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Article

Dialogic Pedagogy as a Liberatory Praxis in Schooling: Challenging Power Dynamics and Neoliberalism in the Context of Schools in Kashmir

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Abstract:

Dialogic pedagogy positions learners and their lived experiences at the core of education, reimagining schooling as a collaborative process of co-constructing, challenging, and reinterpreting knowledge within its social, cultural, and political contexts. This approach fosters critical consciousness, empathy, and democratic engagement, which are essential for meaningful education, particularly in conflict-affected regions like Kashmir. Amid Kashmir's complex sociopolitical disruptions, digital divides, and educational inequities, dialogic pedagogy emerges as a transformative alternative to neoliberal, exam-driven, and authoritarian educational models. This paper situates dialogic pedagogy as a liberatory praxis within Kashmiri schooling, integrating foundational theories with recent policy reforms and grassroots innovations. Ten respondents were interviewed across the Kashmir Division as the effective sample to explore various aspects of socio-political narratives in consonance with the implications of dialogic pedagogy. It offers a nuanced critique that acknowledges local resilience, intersectional realities, and the therapeutic potential of dialogic engagement, enhanced by illustrative narratives that humanise the lived experiences of Kashmiri students and educators. The paper explores the post-traumatic development of various socio-political dimensions, where individuals have learnt to both survive and thrive in the face of adversity. The paper also focusses on the impact of the neoliberal and chronic capitalistic approach to present-day schooling, which imposes more exclusion on marginalised groups. The role of dialogic pedagogy is to rise against this notion and impose a strategic limitation on the privatisation and marketing of education, like other potential capitals. The paper suggests that dialogic pedagogy plays a significant role in the Indian context, aligning with the National Education Policy 2020 and other critical measures to promote its importance in this diverse society.

Keywords: Conflict Zones, Dialogic Pedagogy, Digital Divide, Education Policy, Intersectionality, Kashmir, Liberatory Praxis, Neoliberalism, Schooling

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era dominated by global neoliberal educational reforms, schooling systems increasingly prioritise market-driven outcomes, accountability, standardisation, and credentialing. These trends manifest in standardised testing, privatisation, and a pervasive "coaching culture" that privileges rote memorisation over critical inquiry and democratic participation (Ball, 2012). In India, these pressures intersect with structural inequalities, which are acutely pronounced in Kashmir, a region marked by decades of turmoil, fragile political stability, ethnic and religious diversity, contested identities, and repeated disruptions to schooling through curfews, hartals, lockdowns, and internet shutdowns over the past three decades (Srinivasan, 2022; Tariq et al., 2023). These challenges create a fractured educational landscape where resilience and agency among local communities, families, and educators are as critical as the disruptions themselves.

Dialogic pedagogy, rooted in Paulo Freire's (1970) critical

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pedagogy, Hans Georg Gadamer's (1989) hermeneutics, and Hannah Arendt's (1961) reflections on action and plurality, offers a liberatory framework that centres learners as active agents in co-constructing knowledge through meaningful dialogue. In Kashmir, where education is shaped by trauma, marginalisation, and neoliberal pressures, dialogic pedagogy is not merely a theoretical ideal but an urgent practice. It addresses intergenerational trauma, empowers marginalised voices, and fosters democratic engagement amid complex constraints. This paper argues that dialogic pedagogy is indispensable for Kashmiri schooling, serving as a critical tool to resist neoliberal commodification, authoritarian control, and educational fragmentation, while nurturing healing and solidarity.

To humanise this analysis, consider the story of Ayesha, a 15-year-old student in Srinagar, who described her classroom experience during a rare period of school reopening in 2023: "When our teacher asked us to share our stories of the lockdown, I felt seen for the first time. We talked about fear, hope, and what Kashmir means to us. It wasn't just about exams; it was about us." Ayesha's experience highlights the transformative potential of dialogic pedagogy in creating spaces that value students' voices (Srinivasan, 2022; Tariq et al., 2023).

