PRE-SERVICE AND IN-SERVICE TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ABOUT EQUITY IN EDUCATION

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Abstract:

Education, in this 21st century, is broadly re-imagined in terms of its role in building human capital and productivity. Equity in education enhances social unity and trust. It makes the society fairer and helps avoid the large social costs of marginalised adults with few basic skills. The "National New Education Policy 2020" aims to make education more inclusive, equitable, and accessible to all, with a special emphasis on marginalized communities. It emphasizes the development of skills for the 21st century, such as life skills, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving, establishment of new institutions, such as digital universities, as well as the use of technology to support students in learning. Teachers, whether trainees (pre-service) or in-service, have a greater responsibility of ascertaining equity in education.

A research study was conducted to find out the perception of pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education. The study reveals that there lies significant difference in the perception of pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education.

Introduction:

The life of a person is greatly influenced by the quality of education being received. Therefore, aim of the schools is to provide children with knowledge, understanding, skills and interpersonal competences that are essential for their development of adult life / livelihood and contributions to economy and society. Schools can provide unique learning opportunities that may not be available to children in disadvantaged environments, especially if their home environment lacks resources and support for learning. More and more countries are seeking to enhance the performance of all students to reduce achievement gaps between different groups of students (race, language, religion, class, clans, culture, gender, ability). There has been greater focus on ensuring that resources are directed to those areas where improvements in teaching and learning can be achieved better. An optimal distribution and use of resources (man&material) would achieve both efficiency and equity objectives together, by ensuring that resources are channelled to where they are most needed.

Equity as inclusion means ensuring that all students reach at least a basic minimum level of skills. Equity as fairness implies that personal or socio-economic circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin or family background are not obstacles to educational success. Hence, it is a responsibility to ensure that every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need during their education irrespective of race, gender,

ethnicity, language, disability, family background or family income. India's New Education Policy 2020 is framed with a goal of providing equitable education that is fair and inclusive and support the children to reach their learning potential without either formally or informally pre-setting barriers or lowering expectations.

In this 21st century, education is broadly re-imagined in terms of its role in building human capital and productivity. Contemporary rationalisations of equity in policy are not only linked to the economy but it is capable of operating in stratified education systems, defined by an increasing array of market technologies. Responsiveness to user demand seems to be the new policy mantra. In this environment, schools are thus required to be equitable places, committing to provide 'every child, every opportunity'. They should be flexible and adaptive to service providers, capable of packaging different types of education for consumption by different young people and communities.

Key terms:

"Pre-service teachers" are the student teachers of B.Ed college.

"In-service teachers" are the teachers who are already working as school teachers.

"Equity in education" means that each child receives what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential in various dimensions–school system, educational practice, community&parents, resources.

Reviews:

The researcher has gone through many researches on equity in education such as Pre-service teachers' initial perceptions of equity in education: implications for multicultural pedagogy in teacher education (James Christopher McShay, Iowa State University), Perception of Educational Equity and School Climate (Elisabeth Ferreira D'Azevedo, George Fox University), Equity and social justice in teaching and teacher education (Baljit Kaur), Exploring Teachers' Understanding of Equity and Inclusive Education and Their Pedagogical Choices, Kelley Porteous Jones, Teachers' Perceptions of Dealing with Mixed Ability Classrooms (Smruti Mirani &SugraChunawala).

Need of the study:

Equity in education enhances social unity and trust. Equity in education would help reduce school failure and dropout rates. It makes the society fairer and helps avoid the large social costs of marginalised adults with few basic skills.

From various researches it is understood that the term equity is being used in many ways by different thinkers, educators and policy makers. The conceptual framework defined in the OECD Report "*No More Failures"*, equity in education can be seen through two dimensions: fairness and inclusion (Field, Kuczera and Pont, 2007). Equity in education has been mentioned in various education policies of India. Indian Constitution has committed itself in providing free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of fourteen. Earlier National Policy on Education, 1968 and 1986 also laid special emphasis on removal of disparity and equalize educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who had so far been denied equality. Glenn C. Savage, discussed "Tailored equities in schools as a response to local conditions, the needs and desires of local communities and markets". PingPing Zhu Lincoln described "educational equity as the software of an equal

education that ensures students the spiritual equity of education from educational, cultural, and psychological aspects".

In the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), 2001 and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA), 2010 special focus has been given regarding access to education to disadvantaged groups, minorities and girls who are often left behind. As per the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, every child between the age of six and fourteen years has the fundamental right to education. The RTE Act makes child friendly quality education, the fundamental right of every child. A child-friendly school (CFS) ensures every child an environment that is physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically enabling. Inclusive Education (IE) is also an approach ensuring equity by educating the children with disability and learning difficulties with that of normal ones within the same roof. It helps bringing all students together in one classroom and community, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, and seeks to maximize the potential of all students.

