INEQUALITY IN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research paper is to understand the inequalities, in other words, differences in educational opportunities. The educational institutions are different on the basis of number of factors. These include, educational programs, financial resources, teaching-learning methods, teaching-learning materials, infrastructure, human resources, overall environmental conditions and so forth. Apart from the existence of these differences, the educational institutions at all levels need to ensure that they need to promote effective growth and development of students, incur the feeling of job satisfaction among educators and staff members and enrich the overall system of education. When the occurrence of inequalities prove to be barriers within the course of achievement of educational goals, then the educators need to formulate measures to overcome them and enrich the system of education. The main areas that have been taken into account in this research paper are, understanding meaning of inequality of educational opportunities, accessibility to schools and higher educational institutions, and factors identifying inequalities in educational opportunities.

Keywords: Academic Outcomes, Educational Opportunities, Higher Educational Institutions, Inequality, Schools

When acquiring an understanding of 'inequality in educational opportunities', it primarily refers to disparities in educational opportunities. Research has indicated that girls and women experienced discriminatory treatment with regards to acquisition of education as well as other opportunities. In the past, individuals and communities possessed this viewpoint that girls are liabilities. They would only make demands and would not yield any returns on investment. They were discouraged from the acquisition of education and were trained in the implementation of household responsibilities. The reason being, it was believed by the individuals and communities that they have to eventually get married and in their marital homes, they would enhance the reputation of their natal homes by implementing the household responsibilities in a satisfactory manner and obeying the rules. The parents usually train their girls to carry out various tasks and activities in their marital homes in accordance to the desired expectations.

Income inequality is one of the important factors in promoting inequalities in educational opportunities (Rothstein, 2017). Another major factor that promotes inequality in educational opportunities is family income. When the individuals are financially strong, then they do not experience any problems and challenges and even send their children to international countries to pursue education. Whereas, the individuals, who are residing in the conditions of poverty and backwardness experience problems in the sustenance of the living conditions. Due to scarcity of financial resources, they experience problems in making provision of good quality education to their children. Inequality in educational opportunities is also influenced by generation of awareness and information. When the individuals are well-educated and aware, they would attain higher

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educational qualifications as well. Whereas, due to lack of awareness, individuals would just obtain the basic literacy skills of reading, writing and arithmetic or attain low educational qualifications.

UNDERSTANDING MEANING OF INEQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Between group economic inequalities is a common phenomenon in multi-ethnic societies. Such inequalities reflect persistent differences in the capability of the individuals, belonging to different social groups to seize market opportunities either due to discrimination or market constraints. A society with unequal opportunities is characterised by a low degree of social mobility (Asadullah, & Yalonetzky, 2010). In the attainment of economic success, the various factors that need to be taken into consideration are, generation of awareness in terms of various aspects, educational qualifications, skills and abilities, employment opportunities and communication skills. Irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion, ethnicity, gender, educational qualifications and socio-economic background of the individuals, it is essential for them to possess effective communication skills and maintain good terms and relationships with others within the community. In educational institutions, it is vital for the individuals to alleviate introversion and establish effective communication terms and relationships with others.

Some of the countries are more successful as compared to others in causing a reduction in inequalities (Rozer, & Werfhorst, 2017). The inequalities in educational opportunities are primarily characterised by performance and conduct of students. For instance, in educational institutions, when there are organization of events or competitions, then teachers encourage students for volunteering purposes. In such cases, they are required to possess effective communication skills and generate awareness in terms of various aspects. The students are imparted leadership skills and they are required to monitor and control the classroom activities and functions, particularly in the absence of teachers. It is vital for the teachers to ensure that all students are provided with the opportunity of monitoring the classroom activities, but more opportunities are given to students, who possess good communication skills and are diligent and resourceful in the implementation of their job duties. Therefore, it can be stated that inequalities in educational opportunities are identified on the basis of skills, abilities, decorum and communication skills of students.