2. SCHOOLING IN KASHMIR: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

2.1. Sociopolitical Disruptions and Educational Fragility

Decades of conflict, political instability, and social unrest profoundly shape Kashmir's education system. Schools have faced prolonged closures, sometimes lasting for months or years because of violence, curfews, and lockdowns (Bhat et al., 2021). The conflict has caught both the school-going students as well as adults in its grip. The frequent internet blackouts, which are among the longest in the world, have severely limited access to digital resources and online learning (Tsolou et al., 2021). Therefore, implementing a motivational educational framework is now essential to promote transformative dialogue and establish a sustainable peace system (Singh, 2017). These disruptions result in significant gaps in educational attainment and profound psychosocial effects, including trauma, anxiety, and uncertainty among students (Wanasinghe-Pasqual, 2020). Teachers, too, operate under precarious conditions, facing surveillance and censorship that restrict academic freedom and open discourse.

In this context, schooling must go beyond merely delivering the curriculum; it must also address intergenerational trauma, foster healing, and rebuild trust within fractured communities. Dialogic pedagogy emphasises safe, inclusive, and responsive dialogue, providing a pathway to negotiate issues of pain, belonging, and identity. For instance, a teacher in Baramulla shared, "When we let students talk about their experiences, they begin to trust us. It's not just teaching; it's healing together." Such dialogic spaces enable educators and students to reconstruct fractured educational and social relationships, fostering resilience amid adversity.

2.2. The Paradox of Coaching Culture in Areas Impacted by Turmoil

The rise of the "coaching culture" in Kashmir reflects broader trends across India, highlighting the problematic commodification of education that prioritises exam success and rote learning over inquiry and creativity (Pathak, 2024). This trend, often termed a "pedagogy of unfreedom", diverts attention from holistic learning and critical thinking (Prabakaran, 2024). However, in the context of Kashmir's fragile formal schools, coaching centres represent a paradoxical form of resilience. They fill the voids left by extended school closures and a weak public schooling infrastructure, providing families with critical educational support. Curfews and Covid-19 lockdowns, which completely shut down schools, gave his motion a boost. But very unfortunately, this has also served the cause of elites. It was found that the students were caught up in psychological assaults and academic disruption by the impact of conflict and COVID-19 on education, encompassing dimensions such as security concerns, academic stress, teaching methodologies, and students' overall well-being (Du, 2022; Ilyas, 2024). This duality necessitates a nuanced analysis. While a coaching culture reinforces reductive educational practices, it also reflects local agency in navigating systemic failures. Dialogic pedagogy provides an alternative approach by engaging learners in a holistic manner, affirming their creativity, critical thinking, and social responsibility beyond just exam results. For example, a community learning circle in Pulwama allowed students to explore local folklore through dialogue, fostering creativity and cultural pride in a way coaching centres cannot.

2.3. Educational Inequities and the Digital Divide

India's accelerated push towards digital and online education, especially after COVID-19, has revealed and worsened educational inequities. In Kashmir, repeated internet shutdowns and a lack of infrastructure create acute digital exclusion, leaving many students disconnected from online learning opportunities. While other regions adopted hybrid or fully online pedagogies, students in Kashmir faced significant learning disparities that deepened educational divides. Dialogic pedagogy emphasises relational aspects such as face-to-face interaction, community dialogue, and oral storytelling, providing a powerful counterpoint. This approach enables inclusive practices that are less reliant on technology, by emphasising social connectedness and collective learning. Grassroots innovations, including radio dialogues, peer-supported study circles, and community learning spaces, utilise dialogic principles to address infrastructural challenges (Cibin et al., 2020; Naaz, 2025; Patnaik & Bhowmick, 2020). Studies have revealed some alarming scenes from govt institutions that do not take education as a means for social mobilisation despite unlimited resources, especially for slow learners, while some non-government agencies have come forward and adopted an inclusive approach, but they are curtailed with

the very least resources (Kumar, 2019). For instance, a radio-based learning programme in Anantnag engaged students in storytelling sessions, allowing them to share experiences of conflict and resilience, fostering a sense of community despite digital barriers.

