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**SOCIAL JUSTICE AND POLITICAL ORIENTATION IN**  
**EDUCATION**

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*Abstract*

Based on the model of Social Justice in Education (3-R's): *Redistribution, Recognition and Representation*, some researchers have studied the student's social justice representation. However, there are not so many empirical studies focused in the analysis of psychosocial variables that could be related with the social justice representation. In this research, we try to know how the three dimensions that form social justice are related between them and how could be explained (separately and/or jointly) the relationship among social justice dimensions and political orientation. In order to evaluate the social justice psychological representation and the political orientation, a quantitative study it was carry out with 121 undergraduate teacher training students. First, a confirmatory factor analysis shows adequate characteristics of the social justice quantitative scale used regarding the model of three correlated factors. Besides, significant correlations were found between the dimensions of social justice and the political orientation of these students: Students who choose a "left-wing" political orientation have different social justice representations than students who choose "right-wing" orientation. In addition, as other authors in previous studies shows, we found that the three dimensions of Social Justice are correlated between them. These significant correlations confirm the suitability of the three-dimensional model of Social Justice.

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## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, it is possible to find a great diversity of definitions about the social justice concept. In recent decades, different theoretical perspectives have coincided in working with a common social justice conception. On this subject, it is important to highlight two achievements in the last decades: On the one hand, several authors have managed to agree on the need to introduce a concept as important as is social justice in the education. On the other hand, the "Three-dimensional Model of Social Justice" (Fraser, 2008) has achieved the creation of a base to work social justice in education with guarantees. This model is formed by three dimensions: *Redistribution or Economic Justice*, *Recognition or Cultural Justice and Representation or Political Justice*. Firstly, the redistribution concept appears (Rawls, 1971; Sen 2009), which refers to a better distribution of goods, material and cultural resources. Secondly, the recognition dimension (Fraser, 1997) focuses on the social and cultural respect toward all people, as well as on the existence of just relationships within society. Thirdly, the representation-participation dimension (Miller, 1999; Bell, 1997; Lee & Hipólito-Delgado, 2007) that refers to participation in decisions that affect the daily life.

## 2. Problem Statement

Unfortunately, we live in societies with inequalities generated by different kinds of injustices. Some of those injustices that most affect modern societies are: Racism, male chauvinism, classism or homophobia. These discriminatory behaviours have existed for centuries, however nowadays new types of injustices are continually appearing. A recent example is the concept of aporophobia (Cortina, 2000; Martínez, 2002), that refers to the exclusion of the poorest people in society. Another example of marginalization related to education is *bullying* (Olweus, 1994) and, more recently, *cyberbullying* (Di Lorenzo, 2012). Thereby, a research of Cerezo (2009), confirms that in almost all Spanish schools there are situations of mistreatment between 22% and 35% of students. The needs and the different kind of injustices existing in modern societies are continuously changing. Probably, educational institutions are the places with the greatest capacity to achieve fairer societies in the future. Consequently, if we desire societies with optimum levels of coexistence and respect, the Education for Social Justice should be the fundamental tool to fighting against inequality, exclusion, discrimination and/or social marginalization (Jacott & Maldonado, 2012). Education for Social Justice focuses on education *for*, *in* and *from* social justice (Murillo, Hernández-Castilla, Hidalgo, & Martínez-Garrido, 2014). First, education *for* social justice empowers the students towards the conviction and participation to intervene in their daily life. Second, education *in* social justice raises awareness about the injustices that exist and ways to reverse them. Finally, this approach is based on an education *from* social justice, with fairer educational institutions. In addition, it may be necessary to inquire about "social justice, *for what*": To promote human development of all citizens, either in terms of capacity development (Nussbaum, 2011) or progress towards interpersonal and community well-being (Prilleltensky, 2012).

