Loreto College, Kolkata

Perspectives of Equity in School Education

Usashi Kundu (De)
Assistant Professor, Department of Education,
Diamond Harbour Women's University, Sarisha
Email Id: usashik@gmail.com

Abstract

Equity in education is to provide fair and inclusive opportunities for all students to help them achieve their fullest educational potential irrespective of their background or characteristics. Its target is to make sure that every student can avail the necessary resources, support, and quality education to flourish academically and personally. Equity identifies the diversified needs of the students and recognizes that they may require different levels of assistance and intervention to prosper in their learning journey. In this context, the present paper makes an attempt to explain the term 'equity' in education and the principles of equity. It also discusses the role of equity in school education, barriers to educational equity and the strategies to promote educational equity. The researcher has adopted qualitative research method. Dissertations, e-journals, e-books, and e-articles etc. have been thoroughly reviewed as secondary sources of data. NEP 2020 visualizes that every student will achieve his full potential and succeed academically and personally if educational equity is ensured in school education.

Keywords: Equity, principles, barriers, strategies

Introduction

An efficient education system accommodates students from diverse backgrounds- irrespective of their economic status, race, family history, or other variances. In such an education system, every student is provided with equal opportunities to access the support and resources available for their education. This fundamental concept carries the spirit of equity in education.

Education is a fundamental right for every child. All students need and deserve the opportunity to build their career in a congenial environment. With the introduction of educational technology, stakeholders find it challenging to offer a suitable learning environment to all learners. But providing a suitable learning environment with equitable access to education is presently the need at the global level.

Objectives

The objective of the present paper are as follows:

(i) to explain the term 'equity' in education;

(ii) to explain the principles of equity;

Loreto College Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol-1, Issue-1, **(May 2025)**
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Loreto College, Kolkata.
Page No: 84-90, Section: Article

Loreto College, Kolkata

(iii) to discuss the role of equity in school education;

(iv) to find out the barriers to educational equity; and

(v) to suggest strategies to promote educational equity.

Understanding Equity

The term 'Equity' relates to gender, race, poverty, and disability. It explains the conception of fairness, specifically most disadvantaged sets or communities in respect of education. WHO defines equity from the social perspective and considers it as "the absences of avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people".

The phrase 'equity in education' is complicated and can be explained from various angles, making it difficult to find a concise definition. Basically, equity in education or educational equity is the task of creating an educational system that provides service to students of all kinds and develops their educational experience accordingly. Equity in education is to create a teaching environment that caters to an individual student. In an equitable educational environment, all students can access the resources and support they need so that they can achieve their learning goals. This means that irrespective of a student's gender, background, language, race, socio-economic status, learning capability, disability, or family history, every student has the opportunity to receive that support and resources that are required for them to achieve their educational goals.

There are two dimensions of equity in education.

(i) Fairness- It is making sure that personal and social background, for example, gender, socio-economic status, ethnic origin should not serve as an obstacle in achieving educational potential.

(ii) Inclusion- It is ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all.

Thus, in general equity means providing all the necessities to deserving candidates to get equal outcomes. Equity in the field of education can be explained as-

(i) Access to school

(ii) Opportunity to legally recognized right

(iii) Treatment of educational models and measures

(iv) Result of opportunity for success

While the terms 'equity' and 'equality' are often used interchangeably, there are prominent differences between them. 'Equality' means offering all students with the same educational opportunities throughout their entire scholastic career. However, this approach does not take into account that with those opportunities, each student may have different needs to reach their targets. 'Equity', on the other hand, involves establishing a level playing field across the classroom, taking student opportunities and infusing them with support and resources personalized to each student. This means that disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students experience the same quality of education even though they may have different learning needs. Equity aims to boost disadvantaged students and ensure that they are presented with the same options as others, making up

Loreto College Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol-1, Issue-1, **(May 2025)**
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Loreto College, Kolkata.

Loreto College, Kolkata
Page No: 84-90, Section: Article

the differences for these disadvantaged students. Equality focuses on the group, while equity focuses on individuals. Equality is based on a generic, one-size-fits-all approach while equity is adaptable.

