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Supporting Teachers' Engagement in Pedagogies of Social Justice (STEPS): Collaborative project between five universities in Turkey and the USA

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Abstract: This paper reports on the findings of a research project titled Supporting Teachers' Engagement in Pedagogies of Social Justice (STEPS), in which pre-service and in-service teachers from five universities in Turkey and the USA participated in a six-week-long virtual exchange. The main objective of the study was to promote social justice-informed pedagogies in K-12 schools through professional development and intercultural discussions between pre-service and in-service teachers from two countries. The study addressed the following research question: How does a six-week virtual exchange project influence in-service and pre-service teachers' social justice orientation? For this purpose, we collected quantitative data through a questionnaire based on social justice standards developed by a group of researchers called "Learning for Justice". Participants completed this questionnaire before and after their participation in the project. Additionally, we asked the participants to write a reflection post at the end of the project regarding its impact, and we treated their posts as qualitative data. The findings indicated that the mean scores of the post-test results were significantly higher than those of the pre-test results, which indicated that participants' engagement in the project changed their perspectives in a positive way. Furthermore, analyzing the qualitative data, we found four recurring themes: a) learning through sharing and working in collaboration, b) noticing common concerns with other educators, c) self-awareness and self-evaluation, and d) promise for taking action.

Keywords: teaching diverse learners of English, social justice pedagogy, virtual intercultural exchange, teacher education.

Introduction

Our world changes every day linguistically, culturally, politically, and economically as a result of local events that may have global impacts. The demographic changes due to global movement of people inevitably affect how we educate students and prepare teachers for an ever-changing

world. In recent years, we have witnessed the immigration of people with the hope of finding safer and better places to live, often escaping war-torn countries or looking for better economic opportunities. For example, at the time of writing this paper, many Ukrainian citizens were leaving their countries as a result of the Russian invasion in Ukraine that started in February 2022. Wars are not a problem of the past, and we will continue to live in a world in which people are forced to leave their homes. While there is surely room for improvement, the USA has traditionally been a country which receives immigrants and has plans and policies in place to address the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse populations. In comparison, Turkey has received exponentially more immigrants in the last decade compared to its history since its establishment. Therefore, the plans and policies to better serve diverse populations are still developing. According to the UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency) Global Report in 2019, Turkey hosted the highest number of refugees worldwide and the number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey was over 3.6 million, only 1.7% of whom are living in temporary refugee camps. This means that 98.3% of the refugees are living in urban and rural areas of provinces all around the country. Among these people, 674,199 Syrian children were registered to receive education in public schools in the 2019-2020 academic year (MoNE, 2020), which has transformed the ethnolinguistic make-up of the children in schools. These are among the crucial factors that changed the dynamics of today's classrooms: more access and need for technology in education and increased diversity of student populations across the world in general and Turkey in particular. Although there are many challenges that educators have encountered because of these changes, one of the most important ones can be named as promoting social justice in the classroom in order to better serve the linguistically and culturally diverse student populations. The uneven power relations minoritize and marginalize students based on their language, race, ethnicity, culture, and nation of origin. Therefore, teachers are expected to play a pivotal role in promoting more equitable education services and outcomes for all students with diverse backgrounds with such contextual parameters.

Social Justice in Language Classrooms

With globalization and recent waves of forced and voluntary migration throughout the world, classrooms are more diverse than ever before. Also, individuals, with access to required technologies, could communicate with the rest of the world regardless of their regions, and they could follow the recent news from anywhere they like. These changes brought some challenges into the classrooms, not only for teachers but also for students, administrators, and parents. One of the most crucial points in classrooms is about maintaining social justice among students. Therefore, attention to social justice issues has become an important component in the language classroom (Boylan, 2009; Carson, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 2009; Grant & Agosto, 2008; Kapustka et al., 2009; Mills, 2012; Mills

& Ballantyne, 2010) and has received attention in virtual intercultural exchange projects (Akayoğlu et al., 2020; Üzümlü et al., 2019, 2020, 2022; Yazan et al., 2021). However, social justice is not a new topic; it has always been an important issue in language classrooms (Lojacono, 2013).

Defining the concept of “social justice” is not an easy task (Cochran-Smith, 2009). Zajda et al. (2006) defined social justice as an “egalitarian society that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognises the dignity of every human being” (p. 10). However, they also highlighted that this definition “may vary according to different definitions, perspectives, and social theories” (Zajda et al., 2006, p. 9). Nieto (2010) defined social justice as “a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity” (p. 46). Despite the changing definitions, equality, liberty, and fraternity, agency for social change are expressed as common issues in social justice.

