

Global Perspectives on Educational Equity

Nyiramukama Diana Kashaka

Faculty of Education, Kampala International University, Uganda

ABSTRACT

Educational equity has emerged as a central concern in global education discourse, shaped by historical injustices, persistent socioeconomic disparities, and evolving policy frameworks. This paper explores educational equity from multiple global perspectives, tracing its historical roots, theoretical foundations, and implementation across diverse cultural and political contexts. It investigates how educational systems address or exacerbate inequality, drawing on theories of social justice and critical pedagogy. The study includes comparative case studies from Mongolia, New Zealand, Finland, and other regions to illustrate how different nations conceptualize and implement equity-oriented educational reforms. It further discusses the impact of COVID-19 on existing disparities, the role of technology in bridging educational gaps, and the importance of community engagement and advocacy in shaping equitable outcomes. Through an interdisciplinary lens, this paper emphasizes the need for context-sensitive, inclusive, and collaborative approaches to realize meaningful educational equity globally.

Keywords: Educational Equity, Global Education Policy, Social Justice in Education, Critical Pedagogy, Educational Inequality, Comparative Case Studies, COVID-19 and Education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic human right essential for personal and social development. It enables individuals to reach their potential and contribute to their communities. Highlighting education's role in tackling local challenges reveals the intricacies of education systems and the difficulty in integrating relevant policies and practices. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities, particularly through school closures. Understanding equity in education requires examining diverse global practices and experiences. Since the late 20th century, there has been a push to create more equitable education systems. However, discussions often overlook gender, race, and political factors intrinsic to education's broader systemic context. While scholarly work has gained a global perspective, equity concepts predominantly reflect English-speaking contexts, sidelining insights from the Global South, where inequities are deeply entrenched in political and economic structures. To effectively address these disparities, it is crucial to adopt alternative perspectives that inform equity-oriented interventions in education [1, 2].

Historical Context of Educational Equity

Issues related to equity and diversity in education have a long history and are rooted in broader societal contexts. Both policy agendas have been considered as problems of social justice for some time. International policies that focus on equity and diversity have arisen from this background, but have also helped to bring about changes in societal values and practices. The most known of these is the Education for All initiative and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goal on education. The conventional understanding of educational equity, which emphasized the absence of differences in measurable educational outcomes associated with social status or demographic characteristics, has been expanded. The most recent definition of educational equity is "all students can access an education of a quality that is comparable to that of their peers, regardless of their personal and socio-economic circumstances." This definition addresses various dimensions of equity as follows. (1) All students have access to quality schooling. Comprehensiveness of schooling is recognized as an important equity criterion. (2) All students can learn to a minimum level of proficiency. Equality of learning opportunities is also recognized as a key fairness criterion based on the argument that socio-economically disadvantaged students should

have a fair chance to receive cognitive achievement aligned with their capabilities. (3) All students can learn to a level of proficiency that enables them to seek either higher education or occupational skills. In a knowledge-intensive society, there is an extreme emphasis on the economic role of education. These more nuanced definitions of educational equity have pushed the policy agenda to expand the scope and to alter the emphasis of equity policies and interventions. Since then, equity in education has become a goal everywhere: in development agency agendas, in research and practice, and also in policy dictating the ascent of nations. The newest and most concrete definition of educational equity is that all students can access an education of a quality that is comparable to that of their peers, regardless of their personal and socio-economic circumstances. This definition acknowledges the multidimensionality of equity in education and addresses the consideration of two important fairness criteria. It also emphasizes that education and other public and private social institutions should ensure financial, institutional, and employability equality in utilizing resources concerning student characteristics for educational opportunity fairness [3, 4].

Theoretical Frameworks

In recent decades, educational inequality has been studied from various social science perspectives, enriching the understanding of its causes and implications across different contexts. However, these perspectives often exist in isolated academic silos, which has resulted in a fragmented understanding of educational inequality. This lack of an integrated framework is concerning, especially as educational disparity exacerbates in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a pressing need to synthesize multidisciplinary knowledge on educational equity while maintaining the unique insights from each discipline. This study identifies three dimensions where perspectives on educational inequality vary: theoretical framing, empirical evaluation, and conceptualization of education's role in inequality. By examining these dimensions, insights can be sharpened, revealing the strengths and weaknesses of different disciplinary approaches and fostering collaboration. Research correlating educational attainment among youth tends to be led by economics, utilizing longitudinal surveys. Meanwhile, education sciences, pedagogy, and psychology explore school-level discrepancies in educational attainment. Different disciplines also frame the issue of educational inequality distinctly: philosophy and political science typically address it as an issue of individual justice rooted in equality notions, while sociology and social justice studies view it through a social justice lens, and education policy often regards it as a societal threat [5, 6].