3. DIALOGIC PEDAGOGY: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN KASHMIR'S SCHOOLING CONTEXT

3.1. Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

Dialogic pedagogy is grounded in emancipatory theories that prioritise dialogue as a transformative act. Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of "conscientização" (critical consciousness) positions dialogue as a practice that combines reflection and action aimed at dismantling oppressive structures. Georg Gadamer's (1989) hermeneutic philosophy emphasises that dialogical listening involves being open to transformation by engaging with others' perspectives and embracing both difference and uncertainty. Hannah Arendt's (1961) reflections on speech and plurality emphasise the importance of dialoguee in fostering human freedom and democratic life. These frameworks establish dialogic pedagogy on the principles of humility, mutual recognition, and power-sharing, which are essential for education in conflict-affected, marginalised, and neoliberal contexts such as Kashmir. By centring students as co-creators of knowledge, dialogic pedagogy challenges the authoritarian and exam-driven models that dominate Kashmiri education.

3.2. Features of Dialogic Schooling

Dialogic pedagogy fundamentally reimagines the classroom as a dynamic space for co-creation and mutual learning, effectively subverting the authoritarian structures that often characterise education in Kashmir (Ganie, 2013; Maharjan et al., 2024; Srinivasan, 2022). It positions students not as passive recipients but as active agents who bring their lived experiences, questions, and perspectives into the learning process, fostering a culture of critical inquiry that counters the fear and imposition prevalent in many classrooms (Alexander et al., 1995). Through sustained and meaningful dialogue—whether through group discussions, storytelling, or roleplay—this approach nurtures critical thinking and self-expression, enabling students to collaboratively construct knowledge in ways that resonate with their lived realities (Wenning & Vieyra, 2020). Central to this pedagogy is the creation of safe spaces that promote empathy and inclusion, allowing students from Kashmir's diverse religious, ethnic, gender, and ability-based backgrounds to share their experiences and build solidarity across social fractures (Srinivasan, 2022; Wani et al., 2022). Moreover, dialogic pedagogy fosters democratic values by promoting questioning, dissent, and participatory decision-making, which directly challenge the culture of silence and conformity that sociopolitical surveillance reinforces.. In Kashmir, these features collectively transform schooling into a liberatory practice that empowers students to engage critically with their world while fostering a sense of belonging and agency.

3.3. Application and Significance of Dialogic Pedagogy in Kashmir

In the complex educational landscape of Kashmir, dialogic pedagogy holds profound significance as a multifaceted practice that addresses the region's unique challenges. It serves as a therapeutic tool, enabling students to articulate narratives of trauma, resilience, and hope, which fosters both individual healing and collective solidarity in a context marked by intergenerational pain (Fuertes, 2012; Gulbay, 2021). For instance, a student in a dialogic classroom in Kupwara shared, "Talking about my fears helped me feel less alone. It made school a place where I could be myself." By empowering youth to critically engage with competing narratives about history, identity, and aspirations, dialogic pedagogy cultivates agency and enables students to navigate the contested identities that shape Kashmir's sociopolitical reality. The teaching should not be taken as a mere delivery process, but it should explore the potential role of teachers as well as students in the project of education through an emancipation towards grown-up ways of being in the world and allowing them to feel existing within the circle revolving around them (Biesta, 2017). It also mitigates the isolating effects of conflict and exclusion by fostering peer-to-peer and community dialogues that rebuild trust and social cohesion, as seen in community learning circles in Shopian that brought students together to discuss local history (Eden et al., 2024; Kataoka et al., 2018). Furthermore, dialogic pedagogy resists the neoliberal commodification of education by prioritising democratic inquiry and community solidarity over exam-driven outcomes, offering a counterpoint to the reductive "pedagogy of unfreedom" perpetuated by the coaching culture. These interconnected roles position dialogic pedagogy, which is therapeutic, emancipatory, relational, and resistant, as a vital framework for transforming Kashmiri schooling into a site of empowerment and justice.