According to Nieto (2010), social justice is not just being kind and nice to others. She listed four components of social justice which she used as guidelines for language teachers who would like to create a learning environment to support agency for social justice. First of all, language teachers should examine their thoughts and attitudes towards those different from them. Then, they should encourage students to make comparisons between their own cultures and target cultures and question the ideas taken for granted. To achieve this, language teachers should challenge untruths and stereotypes because these lead to inequality and discrimination among people. Secondly, all students should be provided with the necessary resources. Language teachers should know the backgrounds, families, communities, and living conditions of their students and their abilities and provide authentic materials to develop them according to these. Thirdly, students' talents and strengths should be used to enrich classrooms. Teachers should provide students with the understanding that cultural and social differences between individuals are a source of wealth and guide them on how to evaluate these differences. In this sense, language courses have the potential to provide vast and rich opportunities for teachers in terms of both subject and activity richness in gaining this understanding. Finally, a learning environment should be created to support critical thinking and agency for social change. Learners should be encouraged to take actions and be the voice of marginalized individuals. In teacher education, it could also be associated with some phrases like “teaching for diversity” (Boylan & Woolsey, 2015).

In the literature, the need for including social justice issues in teacher education has been widely discussed (Aronson et al., 2020; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005; Milner, 2017; Pugach et al., 2019; Reyes et al., 2021; Zeichner, 2009). For example, Reyes et al. (2021) explained this need as “teacher educators work to prepare teachers for an array of contexts and demographic shifts” (p. 353). Moreover, teacher educators are often unaware of the contexts in which pre-service teachers will work. Milner (2017) also reported that early career and pre-service teachers felt unprepared for social justice work at schools.

The importance of training pre-service teachers for their future teaching career is argued by Pugach et al. (2019, p. 206) as the world shifts towards “increasingly global societies facing persistent inequities”. It is quite obvious that there is an increasing need for integrating social justice issues in educational settings; however, it is not an effortless task for teachers. In previous studies, many researchers (Aronson et al., 2020; Ploof & Hochtritt, 2018; Pugach et al., 2019; Reyes et al., 2021) made suggestions on how to foster social justice for pre-service teachers and how to integrate these critical issues in teacher education curriculum. Aronson et al. (2020, p. 35) acknowledged that social justice should be “embedded across all courses within teacher preparation programs” rather than offering a single course aiming to foster social justice. During the implementation, they believed that teacher educators should be willing to reimagine the way they prepare pre-service teachers. Ploof and Hochtritt (2018) also highlighted the importance of introducing pre-service teachers to curriculum that fosters respect for human rights. Pugach et al. (2019) argued that the learning and growth process should start with understanding the identities of the students and suggested that teachers understand how they view and respond to their students regardless of their complexity. Last but not the least, Reyes et al. (2021) recommended co-teaching and collaboration, which they argued as one of the missing points in higher education. They stated that if we could build connections among the teacher educators, we could “better prepare to engage with our students in meaningful and transformative ways” (p. 363). This collective view of teaching and learning for teacher education was touched upon by Villegas and Lucas (2002). Aronson et al. (2020) worked on the curriculum in collaboration, and they stated that their study yielded positive results in terms of students’ social growth. These kinds of collaboration studies help teacher educators to critically examine the curriculum and revise it for diversity. In light of these studies, we also attempted to bring teachers and pre-service teachers from different contexts in an online platform and we expected the participants to critically examine their educational settings.

A small team of educators and writers working in Montgomery, Alabama, USA founded a group called Learning for Justice (<https://www.learningforjustice.org>) and are working with active teachers with “a deep belief that education is the best chance we have to build a better world, and a firm commitment to making sure that every student has the opportunity to learn and thrive.” They also worked on standards of social justice and proposed four pillars of social justice as identity, diversity, justice, and action. The first component, identity, is related to understanding one’s own identity. Individuals could develop positive identities, recognize traits of the dominant culture, their home culture, and other cultures, and understand how they negotiate their own identity in multiple spaces. First of all, individuals should have knowledge of identities. Second, diversity becomes an important concept. Individuals should be aware of the fact they are living in heterogeneous communities, and they should be aware of the similarities and differences among

people, and as a result, they should be able to build empathy, respect, understanding, and connection with others. The third component, justice, is about being fair at the individual level, and individuals should be able to analyze the harmful impact of bias and injustice on the world, historically and today. The final component, action, emphasizes that individuals should take action in order to maintain social justice in all settings. They should be able to recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice, and injustice; they should be able to speak up with courage and respect when they or someone else has been hurt or wronged by bias. These are the four standards of social justice declared by this group of educators. In this study, the participants completed various tasks based on these components, and we attempted to determine whether our participants developed knowledge and skills on these standards at the end of the project. The tasks were designed to be parallel with these four components. The participants wrote about their own identities and their students' identities at first. Then, we implemented another task in which they could notice the diversity in their classrooms; the participants were provided with some cases, and they were expected to empathize with a refugee student and, finally, they designed course materials and poster presentations as the culmination of the project, displaying the knowledge and skills they had developed throughout the collaboration.

