraser-informed justice lenses in policy research and adopt Community Cultural Wealth to replace deficit views with assets (Gewirtz, 2020; Yosso, 2020).
- Preparation and evaluation frameworks. Make justice program-wide (not one-off courses) using QuantCrit/CRMM designs; employ co-creation/RCT-based doctoral models; assess equity competencies with contextualized practica (Wronowski et al., 2022; Banda et al., 2024; Simola, 2024; Moraguez, Dexter, & Clement, 2025).
- Contextual and global adaptations. Localize Western models for traditional/marginalized societies; co-construct inclusion with learners; recognize distinct repertoires (e.g., Islamic school leadership) while expanding beyond Western-centric evidence (Oplatka & Arar, 2016; Ainscow & Messiou, 2018; Ezzani, Brooks, Yang, & Bloom, 2021; Chaaban, Badwan, & Arar, 2025; Bourgeois, Ledger, & Harris, 2025).

Therefore, effective integration couples clear implementation roadmaps (Castañeda + RPPs + resources/monitoring), institutionalized roles and climates (empowered middle leaders; diversity climate goals), and coherent preparation (QuantCrit/CRMM; assessed competencies). Leaders should adopt subject-specific justice pedagogies at whole-school scale, calibrate to context, and track outcomes transparently to avoid compliance drift and performative diversity (Popp et al., 2021; Gerdin et al., 2021; Misiaszek, 2021; Trujillo et al., 2021; Weddle et al., 2024; Shaked, 2025).

RQ4 What challenges and barriers have been identified in the integration process?

Strategies, policies, and frameworks used to integrate social justice in school leadership and administration (2015–2025)

1) Leadership practice & preparation (school level).

- Embed advocacy, equity-oriented decision-making, and inclusive governance in leader preparation and daily routines (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015; Goins, 2018).
- Lead relationship- and climate-building as a core justice practice (Wang, 2018) and train leaders to avoid deficit discourse, especially in high-poverty contexts (MacDonald, 2020).
- Treat middle leaders as autonomous equity actors and extend justice to teacher-facing policies using distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Shaked, 2025).
- Practice context-responsive leadership—adapting to accountability regimes, community disadvantage, system centralization, and available autonomy/resources (Trujillo et al., 2021; King, Travers, & McGowan, 2021; Alajmi, 2024).
- Recognize faith-based/culturally situated repertoires, e.g., Islamic school leadership (Ezzani, Brooks, Yang, & Bloom, 2021).

2) Policy and system implementation levers (district/state level).

- Use Castañeda v. Pickard’s three-pronged test—sound theory, adequate resources, and evaluation—as an implementation roadmap for EL/MLL equity (Mavrogordato, Callahan, & Bartlett, 2022).
- Build capacity infrastructures—Research–Practice Partnerships (RPPs), professional networks, and monitoring systems—to support fidelity and scale (Weddle, Hopkins, & Goldstein, 2024; Bartlett, Callahan, & Mavrogordato, 2024).
- Standardize course placement and reclassification processes to expand advanced-course access and reduce arbitrary variation (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Cimpian, Thompson, & Makowski, 2017; Mavrogordato & White, 2017, 2020).
- Reclaim systems leadership from neoliberal logics to reduce stratification and unite schools around SJ aims (Fittock, Cunningham, & Striepe, 2021; Terra Glowach, 2025).

3) Curricular and pedagogical frameworks leaders can champion.

- Institutionalize critical/controversial inquiry in social studies (Misco & Shiveley, 2016; Popp, Montgomery, Hoard, & Brock, 2021) and critical literacy/language pedagogy in ELT (Janks, 2019; Degener, 2017).
- Scale culturally relevant/sustaining science pedagogy to broaden participation and identity affirmation (Rodriguez, 2015; Mensah, 2019).
- Adopt whole-school wellbeing-oriented HPE via nine social-justice pedagogies (Gerdin, Philpot, Westlie, et al., 2021) and hope/resistance pedagogy in environmental & sustainability education (Misiaszek, 2021).
- Support day-to-day operationalization in subject areas (e.g., differentiated math instruction, relevant materials, empowerment) as scalable local models (Mocorro & Mocorro, 2025).

4) School culture and climate mechanisms.

- Set explicit diversity-climate goals and engineer high-quality intergroup contact to reduce xenophobia (Serin & Bozdağ, 2025).
- Use critical multicultural theory to build inclusive, democratic school cultures (Rentzi, 2024).

5) Preparation, professional learning, and assessment frameworks.

- Make justice program-wide (not a one-off course) using QuantCrit and critical race mixed-methods (CRMM) designs; track disposition gains and identity-patterned variation

(Wronowski, Aronson, Rind, et al., 2022; Banda, Reyes, Wronowski, Radina, Aronson, & Batchelor, 2024).