Regarding the evolution of the school coexistence in Spain, it is important to emphasize that the number of bullying victims have been increasing in recent years. The coexistence in the classroom is one of the topics more investigated for several areas of Education, Psychology or Sociology. In spite of the

progress achieved in "Education for Social Justice", there are no less challenges ahead in this area. The representation and attitudes towards social justice that new generations of citizens acquire, may determine the more or less fair coexistence of future societies. Obviously, the influence of the education institutions and the work of the teachers in this process could play an important role. It is relevant to note the research by Borrero, Conner, & Mejia (2012), that show a comparative descriptive analysis of projects within two teacher preparation programs (one focused on training undergraduates and one focused on training graduate students). This research illustrates how service-learning when is connected with student participation, prepares prospective educators to teach for social justice. Their analysis highlights the common and distinctive features of these two approaches to integrating service-learning, student voice, teacher education and social justice, and offers evidence about how prospective teachers at different stages in their teacher education can be challenged to rethink their understandings and approaches to the young people that they will teach. Therefore, the social justice representation of students and teachers have an effect in their actions (or inactions) of their own schools (Jacott et al., 2014). However, there are not so many quantitative researches on students and teachers representations about social justice and other psychosocial variables (for example political orientation) involved and their implications education. Thus, the link between the *left-wing* or *right-wing* political identification can be seen as a coherent set of beliefs, values and attitudes about the social and political system, and the role that people develops as a citizen (Costa, Etchezahar, & Melita, 2011). In this way, probably this differentiation will be reflected in more or less elaborate social justice representations of undergraduate teacher training students. These psychosocial variables and others could be important to research and to prevent future social injustice.

### **3. Research Questions**

One of the main questions in this research is to confirm the possibility of evaluate the three-dimensional social justice representation through a quantitative method. In this sense, a research of the social justice representation of approximately a thousand teachers and students in Spain (Jacott et al., 2014) concludes that: In sixth course of primary education, girls have a higher mean value than boys in all factors of social justice. In addition, the same research shows that there are differences in social justice representations of some groups of students and teachers. For example, teachers of social sciences subjects have a more elaborated representation on the redistribution dimension and teachers of experimental sciences have more elaborated representation on recognition and representation dimensions. Based on data like the previous ones, it could be crucial to research which psychosocial variables are related with more or less elaborate social justice representations (redistribution, recognition, representation). Consequently, for us it is essential to know if the social justice representations of undergraduate teacher training students are correlated with aspects such as political orientation, the level of citizen participation and other conceptions of reality. There is already evidence that social justice representations are not the same in all students and teachers. The next step for us is to analyse what other factors could be related to these differences and how to be able to reverse them.

#### 4. Purpose of the Study

One main aim of this research is to analyse the social justice representations of undergraduate teacher training students. We propose a quantitative evaluation of the social justice participant's representation in coherence with the three-dimensional model. For this purpose, the social justice scale used and previously tested (Etchezahar, Barreiro, Jacott, & Maldonado, 2016), is evaluated through statistical analysis. In addition, another main purpose is to know how political orientation interacts with each dimension of social justice.

#### 5. Research Methods

In this research, 121 undergraduate teacher training students of the Autonomous University of Madrid participated. On the one hand, a Likert-Scale questionnaire of social justice (Etchezahar, Barreiro, Jacott, & Maldonado, 2016) is used to analyse the student's social justice representation. This questionnaire contains 30 items (10 items belonging to each dimension) related to daily life issues and the agreement or disagreement (1-Strongly disagree / 5-Strongly agree) that participants have (for example: "*More resources should be devoted to students with special educational needs*"). On the other hand, an adapted version of the Scale of Ideological-Political Self-Positioning is also used (Rodríguez, Sabucedo and Costa 1993) ("*In politics, people talk left and right, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being on the far right and 10 on the far left, where would you be?*"). Finally, we analysed the participants preferences about what should be the government's position on economic distribution (through agree/disagree with the item: "*The priority Government action should be to reduce differences between rich people and poor people*"). In terms of data analysis, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out on the social justice scale to confirm the three-dimensionality of social justice. Subsequently, an analysis of bivariate correlations with the Pearson coefficient was got to analyze the correlation between social justice representations and political orientation.

#### 6. Findings

First of all, we analysed social justice representation of the participants. After the application of this scale, a *confirmatory factorial analysis* was carried out that confirmed adequate characteristics of the scale for the model of three correlated factors (redistribution, recognition and representation/ participation) ( $X^2 = 321, 657, df = 105, X^2 / df = 3.06, CFI = .91, \Delta^2 = .92; RMSEA = .043 [ .000 - .069]$ ). In addition, the *exploratory factor analysis* distinguished three dimensions of the construct and internal consistency indexes are adequate: Redistribution ( $\alpha = .67$ ); recognition ( $\alpha = .70$ ); representation ( $\alpha = .71$ ).