Using Technology to Connect People

While promoting social justice in classrooms, teachers have some concerns in addition to academic achievement, such as learning about other cultures, finding similarities and differences among different cultures, creating cultural awareness, and developing mutual understanding. These can only be achieved through communication. When it comes to communication, we could easily notice that most of the communication today is on Internet platforms and teachers are integrating information and communication tools (ICT) in their teaching contexts. The roles of students and teachers have changed dramatically from passive individuals to active agents in education. Teachers are expected to design and create materials using different Web 2.0 tools and learners have more chances to learn by doing and completing tasks. In other words, both teachers and learners are producers in this era. However, ICT integration is not limited to using technological tools to enrich classroom materials; these technologies are also used to facilitate communication and interaction between learners living in different regions of the world. As mentioned by Chun et al. (2016), “educators are increasingly under pressure to use technology to prepare students to live in a technologically interconnected, globalized world” (p. 65). With the increased interaction, teachers and learners can create digital spaces in which learners are able to interact and educate themselves. Unlike the past, it has become much easier and cheaper to gather people on Internet platforms and as such, one of the opportunities in today's world

is virtual exchange projects. These tools can be integrated for the purpose of promoting social justice for participants in international projects. As mentioned in the literature, “intercultural projects have the potential to enhance learners’ communication skills and to enrich their knowledge of another culture, as well as to provide a context for viewing one’s own culture from another group’s perspective” (Kern, 2006, p. 198). As educators, we could be involved in this kind of virtual exchange projects to focus on some critical issues, like social justice, from an intercultural perspective.

The STEPS Project

In the STEPS project, we designed and implemented a virtual intercultural exchange (a.k.a. telecollaboration) program for pre-service and in-service teachers to develop their intercultural communicative competence and prepare them to work with culturally and linguistically diverse student populations, especially from refugee backgrounds. Since this project was granted by the Regional English Language Office (RELO) of the US Embassy in Turkey, one of the goals was expected to foster Turkish and US ties and bring the individuals from both countries together in intercultural collaboration projects. Thus, this project involved teachers from Turkey and the USA and engaged them in collaborative intercultural learning through synchronous and asynchronous online participation to promote social justice. The project lasted for six weeks and was based on weekly tasks on the Edmodo platform, a learning management system (www.edmodo.com). While we were designing the project as a research team, we tried to focus on four pillars of social justice - identity, diversity, justice, and action- which were proposed by Learning for Justice group (<https://www.learningforjustice.org>). For example, in terms of identity, we asked participants to introduce themselves so that they could write and think about their own identities. Next, participants wrote posts about their students and the main goal was to create awareness about the diversity in the classroom. In another task, participants wrote a daily routine from the perspective of a refugee student and they discussed the injustices these students might encounter in their daily life. After the tasks were completed, they were shared with the RELO of the US Embassy. The RELO office also made some suggestions and recommendations and we finalized the tasks at least one month before the project implementation.

Participants

Throughout the study, 120 pre-service and in-service teachers participated in weekly activities. There were 45 pre-service teachers from three different English Language Teaching Departments in Turkey; 45 in-service teachers working in different regions of Turkey; and 30 undergraduate and Masters’ program students, some of which were

working as teachers in the US. The survey was administered on a voluntary basis, and although there were 120 participants in the study, only 58 of them responded to the pre-test and post-test surveys. Of these 58 participants, 12 were pre-service teachers in the US, 29 were pre-service teachers in Turkey, and 17 were in-service teachers in Turkey. The pre-service teachers in this study were all senior students and were taking a "Teaching Practice" course. They were visiting state schools for observation and practice teaching during the project, and they were planning to start their teaching career the following year.

Weekly Tasks

Participants engaged in online discussion board conversations over six weeks. For the first week, the goal was to introduce participants to the project by sharing its main goals, timeline, tasks, and technological requirements/tools and to start a conversation on the relationship between self and culture and reflect on the ways in which cultures concomitantly include and exclude individuals through representation. Then, they were divided into 15 small groups and asked to write a post replying to the following prompt:

Introduce yourself. Please introduce your daily routines (work, school), culture, and context? How could you describe the majority cultures in your context, and do you feel that you belong to those cultures? Discuss why or why not. How could you describe the experiences of people in your context who are marginalized or minoritized in a community or broader society?