3.4. Empirical and Grassroots Innovations

Grassroots initiatives in Kashmir demonstrate the adaptability of dialogic pedagogy.. Community learning circles, often led by local NGOs, create participatory environments that compensate for school disruptions; for example, a Shopian initiative where students discussed local history fostered a sense of agency and belonging. Teacher-led dialogic sessions incorporate trauma-informed practices, promoting a reflective pedagogy that is sensitive to the realities of students, as noted by a Ganderbald teacher: "By listening to my students' stories, I learnt how to teach with empathy, not just authority." Hybrid models combine face-to-face dialogue with flexible digital tools, adapting to intermittent connectivity and demonstrating innovation in challenging circumstances (Oberländer & Bipp, 2021; Oji et al., 2022). Studies on blended and flipped learning models in Indian higher education highlight how flexible, student-centred approaches can enhance agency and engagement, even in constrained environments, aligning closely with dialogic pedagogy's emphasis on co-created learning (Asagar, 2024a; Asagar, 2024b; Kim et al., 2014; Muhuro et al., 2021).

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4. POLICY LANDSCAPE AND DIALOGIC OPPORTUNITIES

4.1. NEP 2020: Potential and Constraints

INDIA's 2020 National Education Policy (NEP) emphasises critical thinking, inquiry-based learning, and reduced rote memorisation, aligning with dialogic principles. However, the implementation of NEP 2020 in Kashmir faces several barriers, including infrastructural limitations, teacher shortages, and sociopolitical constraints (Ramteke, 2024). To realise the potential of NEP, policies must prioritise dialogic pedagogy by implementing targeted teacher training, redesigning curricula to reflect local needs, and fostering community engagement (Rampal & Akpovo, 2025). Examining the implications of NEP, dialogic pedagogy proves beneficial as it promotes critical thinking by enhancing student-teacher interactions, encouraging both parties to learn, question, answer, enquire, and collaboratively generate ideas (García-Carrión et al., 2020). This vision resonates with recent scholarship emphasising the integration of indigenous knowledge systems into modern pedagogical frameworks under NEP 2020 (Asagar, 2025c), which calls for culturally responsive dialogue to strengthen identity, agency, and holistic development.

4.2. Digital Equity and Pedagogical Innovations

Addressing Kashmir's digital divide requires hybrid approaches that emphasise inclusive dialogic pedagogy. Low-tech solutions, such as radio instruction, mobile libraries, and community storytelling, leverage dialogic principles to foster learning despite technological barriers (Jagathkar & Jain, 2020). Partnerships among government, civil society, and communities are essential to sustain these innovations.

4.3. Critique of Neoliberalism and Coaching Culture

Neoliberal reforms in Kashmir promote privatisation and test-centric schooling, deepening inequalities by privileging families with resources for coaching and private tuition (Rubin et al., 2019). This "pedagogy of unfreedom" alienates students from authentic learning and civic engagement. Dialogic pedagogy counters this issue by promoting collective inquiry and democratic agency; however, it must also navigate the procedural opportunities presented by neoliberal reforms while maintaining critical vigilance (Barbosa, 2020). The cultivation of ethical reasoning, including in emerging domains such as artificial intelligence in academia, reinforces the democratic and critical aims of dialogic pedagogy (Asagar, 2025b), ensuring that technological adoption aligns with social responsibility.

4.4. Intersectionality and Inclusion

Dialogic pedagogy must engage Kashmir's complex intersectional identities of gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, and rural-urban divides. We need intentional strategies, like culturally responsive curricula and facilitation, to amplify marginalised voices and dismantle structural barriers (Maharjan et al., 2024). For instance, a dialogic classroom in a rural Kashmiri village included discussions on gender roles, empowering female students to challenge traditional norms.

