



MAINSTREAMING EQUITY: EDUCATION FOR ALL- A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Education has the power to address the fault-lines in our academic culture. Besides enhancing the skills of reasoning and objectivity, it imparts a sense of empathy, speaks for human equality and inclusion for all. Equity in Education provides a ground to the disadvantaged to fight back and meet their outcomes of learning. It is often being misinterpreted as Equality in educational outcome which is certainly not the case. It's time to promote and deliver quality and equitable education. This paper throws light on the meaning of equity in learning. It provides a conceptual framework of measuring the equity in learning and gives clarity on the outcomes of learning. There is a need to address the key challenges and issues around equity in education. Perfect equality is a far-fetched dream, but equity can ensure greater equality.

Key words: Equity, Equality of opportunity, Inclusive education

INTRODUCTION

Quality based education lays foundation for innovation, research and unleashes the spirit of entrepreneurship and works towards greater growth prospects. It becomes important to study and strategize our pedagogies with a view to solve the problems inherent in our society and thus it becomes important to formulate the curricula, teaching skills and attitudes keeping in mind our needs towards the society.

According to the Global Educational Monitoring Report, 2016 the youth between the ages 7-14 have not stepped inside a classroom, this amounts' to around 263 million children out of which most of them are girls. Also the data suggests that the compared with the rich segment of society, the poor are prone to leaving schools much before their primary education is complete. These gender disparities and in-equality of wealth exists everywhere in the world but more so in developed countries due to heightened levels of globalisation and urban-



migration in search of a better standard of living. Thus for inclusive quality education and life-long learning it becomes inevitable to discuss inequalities particularly relating to access, participation in education, learning processes, outcomes and achievements.

The term equity simply means being just, fair or impartial. Eminent philosophers and educationists believe that it is important to lessen the inequity in education. It is vital to draw the difference between the equity and equality. It is rather impossible and undesirable to say that everyone achieves the same outcomes i.e. equality in education or be at the same level of success but instead, one can work to lessen the gap in the outcomes which can be attributed to power, position, wealth, race etc. (Equity in Education). Thus, the term equity is based on the principles of fairness which are not necessarily equal. The term equality would rather mean equal in terms of status or rank or quantity. Equity is the 'process behind the 'outcome' i.e. Equality. Generally, we see a lot of systematic inequality in educational performances/outcomes which can be majorly accredited to inequities such as the failure in policy measures, phased out and redundant strategies and conventional planning systems. The question that arises is what degree of equity is considerable? What is the nature and magnitude of equity? What is the idea of justice and fairness? The answer to this question is always a debatable one with a gamut of political choices. The policy makers and the big wigs of the political domain believe that it is best to uplift the bottom to the top and narrow the gap in outcomes. The focus should be equitable funding and not equal funding. The disadvantaged sections of the society should be meted out with resources, quality education so that they can accomplish their goals.

One cannot undermine the role of equity in education. Right to Education has been recognized fundamentally at the UN Declaration and also in India; it paves its way through the Universalization of Elementary Education i.e. it is mandatory for children for age group 6-14 years to acquire free and compulsory education. It is not just sufficient to provide education but also work towards achieving high levels of Human Development index, which includes various parameters such as health, longevity, quality of life etc. All these factors reinforce the intrinsic value of diversity and help education to be a life-long learning process across populations to achieve social cohesion and economic prosperity.



Human rights are an essential part of our lives. It becomes imperative for the policy makers to provide sufficient opportunity to the people to build their capacity, participate and have an equal footing in society. However, the doctors, lawyers, professors and all these budding talents can be under-utilized if this opportunity is not fairly distributed. This challenge of inclusivity is also taken up under the Sustainable Development Goal 4 which talks about the how to achieve gender parity in outcomes, access to equal educational opportunities especially with respect to specially able, indigenous people, ethnic and linguistic minorities and disadvantaged and displaced children in society at large. To measure progress in this are we need sufficient data points and solid evidences from the marginalized populations. We are at a major crossroad; there is an urgent need to cater to greater social progress. Therefore, it is crucial to push educational equity through global and local agendas across all stakeholders. The governments of various nations should engage and monitor participation from other sectors- Health, child protection and social welfare.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Danielle Gonzales & Ross Wiener talks about the role of federal forces in public education. The idea of racial discrimination is not new in a school setting and thus it becomes paramount to make these schools multi-cultural and diverse. There are fewer disparities in the opportunities for these students which in turn lead to unaccomplished outcomes. It further states the evolved role of the state-education policy makers to address the racial tensions and hate crimes and differences in demographics. **Amjad Nazeer** discusses how the minorities in the school setting were penalised and discriminated against. His study was based education reform and according to him the reform process was fruitful only if principles of equality and non-discrimination were followed. He laid emphasis on the curriculum being transacted by the teacher and further told that it was the teachers who inculcated their prejudices' in minds of the students. **Sonam Joshi** lays emphasis on embracing gender-neutral parenting. From the very beginning the children are given a list of do's and don'ts and what is expected out of them. Stereotypes can be reinforced by different toys and clothes for both genders. Thus in the process of education the young minds it is important to provide a level playing field for talent to unleash. Education is all about breaking barriers and empowerment, gender sensitivity should be inculcated since pre-school and day care. An important aspect of equity in education is raising a child to be self-sufficient and independent irrespective of gender-