- Employ co-creation/RCT-based approaches in advanced courses to share authority and deepen praxis (Simola, 2024).
- Establish assessed equity competencies and context-based practica in leadership preparation; close quality gaps across programs (Moraguez, Dexter, & Clement, 2025).
- Surface leaders' personal justice orientations, which often outweigh macro-policy signals (Flood, Angelle, & Koerber, 2023).

6) Equity frameworks that reframe assets and guide policy.

- Apply Fraser-informed justice lenses in policy analysis (Gewirtz, 2020).
- Center Community Cultural Wealth to replace deficit views with aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2020).
- Localize Western models and co-construct inclusive practices with learners; expand beyond Western-centric evidence (Oplatka & Arar, 2016; Ainscow & Messiou, 2018; Chaaban, Badwan, & Arar, 2025; Bourgeois, Ledger, & Harris, 2025).

Actionable checklist for leaders and administrators

- **Implement Castañeda + RPPs:** Pair the three-pronged test with cross-agency partnerships, resource mapping, and outcome monitoring (Mavrogordato, Callahan, & Bartlett, 2022; Weddle et al., 2024; Bartlett et al., 2024).
- **Institutionalize roles & climate:** Empower middle leaders; formalize diversity-climate goals and meaningful contact; extend justice to staff policies (Shaked, 2025; Serin & Bozdağ, 2025).
- **Rewire preparation/PD:** Spiral SJ across programs (QuantCrit/CRMM, co-creation); use competency-based assessment and local practica (Wronowski et al., 2022; Banda et al., 2024; Simola, 2024; Moraguez et al., 2025).
- **Lead whole-school pedagogy:** Scale HPE's nine pedagogies, historical-inquiry justice principles, and hope/resistance ESE (Gerdin et al., 2021; Popp et al., 2021; Misiaszek, 2021).
- **Design for context:** Calibrate to political structures, centralization, and community needs; provide autonomy, resources, and cross-agency support (Trujillo et al., 2021; King et al., 2021; Alajmi, 2024).
- **Guardrails:** Audit pipelines (e.g., CTE access), track equity metrics, and avoid compliance drift or performative diversity (Emerick, 2021; Yurkofsky, 2021).

RQ5 What are the outcomes and impacts of integrating social justice into educational management?

FOR STUDENTS

- **Greater access & achievement pathways.** Justice-oriented science and physics curricula highlighted issues of power and representation and sought to widen STEM access for girls and minoritized groups (Rodriguez, 2015; Hazari & Cass, 2017; Mensah, 2019; Martin, Gholson, & Leonard, 2019). Equity-focused policy research showed that course placement and reclassification practices directly shaped access and achievement, with inequities persisting when left unaddressed (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Cimpian, Thompson, & Makowski, 2017; Mavrogordato & White, 2017, 2020).
- **Identity, belonging, and wellbeing.** Culturally sustaining practices in early childhood fostered belonging and inclusion (Souto-Manning, 2016). Whole-school pedagogies such as

the nine HPE pedagogies and hope/resistance frameworks in environmental education advanced wellbeing and agency (Gerdin, Philpot, Westlie, et al., 2021; Misiaszek, 2021).

- **Critical literacy & civic agency.** Embedding controversial issues in social studies, critical literacy in English, and critical language pedagogy cultivated reflective thinking and civic consciousness (Misco & Shiveley, 2016; Janks, 2019; Degener, 2017). Students in higher education showed increased justice commitment when curricula embedded SJ consistently across disciplines (Howard, Statham, Gilles, Roberts, & Turner, 2022).
- **Reduced prejudice.** Social justice leadership improved diversity climate and quality of intergroup contact, indirectly lowering xenophobia (Serin & Bozdağ, 2025).

FOR TEACHERS & LEADERS

- **Transformative dispositions and practice.** Leadership preparation embedding advocacy, equity-oriented leadership, and inclusive decision-making encouraged transformative practice (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2015; Goins, 2018; Wang, 2018). Preservice teachers in QuantCrit and critical race mixed-methods programs demonstrated measurable growth in equity dispositions (Wronowski, Aronson, Rind, et al., 2022; Banda, Reyes, Wronowski, Radina, Aronson, & Batchelor, 2024).
- **Retention & staff justice.** Leaders' attention to distributive, procedural, and interactional justice improved fairness for staff and supported retention of teachers of color (Goodloe & Ardley, 2021; Shaked, 2025).
- **Values and context.** Principals' biographies and justice orientations often outweighed macro-policy signals, suggesting leadership preparation must surface and interrogate personal orientations (Flood, Angelle, & Koerber, 2023). Contextual adaptation remained key: leaders in disadvantaged settings risked deficit discourses without explicit training (MacDonald, 2020).

