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# Addressing Inequalities in Access to High-Quality Education Worldwide

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## Introduction

Involvement in quality education has long been viewed as a basic human right that plays various roles in the development of society. Education creates the basic skills that enable individuals to participate effectively in society, as well as bettering their future living conditions. While there has been tremendous improvement in the involvement of people in education over the past decades, there are still various disparities in the involvement in quality education in different countries as well as within countries. Disparities are seen by factors such as economic status, gender, location, disabilities, as well as political stability.

However, in most developing countries, there is a lack of infrastructure and poorly developing education systems that result in poorly developing educational programs. Even when such countries develop sufficient infrastructure for education, most students may end up facing challenges such as crowded classrooms and an unfavorable environment for study sessions. However, for countries that experience war, most education systems remain undeveloped since students do not gain access to academic programs for a considerably long period of time compared to their peers from developing countries such as Norway and the United States of America that belong to a higher-income country group.

The effects of inequality in education reach beyond the students themselves. Education inequality is seen to perpetuate poverty cycles, but it also impacts economic inequality. Moreover, it hinders societal mobility. Education inequality also hampers the development of the globe, inhibiting societies from innovating and from effectively governing. Moreover, this inequality also limits innovation and development for coping with global issues like climatic change and health epidemics. Overcoming these global challenges is not only an obligatory requirement but also an utmost reality for sustainable societal growth and development.

## Definition of key terms

### *Digital Divide*

Refers to the gap between individuals or communities that have access to modern information and communication technologies and to those who do not.

### *Education in Emergencies*

The allocation of safe and relevant facilities for continuous education during situations of conflict, natural disasters, or other humanitarian crises.

### *Education Inequality*

The differences that are visible in access to educational resources, opportunities, and outcomes between individuals or groups.

### *Inclusive Education*

This refers to an approach in education that aims to ensure that all learners, regardless of their background, where they live, or their ability, are able to participate fully in the education system.

### *Low-Income Countries*

Nations that have a Gross National Income (GNI) of \$1,135 or less as of 2026. These economies often face several challenges in developing their infrastructure, overall economy, and they have to also face mass unemployment.

### *Learning Outcomes*

The knowledge, skills, and attributes that students are expected to acquire during their time in the education system.

### *Learning Poverty*

This means the condition in which children are unable to read, write, and understand a simple text by the age where they are expected to have basic literacy skills, and it is often used as an indicator of low education quality in different countries.

### *Quality Education*

Education that allows learners to gain relevant knowledge, effective teaching, safe learning environments, and suitable resources to achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

### *Socio-Economic Status*

This refers to the way people can be described based on their education, income, or type of job. The three levels to a socio-economic status are low, medium, and high. People on the lower side often have a worse financial situation than those on the higher end.

## General Overview

Disparities of access to high-quality education can be seen and can be witnessed by both developing and developed nations. Although the enrollment rate of students within the initial learning institutions has improved over the years, access to education is not synonymous with access to high-quality education. Students within different areas do not have access to basic literacy and numeracy skills within their learning institutions. Economic inequality is among the key considerations that influence imbalances in education. In low-income countries, it can be seen that there is no investment in financial resources to be allocated to education, which leads to poorly managed infrastructure, inadequate trained teachers, limited textbooks, and outdated information. This can be contrasted with high-income countries, whereby they are able to allocate higher amounts of money to education, leading to better infrastructure, optimal class sizes, and optimal learning achievements. Nevertheless, within high-income areas, socio-economic status is a vital factor in influencing imbalances in education. Those in low-income socioeconomic classes tend to attend schools with inadequate funding, with issues concerning higher education, thus contributing to cycles of poverty within societies with limited expansion.

Geographic factors also play their part in uneven education access. In most rural and remote areas, the scarcity of education institutions means that pupils have to travel far to get to school or even forgo schooling altogether, as in the case of those living far from the nearest center. Some areas, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia, have been especially harmed in that the scarcity of teachers and resources means that rural schools will be disproportionately ill-equipped when juxtaposed to those in urban districts that sometimes have so many pupils that they might as well be attendance records.

Gender inequality is also another area that is still a major concern today. Despite the fact that the overall gender gaps in education world wide have been brought way down in the last twenty years or so, there are still cultures and geographical locations where girls are restricted from getting educational opportunities due to a variety of factors such as child marriage, domestic chores, and cultural biases that result in hampering girl education in a negative manner. Simultaneously, boys are also seen to have higher dropout rates due to child labor and involvement in conflict or being forced to enroll in their respective armies.

Conflict, war, political instability, and humanitarian crises also greatly fuel the disparities in equality in terms of access to quality education. This happens in that war can lead to the destruction of many schools, the displacement of teachers and students, and the diversion of finances from the educational system by the governments in that they allocate finances from the educational sectors to support war or emergency spending. Many schools in conflict areas are utilised for non-educational purposes or become environments where learning does not take place. Refugee children encounter various challenges, including language, documentation, as well as understanding the educational structures in the hosting countries. Still, they are most at risk of never attending school on multiple occasions, thus facing discrimination in education on long-term terms that might encompass diminished

working opportunities, susceptibility to poverty, as well as diminished social consciousness within post-conflict societies.