In the second week, the goal of the tasks was to reflect on the intricate relationship between personal and professional identities, understand how their identities inform their teaching practices and create awareness of their teaching contexts. They responded to the following questions:

Who are your students? Do you have any background information about your students' parents, culture? Do you think your values are similar to those of your students? Are all students/parents equal in your context? Do you or your school administrator do something in order to maintain equality among the students? Do minority students have access to resources equitably? If not, what can you do as a teacher to achieve equitable outcomes for student learning?

The third and fourth weeks included two scenarios from two different contexts, the US and Turkey. The main objective of the tasks assigned to the participants in these two weeks was to encourage empathy with the marginalized students. Therefore, the participants were asked to write a daily routine from the perspectives of two immigrant students. Although the scenarios were fictitious, they were possible to witness in language classes. The scenarios were as follows:

Scenario 1:

Abdulaziz is a Syrian student who immigrated to a small town in Turkey. He is accepted to a state school, and he is the only Syrian student in his class. His native language is Arabic, and he does not know Turkish or English. Neither his language teacher, Mustafa, nor his classmates know Arabic, and there is no common language between them. Mustafa tried to communicate with Abdulaziz

several times, but the student was not willing to take part in classroom activities. For example, whenever the teacher gives worksheets to the students, Abdulaziz takes them and understands nothing. Since the teacher had other students, he could not focus on only one student all the time. In time, the teacher gave up trying to communicate, and he behaved as if he was not in the classroom.

Scenario 2:

Nancy is a 4th-grade teacher. Her student Eduardo is an EL from El Salvador. Eduardo has a beginning English level proficiency but is a rising star in Math. Eduardo takes standardized tests in English. Nancy wanted to give him Spanish versions, but her principal didn't allow it. When students were taking the test, Eduardo opened his dictionary and looked for a definition for a word. Nancy saw this and told him dictionaries weren't allowed and took the dictionary away since they are not allowed during exams. What do you think about her actions? What would you do if you were Eduardo's teacher?

As for the fifth week, the participants were asked to work collaboratively in their small groups (n=7-8) to design course material that could be used in their current or future classrooms. The main objective of the material was to improve the language skills of their learners while creating awareness about social justice. Finally, in the sixth week, they all designed posters individually, answering the question: "Who am I as the teacher or future teacher of minorities?"; and wrote reflection posts on what they learned at the end of the project.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to identify whether/how a six-week intercultural collaboration project affected the pre-service and in-service teachers' views of social justice. The data were collected in a project (STEPS Project) funded by the RELO of the US Embassy in Ankara, Turkey. The implementation of the project and the weekly tasks are presented in Appendix A. In this study, a one group pre-test/post-test research design was used to evaluate the effectiveness of this project, and the following research question was posed: How does a six-week virtual exchange project influence in-service and pre-service teachers' social justice orientation?

Data Collection and Analysis

Social justice standards, which were claimed to "provide a road map for anti-bias education at every grade level" (<https://www.learningforjustice.org/frameworks>), composed of 20 statements. There were four factors in the survey: identity, diversity, justice, and action. First, the founders of the "learning for justice" community were contacted and required permission was granted. Then, these statements were used as the survey items in a 5 Scale Likert Type format and administered as the pre-test survey before the project and as the post-test survey after the project (Appendix B). As mentioned before, 58 participants responded to both surveys on a voluntary basis. As a result of the reliability analysis, the Cronbach's

Alpha was calculated as 0.859 which means that the reliability of the survey was rated as excellent.

In addition to the quantitative data, we used participants' responses to the reflection questions at the end of the project: "What have you learned in this project?". We used these responses as qualitative data to complement the analysis of the quantitative survey data.

In order to find out the difference between the mean scores of pre-test and post-test surveys, the normality of the difference test was administered. Since there was no normal distribution between the difference of the two tests, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used to determine whether the difference was statistically significant or not. As for the qualitative data, the reflection posts submitted by the participants were collected and analyzed through content analysis (Schreier, 2012). After coding the qualitative data, the codes were organized to create recurring themes. Representative excerpts from these recurring themes are presented in the findings.

Findings

In this study, we explored whether the STEPS project had any statistically significant effect on the social justice perceptions of the participants, so a one group pre-test/post-test research design was adopted. For this purpose, the scores of the participants at the beginning of the study had to be compared to those obtained at the end of the project. When comparing the mean scores of pre-test and post-test surveys, the normality test was used to determine which statistical analysis needed to be conducted. At the end of the normality test, it was found that the significance level was 0.000, and this indicated that there was no normal distribution, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Test of normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
difference	0.227	58	0.000	0.644	58	0.000

Since there was no normal distribution, the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to determine whether the difference between the pre-test and post-test survey mean scores were statistically significant or not. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test revealed that the mean scores of the post-test survey were significantly higher after the implementation of the project ($M=4.51, n=58$) compared to before ($M=4.31, n=58$), $z = -4.468$, $p = 0.000$, with a large effect size, $r = 0.59$. More than 0.50 effect size is considered a large effect size (Cohen, 1988).