In India, 70 percent of the population resides in rural communities. The individuals, belonging to rural areas, who are in a deprived and marginalized state have the major objective of bringing about improvements in the sustenance of their living conditions. For attaining better livelihoods opportunities, education is regarded as the major instrument. Research has indicated that even when the parents are not educated, still they aspire to get their children enrolled in schools and higher educational institutions. The individuals, belonging to rural communities, mostly aspire to migrate to urban communities. They possess the viewpoint that in urban areas, they will be able to acquire good educational and employment opportunities. The individuals vary in their natures, behavioural traits, attitudes and learning abilities. When they are diligent, resourceful, and possess sharp intellectual abilities, then they are able to achieve the desired academic outcomes. On the other hand, when individuals are overwhelmed by apprehensiveness, they experience setbacks,

particularly in terms of their academic performance. Hence, the learning abilities of the students and natures and attitudes are also vital factors in promoting inequalities in educational qualifications.

ACCESSIBILITY TO SCHOOLS AND HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In order to acquire education, it is essential for the individuals to have accessibility to schools and higher educational institutions. Inequality in education is primarily characterised by the attainment of educational qualifications by the individuals (Chapter Two. Inequality in the Schools, n.d.). The educational institutions in some cases are located nearby ones homes. In such cases, individuals do not experience any problems in attending them and may walk down to their schools or make use of personal transportation. The parents also are able to assist their children in taking them to schools and bringing them back home. Whereas, in other cases, when educational institutions are located at a distance, then the individuals are required to arrange for some means of transportations. Usually, the individuals, belonging to rural communities migrate to urban communities to get enrolled in higher educational institutions. In such cases, they need to take care of other aspects as well, apart from pursuance of education. When the individuals recognize the significance of education, then they aspire to get enrolled in educational institutions and augment their skills and abilities. These include, pre-schools, elementary education, secondary education and higher education. It is apparent that all individuals are different from each other in the attainment of educational qualifications. The different educational institutions have been stated as follows:

Pre-schools

Pre-schools are the schools, which establishes the foundation from where learning of the students initiates. In pre-schools, learning begins with play. When the children get enrolled in pre-schools, then they are familiarised with playthings and games. Gradually, they are imparted information regarding other concepts, such as, alphabets, numbers, lines, colours, shapes, environment, plants, vehicles and so forth. In pre-school education, major emphasis is put upon extra-curricular and creative activities. These include, artworks, handicrafts, music, singing, dancing, sports, physical activities, yoga, taekwondo and so forth. Another major factor that is emphasised upon in pre-schools is, students begin to realize that outside their home also there is a world, with which they need to interact with. The parents are vested with the major responsibility of preparing their children to form effective terms and relationships with others, pay attention towards tasks and activities and be disciplined.

In pre-schools, children are different from each other in terms of number of aspects. These include, natures, attitudes, behavioural traits and learning abilities. Some children experience set-backs in understanding academic concepts, some are attentive, some may understand the concepts, but take time and so forth. It is the job duty of the teachers to ensure that, they are able to impart learning and understanding of the academic concepts in a well-organized manner. In pre-schools, normally the mother system is followed. It means, all subjects such as, English, Hindi, mathematics, science, social science and so forth are taught to the students by a single teacher.

Elementary Schools

Elementary schools are the schools that comprise of students, from six years until 13 years age. They are up to the eighth grade. In elementary schools, the students are imparted knowledge and understanding in terms of academic subjects, including mathematics, science, social science, English, Hindi, and Sanskrit. In addition, attention is also paid on creative and extra-curricular activities. In elementary schools, students begin to recognize the significance of education and usually pay attention towards the achievement of academic goals. They are able to gain familiarity with educational resources and began to make use of technology as well in acquiring an efficient understanding of the academic concepts. When they are required to work on their projects or assignments or prepare themselves well for the tests, they make use of various kinds of technologies and learning apps.

In order to enable the students to achieve academic goals, it is vital for the school authorities and teachers to make provision of adequate teaching-learning methods, infrastructure, equipment, materials and amenities within schools and create an amiable and pleasant environmental conditions within the classroom. With the availability of proper facilities and equipment, the students will be able to develop motivation towards learning and concentrate well on their studies. In urban schools, there have been implementation of modern and innovative strategies in the teaching and learning methods. But in rural schools, due to lack of scientific and innovative methods, the students need to undergo challenges in acquiring an efficient understanding of academic concepts and achieving academic goals. Therefore, measures need to be formulated to bring about improvements in the system of education.