FOR SCHOOLS & SYSTEMS

- **Inclusive school cultures.** Co-constructing inclusive practices with learners strengthened student voice (Ainscow & Messiou, 2018). Critical multicultural theory provided a framework for inclusive, democratic schools (Rentzi, 2024).
- **Policy-to-practice traction.** Castañeda's three-prong framework and research-practice partnerships enabled equity-aligned policy implementation for multilingual learners (Mavrogordato, Callahan, & Bartlett, 2022; Weddle, Hopkins, & Goldstein, 2024). Equity outcomes improved where resources, networks, and monitoring were in place (Bartlett, Callahan, & Mavrogordato, 2024).
- **System leadership countering inequities.** Comparative work in Australia and Sweden showed that reclaiming system leadership from neoliberal reforms could unite schools around equity (Fittock, Cunningham, & Striepe, 2021). A broader review identified three waves of systems leadership and urged an explicitly anti-racist, anti-hierarchical turn (Terra Glowach, 2025).

FOR THE FIELD

- **Conceptual sharpening.** Analyses informed by Fraser clarified multiple dimensions of justice—redistribution, recognition, and representation—in leadership and policy (Wang, 2016; Gewirtz, 2020). Yosso's (2020) Community Cultural Wealth framework replaced deficit views with six actionable forms of capital schools could leverage.

- **Guardrails against slippage.** Leaders reduced performative diversity by auditing pipelines (e.g., CTE access) and resisting compliance-driven reform that substituted substantive improvement with technical box-ticking (Emerick, 2021; Yurkofsky, 2021).
- **Equity of knowledge production.** The field remains Western-dominated and often treats identity one-dimensionally; calls for more intersectional and non-Western research persist (Pugach, Gomez-Najarro, & Matewos, 2019; Gümüş, Arar, & Oplatka, 2020; Wang & Nguyen, 2025; Chaaban, Badwan, & Arar, 2025).

Therefore, across 2015–2025, integrating social justice into educational management has produced broader participation and access, stronger student wellbeing and critical agency, more inclusive school cultures, and leadership that foregrounds advocacy and fairness. Impacts are strongest where policies, preparation, and pedagogy are coherently aligned with resources and context, while risks emerge from inequitable EL policies, deficit discourses, uncritical ed-tech adoption, and performative diversity strategies (Callahan & Shifrer, 2016; Selwyn, 2016; MacDonald, 2020; Emerick, 2021).

V. CONCLUSION

This systematic review of 102 studies (2015–2025) demonstrates that social justice in educational management is no longer a peripheral concern but a defining framework for leadership, pedagogy, teacher preparation, and policy reform. Across contexts, the research reveals two converging trajectories. The 2015–2020 scholarship focused on identifying inequities—such as restricted access for English Learners, exclusion of women and minorities in STEM, and deficit discourses in disadvantaged schools—while proposing theoretical and pedagogical frameworks to counter them. In contrast, the 2021–2025 body of work advanced comparative, context-sensitive, and policy-driven strategies, highlighting not only inequities but also concrete mechanisms for reform, including culturally sustaining pedagogy, QuantCrit teacher preparation, middle leadership empowerment, and research–practice partnerships.

In summary, the studies define social justice in educational management as a multidimensional project of redistribution, recognition, representation, and identity-building. Operationalization takes place through advocacy-driven leadership, equity-focused curriculum design, culturally responsive teacher education, and community-engaged school governance. Importantly, justice outcomes extend beyond access to include student wellbeing, identity affirmation, civic agency, and inclusive school cultures. However, challenges remain: inequitable policy interpretation, compliance-driven reforms, symbolic diversity initiatives, and the continued Western dominance of research agendas.

RECOMMENDATION

To serve the present generation of students, social justice must be embedded as a core principle in how schools are led, teachers are prepared, and curricula are delivered. Leaders should practice inclusive decision-making, advocate for marginalized learners, and ensure fair policies that provide equal access to advanced courses and resources. Curricula must integrate culturally sustaining and critical pedagogies that affirm identity, foster wellbeing, and prepare students for civic participation. Teacher education should go beyond theory, equipping candidates with practical skills and reflective dispositions to confront inequities in real classrooms. Schools should also cultivate positive climates by setting clear diversity goals, reducing prejudice through meaningful contact, and engaging parents and communities in decision-making. Most

importantly, equity work must move from rhetoric to measurable outcomes—tracking who succeeds, who feels included, and who benefits from resources—so that all students, regardless of background, can thrive in an education system designed for fairness and empowerment.

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