Modern global issues, like the COVID-19 crisis, have also brought new emphasis and highlighted the problem of education inequality. Through some of the periods when it was necessary for schools to be closed, there was considerable reliance on online and digital education solutions. Although this concept and approach ensured that education was somewhat continued, it is also clear that it introduced an inequality gap through access and availability to internet and digital facilities and capabilities. Students who had access and opportunities were able to continue their education, while others suffered considerably in terms of losing out on education. Wherever developing countries and various minority groups are concerned, the lack of availability of electricity and various capabilities prevented successful participation in online education. Many of these global issues emphasise the difference that exists in the potential of various countries for different and online approaches towards education.

In conclusion, the issue of inequalities in accessing quality education is a result of a series of both economic, social, and political factors. On the one hand, the issue not only affects individual students, but on the other hand, the effects can further result in the form of reduced capacities and abilities for nations in meeting the challenges posed by the international environment. On the other hand, one aspect or subject or activity in the life of an individual and the life of the international system has and will continue to play significant roles in meeting the desired goals and objectives. Therefore, the issue can only be solved through precise and strict political efforts.

## Major parties involved

### *United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)*

UNICEF works to make sure that there is equal access to education for children, especially in contexts of conflict and humanitarian issues. Their programmes focus on early childhood education, gender equality, and education in emergencies.

### *United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)*

UNESCO plays a central role in promoting education as a fundamental human right and trying to coordinate international efforts and improve education systems. It collects data, sets global educational standards, and supports countries in implementing educational reforms that align with international goals and ideas.

### *Low-Income and Developing Countries*

Many low-income or developing countries face structural challenges such as limited funding, excess population growth, and political instability, which decreases their ability to provide high-quality education for their citizens.

### *Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)*

International and local NGOs play a crucial role in providing educational services, advocating for policy changes, and supporting underrepresented and marginalised communities, especially in areas affected by conflict or extreme poverty. They allow for the allocation of educational services such as infrastructure for schools, training teachers, supplying learning materials, and also providing emergency education in refugee or crisis settings. In addition to providing services, NGOs also advocate for policy change by working with many governments and international organisations that promote inclusive and equitable education systems. Local NGOs are equally as effective because they understand cultural and social barriers within their community and they can design community-based solutions. Through sustainable initiatives, NGOs contribute to long-term improvements in access to and quality of education.

### *World Bank Group*

The World Bank Group is a major provider of financial and technical assistance for educational projects, especially those that are situated in low or middle income countries. They focus on improving education system efficiency, learning outcomes, and access to learning and schooling for disadvantaged groups.



## Timeline of events

**1948 December 10<sup>th</sup>** The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises education as a fundamental human right.

**2000 September 8<sup>th</sup>** The Millennium Development Goals are adopted by the United Nations and they include universal primary education as a global objective.

**2015 September 25<sup>th</sup>** The Sustainable Development Goals establish *Goal 4*, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable education for all.

**2020 January 30<sup>th</sup>** The COVID-19 pandemic is first widely recognised and it disrupts education systems worldwide, which highlights the digital divide and socioeconomic inequalities.

## Relevant UN treaties and events

**Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR):** Establishes and recognises education as a fundamental human right and states the argument that elementary education should be free and compulsory, 10 December 1948.

**Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):** This legally binds the signatory states to guarantee children's rights to education and promote equal access to education at all levels, 20 November 1989.

**A/RES/70/1; Transforming Our World; the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:** Adopts the Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure inclusive education for all and promote lifelong learning opportunities, 25 September 2015.

**A/RES/74/142; The Right to Education:** Reinstates the obligation that all states should eliminate discrimination in education and address barriers to equal learning access, including poverty, gender, disability, and conflict, 18 December 2019.

## Previous attempts to solve the issue

### *Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes*

Many countries, particularly those in Latin America, have implemented conditional cash transfer programmes that give financial help to low-income families. Their only condition to these families is that their children must attend school regularly and these programmes aim to lower the dropout rates, address child labour, and improve access to education for the less privileged.

### *Digital Learning Initiatives*

Governments and international organisations have introduced digital learning initiatives to expand access to modern education and technology. This initiative includes the development of online platforms, distributing devices, and the expansion of internet connectivity.

### *Education Cannot Wait (United Nations)*

This is a global fund which is dedicated to making sure that there is access to education in emergency situations. They aim to provide long-term funding in order to support education for children who have been affected by conflict in their country.

### *Education for All (EFA) (United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation)*

This initiative was launched to expand the access to basic education worldwide, and it has a primary focus on increasing literacy, trying to achieve gender equality, and promoting education from an early age.

### *Global Partnership for Education (GPE)*

The Global Partnership for Education provides financial and technical support to strengthen education systems in lower-income countries. They focus on increasing literacy rates and increasing access to education for marginalised groups.

### *National Education Reforms*

Many countries and nations have introduced policies and laws where schooling is now compulsory, there is professional teacher training, and there are changes in curriculum to improve education access and quality.

## Possible solutions

### *International Funding and Support*

One solution is increasing the international funding and support for education systems in low-income countries and countries that have been affected by conflict and war. These investments would target teacher training, infrastructure, and learning materials.

### *Addressing the Digital Divide*

Expanding digital learning initiatives while addressing the digital divide. Making sure that there is affordable access to the internet and providing technological resources, which will help in crises.

### *Strengthening Inclusive Education Policies*

By strengthening inclusive education policies, it will support learners with disabilities, promote gender equality, and ensure that education systems are adaptable to different social and cultural contexts.

### *Improving Data Collection*

Through fostering public-private partnerships, increasing the community involvement in education planning, and improving data collection on learning and schooling statistics, this solution will aim to help governments address the problems of inaccessible education and inequality.

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