



THE STUDY ON EQUAL RIGHTS IN ACCESSING GENERAL EDUCATION IN SEVERAL DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND LESSONS FOR VIETNAM

O ESTUDO SOBRE A IGUALDADE DE DIREITOS NO ACESSO À EDUCAÇÃO GERAL EM VÁRIOS PAÍSES DESENVOLVIDOS E LIÇÕES PARA O VIETNAME

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the right to educational equality in developed countries and its implications for Vietnam. Using a qualitative research approach, it analyzes policy documents, reports, and academic literature from countries such as the United States, Germany, Japan, and Nordic nations. The research highlights key strategies that promote educational equality, including inclusive education, equitable resource allocation, financial aid programs, and policies aimed at reducing socio-economic and geographical disparities. In the United States, legal frameworks such as Title IX and IDEA have played crucial roles in promoting gender and disability rights in education, while federal initiatives address socio-economic inequalities. Germany's dual education system provides both academic and vocational training, yet socio-economic stratification remains a challenge. Japan emphasizes inclusive education for students with disabilities and closing the urban-rural education gap. Nordic countries, particularly Finland and Sweden, are recognized for their highly equitable and inclusive education policies, ensuring free education and strong student support systems. Drawing from these experiences, Vietnam can enhance its education system by prioritizing universal and inclusive education, improving resource distribution, expanding financial support for disadvantaged students, and addressing rural-urban disparities. Teacher training and social integration policies are also crucial in ensuring equal learning opportunities. By adopting best practices from developed nations and tailoring them to its specific needs, Vietnam can work towards a more equitable education system that guarantees equal opportunities for all learners, fostering long-term social and economic development.

Keywords: Educational Equality, Accessibility, Fairness, Support Systems, Universal Access





RESUMO

Este estudo explora o direito à igualdade educacional em países desenvolvidos e suas implicações para o Vietnã. Usando uma abordagem de pesquisa qualitativa, ele analisa documentos de políticas, relatórios e literatura acadêmica de países como Estados Unidos, Alemanha, Japão e nações nórdicas. A pesquisa destaca as principais estratégias que promovem a igualdade educacional, incluindo educação inclusiva, alocação equitativa de recursos, programas de auxílio financeiro e políticas voltadas para a redução de disparidades socioeconômicas e geográficas. Nos Estados Unidos, estruturas legais como o Título IX e a IDEA desempenharam papéis cruciais na promoção de direitos de gênero e deficiência na educação, enquanto iniciativas federais abordam desigualdades socioeconômicas. O sistema educacional dual da Alemanha fornece treinamento acadêmico e vocacional, mas a estratificação socioeconômica continua sendo um desafio. O Japão enfatiza a educação inclusiva para alunos com deficiência e fecha a lacuna educacional urbana-rural. Os países nórdicos, particularmente a Finlândia e a Suécia, são reconhecidos por suas políticas educacionais altamente equitativas e inclusivas, garantindo educação gratuita e fortes sistemas de apoio aos alunos. Com base nessas experiências, o Vietnã pode aprimorar seu sistema educacional priorizando a educação universal e inclusiva, melhorando a distribuição de recursos, expandindo o suporte financeiro para alunos desfavorecidos e abordando as disparidades rurais-urbanas. O treinamento de professores e as políticas de integração social também são cruciais para garantir oportunidades iguais de aprendizagem. Ao adotar as melhores práticas de nações desenvolvidas e adaptá-las às suas necessidades específicas, o Vietnã pode trabalhar em direção a um sistema educacional mais equitativo que garanta oportunidades iguais para todos os alunos, promovendo o desenvolvimento social e econômico de longo prazo.

Palavras-chave: Igualdade educacional; Acessibilidade; Justiça; Sistemas de apoio. Acesso universal

1. INTRODUCTION

Access to education is a fundamental human right recognized globally, yet its implementation remains a significant challenge in many parts of the world. This study examines the concept of equal rights in accessing general education in several developed countries, exploring how different policies, structures, and practices contribute to or hinder equitable access to quality education. The focus is placed on how these countries address barriers such as economic inequality, racial segregation, and privatization of education, and the lessons they offer for Vietnam's efforts in achieving universal education for all.