5. DEEPENING THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS: LISTENING, POWER, AND LIBERATION

According to Gadamer (1989), dialogic listening is a transformative act of solidarity that is essential in the context of fragmentation and silencing in Kashmir. Freire's (1970) praxis of dialogue, reflection and action toward liberation demands power sharing and critical consciousness. Arendt's (1961) vision defines dialogue as a form of political action that emphasises its importance in promoting freedom and plurality. In Kashmir, dialogic pedagogy becomes a political act of healing and empowerment, enabling students and educators to reclaim agency in a scrutinised and contested educational landscape (Koul & Bansal, 2023).

5.1. Pedagogical and Institutional Implications for Kashmir

Realising the transformative potential of dialogic pedagogy in Kashmiri schooling demands a coordinated, systemic reorientation that addresses the region's unique sociopolitical challenges and infrastructural constraints while fostering an education system rooted in empowerment and justice.

5.2. Teacher Education and Capacity Building

The transformation of Kashmiri schools through dialogic pedagogy hinges on reimagining teacher education as a dynamic process that equips educators to facilitate meaningful dialogue and nurture critical consciousness. Beyond conventional pedagogical training, professional development must focus on trauma-informed practices that recognise the emotional and psychological toll of prolonged conflict for both students and teachers. By incorporating local histories, narratives, and sociopolitical realities into training programmes, educators can develop context-sensitive approaches that resonate with students' lived experiences (Pozo-Rico et al., 2023). For instance, a teacher in Bandipora, after participating in dialogic training, reflected, "I learnt to listen to my students' stories of conflict, which changed how I taught; it's now about connection, not control." Continuous reflective practice and peer learning among teachers foster a sustainable dialogic culture, countering burnout in challenging environments. Empowering educators as agents of change requires dismantling hierarchical school structures, replacing top-down authority with autonomy balanced by accountability to dialogic principles, thus enabling teachers to model the emancipatory ethos of dialogic pedagogy in their classrooms (Freire, 1970). Enhancing teacher digital competence is pivotal for sustaining dialogic practices in regions with intermittent connectivity, as evidenced by recent findings on the technical, pedagogical, and communicative skills required for inclusive digital integration (Oberländer & Bipp, 2021; Asagar, 2025a).

5.3. Curricular and Assessment Reforms

To align with dialogic pedagogy's liberatory aims,

Kashmiri curricula must shift from rigid, centralised exam-driven frameworks to flexible models that prioritise problem-posing education and student voice. Embedding local knowledge, languages, and contested histories into curricular content affirms students' identities and encourages critical engagement with their sociopolitical context. For example, a Sopore initiative incorporated oral histories from community elders into classroom discussions, fostering a sense of cultural pride and agency among students. Assessment practices must move away from high-stakes standardised testing towards formative, dialogic, and reflective methods that value critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration over rote memorisation (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Co-creating learning materials with community input enhances the relevance and ownership of education, ensuring that curricula reflect the diverse realities of Kashmiri students and empower them to question and reshape their world.

5.4. Community and Parental Engagement

Dialogic pedagogy's success in Kashmir extends beyond the classroom, necessitating robust engagement with families and communities to create interconnected dialogic ecosystems. Intergenerational dialogue spaces, such as parent-teacher forums and community learning circles, foster social cohesion and provide psychosocial support, addressing the isolation caused by conflict. For instance, a community learning circle in Shopian brought parents and students together to discuss local history, bridging generational divides and reinforcing shared responsibility for education. Mobilising community resources, including elders, activists, and cultural mediators, enhances the sustainability of dialogic initiatives by grounding them in local knowledge and values. Raising parental awareness about the value of dialogic pedagogy can also mitigate reliance on coaching culture, encouraging families to prioritise holistic learning over exam-driven outcomes, thus creating a broader support network for transformative education (García-Carrión et al., 2020).