Secondary Schools

When acquiring an understanding of secondary schools, there are two factors which need to be identified. These are, secondary schools also refer to the buildings where education takes place and it is also referred to the education. The teachers employed in secondary schools, normally specialize in one particular subject. They teach students one particular subject. Students have different teachers for different subjects. In secondary schools, the primary objective of the teachers is to ensure that students acquire an efficient understanding of the academic concepts that may enable them to achieve academic goals. Furthermore, they are required to maintain good terms and relationships with the teachers and fellow students.

In secondary schools, students are well-versed and are required to make selection of the fields, which they have to pursue in higher educational institutions. In secondary schools, it is essential for students to pay adequate attention upon their studies. Though, they do pay attention towards learning of extra-curricular and creative activities as well, but giving priority to the attainment of academic goals is regarded as the major priority in secondary schools. In secondary schools, normally when students experience academic problems, they obtain assistance from teachers and fellow students. Whereas, within homes also their parents make provision of educational resources that may render an effective contribution in helping them achieving academic goals. These include, technologies, learning materials, books, private coaching classes, tutors and so

forth. When students possess motivation towards studies, they make effectual use of these resources to pursue academic goals.

Higher Educational Institutions

The education obtained in higher educational institutions is the education that is acquired on completion of senior secondary education. It is referred to pursuance of Bachelors, masters and doctoral programs. Higher education is primarily meant to prepare the individuals for seeking employment opportunities in various fields. It takes place in colleges and universities. In higher educational institutions, the admission of the students takes place on the basis of their merit, grades, performance in entrance examinations and interviews. There are seats reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. Students are adults, hence, they normally bring in their daily life experiences within the classroom settings. In some cases, instructors and students, belong to the same age group and students are allowed to give ideas and suggestions to their instructors.

In higher educational institutions, students are normally independent. Usually, they migrate to other cities or countries to pursue higher education. Hence, when they are living separately from their families, then they have to be independent and manage all the other responsibilities as well. These include, household responsibilities, living accommodation, other expenses and so forth. Apart from studies, they are engaged in other tasks and activities as well. These include, employment opportunities, honorary jobs, management of household responsibilities and other activities. When they get enrolled in higher educational institutions to pursue professional educational qualifications, it is vital for them to work diligently and resourcefully towards the achievement of academic goals. But, research has indicated that in some cases, individuals work enthusiastically and attain their degrees. Whereas, in other cases, they drop out and pursue other goals. In most cases, when individuals cannot afford higher education, they simply discontinue their studies and get engaged in employment opportunities.

FACTORS IDENTIFYING INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The major factors identifying inequalities in educational opportunities have been stated as follows:

Family Background – The family background of the individuals is regarded as an important factor in acquisition of educational opportunities. Financial status of the individuals is an important factor in influencing family background. When the individuals are engaged in reputed employment opportunities and are financially strong, then they are able to overcome problems and challenges and are able to provide good quality education to their children. On the other hand, when the individuals are not financially strong, belong to deprived, poverty stricken and economically weaker sections of the society, they experience challenges in making provision of good quality education to their children. The individuals, belonging to various occupations, categories and backgrounds have

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recognized the significance of education, but family background and financial position renders an indispensable contribution in promoting inequalities in educational opportunities.

Socio-Economic Status – The socio-economic status of the individuals is regarded to be of utmost significance in the acquisition of educational qualifications. This is primarily characterized by the occupation that the individuals are engaged. For instance, businessmen, who are engaged in production and manufacturing of goods and services may encourage their children to pursue Masters of Business Administration (MBA) educational qualification. Whereas, when individuals are engaged in medical professions, they may encourage their children to pursue medical educational qualifications and so forth. On the other hand, poverty stricken individuals and the individuals, belonging to deprived and marginalized sections of the society may experience financial problems to a major extent in getting their children enrolled in educational institutions. In Government schools, education is provided free of cost, hence, they are fortunate enough to get their children enrolled in Government schools.

Psychological Barriers – The enrolment of students in educational institutions may cause psychological barriers that may have an impact upon their acquisition of education to a major extent. The psychological barriers are the psychological problems, such as, stress, anxiety, pressure, depression and demotivation. Usually, when students migrate to other cities or countries, they experience differences in the system of education. As a result of these differences, they experience problems in acquiring an efficient understanding of the academic concepts. As a consequence, the feel stressed. When they are unable to achieve good grades, and experience academic setbacks, these factors further augment psychological barriers. The extent of psychological barriers may differ among students. Some may experience them to a major extent, whereas, some may experience them to a lesser extent. Whereas, some may not experience them at all and are able to implement academic performance in a well-organized manner.

