

Educational Opportunity and Equity from the Perspective of Social and Economic Identity

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Abstract: Educational equality is an important issue of continuing concern to all sectors of society, and it is essential to promote economic development and social progress. In fact, educational inequality is a serious issue in both developed and developing countries; society tends to allocate fewer resources, including infrastructure, teachers, and school funding, to people who are disabled and poor. It tends to do the same to those cultural minorities. This paper discusses the current state of educational inequality in terms of household income, economic disparities, regional disparities, and disability groups. The paper also gives sociological, economic, and pedagogical perspectives on the mechanisms of educational equity. In the end this paper will discuss the possibilities of using technology and policy to eliminate educational inequality.

Keywords: Equality in Education; Equity and Opportunity; Educational Resources; Social and Economic Identity

1. Introduction

Equality in education means the universal right to equal access to education for all members of society, regardless of their social status. Education is a fundamental human right, which is not differentiated by social status such as gender, race, sex, social origin, cultural background, or disability (Cole, 2011). Educational inequality can create a sense of social exclusion or even lead to social problems. The only way to bring out the potential of every person in our society is to insist on educational equity and giving every person the same opportunity to receive education. Therefore, promoting educational equality is a goal that society needs to work on sustainably. This paper will explore the possibility of educational equality from the perspectives of social class, culture, and economic level. It will also discuss factors that affect educational equality, and the consequences of educational inequality. This article will also provide some insights to reform the educational system in the new era with the goal of pursuing educational equality.

2. Educational inequality exacerbates class solidification

Without the channels of social mobility provided by education, the social class structure will become more solidified and rigid. From a sociological perspective, each stage of schooling is an allocation of educational opportunities. Educational equity is important because access to education is the best way for disadvantaged people to get out of their difficult lives and improve their own living status and that of their descendants. Take the poor rural population as an example, as one of the disadvantaged groups in the society, their overall survival situation is obviously worse than that of the urban population. The best way to improve this situation is to achieve class mobility of the poor rural population to a higher social level. Access to a fair and good education is the solution to mobility. Thus, equitable access to education is also conducive to higher educational attainment by the poor, which leads to occupational and class mobility. In reality, however, educational opportunities are not equally distributed among social members due to objective factors such as economic rewards, cultural differences, regional differences.

3. The Association between Household Income and Educational Equity

From an economic perspective, the existence of a gap between rich and poor leads to educational inequity. In Bourdieu's view, people from different social classes occupy different proportions of society's resources, and the upper class has more

social resources, so they have the opportunity to give their children education that is above the social average (Bourdieu, 1974). In recent years, the role of family economic capital on children's educational opportunities has been increasing, which puts students from less well-off families at an increasing disadvantage place in the competition for education. With the gradual marketization of the education, a sizeable industry has formed outside of school education, which is extracurricular tutoring training. As a supplement to school education, extracurricular tutoring training helps to improve students' academic performance, but it also puts great financial pressure on families. Since tutoring classes require a very high investment of money and time, low-income families cannot afford to pay for these educational resources, which puts them at a competitive disadvantage in the future.

4. Elite education versus general education

Murphy, an economics expert at the University of Chicago, suggests that the primary cause that can create a gap between rich and poor individuals in today's society is the human capital that is gradually accumulated by the body of knowledge and thus constitutes (Murphy, 2016). Higher income families have a higher quality demand for education. A large number of middle- and upper-income parents are likely to choose private school that is more prestigious and more expensive than public schools. Private schools are able to offer high salaries to find good teachers, thus, to ensure quality teaching. What's more, private schools are not obligated to consider social equity, so they have autonomy in terms of fees and student admissions. As a result, private school students have a significant advantage over public school students in the same education system, thus increasing the class differentiation within the education system. It is the inequitable distribution of educational resources that compels parents to do everything possible to send their children to the so-called priority schools, as good private schools have better hardware and lots more teaching resources than public schools. Even these two children are in the same neighborhood, they might be enjoying completely different educational resources.

5. Regional Economic Disparities and Educational Inequality

The economic strength of a region affects educational resources, and differences in educational resources are often the most direct cause of educational inequity. Regional economic status largely determines the amount of education funding, and the amount of education funding largely determines the educational resources available to local students. Economically developed cities can invest more money in teaching, both in hardware facilities such as educational equipment and in soft facilities such as a group of excellent teachers. Students in urban areas have access to advanced facilities such as multimedia classrooms, computer rooms, and laboratories. Rural children not only don't have access to these facilities, they do not even have decent houses to attend classes. On the other hand, rural areas have a much worse economic level, less convenient transportation, and poor welfare for teachers. As a result, many teachers are reluctant to work in these areas, which further leads to the inequality of educational opportunities and resources in rural areas.

6. Disability Groups and Educational Inequality

Individuals in the same society should have equal access to school and educational processes. Equity in education represents not only a sense of care and responsibility on the part of individuals with disabilities, but also a way to alleviate and improve the economic and social difficulties of their families. In fact, as a social group, the disabled often do not have equal access to educational resources. Students with physical disabilities face marginalization in education and have rather limited participation in future career decision-making process. For example, visually impaired students do not learn the same things as regular students. Rather, they need to attend special technical schools specially built for the blind. Not only that, Lamichhane found in his study of the situation in some developing countries that students who study in special education institutions receive relatively fewer years of education compared to regular students. They also get less educational resources (Lamichhane, 2015). In addition, the elimination of discrimination and the improvement of policies are equally important. As students from the disabled group are often treated unkindly or publicly offended by teachers and classmates. Faced with prejudice and discrimination, their willingness to learn can be affected or even at risk of dropping out of school. In the existing situation, students with disabilities still face greater challenges in fighting for equal educational resources.

7. The potential policy to promote equality in education

Policy interventions have an important role to play in eliminating educational inequality. The government needs to continuously optimize the allocation of educational resources and opportunities and strengthen the investment in educational resources in educationally weak regions, so as to improve the situation of educational inequality between regions. The government should minimize the impact of the market and society on educational equality. Weakening the impact of the market on educational inequality requires the government to adequately guarantee investment in education at all levels and restrain the tendency of public educational institutions at all levels to run schools by market-based means. To maintain social equity, what we can do is to maintain the stability of education with policies that do not overly favor one group. In addition, the government should invest in technology to help disadvantaged groups secure educational resources. Technology can break the barriers of time and space and thus promote educational equality to a certain extent. Technology is neutral, and technology does not discriminate against any student regardless of social identity. It is possible to use technology to help countries mobilize educational resources, allowing some excellent schools to provide distance learning to groups with few educational resources. Through taking online courses, students with physical disabilities have opportunities to enjoy the same educational resources as other students without discrimination and physical inconvenience.

8. Conclusion

Equity in education has long been an important topic of pedagogical research and an important driving force for social mobility. The equitable distribution of education can spark the creation of an inclusive and fair societies. Inequality in educational opportunities can be improved through policies and through people's efforts. Although there is no way to completely eliminate inequality in a short period of time, we can reduce its affect to certain groups, so that education can perform more of its positive function. Hence, everyone can see the value of their efforts. We firmly believe that in the post-epidemic era, when the education system is gradually discovering its own loopholes and improving them. Gradually, both the poor, the disadvantaged and the special groups can eventually have equal resources in today's education system.

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