The right to education is enshrined in various international agreements, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Despite this, disparities persist, with marginalized groups often facing greater obstacles in accessing education. Scholars such as Tomaševski (2003) and Coomans et al. (2005) highlight the impact of privatization and economic policies on educational inequality, stressing the importance of ensuring that education





remains accessible and free from discriminatory practices. In the context of developed countries, the ongoing challenges of racial segregation and unequal resource distribution in schools are discussed by authors like Farley et al. (1978) and Frankenberg (2009), who analyze how historical and systemic inequalities continue to shape access to education.

For Vietnam, these international experiences and insights provide valuable lessons. Vietnam has made significant progress in expanding access to education, yet challenges remain in achieving true equality, particularly for rural and disadvantaged populations. The study aims to explore how policies and practices in developed countries could inform Vietnam's educational reforms, particularly in terms of inclusivity, resource allocation, and reducing disparities.

By reviewing the experiences of countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and other European nations, this paper seeks to identify best practices that could guide Vietnam in enhancing its educational system. The findings will provide a comprehensive understanding of the current global landscape of education equality and offer practical recommendations for policy improvements in Vietnam.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE RIGHT TO EQUALITY IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

2.1. Definition of the Right to Equality in Education

The concept of the right to equality in education is grounded in the belief that education should be accessible to all individuals, irrespective of their socio-economic background, ethnicity, or physical abilities. According to Besley, Ac, and Peters (2007), equality in education is not merely about providing access, but about ensuring equitable opportunities, resources, and outcomes for every learner. This broader view of educational equality emphasizes not only the availability of education but also the quality and relevance of educational content offered to diverse student populations.

The right to equality in education encompasses several critical components, including learning opportunities, financial support, physical infrastructure, and resource distribution. As Coomans et al. (2005) argue, these elements must be considered holistically to ensure that education is truly inclusive and accessible. Learning opportunities must be free from discrimination based on gender, disability, or socio-economic status, with systems in place to accommodate the unique needs of different students. Financial support is crucial for those from economically disadvantaged





backgrounds, ensuring that all children have the necessary resources to succeed in their education (Tomaševski, 2006).

Moreover, physical infrastructure plays a pivotal role in promoting equality. Tomaševski (2003) points out that adequate facilities, such as accessible schools, proper teaching materials, and supportive learning environments, are fundamental in ensuring all children have the chance to thrive academically. Without such infrastructure, marginalized groups, particularly those in remote areas, face greater barriers to education.

Fairness in resource allocation is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of achieving equality in education. Tomaševski (2005) and Klees & Thapliyal (2007) highlight that unequal distribution of resources often leads to disparities in educational outcomes. These disparities can be seen in the context of public versus private schooling, rural versus urban access, and in the treatment of minority or disabled students. In countries like the United States, for example, historical segregation has resulted in unequal educational opportunities for racial minorities, despite the legal frameworks put in place to ensure educational equality (Klees, 2016; Farley et al., 1978).

Thus, the definition of the right to equality in education extends beyond mere access to schooling. It involves a comprehensive approach that includes equal opportunity, financial support, necessary infrastructure, and equitable distribution of resources to ensure every learner can realize their full potential. In this light, education becomes not just a public service, but a fundamental human right, as emphasized by Fait (2015) and others.

The work of organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF underscores the necessity of international collaboration to support and enforce this right. As Volio (1979) emphasizes, the right to education is an essential pillar of child development and a necessary condition for achieving broader human rights goals.

Thus, the definition of the right to equality in education must be understood as multi-faceted, incorporating elements of accessibility, fairness, and support. To truly achieve equality, education systems around the world must not only aim to provide universal access but must also ensure that every child, regardless of background, has the tools and opportunities to succeed.





