

Investigating Workplace Discrimination Among Teachers in Public Schools

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Abstract

This study focuses on teachers' workplace discrimination in public-sector schools in Tehsil Kharian, District Gujrat, Pakistan. A descriptive survey approach was taken, surveying a sample of 235 public-sector school teachers, selected using random sampling. Discrimination was measured using a self-developed 21-item questionnaire titled “Workplace Discrimination” which examined discrimination in three dimensions: Hierarchical Discrimination, Interpersonal Discrimination, and Favoritism. The discrimination questionnaire has a high reliability score of Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.92 and considerable consistency within each of the 21 items. The value of CVI was calculated 0.98 for 14 experts. Descriptive statistics of mean, frequency, and standard deviation on SPSS (Version 24) were performed and revealed the teachers perceive a moderate degree of discrimination associated with workplace discrimination on all three dimensions. The majority of the teachers assessed discrimination within the hierarchical structures of the school and favoritism directed toward them as discrimination as moderated to high, while within the scope of interpersonal communication he perceived discrimination as moderate to high. These findings justify the conclusion that moderate discrimination in terms of the assessed dimensions exists and that these experiences vary with the public school. Finally, the study recommends the need for equal, fair, and open systems of communication at public schools to bring a reduction in the discrimination described.

Keywords: *Workplace Discrimination, Hierarchical Structure, Interpersonal Communication, Favoritism, Public-School Teachers*

1. Introduction

Constructing education, especially social education, is unmatched by nothing else. Moreover, nothing can surpass the influence educators have within the educational field. Still, the importance of an educator comprises the double-edged sword of carrying the mental fatigue of the profession versus classroom

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adversities. One of the most significant, yet still underprovided, is the oversight of measurement discrimination within the public schools. Discrimination by way of gender, by age, by ethnicity, by religion, or any unmourned element thwarts educational workplace motivation, satisfaction, and results commitment (Guul et al, 2019).

Discrimination in the workplace is the unequal treatment of people because of their gender, race, religion, or age, not related to their work performance. In educational environments, this may take the form of biased work assignments, promotion favoritism, decision exclusion, and unequal access to opportunities. Teachers that get treated this way may feel frustration and lose their motivation, or mentally suffer as a result of this treatment (Dipboye & Colella, 2013). In a Turkish study, workplace relations were adversely affected by school administrators exhibiting favoritism and bias toward certain teachers driven by personal connections and demographic characteristics (Polat & Hiçyılmaz, 2017).

Likewise, studies conducted in Pakistan indicate that verbal harassment discrimination, in the form of sexist remarks, exclusion, and teasing, is widespread in public school settings and adversely impacts teachers' job performance, anxiety, and stress (Kamran et al., 2024). This is consistent with research internationally which finds that discrimination and exclusion of teachers result in diminished job satisfaction and increased turnover intention (Bednar & Gicheva, 2019). With respect to classroom quality and the learning outcomes of students, the school discrimination that teachers undergo impacts their emotional and psychological well-being, which in turn, affects classroom quality (Venketsamy et al., 2024).

Public school environments are especially vulnerable to discriminatory practices because of their managerial structure, politics, and limited resources. Teachers in these schools are dependent on higher-ups for things like promotions and benefits which allows bias and favoritism to occur (Tariq & Zaman, 2022). In developing countries, social and cultural norms can rationalize unequal treatment, making it hard for teachers to speak up and not be scapegoated without fearing retaliation (Akhtar et al., 2024). Cases of discrimination are often unreported because they are either dealt with as interpersonal conflicts or not in the scope of the institution (Jabeen et al., 2023).

Equity and discrimination impact the well-being and the professional identity of a teacher. Discrimination in organizations rests on the theory of organizational justice which states that the perception of fairness, whether it be procedural, distributive, and interpersonal, significantly impacts employee morale and affective commitment (Colquitt et al., 2001). When there are equality recognition and resources, the institution loses trust of the teachers which in turn, affects, their willingness to work and performance. In a study about the

psychological well-being of teachers, Brar et al. (2019) states that discrimination in the workplace and perception of it as inequitable is the source of psychological stress and emotional well-being issues. Özkul and Demirtaş (2025) found that teachers described feelings of exclusion, unfairness, bias, loss of motivation, isolation, and low attachment to their school as a result of discriminatory actions by school administrators. Even though it's important, how teachers deal with discrimination has not received enough attention, especially in South Asian countries. The focus of previous research has been on higher education and the private sector, leaving the dynamics of public schools unexamined. This is significant, as teachers in public schools' work under much tighter bureaucratic and political conditions (Kouser et al., 2024). With this in mind, this study aims to analyze the nature, causes, and consequences of discrimination in public school settings. Such an analysis can reveal the impact of this discrimination on the morale of teachers and the performance of the institution.