Principles of Equity

UNESCO has emphasised on five principles which can guide to measure equity in learning and education. These are Meritocracy, Minimum Standards, Impartiality, Equality of Condition, and Redistribution. Meritocracy means the opportunities provided on the basis of the merit of the students. Merit is considered to be the academic performance of the students and not the age-old idea of inherited merit. Minimum standard refers to the criteria that defines basic measure of equity. This includes whether the child has been enrolled in the school, the retention level, the literacy level etc. Impartiality is measured by the differences in educational access and outcomes with respect to gender, locale, ethnicity, and economic background of the learners. The aim of school education is to reduce these differences so that educational equity can be achieved. These impartiality goals are the yardsticks of ensuring minimum standards. Equality of condition is also significant in ensuring equity in education. UNESCO highlights that quality of condition depends on the distribution of the variable across children, regardless of their circumstances. For example, if we look at the number of years of education received and plot a graph, starting with those who have the least education and ending with those who have the most, we will find that flatter the line, greater the equality of condition. Such measures require only one variable and shows equity indicators that are comparable over time and between countries. The principle of redistribution emphasises that distribution of inputs has to be uneven so as to ensure and compensate the existing inequality. This unequal distribution of inputs leads to differential treatment of the stakeholders in education.

Maiztegui-Onate and Santibanez-Grubber (2008) highlighted three principles of equity which are as follows-

(i) Horizontal equity- It is equality of treatment for those who start from the same point

(ii) Vertical equity- It is the series of compensatory measures directed toward minority groups or toward groups at risk of disadvantage (for example, women, ethnic minorities or the less affluent social classes), and

(iii) Equal education opportunity- It is the series of initiatives designed to ensure that everyone has the equal opportunities for success, starting from different conditions and resources.

Role of Equity in School Education

Equity in school education plays a primary role in bringing fairness, social justice, and equal opportunities for all students in the educational system. Some key roles of equity in education are:

- **Fairness in Access to Education**: Equity ensures that all students have equitable access to quality education, irrespective of their background, personal characteristics, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc. It helps to remove barriers for the disadvantaged students so that they can access educational opportunities. It is important to provide targeted support to the deprived students so that every student has an equal chance to succeed academically.
- **Closing Achievement Gaps**: Equity in education highlights on minimising and ultimately closing achievement gaps between various student groups.

Loreto College Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol-1, *Issue-1*, **(May 2025)**
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Loreto College, Kolkata.

Loreto College, Kolkata

Page No: 84-90, Section: Article

- **Diversity and Inclusivity**: Equity fosters a diverse and inclusive learning environment where each and every student feel valued, respected, and represented. It recognizes and celebrates the diversified backgrounds with which students come to the educational set up.
- **Addressing Systemic Inequalities**: Equity in education addresses systemic inequalities in the field of education. It promotes for fair distribution of resources, funding, and support system for all students.
- **Social Mobility**: Equity plays a crucial role in endorsing social mobility by providing equitable educational opportunities. It enables students from disadvantaged backgrounds to come out of the vicious cycle of poverty and improve their prospects.
- **Empowering Marginalized Groups**: Equity empowers marginalized groups by providing them a voice and ensuring that their needs are satisfied in the education system. It helps them to overcome the historical and societal barriers that obstruct their educational progress.
- **Creating a Just Society**: Equity in education is related to the principle of social justice. It aims to create a just society where everyone has an equal opportunity to prosper and contribute substantially to the community.
- **Economic Benefits**: An equitable education system benefits the society economically. Access to quality education and acquisition of requisite skills contribute to a productive and innovative workforce.
- **Promoting Global Competitiveness**: Countries with equitable education systems can successfully compete in the global market. A well-educated and skilled human resource is necessary for attracting investment and driving economic growth.

Equity in school education is significant because of the following factors:

- It gives opportunity to underprivileged and disadvantaged students so that they can succeed.
- It gives each and every student the chance to learn in the way according to their learning style.
- It helps students to become more engaged with others who share their race, gender, or ethnicity in their learning materials and during lessons.
- It increases students' access to resources to enhance their education.
- It strengthens the connection between a student's family and his teachers, so that an enriching educational environment can be fostered at home.
- It guides students to flourish in their educational career, profession, and life.
- It closes the opportunity and achievement gaps between students by placing them on equal footing.
- It influences the community in positive ways.