2.2. The Importance of Equality in Education

Education serves as a fundamental driver of social mobility, economic growth, and national development. Ensuring equality in education is not merely a moral or ethical obligation but a crucial strategy for fostering inclusive societies and sustainable progress. Various scholars and international organizations have highlighted the transformative power of education in reducing inequalities and promoting human rights (Fait, 2015; Tomaševski, 2006).

At the individual level, educational equality enables personal development by providing learners with equal opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for their future careers. Research by Denison (1962) emphasizes that education is a key determinant of economic productivity, contributing directly to both individual and societal prosperity. Without equal access to quality education, disadvantaged groups are more likely to experience intergenerational cycles of poverty and limited social mobility (Klees, 2016).

From a societal perspective, equality in education fosters social cohesion by reducing disparities among different demographic groups. As Coomans, Wolf, and A (2005) argue, a well-structured educational system that ensures fairness in resource distribution plays a pivotal role in preventing segregation and systemic discrimination. The desegregation efforts in the United States following *Brown v. Board of Education* were a critical example of how educational policies can directly impact racial and economic inequalities (Kluger, 1975; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). Moreover, research by Frankenberg (2009) highlights the continued impact of segregation in American schools, demonstrating the necessity of policies that actively promote equality.

At the national level, a more equitable education system leads to a stronger, more competitive workforce, ultimately driving economic and technological advancement. The Nordic countries, particularly Finland and Sweden, have demonstrated that investing in universal, high-quality education results in greater innovation, lower unemployment rates, and higher overall living standards (McMillan, 2010). In contrast, countries with highly stratified education systems often struggle with long-term economic disparities and social instability (Hillmert & Jacob, 2003).

The role of education in human rights protection is also well-documented. According to Tomaševski (2005), framing education as a tradable service rather than





a fundamental right exacerbates inequalities, leaving marginalized populations at risk. To address this issue, UNESCO and UNICEF have consistently advocated for policies that reinforce education as a universal right, ensuring that all children, regardless of socio-economic background, have access to quality schooling (Volio, 1979).

Thus, the right to equality in education is indispensable for fostering a just and progressive society. Whether viewed from an individual, societal, or national perspective, equitable education policies contribute to social stability, economic prosperity, and the fulfillment of fundamental human rights. Policymakers must continue to prioritize investments in education to bridge gaps in access and ensure that no student is left behind (Besley, Ac, & Peters, 2007).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted as qualitative research, employing documentary research as the primary method. By analyzing existing literature, reports, and policy documents, the study aimed to understand the right to equality in education from multiple perspectives and apply relevant findings to the Vietnamese context.

The research followed a two-pronged approach. First, secondary data analysis was carried out by examining a wide range of documents, including books, research reports, and policy papers from various countries and international organizations. These sources provided insights into global perspectives on educational equality. Second, a comparative and analytical approach was adopted to evaluate educational policies and practices in developed countries and compare them with the current situation in Vietnam. By identifying similarities and differences, the study derived lessons that could be applied to improve educational equality in Vietnam.

The selection of sources was based on credibility and relevance to the topic. The study utilized reports from major international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and OECD, which provide comprehensive data and analysis on global educational equality. Additionally, scholarly research on educational policies from developed countries was reviewed to gain insights into effective strategies for promoting equal educational opportunities.





4. ANALYSIS OF THE STATE OF EQUALITY IN EDUCATION IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

4.1. United States

The United States has implemented various policies and legal frameworks to promote educational equality, aiming to provide all students with fair and equitable learning opportunities. Over the decades, legislative measures and government-funded programs have played a crucial role in addressing disparities in access to education, particularly for marginalized communities.

One of the most significant legislative actions ensuring educational equality is Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibits discrimination based on sex in federally funded education programs. This law has been instrumental in promoting gender equity in schools, particularly in sports and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education (U.S. Department of Education). Additionally, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that children with disabilities receive free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment possible, ensuring that students with special needs are not excluded from mainstream education (McMillan, 2010).