biases and patriarchy. **Luciana Castella, Serena Ragazzia, Alberto Crescentinia** offers conceptions of equity and how locally practices are followed at the institutional level. The general principles of fairness and equality should be same for all and thus should be looked at with a global viewpoint. The concept of equity should have a dual adaptability- practically, the political side to it should cater to policy making issues and theoretically, the principle of justice should be intact. The pragmatic view can be applied in the school setting. **The Darjeeling Chronicles** highlight the caste based reservation in India started from the Rig Veda period. It divided the society into classes called varnas. This segregating would ensure effective functioning of the society but gradually this lead to birth of caste and race divisions. Initially the caste system was based on the system of merit but later many who were on place of privilege took undue advantage to exploit and faulty interpret the system. To counter the historical wrongs of upper caste and lower caste and the humiliations and discriminations to the dalits, the independent India voted for a caste based reservation for schedule caste and schedule tribes and other backward classes of the society. It was believed that this would ensure equity and once equity was ensured only then the equality would be established. But many have misused this opportunity of equity to further their interest and occupy this position for generations to come. BR Ambedkar who propounded this system believed that such reservations be confined to maximum period of 30 to 40 years so that the socially and educationally rise to same platform but over the years this provision has been extended and misused. It's time to change the parameters, those in position and post of privilege should be denied reservations and quotas even if they belong to other backward classes. Education has the power to uplift the society and once that it attained; other marginalised and disadvantaged sections of society should be given a fair chance to rise to the occasion. **Baljit Kaur** emphasises about equity and social justice in teacher education. Her overarching concern is preparing pre-service and the in service teachers to be diverse in teaching-learning practices. The idea of equitable education is more than having diverse classrooms. She further talked about the minorities, margins and the misfits in the mainstream education. Various cases of differential treatment to minorities were analysed and it becomes a special responsibility for the teacher to look after the needs of the children and make the classroom interaction inclusive. It is important to build comprehensive teacher educator programs which focuses explicitly on social justice and equity in context of education. It is valued to have more critical voices in teaching and learning and also to celebrate the differences in each



other. **Biplob Acharya** elaborates how children with disability face discrimination. Their access to school is limited as there is shortage of trained teachers, assessing their needs, infrastructure. They face a problem of exclusion from society which terribly hampers their social and financial development. Inclusive education can only be ensured if diversity can be understood. So many cultural diversities and ethnicities can uplift the society. Classroom environment should be generous and all-encompassing setting should be created. There should a multi-sectoral approach to combat barriers to quality and inclusive education.

Objectives of the Study:

- Understand the meaning of equity in learning and why equity is important in education
- Provide a conceptual framework that guides to measure educational equity and ensure clarity in learning outcomes

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The learning outcome and idea of success of each and every student differs. The purpose would be defeated if one were to be achieve the same as the fellow pupil. The differences in there learning abilities and their intrinsic motivation to achieve, their economic background and access to the educational resources can lead to different learning outcomes. The application of equity is more tilted towards theories and principles of justice which guide in distribution of education which suggest that these inequalities are fair only if they justified to the ones who are least advantaged in the society. Furthermore emphasis is laid to the set of options which a person has to himself or herself rather than the outcomes one achieves.

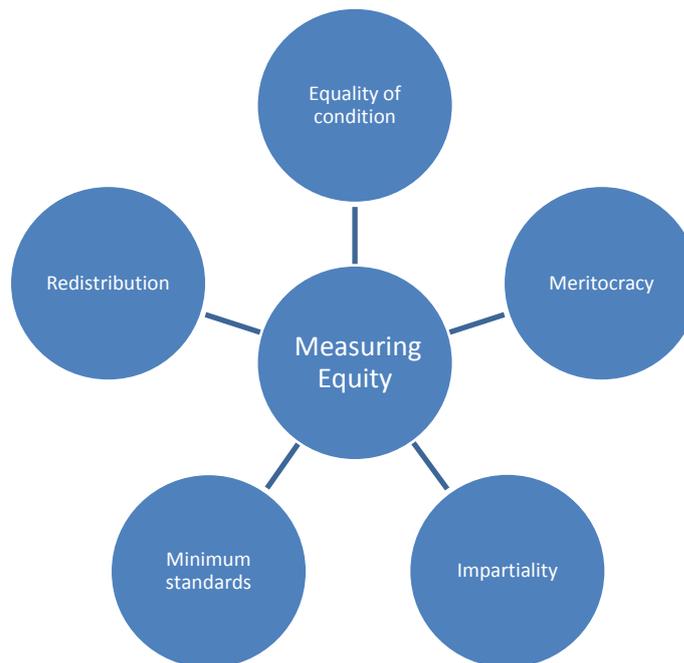
Everyone should have a fair chance to thrive in whatever they aspire for; the circumstances in which they were brought up are regardless of their economic status. Fairness includes their willingness and propensity to work hard or the intelligence levels which will help them reach their desired positions. It is baseless to say that one can achieve equality in education despite everyone getting the same education; there grasping powers can be different- depending on their previous learning's, personality, overt discrimination on basis of gender and ethnicity etc. This equality for opportunity is enshrined in international and national laws and constitution. The idea of Equality for opportunity is always a contested one as philosophers