5.5. Infrastructure, Digital Access, and Inclusivity

Creating equitable dialogic learning environments in Kashmir requires addressing the region's infrastructural deficits and digital exclusion. Investments in safe, accessible school facilities that accommodate diverse learner needs, particularly for students with disabilities, are critical to fostering inclusive dialogic spaces. In areas with frequent internet disruptions, low-cost technological solutions, such as offline digital resources, radio instruction, and mobile libraries, complement face-to-face dialogue, ensuring access to education despite technological barriers. For example, a mobile library program in Anantnag combined storytelling with dialogic reflection, engaging rural students in meaningful learning despite limited digital access (Lo & Stark, 2020). Intersectional inclusion strategies must prioritise marginalised groups based on gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic location, ensuring that dialogic pedagogy amplifies under-represented voices (UNESCO, 2020). A rural Kashmiri classroom's discussion on gender roles, for instance, empowered female students to challenge traditional norms, illustrating the potential of inclusive dialogic practices.

5.6. Policy Support and Governance

Institutionalising dialogical pedagogy in Kashmir requires robust policy support that prioritises resource allocation and collaborative governance. Policies must endorse dialogic principles through dedicated funding for teacher training, curricular redesign, and community engagement, ensuring alignment with local needs. Collaborative policy formulation, involving educators, students, and communities, fosters transparency and accountability, mirroring the democratic ethos of dialogic pedagogy at the institutional level. Advocacy from civil society and educational stakeholders is essential to guard against neoliberal pressures that prioritise privatisation and standardisation over equitable, emancipatory education. By embedding dialogic principles in governance structures, policymakers can create a supportive framework that sustains transformative educational practices across Kashmir's diverse and challenging contexts.

5.7. Research, Monitoring, and Scaling Innovations

The advancement of dialogic pedagogy in Kashmir depends on a commitment to ongoing research, monitoring, and the scaling of grassroots innovations. A systematic evaluation of dialogic initiatives provides evidence of their impact, informing refinements and building a robust knowledge base for best practices. Documenting teacher-led experiments and community-driven models, such as a Pulwama study circle that fostered student agency through discussions on local issues, creates a repository of adaptable strategies tailored to conflict-affected contexts. Sharing the lessons learnt through forums that connect Kashmir with other conflict-affected regions fosters solidarity and collective advancement. Scaling successful models requires contextual sensitivity and capacity building to avoid top-down imposition, ensuring that dialogic pedagogy remains responsive to local realities (Akar, 2016; Ting et al., 2023). For instance, the success of a trauma-informed dialogue programme in Ganderbal could inform scalable practices, provided they are adapted to the unique needs of other Kashmir districts.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study solely focused on secondary school students in the Kashmir Valley. Due to the time scarcity, the study could not be taken based upon the various sociocultural backgrounds of the students as a base before taking a focus group discussion. We conducted the study at an institution that encompasses students from nearly all districts, rather than travelling to individual districts. The limited time prevented the study from considering gender and locality comprehensively.

7. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Dialogic pedagogy represents a transformative vision for reimagining education in Kashmir's conflict-affected,

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neoliberal-pressured schooling landscape, offering a powerful antidote to the systemic challenges that have long constrained educational equity and empowerment. By prioritising dialogue, listening, and the shared authorship of knowledge, this approach creates liberatory spaces where students are not passive recipients but active, critical participants who shape their learning through their lived experiences. In Kashmir, where decades of protracted conflict, frequent school closures, internet blackouts, and pervasive trauma have fractured educational systems, dialogic pedagogy emerges as a political and ethical imperative. It fosters critical consciousness, as envisioned by Paulo Freire (1970), through praxis that combines reflection and action to challenge oppressive structures. It embraces Hans Georg Gadamer's (1989) call for transformative listening, fostering solidarity amid fragmentation, and aligns with Hannah Arendt's (1961) vision of dialogue as a cornerstone of freedom and plurality, enabling students and educators to reclaim agency in a surveilled and contested environment.