Social Justice Theories

The primary intent of this overview is to provide an understanding of four approaches to social justice theories as researched by relevant education scholars. Some systemic and institutional determinants for the management of each approach are also highlighted and discussed in general. Due to the vagueness and unboundedness of social justice, it is recently debated in the sphere of educational equity and has grounded support from various perspectives such as a social justice approach, recognition, and the teaching of controversial issues. In the more narrowly defined, education scholars try to connect it to educational institutions by exploring the punitive or stabilising nature of education. Education is broadly understood here as any planned influence of one individual or group over the capacities, character, or thinking of another individual or group, including both formal schooling, non-formal, and informal settings. To facilitate this discourse and understanding of the local context of social justice in education, four approaches to social justice, of which education scholars are proponents, are discussed. These approaches are mostly interdependent and co-constructed. The review of these approaches focuses on the main definitions and aspects of social justice, but avoids a detailed discussion of their systemic and institutional determinants. Social justice, while primarily state-driven in most developed democracies of the world since the end of the Second World War, has increasingly become a buzzword amongst the masses since the financial meltdown and subsequent recession in 2007-2008. Globalisation is accountable for the breakdown in the social contracts on which these countries were based, namely the distribution of resources and opportunities, radically in favour of the wealthier strata of the populace in most parts of the world. However, education remains the centre of attention, due to the breakdown in the implementation of these policies at ground level [7, 8].

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy seeks expanded awareness of politics, power, privilege, and oppression within the context of schooling. In this cultural moment, much has become clear. Educational systems and structures that uphold values of equity, access, and justice must be called into question. Critical pedagogy begins with naming the world as it is, and it seeks to develop a lens for recognizing how power operates throughout institutions and spaces. Educators committed to this work develop practices for particularly

difficult aspects of critical pedagogy: rearing students who take up they're his/her/their intellectual responsibilities and live conscious and accountable lives; crafting learning contexts and curricula that interrogate boundaries; and maintaining a kind of passion in the pursuit of hope in the everyday interaction and practice of teaching critical pedagogy. In the recognition that critical pedagogy is not yet situated practice, an admittedly personal account is offered as a mode of inciting (indeed begging) conversation about challenges of educational equity practice writ large. Recognizing that wise and well-intended educational theorists/practitioners differ in their approach to teaching the practices of PCK/TPCK, the author offers her account of efforts in facilitating learning about and developing relationships to equity-centered practice. While significant consideration has been given to the commonly held ideal outcomes for equity-focused professional development in teacher education contexts, a more difficult beginning task acknowledges the often misdirected expectations of the participants. Efforts must first and foremost seek to understand why equity-centered change is important, what a teacher's individual and collective stake in the undertaking is, and how far current practices are from equity-focused theories of equity-focused practice [9, 10].

Global Case Studies

This section provides four examples of approaches to educational equity in different parts of the world that are being used to further explore options to the dominant Chilean policy option in a more equitable direction. Each example highlights an aspect of a possible alternative policy option that appeared to differ in significant ways from the approach pursued in Chile or most other countries, illustrating mechanisms of educational equity at work and how they could be implemented into the Chilean system. The intended audience is the Chilean leadership development program participants, but also educational leaders and politicians within their and in other countries. In the case of Mongolia, they focus on one of the four equity principles—proximity to school—that has received no serious attention in Chile since the late 1980s, when it was dropped as a basic principle of educational equity. Nevertheless, this principle is used, for example, in Mongolia's success in dramatically improving educational access. In New Zealand, they focus on the use of local participatory school governance and decision-making that has empowered communities. Educational success appears to be more dramatic than the largely unsuccessful efforts in Chile. In the case of Finland, they present teachers as the drivers of social development and the mode of teacher recruitment as a significant part of this case. Finland's educational success has drawn international attention, and significant discussion has even taken place in Chile about learning from this model. Lastly, they will consider the strides in education introduction and the choice of a public school option. This country has drawn global attention for seeking to provide its services in a more equitable way, while recent indications are that mass privatization in education and related welfare services has taken on almost a life of its own [11, 12].