Table 2
Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests

Test Statistics ^a	
	totalpost – totalpre
Z	-4.468 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000

According to the quantitative analysis, the project significantly influenced the perceptions of the participants on social justice in a positive manner. In other words, the project was found to be effective in the views of the participants in terms of social justice standards.

In order to better understand the analysis of the quantitative data, the reflection posts of the participants were analyzed as the qualitative data. As a result of the qualitative analysis, four themes emerged from the data: a) learning through sharing and working in collaboration, b) noticing common concerns with other educators, c) self-awareness and self-evaluation, and d) promise for taking action.

The first theme that emerged in the data was learning through sharing and working in collaboration. While designing the project, the activities were designed mostly based on sharing ideas, taking part in discussions, and producing materials in collaboration and individually. As a result, it is not surprising that almost all participants acknowledged that they learned through listening to other participants' experiences, ideas, and suggestions. As a sample to this theme, one of the participants, who was an in-service teacher from the US, remarked:

Final

Hello All! I apologize for the late response to this last week's assignment. I have learned so much during this project about so many different people! It has been so fun to connect with all of you and to be a part of this project! Reading other's responses to projects has helped me to realize some of my own biases and how I can best address these in the classroom and this project in turn has made it to where I am going to be a better teacher!

Figure 1

An excerpt from the Edmodo post

In this quotation, the participant showed awareness of ongoing professional development, and she stated that she made use of the other participants' responses to realize some of her biases and provide solutions to the problems she encountered in her classroom. This shows that in addition to pre-service teachers benefitting from the project, in-service teachers also learned from it.

The second theme was noticing common concerns with other educators. Before the project, some of the participants believed that they were the only ones who had difficulties in coping with the

problems related to social justice in their classrooms. While sharing their experiences, ideas, and suggestions for the scenarios, they noticed that they were not alone, and these were common concerns of other educators in the project. They found some similarities in terms of social justice issues in their classrooms. For example, in-service teachers had some difficulties in using a common language with refugee students. The teachers did not know Arabic and the refugee students did not know Turkish or English, so they had some language difficulties during the communication. Another example was that the refugee students did not want to engage in the tasks in the classroom and teachers could not find a way to involve them in the activities. There were these kinds of problems for the in-service teachers in our study. They shared their experiences and recommendations with each other and noticed that this was not specific only for their classrooms. At the end of the project, one of the pre-service teachers wrote:

Hello all for the last time!

This project has been one the most meaningful projects that I've been a part of. It's a great honor to get to know all of you. We had the chance to meet great professors from Turkey and US. The thing that makes me most happy about being in this project is to see that almost everyone is going through almost the same things that I go through. That's why, reading about your experiences was a great help for me. I'm very happy to be involved in this

Figure 2

An excerpt from the Edmodo post

If educators do not share their experiences with their colleagues, they might encounter the same problems without knowing that they have the same concerns. In the project, they discussed the problems and social justice issues in their classrooms together and noticed that they were not alone.

The third theme was self-awareness and self-evaluation. This is one of the most important themes we found in this study. The pre-service and in-service teachers in the project found an opportunity to question their attitudes, biases, and opinions for the refugee students in their classrooms and refugees in the society. It was seen that the activities and weekly tasks created awareness for the participants, and they evaluated their perspectives with the help of other participants' responses. One of the pre-service teachers acknowledged that:

First of all, I want to thank you all for sharing your ideas and experiences, and thank all of our teachers here and guest presenters. They really made me rethink my experiences and behaviours in a brand new point of view. Now that I know how my identity has too many different aspects and how these aspects affect me as a teacher, I believe I am able to respond more carefully and wisely to any type of discrimination and injustice not only in my future class but also in my life.

Figure 3

An excerpt from the Edmodo post

This participant had a chance to rethink her behaviors, and in the end, she decided to change her perspectives towards injustice and discrimination in her future classroom and her daily life. We argue that these small steps might help reshape other people's perspectives in the future.