feel difficult to define fairness. A person being given a reasonable chance to succeed based on his effort? What if the person is destined to be born in a struggling family? The idea of Equality for opportunity remains central but it has serious implications when tested for measurement. But before measuring Equity, clarity of outcomes should be there and this can be increased manifold by

- Participation - Educational attainment is a strong force which determines the productivity levels and the wage earning capacity of the youth. Therefore it becomes important to provide proper schooling to children, this can be ensured by checking the enrolment rates, completion rates and getting more learners in the loop to complete their secondary as well as tertiary education. Emphasis and access to early childhood education should also be there.
- Learning Ability – In the recent years there has been a shift in more consistent measures to check the learning achievement. Proficiency measures the three levels of basic education cycle- finishing of second grade, then primary schooling and then secondary schooling. Assessment of all the learning outcomes varies. From fluency to numeracy to sophisticated subject based achievement tests are conducted
- Non-cognitive skills- These are the soft skills which are a predictive of positivity in youth of today. Qualities such as positive self-control, truthfulness, persistence, social mannerism and communication skills. Inequities like poverty, marginalism, and discrimination are proved to be counter-productive and can hurt one's positive self control, ambitions and can in still lack of engagement.

It is essential to build equity in and through education. The Following are some variables that guide in measuring educational equity.



- **Meritocracy:** It refers to distribution of educational opportunities on the bases on merit. The meaning of the term merit is a student’s intelligence, effort or accomplishment. Any suitable standardised test can study student’s performance in exams and know his real/ academic ability. This indicator can be used to test performance at the higher education levels. But often, it is seen that this measure doesn’t give a true picture as exam scores not truly measures the student’s learning ability, it’s more of an egalitarian desire to push for an inclusive society where opportunities for higher education are provided.
- **Minimum standards:** The national frameworks have set up a minimum standard for the student to be enrolled for primary education. This standard is universal demonstrating the basic literacy levels are present or not. Viewing equity through this lens gave us a holistic view i.e. This criterion should be met by all only then equity will be ensured.
- **Impartiality:** Normatively, it is seen that the equality of opportunities or educational goods are distributed fairly and checking that the minimum standards are met across all population groups. This goal setting is done keeping in mind the comparison made between the boys and the girls, the poor versus the rich and disparities between the urban and rural areas. This measure will ensure that the differences in groups are reduced and the biases in the educational outcomes are eliminated.



- Equality of condition helps in understanding that regardless of the existing socio-economic circumstances or characteristics of the schools of children, how these educational variables are distributed across all of them. Such indicators can be used for comparison over time and between countries. Since it is known that perfect equality is not possible, distributing educational outcomes independently of circumstances can ensure greater equity.
- Redistribution: In order to reduce equality of condition and impartiality in educational outcomes, it becomes vital for the government to redistribute educational inputs so that compensation is given to those who suffer disadvantage. Higher expenditure on public education to poorest can reduce the regional poverty rates.

Many education interventions can combat inequity. It is important to provide equitable solutions at both the strategy level as well as the program level. At the strategy level, the system as a whole and societies at large are served and root- cause analysis is done to identify the underlying social and economic disparities in the education system. At the Program level, the target population is identified and why the interventions haven't worked are analysed.

CONCLUSION

Equity is the heart of world's social progress. It can be superimposed on equality; it is a path to equality. There may not be equality in inputs but in order to ensure equality in outcomes, equity becomes a relevant concern. It has been gaining lot traction by the educationist and the policy makers to form an inclusive, participatory and holistic approach to education. This Paper provides a General Overview about equity in education and provides clarity on the learning outcomes and seeks to measure those indicators which guide in establishing educational equity. To ensure this, the educational assets should be fairly distributed and at the same time safeguarded for its judicious use. Government spending can be used as a tool to solve the inequities in education. These disadvantaged sections are the hardest to reach and often they are left all by themselves to earn a living, which makes a stronger case for them to be catered first. Redistribution of resources should be equitable and structural prejudices should be done away with. It's time to mainstream equity orientation i.e. Customised equality and then only the people can be on the level of sameness.



SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The role of education and access to education will always be addressed by the masses. For any country to grow and prosper, it is of significant importance to enhance the human resource. It becomes important to define what more parameters can be taken to assess the learning outcomes. The aim is to widen the horizon of the study and include indicators at the disaggregate level to monitor the progress on longitudinal basis. It is difficult to establish comparison both intra and inter country due to lack of data as there is no single standardised national assessment. It is necessary to integrate equity into the system and programs to have an effective analysis.

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