Barriers to Educational Equity

Some of the biggest barriers to equity in education are as follows:

- *Socioeconomic Factors*: It is often seen that children coming from low-income families do not have access to quality resources, fight to meet their basic needs like nutrition and healthcare, and have to prioritize working over schooling to support their families. For example, poor children often fail to access early childhood education programmes, educational toys and books at home, or tutoring services to facilitate their learning.
- *Geographical Disparities*: Schools in rural or economically depressed areas often remain underfunded, lack good infrastructure and teaching staffs, and offer fewer advanced courses and cocurricular activities. Sometimes students have to travel long distances to reach the nearest school, making schooling challenging. Geographical disparities also bring differences between urban and suburban school districts or even among neighbouring communities.

Loreto College Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol-1, Issue-1, **(May 2025)**
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Loreto College, Kolkata.
Page No: 84-90, Section: Article

Loreto College, Kolkata

- *Gender Inequality*: In many cultures, societal norms and stereotypic thought processes hinder equal access to education for their girls. From facing no encouragement in fields where girls are usually underrepresented, to dropping out due to child marriage or household responsibilities, gender inequality acts as a major barrier to girls' education. Even in relatively progressive societies, unspoken biases and lack of role models can hamper gender equality in education for girls.
- *Cultural and Linguistic Barriers*: A lack of culturally relevant curriculum and teaching methods lead to disengagement in the teaching leaning process. Language barriers hinder understanding and academic achievement of students. Unfair treatment based on race, even if it is unintentional, can make students feel like they are outsiders. This can undermine their confidence and make them feel inferior in their classroom.

Strategies to Promote Educational Equity

Strategies that can promote educational equity in schools are as follows:

- *Policy Interventions*: Government and education authorities can play a significant role in reducing inequities through policy measures. This can include reorganising school funding to allocate more resources to underprivileged areas, implementing positive action policies for underrepresented groups, and authorinsing inclusive curriculum and accommodations. For example, introduction of midday meals programme to support students from low-income families.
- *Role of NGOs and Community Organisations*: NGOs working for child education, like CRY India and community-based organisations can play an additional role by supporting the government efforts and work directly with marginalized communities. They can provide supplemental education services, conduct outreach in the society to raise awareness about the importance of education and promote for policy changes. For instance, CRY India's initiatives ensure children access quality education and try to create a conducive learning environment.
- *Cultivating an Inclusive Classroom Culture*: The culture in the classroom should be such that it responds positively to diversity and respects the backgrounds and experiences of all students. This will encourage open discussions about different perspectives and will foster an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- *Innovative Educational Practices*: Restructuring conservative teaching methods and accepting innovative practices can help create a more balanced learning experience. Approaches like project-based learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and use of technology in the classroom can make education more engaging, accessible and fruitful. An excellent example is using multimedia resources and hands-on activities to cater to the needs of students having different learning styles.
- *Teacher Training and Development*: Equipping teachers with appropriate teaching skills and right attitude is highly needed for bringing equity in the classroom. Professional development and capacity building programmes can concentrate on issues like implicit bias, cultural competency, differentiated instruction, and inclusive learning environment. Schools can arrange workshops on gender-neutral language and avoid stereotypical portrayals in teaching learning materials.
- *Addressing Systemic Issues*: By becoming sensitive to issues like gender, poverty, and ethnicity, teachers can find ways to guide students to tackle the effects of these issues on their educational journey. Addressing these deep-rooted issues can help teachers remove obstacles to student learning and reduce biases and disparities present in the education system.
- *Understanding the Role Administration and Leadership*: Sometimes, administrators and school leaders may unknowingly help to disseminate inequity in the education system. In these cases, teachers should

Loreto College Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol-1, Issue-1, **(May 2025)**
Peer-Reviewed e-Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies
Loreto College, Kolkata.
Page No: 84-90, Section: Article

Loreto College, Kolkata

alert leadership and then coordinate with them to introduce positive change. Teachers who know when and how to collaborate with administrators can greatly bring in equity in their classrooms, schools, and communities.

- *Removing Barriers in the School Environment*: Learning and development gaps are often noticed in the early stage of a student's education. The more proficient teachers are at identifying these gaps, the more likely it is for a student to overcome. To eliminate educational barriers, teachers can educate parents on support systems and resources available to their children. These resources might include parent-teacher conferences, one-to-one tutors, remedial and special classes, and after-school programmes. If there is an issue of financial problem, teachers can help parents find inexpensive resources that can assist their children.

- *Knowing the Students*: Teachers must put effort to know their students individually. They must understand students' strengths, challenges, and interests. This knowledge will help them to modify their teaching approach to satisfy the diverse needs of the students.