Similar treatment to all individuals from the point of view of rights and opportunities is called equality. The right of equality has been provided to all in our Indian Constitution but special concessions (facilities) have been provided to scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, backward castes and classes, women and children. Here, we have various types of schools run by different agencies, i.e., government, government aided, private and minority institutions, providing educational access to children from diverse backgrounds. The NEP 2020 is also based on the principle of full equity and inclusion in educational institutions ensuring all students to thrive in the educational system. This policy aims to make education more inclusive, equitable, and accessible to all, with a special emphasis on marginalized communities. It emphasizes the development of skills for the 21st century, such as life skills, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving.

Thus teaching and teachers are crucial in the process of social justice and transformation. Teachers may bring their values, assumptions, and judgments to play in the fields in which they operate as "teachers". The purpose of being a teacher and their relationship to their students is to be understood. Therefore, equity must be explicitly embedded in teacher education programme for the pre-service teachers.

Teachers whether trainees or already in-service have a greater responsibility of ascertaining equity in education. In India the pre-service teachers have a course on equity and inclusive education, where they acquire the knowledge and understanding about equity. The national system of education, on par with international organizations, has adopted an education system that emphasizes education for all. This is why pre-service and in-service teachers typically should have regard for equitable teaching as being a priority in the school education environment.

Taking into consideration the present scenario, it is very much essential that the teachers should have proper attitudes, values, knowledge, understanding and skills to function sensitively and responsibly in the increasingly diverse democratic schools and society. In an educational system for all students to benefit and succeed, teachers being the champion of social justice ensure that equity in education is attained.

Since the meaning of equity in education is gradually evolving and becoming more flexible and, more and more voice is raised about the importance of social justice, multiculturalism, inclusiveness in education, it is interesting

to know how the teachers who are the leading actors of providing equity in education perceive and implement it in the present scenario. In earlier researches perception of teachers of equity in education in relation to race, school climate, diverse learners is found. But in this present study attempt has been made to find out the perception of both pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education mainly in four dimensions: school system, educational practices, parent & community and resources.

Delimitations of the study:

The present research study is delimited to Navi Mumbai only. The pre-service and in-service teachers of Navi Mumbai have been taken as samples for this study. Pre-service teachers are the student teachers of B.Ed colleges of Navi Mumbai. The In-service teachers are the teachers of ICSE, CBSE and State Board English medium schools of Navi Mumbai.

Objectives of the study:

1. To study the perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education in various dimensions – school system, educational practice, community&parents, resources.
2. To find out the difference between the perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education.
3. To find out the difference in perceptions of teachers of different boards about equity in education.

Hypotheses

- There is no significant difference in perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education.
- There is no significant difference in perceptions of teachers of different boards about equity in education.

Methodology: For the present research descriptive survey method is used.

Sample: 200 pre-service and in-service teachers have been taken as sample for the present research study by simple random sampling technique.

Tool: For the collection of data, questionnaire on perception of pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education was prepared by the researcher. The tool consists of 33 items under four dimensions-School system, Educational practice, Community&Parents, Resources. The test-retest reliability coefficient of the tool is .84. The content validity of the questionnaire was ensured through the consultation with experts in the field.

Results and Discussion:

Table-1: Perceptions of Pre-service and In-service teachers about equity in education in various dimensions

Dimensions	Pre-service teachers' perception		In-service teachers' perception		t value	Significance at .05 level
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
School system	48.68	3.42	48.01	3.90	1.29	NS
Educational practice	34.14	2.37	33.47	2.82	1.82	NS
Community& Parents	23.28	2.23	23	2.56	.83	NS
Resources	30.19	2.81	29.05	2.57	2.99	Sig

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Table-1 depicts the mean and standard deviations of perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education with respect to dimensions such as, school system, educational practice, community&parents, resources. It is observed that the pre-service and in-service teachers do not significantly differ in their perceptions about equity in education in school system, educational practice and community&parents. But they differ significantly in their perceptions about equity in education in resources.

Table-2: Difference in perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education

Categories	N	Mean	SD	t value	Significance at .05level
Pre-service teachers	100	136.32	7.57	2.06	Sig
In-service teachers	100	133.93	8.78		

The t value is 2.06. The p value is .0406. The result is significant at $p<.05$

From Table-2, it is evident that there is significant difference in perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education. Hence, the hypothesis 1 is to be rejected. According to hypothesis 1 there is no significant difference in perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education. But from the result it was found that the t value 2.06 is significant at 0.05 level. Therefore the stated null hypothesis is rejected.

Table-3: Result of ANOVA on difference in perceptions of teachers from different boards about equity in education

Categories/School Boards	Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean of Squares	F Value	Significance at .05 level
State Board ICSE Board	Between	55.7714	2	27.8857	.34566	NS
CBSE Board	Within	8228.8571	102	80.6751		

The F ratio value is .34566. The p value is .708583. The difference is not significant at $p<.05$.

From Table-3, it is evident that there is no significant difference in perceptions of teachers from State Board, ICSE Board and CBSE Board schools about equity in education. Hence, the second hypothesis is accepted and retained. The teachers from State Board, ICSE Board and CBSE Board do not significantly differ in their perceptions about equity in education.