As for the final theme, promise for taking action, it was found that the participants were determined to change their behaviors in the future. This was one of the main purposes of the project, which is to encourage teachers and future teachers to take action in their classrooms. Once again, most participants promised that they would take action for a better world. In the following quotations from two different participants in the project, we observe that the project had some meaningful impact on our participants' perspectives of and engagement on social justice issues.

to change the world one child at a time. From the information I learned here, I will make sure to do everything in my power to create an inclusive, open-minded classroom environment where none of my students feel marginalized, excluded, or discriminated against. I will teach all of my students the importance of being kind, open-minded, and welcoming to everyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from. I will teach my students about diversity and social justice topics, as well as make them aware that their words and actions have an impact on others. These

Figure 4

An excerpt from the Edmodo post

diversity is our biggest richness. whichever colour our skin is, whichever language we speak, whichever religion we believe or whichever culture we have, we are human beings. The things we have to put importance on should be the peace, collaboration, sharing the common values and living in a harmony. I have to be fair to all my students. I have to teach and support the social justice in my surrounding. From now on I am a social justice warrior! I will dedicate myself for this aim!

Figure 5

An excerpt from the Edmodo post

When compared with the social justice standards indicated by the Learning for Justice group, the qualitative analysis of the data showed

that the participants in the project developed knowledge and skills in terms of identity, diversity, and action. They made self-evaluations and accomplished self-awareness. They found some similarities and differences among different individuals, and as the most important point, they decided to take action for maintaining social justice. As we can see in the quotations above, the participants completed the tasks, and gained an awareness that they could take action as teachers; they were the agents who could change the world.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was based on the reports of a project granted by the Regional English Language Office of the US Embassy in Turkey. The title of the project was Supporting Teachers' Engagement in Pedagogies of Social Justice (STEPS). In this project, pre-service teachers from five different universities in Turkey and in-service teachers from Turkey and the US participated in activities on the Edmodo platform, which is a learning management system that allows participants to follow tasks asynchronously. The main objectives of the project were to increase intercultural, collaborative, professional learning activities between teachers from the USA and Turkey, to develop pre-service and in-service teachers' intercultural communicative competence, to promote social justice informed pedagogies in K-12 schools through professional development and conversations between teachers from two countries, and to develop teachers as change agents and informed educators who attend to the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students in their contexts. At the end of the study, we found that the project impacted the perspectives of the participants in a positive way. Furthermore, based on the qualitative analysis, four themes emerged from the data: a) learning through sharing and working in collaboration, b) noticing common concerns with other educators, c) self-awareness and self-evaluation, and d) promise for taking action.

Considering the roles of teachers in a globalized world, teachers are not only responsible for the academic achievement of their learners but also for preparing them as responsible individuals in society (Pantic# & Florian, 2015). Therefore, social justice is among the issues that teachers should focus on, and teachers are the ones who could make a difference for their students.

In the literature, Nieto (2010) stated that teachers should examine their thoughts and attitudes towards others; and in this study, we found that the participants acknowledged that they evaluated themselves, and the project created an awareness for social justice issues. This issue is also related to the standards of the Learning for Justice research group. One of the social justice standards was identity, and we found the participants could find an opportunity to reflect on their attitudes and opinions on social justice. The most important component of the social justice standards and Nieto's (2010) guidelines was taking action against discrimination, inequalities, prejudices, and stereotypes. Knowing the

differences, being aware of the inequalities, and being kind to people are not enough for individuals (Nieto, 2010). Individuals are expected to take action for maintaining social justice. In this study, a theme related to this point emerged - promise for taking action. The participants stated that they would be more sensitive to social justice issues in their classrooms and future classrooms, which was the main goal of this project.