Policy Approaches to Educational Equity

Policies addressing educational inequalities must grapple with the related class and race issues as well as the language realities of the communities where today's "failing" schools are most frequently located. These definitions of Berlin, idealist, and educational opportunity must focus on the desires, needs, and real-world experiences of the communities where schools are not living up to the ideologies enshrined in constitutions and statutes or the childhood aspirations of Americans. Policy agendas must also reflect the need to make real the dreams of parents and others that began the histories of these epic injustices. Education is the foundation for our economic, political, and spiritual futures. Policies and litigation must develop strategies that include parental inputs and community aspirations for the children most affected. Inattention to what parents actually wanted, and their dreams to which they necessarily sought access, could doom any attempts to bring equity to their schooling. Specific lessons can be drawn from the United States' explication of its civil rights demands. The structure of bridges that will lead to opportunity must include both the bricks of constructive as opposed to retaliatory action and a conscious, aggressive, and constant building of an inclusive vision of equity. In this endeavor, the focus must be on the nature of the rights, which must be framed broadly to include access, opportunity, and outcomes. In addition, the definitions of race must necessarily be considered broad enough to encompass the dialects and cultures that undergird the experiences of many children. As the educational world moves into the twenty-first century, it needs to be reminded that service delivery alone will not by itself diminish its inequities. The broad ideologies, structural realities, and social practices must also be modified. Such efforts must be pursued in ways that will enable the many and often competing interest groups to connect with each other's concerns and thus work together to enhance equity and quality for all students who call a school their own [13, 14].

Challenges to Achieving Educational Equity

While equity is a primary focus of education worldwide, it is also recognized as a complex and often ill-specified construct at both the global and national levels. In this focus on education, equity concerns the extent to which differences between groups of learners in terms of the opportunity to learn and outcomes of that learning can be explained or predicted by differences in educational resources or assessments. Present understanding of the equity construct, and the prior evidence related to it, dictates a focus on two of its dimensions: vertical equity and horizontal equity. The former holds that equity is present when subpopulations of students with less economic, social, or educational advantages are provided steeper slopes of access to educational resources or assessments, or are provided somewhat better opportunities to learn and educational outcomes, than are their more privileged counterparts. On the other hand, the latter holds that equity is present when educational resources or assessments are equally distributed across subpopulations of students, independent of the subpopulations' opportunities to learn or educational outcomes. Overall, equity is expressed, and inequity is evident, only as calculations of relationships among differences between groups and amounts of resources or assessments across those groups. These amounts can include monetary investments such as salaries, as well as non-monetary investments such as lower student-to-teacher ratios. Equity and inequity are conceptualized as ratios of a dependent variable to an independent variable, with the realization that such ratios are imperfect. Some values of these ratios may range from 0 (or some other appropriate minimum) to $+\infty$, and some values may be invalid. Differences in amounts are converted to proportions or fractional equivalents of the larger of the two amounts, which express inequality or inequity on a 0 to 1 scale, which can then be interpreted as a simple fraction or percentage of a whole. The 0 value indicates no difference, the 1 or 100% value indicates that all of one group received the resource or assessment, or opportunity to learn, and none of the other [15, 16].

Role of Technology in Education

Technology is advancing rapidly, influencing many life aspects. In education, primary school technological training is often not continued in secondary schools, which focus more on theory, neglecting practical learning. While theory is crucial, practical experience is equally important, marking a shift from traditional teaching methods to a focus on learning experiences and outcomes. Advances in technology provide new avenues for learning and communication, prompting various sectors to propose innovative educational perspectives. Emphasis is placed on transforming learning environments, understanding learner profiles, redefining teacher roles, integrating educational technologies (EdTech), revising curricula and assessments, and prioritizing quality education. Educational tech changes should be holistic rather than fragmented. Key considerations include how, when, and why technology is used, influencing the quality and success of education delivery. Effective teaching relies on pedagogical decisions regarding the educational tools used. Factors influencing technology's implementation in education include the type of technology, testing timelines, educational goals, student demographics, teacher training, environmental aspects, and educational policies. Education demands significant time and resources, varying based on developmental maturity, cultural, demographic, economic, and physical factors of nations. In this context, educational technology is seen as a tool for imparting specific knowledge rather than an essential component for societal growth and survival [17, 18].

Community Engagement and Advocacy

Community engagement describes various efforts to include stakeholders in some aspect of decision making, programming, or delivery. Advocates for educational equity specify actions they believe will ensure access to and success in school for particular communities. Community engagement may be informal and uncoordinated, or it may be heavily organized and planned. Approximately half of the initiatives in this group were aimed at raising awareness about inequities in education, gathering information or documenting injustices, amplifying the voices of affected communities, attracting and mobilizing resources, or supporting advocacy efforts. These initiatives were termed "advocacy" but differed from those described above in that they did not focus specifically on lobbying or political processes. As a result, they were not included in the advocacy category. Particularly salient interventions included those with some connection to a larger advocacy effort at the state or national level, such as efforts to change policies requiring a specific level of funding for schools or those to reduce the criminalization of students, particularly those of color. Frequently, it was the case that these efforts were pioneered by experienced advocacy organizations, which then plunged into the work of grassroots engagement and organizing. Some organizations, particularly larger ones based in urban areas, provided extensive assistance to grassroots organizations, helping them develop their message, pool resources, and identify audiences and strategies. At the same time, larger organizations were careful to ensure that their

efforts were grassroots-led and did not overshadow or “take over” the message and mobilization efforts of smaller organizations. The provision of initial seed funding and training allowed for the development of partnerships to address inequities in education on the part of organizations that may not have been able to do so otherwise [19, 20].