Furthermore, federal initiatives such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and its reauthorizations, including the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), have aimed to bridge achievement gaps among students from different socio-economic backgrounds. These acts emphasize standardized testing, accountability, and additional support for disadvantaged students (Klees & Thapliyal, 2007). However, scholars have debated the effectiveness of these policies, arguing that heavy reliance on standardized assessments has sometimes widened educational disparities rather than closing them (Besley, Ac, & Peters, 2007).

Racial and economic segregation in U.S. public schools has also been a persistent challenge. Despite the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) Supreme Court ruling, which declared racial segregation in schools unconstitutional, de facto segregation remains an issue in many districts (Kluger, 1975; Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). Studies have shown that low-income and minority students continue to have limited access to high-quality schools, experienced teachers, and advanced educational resources (Frankenberg, 2009). In response, programs such as





Head Start, which provides early childhood education to low-income families, and Pell Grants, which support low-income college students, have been implemented to mitigate these disparities (Denison, 1962).

Despite these efforts, challenges persist, particularly in funding disparities between public schools. Since U.S. public education is primarily funded through local property taxes, schools in affluent areas tend to receive more resources than those in low-income communities (Coomans, Wolf, & A, 2005). This funding inequality has led to calls for education finance reform and policies that promote more equitable resource allocation across districts (Tomaševski, 2005).

Thus, while the United States has made significant strides in promoting educational equality through legal protections and support programs, challenges such as funding disparities and persistent segregation continue to hinder full equality in education. Future reforms must focus on ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, have equal access to quality education and the resources needed to succeed (Fait, 2015).

4.2. Germany

Germany has established a dual education system that integrates both academic and vocational training, providing students with diverse pathways to acquire skills and enter the labor market. This model allows students to choose between university-based education and apprenticeship programs, ensuring that both theoretical and practical knowledge are emphasized. The system is highly regarded for its ability to bridge the gap between education and employment, reducing youth unemployment and fostering economic growth (Denison, 1962).

In addition to the dual education model, Germany employs educational stratification policies, which categorize students into different tracks based on academic performance and career aspirations. After primary school, students are directed into one of three main types of secondary schools: Gymnasium (academic-oriented), Realschule (intermediate education), and Hauptschule (basic education focused on vocational training). This structured stratification aims to provide specialized education that aligns with students' abilities and career prospects (Hillmert & Jacob, 2003). However, critics argue that this system reinforces socio-economic inequalities, as students from privileged backgrounds are more likely to attend



Gymnasium and pursue higher education, while those from lower-income families tend to enter vocational training earlier (McMillan, 2010).

Despite concerns regarding social mobility, Germany has implemented various policies to ensure equitable access to education. Financial support programs, such as BAföG (Federal Training Assistance Act), provide scholarships and student loans to low-income students, allowing them to pursue higher education without financial burdens. Additionally, initiatives focusing on immigrant and refugee students aim to integrate marginalized groups into the educational system, promoting social inclusion and equal opportunities (Coomans, Wolf, & A, 2005).

Overall, Germany's education system is a well-structured model that balances academic and vocational training, offering diverse learning opportunities for students from different social classes. However, while the dual education system enhances employability and workforce readiness, continued reforms are needed to address socio-economic disparities and ensure that all students, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to advance in their educational and professional careers (Klees, 2016; Tomaševski, 2006).

4.3. Japan

In Japan, the government has made significant strides in ensuring educational equality, particularly for students with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, including children from rural areas or low-income families. The Japanese education system has long prioritized inclusive education, offering specialized support services for disabled students. Special education schools, along with resource rooms in regular schools, allow students with disabilities to receive tailored instruction in environments that meet their unique needs. Additionally, the Japanese government provides various forms of financial support, including scholarships and allowances, to ensure that students from economically disadvantaged families can access education without being hindered by financial barriers. Programs aimed at reducing the urban-rural education gap are also prominent, with efforts such as transportation subsidies and rural-specific initiatives designed to provide equal educational opportunities to children living in remote areas.