Recognizing the value of teachers is important but they can face workplace discrimination, whether consciously or subconsciously, within public school systems, which can drain their motivation, well-being, and job performance overall. Discrimination within a work environment can occur as unequal treatment, favoritism, and through other various administrator practices. All of these can contribute to negative work climate, job dissatisfaction, and work ineffectiveness. Despite its seriousness, public school teachers discriminate against one another workplace oblique, which is still poorly scrutinized. Identifying the forms, causes, and impacts of inequitable discrimination is crucial to developing fairness and a healthy workplace climate for teachers.

1.1 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study included to:

1. investigate the level of workplace discrimination among teachers in public schools.

1.2 Research Questions

This study was conducted to seek the answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of workplace discrimination regarding hierarchical structure among teachers in public schools?
2. What is the level of workplace discrimination regarding interpersonal relationship among teachers in public schools?
3. What is the level of teachers' workplace discrimination regarding favoritism in public schools?
4. What is the level of workplace discrimination among teachers in public schools?

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study provides an empirical explanation of the data, facts, and assumptions related to workplace discrimination. It describes how discrimination becomes embedded in daily routines and organizational structures. The study focuses on the factors that form the basis of discriminatory practices and lead to teachers being treated unequally within the school environment. It also offers insight into a new paradigm by discussing how feelings of isolation, discomfort, and disrespect can be detrimental for teachers. By identifying the specific forms of discrimination that teachers face in public schools, the study brings attention to the institutional and interpersonal factors that create unequal conditions. These findings can guide policymakers and school administrators in recognizing challenging practices and implementing strategies that promote fairness, transparency, and accountability. Through this evidence-based understanding, the study contributes to efforts aimed at reducing discriminatory behaviors and supporting a more equitable work environment for teachers.

2. Literature Review

Discrimination can occur when one employee demonstrates favoritism or shows disrespect to others. It can also involve someone being treated with disdain and being excluded from a group or team. An example of this could be unequal distribution of salary or bonuses based on an individual's or certain group's gender, ethnicity, culture, economic status, physical or mental ability, etc. Bias of discrimination can also include age, disability, gender, parents' status, religion, ethnicity, physical condition, race and other aggressive behaviors of an employee. This type of discrimination caused negative effects on teacher employees' overall well-being which includes the role of violence in the workplace, which also the studied covered. In the case of school teachers, employees' discriminatory practices were positively correlated to acts of violence (Kim & Ko, 2022). Discrimination's impact on teacher well-being was studied in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, focusing on the public sector's school teachers and their school leadership which also included the contribution of Situational Leadership Theory. Findings indicated a valuable contribution of situational leadership to school teachers' public-school teaching which reflects on the negative correlation of disparate treatment and teacher well-being, signaling discrimination in the workplace (Pervaiz et al., 2024).

These factors were valuable as well to understand the context of Pakistan (Pervaiz et al., 2024). Employee wellness rests on the wellbeing of the teaching staff and it includes the physical, psychological, skills, and teaching knowledge (Iqbal et al., 2023). Workplace discrimination involves undermining the position of individuals in the workplace. This is especially the case with discrimination

based on race, gender, religion, and other factors, such as background, politics, and social class (Hirsh & Kornrich, 2008). In addition to such factors, individuals may also face discrimination based on disability, genetic information, pregnancy, and association. In India, race and gender inequities show across various indicators such as earnings, unemployment, job control, and human capital (Pavalko et al., 2003). Discrimination and inequities manifest across different societal levels, with restricted access to education, healthcare, and the job market, and how individuals are treated in schools. This research examines how discrimination experienced in higher education, especially within the college and university teaching profession, impacts teachers' emotional and physical wellbeing (Wadsworth et al., 2007).

Bullying and discrimination at work relates to various complaints, including fatigue, which is an essential issue for both employers and employees in the workplace. Previous studies have established a link between workplace bullying and fatigue, however, the interplaying more specifically spirituality and gender factors and their influence have been less studied especially in the perspective of school teachers. To address this shortfall in the literature, the most recent study in Lebanon, within the framework of workplace bullying, analyzed the predictors of fatigue, including spirituality and gender with school teachers as the sample. It was established that workplace bullying is a strong predictor of fatigue, and gender as an effect modifier specifically in the female teachers. Besides this, anxiety, in conjunction with depression, was found to be a key predictor of the increase in fatigue (Khairallah et al., 2023).