Choice of Discipline – The individuals may make selection of different disciplines in their pursuance of academic goals. In senior secondary education, they normally make a selection between arts, commerce and science. The differences in the choice of disciplines are attributed to the traditional perceptions of the gender roles. Science and engineering are masculine and are suitable to men. Whereas, health and education are regarded as famine and suitable to women (Caturianas, Uzpelkiene, & Migliarini, 2017). Whereas, in higher educational institutions also, they make selection of the program, based upon their academic scores, interests and abilities. When the individuals are making choice of disciplines, they need to ensure that they will be able to pursue them in an appropriate manner. Research has indicated that in some cases, individuals make selection of the field, but experience problems and difficulties in the achievement of academic goals. The differences in the choice of disciplines are apparent. It is not only in India but in other countries of the world as well.

Teaching-Learning Materials – Teaching-learning materials are regarded as vital factors that promote educational inequalities. The inequalities within the teaching-learning materials are based upon the levels of education, grade levels of students, skills and abilities on the part of the instructors and achievement of academic outcomes. The teaching-learning materials that are used in educational

institutions are, charts, posters, textbooks, technologies, hand-outs, documents, reports, other reading materials, models and so forth. In pre-schools, playthings are also regarded as important teaching-learning materials, as learning of the students begins with play. Whereas, in secondary schools, colleges and universities, instructors make use of technologies, models, charts, posters, books and other reading materials in imparting understanding in terms of academic concepts to the students. When the instructors are making use of teaching-learning materials, they need to be well-equipped with their usage.

Infrastructure – Infrastructure is regarded as an important factor in making provision of amiable and suitable environmental conditions within the educational institutions. The inequalities, particularly regarding infrastructure is primarily depicted within the country in urban and rural schools. In schools in urban communities, the infrastructural facilities are usually in a well-developed state. There are provision of proper furniture, materials, equipment, technologies, civic amenities, restrooms, library facilities, playgrounds and so forth. The availability of proper infrastructure enable the members of the educational institutions to work operatively towards the pursuance of academic goals. On the other hand, in rural schools, there are lack of infrastructural facilities. Hence, these are primary causes promoting drop out of students from schools, especially girls. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate measures and policies that lead to augmentation of infrastructural facilities in rural schools and cause a reduction in the drop-out rate.

Teaching-Learning Methods – In educational institutions at all levels, there are differences in the teaching-learning methods. The differences in these methods are apparent. The teachers are required to make use of these methods in accordance to the grade levels, learning abilities, subjects and concepts and academic goals. The teaching-learning methods that are used in secondary schools are different from the ones, used in colleges and universities. The differences in these methods are normally characterised by ways that are implemented in teaching and learning. For instance, when a teacher is imparting knowledge in English lesson plans, then textbooks are used. Whereas, when a supervisor is supervising his students regarding doctoral thesis, he may make use of technologies. Hence, there are inequalities in the teaching-learning methods at all levels of education.

Programs and Policies within Educational Institutions – The implementation of policies and programs within educational institutions need to be formulated with the main purpose of promoting well-being of the members, including teachers, staff members and students. In schools and in higher educational institutions, research has indicated that women and girls have experienced discriminatory treatment and criminal and violent acts. These acts have had a major influence upon the mind-sets of the individuals and even compel them to drop out of schools. When students discontinue their education, before their educational skills are honed, then it promotes inequality. There have been examples of siblings within the households, who differ from each other in the acquisition of educational qualifications. Therefore, to curb inequality of educational opportunities, it is necessary to formulate programs and policies that are vital to increase the retention rate of students, especially girls.

Health and Well-being – Health and well-being of the individuals matter to a major extent in the acquisition of education. When the individuals are healthy and do not experience any health

problems and illnesses, they are able to concentrate well on their studies. Though research has indicated that individuals with health problems and disabilities are also getting enrolled in educational institutions to pursue educational goals. When they are motivated towards learning, they do not let their health problems and disabilities to cause barriers within the course of achievement of academic goals. Research has indicated that in some cases, individuals experience visual impairments or hearing impairments or are not ambulatory. In such cases, educational institutions have made provision of services to facilitate their learning, such as, disabled friendly ramps, hearing equipment, furniture in classrooms and so forth.