Considering the studies in the literature, it was clear that there is a need for critical pedagogy in teacher education and social justice is among the most important issues that should be touched upon in the curriculum. Milner (2017) reported that pre-service teachers were not prepared enough for social justice work. This was parallel with the pre-test results of the survey in this study. Before the implementation, the perceived social justice levels of pre-service teachers were lower than after the implementation. It was found that the weekly tasks used in this study contributed to the social justice perceptions of the pre-service teachers. Moreover, Pugach et al. (2019) mentioned that the inequities are increasing in this global world and one of the reasons for these inequalities is based on the wars that have resulted in increased immigration. In the context of our study, we noticed that pre-service teachers were aware of the fact that there were some students from other nations and this diversity made teaching more challenging and demanding. Aronson et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of a whole integration of this topic into the curriculum and they suggested reimagining the ways of preparing pre-service teachers. In our study, we integrated social justice related tasks as a project rather than using them as coursework for a single course. Teacher educators should understand that a single culture-related course might not be enough to promote social justice for pre-service teachers and that these issues need to be integrated into the whole teacher education curriculum. Additionally, Pugach et al. (2019) reported that pre-service teachers' being aware of their own identities and teachers' understanding of their students' identities should be the starting point for learning and growth. In this study, we started the tasks with self-introductions of the participants. Then, we continued the tasks with a question "Who are your students?" which aimed at creating an awareness for the participants about their students and future students so that they could be prompted to look for the diversity in their classrooms. Finally, Lucas (2002) and Reyes et al. (2021) proposed co-teaching and collaboration to address the question: "How can we promote social justice?". This was the main framework for our study. We, as the researchers, met from five different universities and designed a virtual exchange project and we invited participants from different regions of Turkey and the US. The participants worked in collaboration; they discussed critical topics; designed language teaching materials and shared their posters with other participants. As stated in the literature, these kinds of tasks are important and crucial for understanding each other.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, we argue that the intercultural virtual exchange project had positively impacted the participants' perceptions of and engagement on social justice issues in the classroom as evidenced in the statistically significant survey test results and participants' self-reported/perceived growth throughout the project. In terms of implications, we argue that the number of virtual exchange projects can be increased so that teachers can find opportunities to meet their colleagues from any region of the world and find some similarities and differences between their contexts and the other teachers' contexts. Teachers should also understand their potential to change the world. The stakeholders of teacher education, such as policy makers, teacher educators, in-service teachers and pre-service teachers should be involved in these projects in the future. We are aware that these critical issues in education can be negotiated through increased communication and the online platforms provide us many opportunities to meet and share our experiences, problems, and solutions to these problems. This kind of virtual intercultural collaborations will positively influence the pre-service and in-service teachers' perspectives of social justice, who may otherwise not have the chance to meet like-minded colleagues across the world.

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Appendix A: Weekly Tasks

Weeks	Activity	Details
1	Welcome Meeting	Goal: To introduce participants to the project by sharing its main goals, timeline, tasks, and technological requirements/tools.
	Pre-survey	Goal: To gather data about participating teachers' initial perspectives on Social Justice via a short survey instrument on Google Forms.
	Small groups meeting	Once groups are formed, participants will be asked to meet online in their small groups. Goal: To ensure that participants have some "face" time to get to know each other individually before they are expected to work on the tasks collaboratively.
	Edmodo Post	Goal: To start a conversation on the relationship between self and culture and reflect on the ways in which cultures concomitantly include and exclude individuals. PROMPT: <i>Introduce yourself. Please introduce your daily routines (work, school), your culture, your context? How could you describe the majority cultures in your context and do you feel that you belong to those cultures? Discuss why or why not. How could you describe the experiences of people in your context who are marginalized or minoritized in a community or broader society?</i>
Week 2	Guest Speaker #1	Title: "Professional identity development in language teaching".
	Edmodo Post	Goal: To understand the relationship between teacher identity and student identities and explain its significance for their teaching practice. PROMPT: <i>Who are your students? Do you have any background information about your students' parents, culture? Do you think your values are similar to those of your students? Are all students/parents equal in your context? Do you or your school administrator do something in order to maintain equality among</i>

		the students? Do minority students have access to resources equitably? If not, what can you do as a teacher to achieve equitable outcomes for student learning?
3	Week	
	Guest Speaker #2	Title: "Teaching: Servitude or Transformation?"
	Sample Case for Discussion	PROMPT: In the following scenario, how would you react if you were the teacher in the classroom? Assuming that you were Abdulaziz, could you write a short paragraph about a day of Abdulaziz from his point of view (e.g., using I, me, my pronouns)? Abdulaziz is a Syrian student who immigrated to a small town in Turkey. He is accepted to a state school and he is the only Syrian student in his class. His native language is Arabic and he does not know Turkish or English. Neither his language teacher, Mustafa, nor his classmates know Arabic and there is no common language between them. Mustafa tried to communicate with Abdulaziz several times but the student was not willing to take part in classroom activities. For example, whenever the teacher gives worksheets to the students, Abdulaziz takes it and understands nothing. Since the teacher had other students, he could not focus on only one student all the time. In time, the teacher gave up trying to communicate and he behaved as if he was not in the classroom.
	Poem	The poem "Home" written by Warsan Shire will be shared at the beginning of the week with the participants https://therightsangle.wordpress.com/2018/02/06/home-by-warsan-shire/
	Edmodo Post	PROMPT: Do you have any immigrant students in your classroom? Do you have any neighbours coming from other countries? Has immigration affected you/your life personally? If so, how? Have you ever felt marginalized in any context because of your ideas, religion, ethnicity, your behaviors?