When it comes to Pakistan, recent research points to the existence of gender discrimination in the education sector and the workplace environment's role in it. The research determined that while organizational politics impacts both the public and the private sector, workplace discrimination in the education sector is minimal and very limited. The research also established that women in the education sector worldwide face little to no significant workplace gender discrimination, suggesting a shift to a more equitable workplace environment (Mian et al., 2016).

Bernotaite and Malinauskiene (2017) examined the relationship between workplace bullying, psychological distress, and burnout. Specifically, this study examined burnouts and psychosocial job stressors and distress's mediation relationships. Results indicated that, in the teaching profession, the psychological distress predictors that remained after considering job strain, burnout, and social support bullying were occasional and severe. While the implications of low social support and job strain seemed considerable, these factors' effects diminished in the final step of the analysis. This suggests that, psychological distress, bullying is not psychosocial job predictors' high social support strain. Specifically, burnout does

not moderate the bullying and psychological distress relationship, reinforcing bullying's distinct effect on the psychological distress of teachers.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive survey research design was selected for this study. This approach was ideal as it facilitated the collection of data from a large number of respondents, describing and analyzing the current extent of workplace discrimination among teachers in public schools. Since the design included neither the manipulation of variables nor the experimental approach, it was dedicated to capturing teachers' discrimination experiences in the workplace, accounting for unprocessed data.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The sample of the study was taken from public school teachers and consisted of 135 participants, all of whom responded. The sampling technique used for the study was systematic random sampling. According to the 10% criterion suggested by Gay et al. (2011), 10% of the schools were selected from the total number of available schools. The total number of high schools was 117, and after calculating the sampling interval (k), every 10th school was selected for the sample. All teachers working as PST, EST, and SST in the selected high schools were considered the target population, and a total of 135 teachers were included in the sample.

3.3 Instrumentation

To understand the discrimination experienced by public-school teachers, the researcher created a questionnaire titled *Workplace Discrimination*. Discrimination in the workplace was narrowed down to three constructs: hierarchical structure, interpersonal communication, and favoritism. The instrument consisted of 21 statements: 8 concerning hierarchical structure, 6 concerning interpersonal communication, and 7 concerning favoritism. The overall Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was 0.93, indicating a very high degree of internal consistency and reliability. 14 experts were contacted to ensure the validity of the tool. The value of CVI was calculated 0.98.

4.Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data were analyzed through statistical measure of i.e. Descriptive statistics, Mean, frequency and Standard Deviation using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS-24).

Table 1

Level of workplace discrimination regarding hierarchical structure among teachers in public schools

Category	Frequency	Percent	Mean	S.D
High	73	54.1	1.60	.734
Moderate	42	31.1		
Low	20	14.1		
Total	135	100.0		

Table 1 shows the percentage frequency of the three categories and the overall mean value of workplace discrimination regarding hierarchical structure among teachers. The mean value (1.60) indicates that there is a high level of workplace discrimination related to hierarchical structure. The table shows that 51.1% of teachers fall into the high category, 31.1% fall into the moderate category, and 14.1% fall into the low category of hierarchical structure discrimination. This indicates that the majority of teachers experience a high level of hierarchical structure discrimination.

Table 2

Level of workplace discrimination regarding interpersonal relationship among teachers in public schools

Category	Frequency	Percent	Mean	S.D
High	66	48.9	1.74	.816
Moderate	37	27.4		
Low	32	23.7		
Total	135	100.0		

Table 2 shows the percentage frequency of the three categories and the overall mean value of workplace discrimination regarding interpersonal communication among teachers. The mean value (1.74) indicates that there is a high level of workplace discrimination related to interpersonal communication among teachers overall. The table further shows that 48.9% of teachers fall into the high category of interpersonal communication discrimination, 27.4% fall into the moderate category, and 23.7% fall into the low category. This indicates that the majority of teachers experience a high level of interpersonal communication discrimination.