Measuring Educational Equity

Many data sources exist on educational equity, yet consistent frameworks for interpreting this data are lacking. Equity is often seen as sameness, but a more useful perspective is through ‘fairness’; it relies on equality of treatment. While some may view equal treatment as fair, others might find unequal treatment acceptable, suggesting fairness may outweigh equality in contexts of equity. Research shows that even young children prefer equal resource distribution. In experiments, they chose boxes with fewer toys over those with more, indicating a natural aversion to inequality. However, people may accept unequal distribution if based on merit or need. For instance, unequal pay is often deemed fair when reflecting different levels of expertise or effort. An equitable education system can be defined in two ways: one treating all students equally and another recognizing fair differences in treatment for some students based on need. This raises complexities in the definitions of educational equity. Four interpretations of equity in education emerge, ranging from an emphasis on equal treatment to a focus on targeted support for disadvantaged groups. Metrics for assessing educational inequities can thus be derived from these interpretations [21, 22].

Future Directions in Educational Equity Research

The 2020 global pandemic has changed how education is delivered and increased inequities in education throughout the world. Educational inequities existed long before the pandemic. However, the pandemic exposed how urgent it is to address inequities in educational access and opportunities, particularly in terms of online schooling, the forced pivot to technology. As different modes of education have been digitized, some groups of students suddenly fell behind. Systematic shale-holes in the social structure have evolved into chasms through which some have tumbled like boulders and some have dropped like grains of sand. Access to education and opportunities have become increasingly stratified. Educational systems worldwide have been affected by the advance of the global pandemic and the ensuing closures of schools. As education takes new competing forms such as intensified online education, those who previously experienced inequity in school and educational opportunities suffer even greater disadvantages. Educational poverty, which refers to limited access to education, and education poverty, which refers to a lack of opportunities and supports to engage in education, expands into another dimension termed educational zooming. The system-induced sudden loss of mature, extensive, and inclusive systems of school attendance has very much amplified stratification in education, both within and across academic systems worldwide. Most educational systems have been somewhat successful in ensuring students’ most basic access to online schooling. However, those who previously failed to access online schooling education have fallen into a double trap, from which it is hard to emerge. Lack of any technology greatly limits utilities of anything education-related, whether online schooling or any learning materials. This is a systemic issue that many low-income states could hardly successfully cope with. However, even with all hardware resources and facilities prepared, some slum schools fail in any educational zooming engagement due to their poverty of capital and human resources, low expectations of families and students for education, and lack of motivation to engage in schooling [23, 24].

CONCLUSION

Educational equity remains an elusive yet critical goal in the pursuit of global development and justice. Despite decades of advocacy and reform, structural inequities rooted in socio-economic, racial, gendered, and geographic disparities continue to hinder access to quality education. The examination of global case studies reveals that while contextualized solutions offer promising strategies, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to achieving equity. Instead, educational systems must embrace a pluralistic framework that acknowledges diverse epistemologies and experiences, particularly those from the Global South. Theoretical perspectives, such as social justice and critical pedagogy, provide vital tools for interrogating entrenched systems of privilege and for crafting responsive curricula and policies. Furthermore, community engagement and the responsible integration of technology are essential in empowering marginalized voices and sustaining equitable change. As the world navigates post-pandemic recovery, a renewed commitment to inclusive, participatory, and transformative education policies will be paramount to ensuring that all learners—regardless of background—have equal opportunities to thrive.

REFERENCES

1. Darmody M, Smyth E, Russell H. Impacts of the COVID-19 control measures on widening educational inequalities. *Young*. 2021 Sep;29(4):366-80.