Conclusion:

This study reveals that teachers of different boards-State Board, ICSE and CBSE do not significantly differ in their perception about equity in education. But the pre-service and in-service teachers' difference in perceptions about equity in education was found to be significant. It is also observed that the differences in perceptions of pre-service and in-service teachers about equity in education with respect to school system, educational practice and community&parents is not significant.

Result shows that both pre-service and in-service teachers are very well aware of and understand that the equity

in education in school systems in form of policies, safe environment and administration can be attained. They believe that schools can adopt various innovative strategies in curriculum in order to meet the needs of diverse learners. Both pre-service and in-service teachers also realize that without the involvement of other helping professionals from community and participation of parents, equity in education is not possible. The pre-service teachers have better understanding about the mobilization of resources for achieving equity in education where as the in-service teachers do not have much clarity about the availability of various resources like, basic infrastructure, instilling moral behaviour among students, incentives to dedicated teachers, providing professional development to teachers that can be utilized for the benefit of students and the society at large. This difference between perceptions on resources availability and utilisation among pre-service and in-service teachers could be due to level of their exposures and awareness in various forms of resources. The in-service terachers appear to have not kept themselves updated with the developments and have limited their understanding of resources as infractructure and equipment availability. However, the resources, actually, has a broader outlook and concept which includes all aspects of our environment. Resources are all those that communities need to function effectively, undertake change and facilitate adoption of a healthy life based on the current development and energy sources.

NEP 2020 provides wider picture of resources such as life skills, greater emphasis of creativity, critical thinking and basic skills. Life skills certainly helps us to understand our inner conflicts, encourage creative and constructive use of our mind and enable us to learn how to optimise life and not to be a victim of situations. Education is not just for giving us livelihood but giving us the art of living wholly and enjoyably. Therefore, resources are to be understood as those that is potentially available to us which are then used effectively and efficiently for the development and creation of new things for the betterment of the mankind and society. Within the ambit of the wider perspectives of resources, it is possible to attain equity in education in India that provides resources to children from diverse background.

Both pre-service and in-service teachers understand that inequitable education policies and practices have a negative impact on individuals and also it limits economic and social development. Effective school systems require the right combination of high quality and well-trained personnel and teachers, adequate educational resources and facilities, and motivated students ready to learn. Designing the right policies to improve equity and reduce school failures is essential. NEP 2020 has rightly enlisted full equity and inclusion in its fundamental principles. It believes in an education institution in which every student feels welcomed and cared for, where a safe and stimulating learning environment exists with wide range of learning experiences, good physical infrastructure and appropriate resources conducive to learning are available to all students.

It is observed that schools that foster participation by parents and help parents to support their children in their school work tend to have definitely better outcomes. Schools need to measure success in improving equity, performance and quality education. The school and its management with their available resources need to ensure that they are being directed to those most in need.

Teachers' perception and understanding of equity in education is very essential and beneficial for the smooth

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functioning of school and the society. Efforts are needed to bring about an attitudinal change among school management. A collective effort on the part of schools and the community is needed for addressing all forms of inequities in education. All educational institutions should realise that investing in equity in education has high returns: in the current context, it represents one of the best strategies that schools, governments and societies can adopt.

Recommendations:

The above major findings and conclusions helped the researcher to suggest the following for achieving equity in education.

- In the present education scenario multiple challenges related to equity, equality and quality can be tackled with multi-pronged, context-specific strategies for addressing the needs of children from diverse backgrounds.

- In preparation of study materials much care should be taken for the inclusion of multilingualism and bilingual approach.

- All teachers should be trained on humane concerns such as caring and sharing, recognizing and valuing each other's contributions, promoting diversity, tolerance, and learning to live together. These concerns should be integrated with disciplinary knowledge, as well as topics related to gender, life skills, environment, conflict management, and social tensions, in order to provide a comprehensive and holistic approach to education.

- In the school system, safe and supportive environment can be ensured by providing classrooms with proper ventilation, lighting, basic facilities and medical aid with equipment for catering to medical exigencies of teachers and students.

- Provisions should be made for mentoring programs to support new teachers and create a conducive work environment that enhances teacher effectiveness and retention. Additionally, adequate financial and career incentives should be developed to attract and retain highly committed teachers who demonstrate high-quality performance.

- Early tracking of students through selection should be deferred.

- Schools should give more emphasis in reducing the dropout rates and increasing the enrolment, retention and performance of students.

- Schools can offer learning experiences like socio-emotional skills that a child may not obtain at home, particularly if he or she is living in a disadvantaged environment.

- It is good to strengthen the links between school and home to help disadvantaged parents help their children to learn.

- There should be proper mechanism for monitoring information on attendance, performance and involvement of students in school activities.

- Teachers can provide clear guidelines on what is expected from parents.

- Efforts should be focused on directing existing education expenditures towards promoting equity in education. This requires a targeted approach that ensures that education funding is distributed in a way that

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- supports equal access to quality education for all students, especially those who are disadvantaged.
- Instead of trying to get recognition only on the basis of results, schools should emphasise on redistribution of educational resources and representation of all the diverse groups in the educational process to bring out the best of the students.

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