Table 3

Level of teachers' workplace discrimination regarding favoritism in public schools

Category	Frequency	Percent	Mean	S.D
High	83	61.5	1.46	.644
Moderate	41	30.4		
Low	11	8.1		
Total	135	100.0		

Table 3 shows the percentage frequency of the three categories and the overall mean value of workplace discrimination regarding favoritism among teachers. The mean score (1.466) indicates that there is a high level of workplace discrimination related to favoritism. The table shows that 61.5% of teachers experience high favoritism, 30.4% experience moderate favoritism, and 8.1% experience low favoritism. This indicates that the majority of teachers face a high level of favoritism.

Table 4

Level of teachers' workplace discrimination in public schools

Category	Frequency	Percent	Mean	S.D
High	35	25.92	2.42	.931
Moderate	75	55.55		
Low	25	18.51		
Total	135	100.0		

Table 4 shows the percentage frequency of the three categories and the overall mean value of workplace discrimination among teachers. The mean score (2.42) indicates that there is a moderate level of workplace discrimination. The table shows that 25.9% of teachers experience high workplace discrimination, 55.5% experience moderate workplace discrimination, and 18.5% experience low workplace discrimination. This indicates that the majority of teachers experience a moderate level of workplace discrimination.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Teachers experience a high level of workplace discrimination related to hierarchical structure. The majority of teachers fall into the high category of discrimination regarding hierarchical structure in public schools, indicating that authority-based unequal treatment is widespread. The teachers experience a high level of workplace discrimination related to interpersonal communication. The study showed that strict rules from the hierarchies often result in a greater level of dissatisfaction and burnout. The teachers faced harsh circumstances and a rigid routine of working from authorities, which led them to experience undervalued,

unfavorable circumstances, poor performance, and disempowerment (Education Support, 2022). Moreover, the distribution of leadership roles within a hierarchical structure can impact teachers' access to professional development opportunities. Schools that adopt a distributive leadership model, where responsibilities are shared among staff members, often see higher levels of innovation and teacher collaboration (Harris, 2015).

Teachers experience a high level of workplace discrimination related to interpersonal communication. The majority of teachers fall into the high category of discrimination related to communication, suggesting that exclusionary, disrespectful, or unequal interactions are common. The teachers experience a moderate level of workplace discrimination. The majority of teachers fall into the moderate category of workplace discrimination in public schools. Effective interpersonal communication is crucial in preventing workplace discrimination. Miscommunications or biases in communication can lead to misunderstandings and discriminatory practices. A study in the United States showed that around 93% of teachers from public and primary level schools faced stress. According to Herman et al. (2018), there is a generation gap among teachers in the workplace, which leads to poor interpersonal communication and relationships, resulting in poor work-based well-being. Moreover, discrimination at the workplace also disturbs communication, leading to poor work-related well-being, poor job performance, and increased burnout (Arvidsson et al., 2019). The findings from a study showed that receiving appropriate social support and having good interpersonal communication leads to lower burnout (Fiorilli et al., 2019).

Teachers experience a high level of discrimination related to favoritism. Most teachers fall into the high category, indicating that preferential treatment is prevalent in public schools. A study on favoritism, teachers' well-being, and behavioral patterns showed that favoritism led to inequality and poor distribution of tasks, which negatively affected teachers' well-being. Teachers also showed maladjusted behaviors due to distrust and conflicts between favorable and non-favorable employees (Polat, 2012). In severe cases, favoritism led to poor work performance among teachers, strikes against injustice, and absenteeism. This overall negatively impacted teachers' well-being, behavior, and the work environment (Jackson, 2020). When considering all forms of discrimination, teachers experience a moderate overall level of workplace discrimination.

6. Recommendations

Following recommendations were drawn from findings of study;

1. Higher authorities may promote a culture in which all teachers regardless of their position are respected as part of a coordinated effort to educate students.

This approach can help reduce hierarchical discrimination and create a more inclusive school environment.

2. In order to reduce workplace discrimination related to interpersonal communication among teachers in public schools, administration may organize workshops on effective communication, conflict resolution, and team-building.
3. To minimize this type of discrimination, higher authorities may organize workshops on effective communication, conflict resolution, and team-building. These interventions can improve teachers' interactions and foster a respectful and collaborative workplace culture.
4. To reduce favoritism, administrators and school leaders may model impartiality and fairness in their interactions with all staff members, ensuring equitable treatment and opportunities for all teachers.
5. To address overall discrimination, higher authorities may implement policies that reward educational institutions for maintaining equitable and supportive work environments. Such measures can help create a fair, safe, and welcoming workplace while reducing teachers' stress, anxiety, and mental strain.

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