2. Reuge N, Jenkins R, Brossard M, Soobrayan B, Mizunoya S, Ackers J, Jones L, Taulo WG. Education response to COVID 19 pandemic, a special issue proposed by UNICEF: Editorial review. *International Journal of Educational Development*. 2021 Nov 1;87:102485. [sciencedirect.com](https://www.sciencedirect.com)
3. Sahlberg P, Cobbold T. Leadership for equity and adequacy in education. *School leadership & management*. 2021 Oct 20;41(4-5):447-69.
4. Engle J. Answering the call: Institutions and states lead the way toward better measures of postsecondary performance. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. 2016;22.
5. Wang C, Chen X, Yu T, Liu Y, Jing Y. Education reform and change driven by digital technology: a bibliometric study from a global perspective. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*. 2024 Feb 12;11(1):1-7. [nature.com](https://www.nature.com)
6. Tamrin AM. Literature as Social Critique: Examining Class Struggle and Inequality in Contemporary Indonesian Fiction. *Journal of Mandalika Social Science*. 2025 Apr 24;3(1):40-7.
7. Knepper HJ, Evans MD, Henley TJ, editors. Intersectionality and crisis management: A path to social equity. Taylor & Francis; 2023 Jan 31.
8. Mehra B. Libraries reclaiming “social justice warriors” during “Miss Rona’s” global pandemic crises. *The Library Quarterly*. 2021 Oct 1;91(4):385-401.
9. McLaren P. Critical pedagogy: A look at the major concepts. In *The critical pedagogy reader* 2023 Nov 1 (pp. 75-97). Routledge.
10. Darder A, Hernandez K, Lam KD, Baltodano M, editors. *The critical pedagogy reader*. Taylor & Francis; 2023 Nov 1.
11. Dyer C, Luke A, Sanjaa N. Boarding schools in transition: A post-socialist analysis of “relevance” as an education policy problem in Mongolia. *Journal of Childhood, Education and Society*. 2022 Nov 19;3(3):308-21. [whiterose.ac.uk](https://www.whiterose.ac.uk)
12. Boeltzig-Brown H. Disability and Career Services Provision for Students with Disabilities at Institutions of Higher Education in Japan: An Overview of Key Legislation, Policies, and Practices. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*. 2017;30(1):61-81.
13. s
14. Pillay I. The impact of inequality and COVID-19 on education and career planning for South African children of rural and low-socioeconomic backgrounds. *African Journal of Career Development*. 2021 May 18;3(1).
15. Zhao L, Cao C, Li Y, Li Y. Determinants of the digital outcome divide in E-learning between rural and urban students: Empirical evidence from the COVID-19 pandemic based on capital theory. *Computers in Human Behavior*. 2021 Dec 31;130:107177.
16. Chetty R, Jackson MO, Kuchler T, Stroebel J, Hendren N, Fluegge RB, Gong S, Gonzalez F, Grondin A, Jacob M, Johnston D. Social capital II: determinants of economic connectedness. *Nature*. 2022 Aug 4;608(7921):122-34. [nature.com](https://www.nature.com)
17. Magdalene R, Sridharan D. Powering e-learning through technology: An overview of recent trends in educational technologies. *The Online Journal of Distance Education and e-Learning*. 2018 Jan;6(1):60.
18. Sedivy-Benton AL, Leland KM. The impact of technology on PK-12 teacher preparation programs. In *Handbook of research on education and technology in a changing society 2014* (pp. 235-245). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
19. Hartsmar N, Leathwood C, Ross A, Spithourakis J. Can educational programmes address social inequity? Some examples from Europe. In *Educational research for social justice: Evidence and practice from the UK* 2021 Jun 23 (pp. 271-297). Cham: Springer International Publishing. [\[HTML\]](#)
20. Eden CA, Chisom ON, Adeniyi IS. Education policy and social change: Examining the impact of reform initiatives on equity and access. *International Journal of Science and Research Archive*. 2024;11(2):139-46. [researchgate.net](https://www.researchgate.net)
21. Al Rawashdeh AZ, Mohammed EY, Al Arab AR, Alara M, Al-Rawashdeh B. Advantages and disadvantages of using e-learning in university education: Analyzing students’ perspectives. *Electronic Journal of E-learning*. 2021 May 17;19(3):107-17. [academic-publishing.org](https://www.academic-publishing.org)
22. Stumbrienė D, Želvys R, Žilinskas J, Dukynaitė R, Jakaitienė A. Efficiency and effectiveness analysis based on educational inclusion and fairness of European countries. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*. 2022 Aug 1;82:101293. [\[HTML\]](#)

23. Wollburg P, Hallegatte S, Mahler DG. Ending extreme poverty has a negligible impact on global greenhouse gas emissions. *Nature*. 2023 Nov 30;623(7989):982-6.
24. Radina NK, Balakina JV. Challenges for education during the pandemic: an overview of literature. *Вопросы образования*. 2021(1 (eng)):178-94.

CITE AS: Nyiramukama Diana Kashaka (2025). Global Perspectives on Educational Equity. EURASIAN EXPERIMENT JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, 7(2):103-109