A key feature of Japan's educational support for disadvantaged students is its commitment to universal access to education. As Tomaševski (2003) highlights, the right to education should not only be conceptualized as access to schools but also as





the opportunity for quality learning, which Japan has focused on ensuring for its most marginalized groups. This aligns with the broader principles of human rights education that emphasize the importance of equality in learning opportunities for all children, regardless of their socio-economic status or physical ability (Fait, 2015; Coomans et al., 2005). Japan's policies also reflect a wider commitment to meeting its international obligations on education as outlined in documents such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stresses the importance of education for inclusive development (Volio, 1979).

4.4. Nordic Countries (Sweden, Finland)

The Nordic countries, particularly Sweden and Finland, are widely recognized for their comprehensive and inclusive education systems that focus on ensuring equal opportunities for all students. These countries have implemented education policies that do not discriminate based on gender, race, or religion, fostering an environment where every student, regardless of background, has access to high-quality education.

In Finland, the education system is built on principles of equity and inclusivity, providing free education to all children from primary school to university. Finland's policies emphasize equal access to education, ensuring that resources are distributed in a way that minimizes disparities between students from different social backgrounds. One of the key features of Finland's education system is the high level of support for students with disabilities, where special education services are integrated into mainstream schools, making education accessible to all students. This is backed by strong national policies that require schools to offer personalized learning plans for students who need additional support (Tomašević, 2003; Besley & Peters, 2007).

Similarly, Sweden has also enacted progressive education policies that provide equitable opportunities for students from all walks of life. The Swedish model of education emphasizes inclusivity and equality, and the government has established strong systems to support students with disabilities and those from underrepresented groups. Education in Sweden is free and compulsory, and the government ensures that disadvantaged students receive additional help, whether through financial aid, school meals, or after-school support programs. Additionally, Sweden has introduced initiatives to close the achievement gap by offering targeted support to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, ensuring that every child has the chance to succeed (Tomašević, 2006; Fait, 2015).





These policies have contributed significantly to the high levels of educational attainment in both countries, making them models for equity in education. The Nordic approach to education has proven to be successful not only in ensuring that no child is left behind, but also in creating social cohesion and mobility. Through the combination of government funding, inclusive policies, and a focus on equality, Sweden and Finland have built education systems that truly reflect the principles of social justice.

5. LESSONS FOR VIETNAM

The experiences of developed countries in promoting equality in education offer valuable insights for Vietnam as it strives to achieve universal education and ensure equal access for all its citizens. While Vietnam has made significant strides in improving educational access, the nation still faces considerable challenges in addressing disparities in access to quality education, particularly for disadvantaged groups in rural areas, ethnic minorities, and students with disabilities. Drawing from the education policies of the United States, Germany, Japan, and Nordic countries like Sweden and Finland, Vietnam can adopt several key lessons to improve its educational system.

Universal and Inclusive Education One of the foremost lessons from developed countries is the importance of a universal and inclusive education system. Finland and Sweden, in particular, have shown that a strong focus on inclusivity—ensuring that every child, regardless of background or ability, has access to quality education—can lead to high educational attainment and social cohesion. Both countries integrate special education services into mainstream schools, which not only provides equal learning opportunities for students with disabilities but also helps reduce the stigma associated with special needs education (Tomaševski, 2003; Fait, 2015). Vietnam can learn from these countries by enhancing its special education services and ensuring that schools are equipped to provide tailored support for children with disabilities.

Resource Allocation and Equity Ensuring equitable distribution of resources is a critical aspect of achieving equality in education. In Finland, resources are allocated in a manner that minimizes disparities between students from different socio-economic backgrounds, ensuring that children in disadvantaged areas receive the support they need (Tomaševski, 2006). Similarly, Sweden provides additional financial





aid and after-school programs to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, ensuring that they are not left behind (Fait, 2015). Vietnam could benefit from implementing policies that ensure a more equitable distribution of educational resources, particularly in rural and underserved areas, where schools often lack the necessary facilities, teaching materials, and qualified staff.