Interest and Enthusiasm – In educational institutions, it the job duty of the instructors to ensure that they put into operation, the teaching-learning methods and instructional strategies in an appropriate manner, so that students are able to acquire an efficient understanding of the concepts. But it is essential on the part of the students to ensure that they pay adequate attention in class, complete their assignments on a regular basis and make sure that they obtain timely assistance and support from instructors and fellow students, particularly in case of complicated concepts. The possession of interest and enthusiasm is regarded as indispensable. When the individuals will possess interest and enthusiasm, they would be motivated towards the implementation of tasks and functions. The differences depicted in the interest and enthusiasm among the members of the educational institutions are important factors in the identification of inequalities in educational opportunities.

Implementation of Evaluation Methods – In educational institutions, at all levels, it is necessary to implement evaluation methods. The primary objective of putting into operation evaluation methods is to identify the flaws and inconsistencies and bring about improvements. The principals, directors and heads and teachers are required to organize discussion meetings, in which they discuss the evaluation methods. These methods need to be implemented fairly. The inequalities in educational opportunities also take place, due to lack of proper evaluation methods or when individuals do not possess adequate skills in terms of bringing about improvements. The commonly used evaluation methods are, class assignments, homework assignments, tests, competitions, presentations, and other activities, which would help the instructors to acknowledge how much the students have learned.

In higher educational institutions, in some of the countries, such as, United States of America, students too are provided with the opportunities to evaluate the performance of the instructors. They are given survey questionnaires, in which, they are required to provide answers to various questions. These include, teaching-learning methods, knowledge and information on the part of the instructors, capabilities to clarify problems and difficulties, availability of the instructors and so forth. These evaluation methods would help the instructors in bringing about improvements in the implementation of their job duties.

Lack of Standardization in Curriculum and Assessment Systems – Lack of standardization in curriculum and assessment systems in some schools and higher educational institutions is one of the crucial factors in promoting inequalities. The reason being, the school practices are different in accordance to the social and ability composition of their intakes. In some cases, schools have higher standards and quality education, whereas, in other schools, there are less demanding expectations in

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terms of the curriculum and assessment systems (Caturianas, Uzpelkiene, & Migliarini, 2017). It is the integral job duty of the teachers to ensure that curriculum and assessment procedures are put into practice in a well-organized manner. When the teachers will be well-aware in terms of making use of these strategies, then they will be able to bring about improvements in the academic performance of the students and facilitate good academic outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Inequality in educational opportunities is referred to the disparities in the acquisition of education as well as in the implementation of other tasks and activities, primarily related to acquisition of education. When acquiring an understanding of inequality in educational opportunities, it is vital to acquire an efficient understanding of the educational institutions. The educational institutions are classified as, pre-schools, elementary schools, secondary schools and higher educational institutions. At all levels of education, the individuals are different from each other. The differences are primarily depicted on the basis of factors, such as, caste, creed, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age and socio-economic background. In higher educational institutions, there are seats reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes as well. The heads and educators need to ensure that there are provision of equal rights and opportunities to all members of the educational institutions.

The factors identifying inequalities in educational opportunities are, family background, socio-economic status, psychological barriers, choice of discipline, teaching-learning materials, infrastructure, teaching-learning methods, programs and policies within educational institutions, health and well-being, interest and enthusiasm, implementation of evaluation methods and lack of standardization in curriculum and assessment systems. These are some of the major factors that promote inequalities in educational opportunities. In some cases, inequalities in terms of acquisition of education cannot be done away with and should be accepted. Whereas, in other cases, it is essential for the members of the educational institutions to ensure that measures are formulated to eliminate inequalities. In India, there are prevalence of inequalities, particularly in urban and rural schools. In urban areas, there are provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, teaching-learning materials, instructional strategies, equipment and civic amenities that are necessary to achieve educational goals. Whereas, in rural schools, these facilities are lacking, which are the major causes for decline in the enrolment and retention rate of students. Therefore, it is vital to make improvements in rural schools. Finally, it can be stated that for bringing about success within the system of education, it is necessary to cause reduction in inequalities.

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