As in previous studies (for example, Jacott et al., 2014), the results showed positive moderate correlations between the three social justice dimensions, coinciding with the three-dimensional model. In addition, there are statistically significant correlations ( $p < .01$  with bilateral  $r_c$ ) between these dimensions and the political self-positioning chosen by the participants. Specifically, significant negative correlations were found, showing a correlational pattern among right-wing political positions and less elaborate social justice representations (especially remarkable with the recognition dimension). On the contrary,

participants with politic positions closer to the left-wing correlate positively with the possession of more elaborate social justice representations.

**Table 01.** Correlations between the Social Justice dimensions and political orientation

	1	2	3	4
Redistribution	-	,373**	,394**	-,312**
Recognition		-	,495**	-,584**
Representation			-	-,309**
Political Orientation				-

Finally, we analyze how the three social justice dimensions are related to the participant's beliefs about the role that the government should take in the economic distribution (evaluated through agree/disagree with the item: *"The priority action of the Government must be to reduce economic differences between rich people and poor people"*). For this purpose, three *variance analyses* were carried out. For these analyzes, two main groups of participants were formed: Participants who showed low/medium levels of elaboration in social justice representations; and participants who showed high levels of elaboration in social justice representations. First, regarding to redistribution dimension: there we found significant differences ( $F(2, 117) = 7.296, p < .001$ ) between the participants that are grouped with low/medium representations and the participants with high representations. Secondly, regarding to the recognition dimension, these same differences were also found ( $F(2; 118) = 3.860; p < .05$ ) (with the same type of groupings: on the one hand, low/medium representations; and on the other hand, high representations), however the post-hoc contrast did not confirm that they were significant. Besides, with respect to the representation/participation dimension, we observed significant differences ( $F(2: 117) = 7.091; p < .001$ ), between participants with low/medium representation and the participants with high representations. Consequently, depending on the level of elaboration shown in each representation (medium/low or high), participants have a different opinion about the role that the government should play in economic matters. The participants that show more elaborated social justice representations (statistically significant in redistribution and representation/participation dimensions) agree in a significant way that the government should carry out actions to reduce the gap between the poorest and the richest people. However, students with low and medium social justice representations show significantly less agreement regarding the actions previously cited by the government.

## 7. Conclusion

First, with regard to the quantitative scale of social justice used, the results show that it has adequate psychometric characteristics to evaluate the three-dimensional construct of social justice. It is important to highlight that redistribution, recognition and representation are moderately correlated with each other. These correlations show that although each dimension evaluates different aspects of social justice, these three dimensions are part of the same construct (three-dimensional model of social justice) and can be quantitatively evaluated.

Regarding the analysis between the social justice dimensions and the political orientation: The more political self-positioning the participants have toward the right-wing, the less elaborate is their social justice

representations (particularly remarkable in recognition dimension). We found these negative correlations with the redistribution and participation dimensions, although the index of these correlations is less intense (approximately half) than with recognition dimension. Consequently, based on the three R that form social justice, the recognition dimension is the one that plays a key role with respect to political orientation. In the future, it would be interesting (with a more heterogeneous sample of university students) to continue investigating the social justice and political orientation correlation. In addition, the political orientation factor could be introduced to the three-dimensional model of social justice. A challenge for future researches, is to determine the origin of the correlation between low elaborated representations of social justice (and the attitudes and behaviours that may result) and a right-wing political positioning. This is a model with a perspective of dynamic social justice, never definitive or completely complete and that is always subject to reflection and improvement (Griffiths, 2003).

Finally, relevant and novel information was found that shows significant differences among the participants when they were asked about the importance that should have for governments the distribution of wealth. The participants with such more elaborate social justice representations (especially redistribution and representation) are significantly more favourable towards government actions related to the equitable distribution of wealth. Therefore, the most determinant social justice dimensions in the participants to choose the government's roles in wealth distribution are redistribution and representation dimensions. These results indicate another interesting hypothesis to continue investigating: Undergraduate training teacher student's with low social justice representations (that according to the results correlate more with right-wing political self-positioning), could be less favourable towards redistribution policies by the government. In the future, it could also be interesting to continue researching how political orientation and social justice representations influences the teacher's daily educational practices.

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