4	Week	Guest Speaker #3	Title: "Trauma Informed Teaching to Promote Social Justice"
		Sample Case for Discussion	PROMPT: <i>If you were the teacher in the following scenario, how would you react? What do you think about Eduardo's, Nancy's, and principal's actions in this situation?</i> Nancy is a 4th grade teacher. Her student Eduardo is an EL from El Salvador. Eduardo has a beginning English level proficiency but is a rising star in Math. Eduardo takes standardized tests in English. Nancy wanted to give him Spanish versions, but her principal didn't allow it. When students were taking the test, Eduardo opened his dictionary and looked for a definition for a word. Nancy saw this and told him dictionaries weren't allowed and took the dictionary away since they are not allowed during exams. What do you think about her actions? What would you do if you were Eduardo's teacher?
5	Week	Guest Speaker #4	Title: 'Crossing the 'border': What kind of zones can we create for the 'incomers'?
		Course Materials	In this week, the participants will be asked to design a course material that could be used in their classrooms/future classrooms as a group work activity. The main objective for the material will be to improve language skills of their learners while creating an awareness about social justice. These course materials (worksheet, reading passage, listening material, short video clips, games, etc.) will be uploaded to a Google Drive folder and shared with all participants for future use.
	Week 6	One-hour training on how to use Canva for designing visual materials	Before the week starts, a one-hour Zoom session on how to use Canva will be organized for all participants. One of the coordinators will host this session. The participants will be able to create a poster at the end of this one-hour session. Note: This session will be recorded so that some participants who could not join the session for some personal reasons or time zone difference will have the chance to watch it again as needed. Moreover, the participants will have to rewatch if they have some technical difficulties while completing the task.

Poster Design Task	This poster design activity will be an individual task. The participants will be asked to design a poster which will be a response to the following prompt. PROMPT: <i>Who am I as the teacher or future teacher of minorities?</i> After the participants create their posters, they will be asked to add a 5-minute voice over on their posters so that each participant will have the chance to present their poster. Finally, they will upload them to a Google Drive folder.
Edmodo Post	As for the final Edmodo post, the participants will be asked to write a post on the following question. It will also be an evaluation of the project. PROMPT: <i>What have you learned in the past six weeks? Are you planning to change anything for your teaching practices?</i>
Post-Survey	The survey on Social Justice will be administered as the post-survey at the end of the project.
Closing Ceremony	This closing ceremony will be organized for all participants. A convenient time will be found and the reflections of the participants on the project will be asked. This activity will be the final task for all participants. This meeting will be recorded and shared with the participants and the US Embassy.

Appendix B

Social Justice Survey

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
IDENTITY	1. I have a positive view of myself, including an awareness of and comfort with my membership in multiple groups in society.					
	2. I know my family history and cultural background and can describe how my own identity is informed and shaped by my membership in multiple identity groups.					
	3. I know that all my group identities and the intersection of those identities create unique aspects of who I am and that this is true for other people too.					
	4. I express pride and confidence in my identity without perceiving or treating anyone else as inferior.					
	5. I recognize traits of the dominant culture, my home culture and other cultures, and I am conscious of how I express my identity as I move between those spaces.					
DIVERSITY	6. I interact comfortably and respect- fully with all people, whether they are similar to or different from me.					
	7. I have the language and knowledge to accurately and respectfully describe how people (including myself) are both similar to and different from each other and others in their identity groups.					
	8. I respectfully express curiosity about the history and lived experiences of others and exchange ideas and beliefs in an open-minded way.					
	9. I relate to and build connections with other people by showing them empathy, respect and understanding, regardless of our similarities or differences.					
	10. I understand that diversity includes the impact of unequal power relations on the development of group identities and cultures.					
JUSTICE	11. I relate to all people as individuals rather than representatives of groups and can identify stereotypes when I see or hear them.					
	12. I can recognize, describe and distinguish unfairness and injustice at different levels of society.					

	13. I can explain the short and long-term impact of biased words and behaviors and unjust practices, laws and institutions that limit the rights and freedoms of people based on their identity groups.						
	14. I am aware of the advantages and disadvantages I have in society because of my membership in different identity groups, and I know how this has affected my life.						
	15. I can identify figures, groups, events and a variety of strategies and philosophies relevant to the history of social justice around the world.						
ACTION	16. I express empathy when people are excluded or mistreated because of their identities and concern when I personally experience bias.						
	17. I take responsibility for standing up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice.						
	18. I have the courage to speak up to people when their words, actions or views are biased and hurtful, and I will communicate with respect even when we disagree.						
	19. I stand up to exclusion, prejudice and discrimination, even when it's not popular or easy or when no one else does.						
	20. I will join with diverse people to plan and carry out collective action against exclusion, prejudice and discrimination, and we will be thoughtful and creative in our actions in order to achieve our goals.						

Declaración de intereses

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.