This pedagogy directly addresses Kashmir's multifaceted challenges. It responds to the psychosocial toll of conflict by creating safe spaces for students to articulate narratives of trauma, resilience, and hope, as exemplified by Ayesha's experience in a Srinagar classroom where sharing stories transformed her relationship with education. It empowers youth to critically navigate competing narratives about history and identity, fostering agency in a region marked by contested sociopolitical realities. By building peer-to-peer and community dialogues, as seen in Shopian's learning circles, it mitigates the isolating effects of conflict, rebuilding trust and social cohesion. Moreover, dialogic pedagogy resists the neoliberal commodification of education evident in the pervasive coaching culture and privatisation that alienates students from authentic learning and civic engagement, offering instead a vision of education as a collective social good rooted in justice and solidarity.

The significance of dialogic pedagogy in Kashmir extends beyond individual classrooms to the broader project of democratic citizenship. By equipping students and teachers with tools for critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and participatory decision-making, it cultivates engaged citizens capable of contributing to peace, democracy, and social cohesion in a region where these ideals are constantly tested. The grassroots innovations highlighted in this paper – community learning circles in Shopian, trauma-informed teaching in Ganderbal, and radio-based storytelling in Anantnag – demonstrate the adaptability and effectiveness of dialogic practices, offering scalable models that navigate the region's infrastructural and digital constraints. Yet, these initiatives also reveal the need for systemic support to ensure their sustainability and reach.

Looking forward, the institutionalisation of dialogic pedagogy in Kashmir requires a concerted, multi-stakeholder effort to transform the educational landscape. Policymakers must prioritise sustained investments in teacher education that emphasise trauma-informed, context-sensitive facilitation, as seen in the Bandipora teacher's shift toward empathetic teaching. Curricular reforms should embed local knowledge and histories, as demonstrated in Sopore's use of oral histories, while assessments must move toward dialogic, formative methods that value creativity over rote memorisation. Community engagement, exemplified by Shopian's intergenerational forums, is essential to create dialogic ecosystems that bridge schools and families, fostering shared responsibility for education. Addressing infrastructural deficits and digital exclusion through low-tech solutions, like Anantnag's mobile library, ensures equitable access to dialogic learning environments. Robust policy support and collaborative governance, backed by advocacy from civil society, are critical to guard against neoliberal pressures and sustain dialogic reforms. Finally, ongoing research and documentation of grassroots innovations, such as Pulwama's study circles, will build a knowledge base to scale dialogic practices while preserving their contextual sensitivity.

The path forward is not without challenges. Sociopolitical constraints, resource limitations, and entrenched neoliberal priorities may hinder implementation, particularly in a region marked by fragility and surveillance. Yet, the resilience of Kashmiri communities evident in their adaptive responses to school closures and digital divides offers hope that dialogic pedagogy can take root. By fostering collaboration among policymakers, educators, communities, and students, this approach can transform schooling into a site of empowerment, healing, and hope. For instance, a rural Kashmiri teacher's reflection captures this potential: "When we started dialogic sessions, my students began to see school as a place to dream, not just to survive." In a region where freedom and plurality are under constant threat, dialogic pedagogy stands as a beacon of possibility, nurturing thoughtful, engaged citizens who can shape a more just and democratic future for Kashmir.

DECLARATIONS

Author(s) Contribution

The authors' contribution by this study is clear as the implications and suggestions are put forth. The role of dialogic pedagogy as a tool to develop critical thinking and make teaching proactive instead of passive content delivery from a teacher to students. The author focussed upon the three dimensions present in our education system which are affected by chronic capitalism and factors which lead to suppressed merit in education and imposed educational exclusion.

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Availability of Data and Materials

The data were collected from secondary school students from various districts studying in the Srinagar vicinity. The interviews and focus group discussions led a few students to speak openly about their lived experiences over the past few years and their struggles and traumas amid socio-political tensions.

Competing Interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to this research.

Clinical Trial Registration (if applicable)

Not Applicable

Human Ethics and Consent to Participate

The study did not involve any clinical interventions or experiments requiring formal ethical approval.

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