- *Differentiating Instruction*: Using diversified teaching methods and materials can accommodate students possessing different learning styles and abilities. Differentiating instruction can ensure that every student engage himself with the content at his own pace and level.

- *Providing Targeted Support*: Students who need extra support must be identified and targeted interventions must be carried out to help them succeed. This can include individual tutoring, additional resources, providing practice worksheets or specialized programmes.

- *Using Culturally Relevant Teaching*: Incorporating culturally relevant teaching materials and examples can reflect the diverse backgrounds of the students in the classroom. This approach can help students see themselves in the curriculum and feel more associated with the content.

- *Providing Accessible Learning Materials*: School authorities must ensure that all learning materials, including textbooks and online resources are accessible to all students enrolled in their schools.

- *Addressing Equity Concerns*: If discrepancies in student outcomes are noticed, proactive steps must immediately be taken to address them. Teachers must collaborate with students, parents, and colleagues to find solutions and support backward students.

- *Engaging Families*: Families must be involved in the learning process by communicating openly with them, inviting them to participate in school activities, and asking for their input on their child's education.

- *Embracing and Enabling Technology*: Technology plays a key role in a student's education. But unfortunately, some students may not access internet to support their studies at home. For these students the school authority and the teachers can create a valuable avenue of support in the school itself by providing access to reliable technology in the classroom.

- *Evaluating Student Performance Regularly*: Monitoring student performance is an important part of teaching, as it can make teaching strategies effective. Teachers who are dedicated to educational equity must regularly evaluate how students are performing and then determine what steps are needed to improve their performance.

Conclusion

- Promoting equity in the classroom requires wholehearted commitment of all the stakeholders to comprehend and meet the diverse needs of every student. By implementing beneficial strategies, educators can create an inclusive learning environment that supports success of all students. By promoting educational equity academic performance of students would improve, achievement gaps would diminish, social and emotional well-being would enhance, diversity and inclusion would be

promoted, marginalized communities would be empowered, economic growth will be boosted, poverty and inequality would reduce, and as a result there would be long-term social impact and strengthened democracy. Equity in education is a vision of NEP 2020 where all individuals would be afforded equal opportunities to achieve their fullest potential and prosper academically and personally. Ultimately, equity in education is a transformative force that would not only shape the future of individual learners but would also have a profound impact on the society as a whole. Thus, by implementing the principles of equity, a significant step would be taken towards building a fair, inclusive, and thriving global community.

References

Basumatary, L. (2023). *Equity and efficiency in public and private schools: A study in Chirang district of Assam.* [Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Education, Bodoland University]. Shodhganga.

Cameron, S., Daga, R., & Outhred, R. (2021). *Five principles to guide measuring of equity in learning*. UNESCO. https://uis.unesco.org/en/blog/five-principles-guide-measuring-equity-learning

Castelli, L., Ragazzi, S., & Crescentini, A. (2012). Equity in education: A general overview. *Procedia- Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 69(SY), 2243-2250.

Child Rights and You. (2024, July 13). *Educational equity: Ensuring equal opportunities for all children*. https://www.cry.org/blog/educational-equity/#:~:text=Educational%20equity%20is%20about%20creating,of%20their%20background%20or%20circumstances

Klein, S., Ortman, P., & Friedman, E. (2002). What is the field of gender equity in education? Questions and answers. In J. Koch, & B. Irby (Eds.), *Defining and redefining gender* equity *in education.* (pp. 3-27). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Lee, S. (2024, June 11). *An overview of equity in education*. WGU. https://www.wgu.edu/blog/overview-equity-education2107.html#:~:text=This%20means%20that%20no%20matter,to%20achieve%20their%20educational%20goals

Maiztegui-Oñate, C., & Santibanez-Gruber, R. (2008). Access to education end equity in plural societies. *Intercultural Education*, 373-381. https://doi.org/10.1080/146759 80802531432

SETU. (2023, July 25). *What is educational equity, and why does it matter?* https://setu.etutor.co/blog/equity-in-education/

Walden University. (2024). *Equity in education: Five principles to consider*. https://www.waldenu.edu/online-masters-programs/ms-in-education/resource/equity-in-education-five-principles-to-consider

World Health Organization. (2025). *Health equity*. https://www.who.int/health-topics/health-equity#tab=tab_1