Addressing Socio-economic Disparities Socio-economic disparities in access to education remain a major issue in Vietnam, particularly in rural regions where families face financial hardships. The U.S. and Germany have implemented various financial aid programs to ensure that students from low-income families can access quality education without the burden of tuition fees or other financial barriers (Klees & Thapliyal, 2007). Programs such as scholarships, school meal plans, and financial support for school-related expenses have proven to be effective in providing equitable access to education. Vietnam can take a similar approach by expanding financial assistance programs and ensuring that education is truly free for all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Rural-Urban Education Gap The education gap between rural and urban areas remains one of the most significant challenges in Vietnam's education system. Japan's emphasis on closing the rural-urban education gap through transportation subsidies and rural-specific initiatives can serve as a model (Tomaševski, 2003). Japan's commitment to ensuring that students in remote areas have access to quality education through targeted policies should inspire similar efforts in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government could invest in infrastructure and transportation to ensure that children in rural areas can attend schools without significant barriers. Additionally, increasing the number of qualified teachers in rural schools and providing professional development opportunities could further help bridge the educational gap between urban and rural students.

Reducing Segregation and Promoting Social Cohesion Historical and systemic segregation in education has been a persistent issue in many developed countries, including the U.S. (Frankenberg, 2009). Although Vietnam does not face the same racial segregation issues as the U.S., ethnic disparities remain a significant concern. Vietnam's education system must ensure that ethnic minority students have equal access to education and are provided with support tailored to their unique needs. Policies that promote ethnic integration in schools and prevent discrimination based on





ethnicity or socio-economic status are essential for fostering social cohesion and creating an inclusive learning environment.

Support for Teachers and Quality Education Finally, ensuring that teachers are well-trained and adequately supported is essential for providing high-quality education. Developed countries like Sweden and Finland have implemented rigorous teacher training programs and continue to invest in professional development to ensure that educators are equipped to meet the diverse needs of their students (Besley, Ac, & Peters, 2007). Vietnam can improve the quality of its education by investing in teacher training, particularly in rural and underserved areas, where teachers may not have access to the same professional development opportunities as their urban counterparts.

Thus, Vietnam can learn from the policies and practices of developed countries to enhance the inclusivity, equity, and overall quality of its education system. By focusing on universal access, equitable resource distribution, financial support for disadvantaged students, and addressing the rural-urban education gap, Vietnam can move closer to achieving true equality in education. Additionally, policies that promote social cohesion, teacher support, and special education services will ensure that all students, regardless of their background or ability, have the opportunity to succeed. With continued reforms and targeted efforts, Vietnam can build an education system that truly reflects the principles of equality and social justice, ensuring that every child has access to a quality education.

6. CONCLUSION

Ensuring equal access to education is a fundamental principle in achieving social justice and sustainable development. Through an analysis of educational policies in developed countries such as the United States, Germany, Japan, and the Nordic nations, this study has highlighted key strategies that contribute to educational equality. These include inclusive education systems, equitable resource allocation, financial support for disadvantaged students, and targeted efforts to bridge socio-economic and geographical disparities.

For Vietnam, these insights offer valuable lessons in refining its education policies to promote equal opportunities for all learners. While Vietnam has made significant progress in expanding access to education, challenges remain, particularly in addressing inequalities faced by ethnic minorities, rural students, and those from





low-income families. By implementing policies that prioritize inclusivity, improve funding distribution, and support teacher development, Vietnam can further strengthen its education system to ensure that no child is left behind.

Ultimately, achieving educational equality requires continuous efforts from policymakers, educators, and society as a whole. By learning from international best practices and adapting them to the local context, Vietnam can work toward a more just and inclusive education system—one that empowers every student with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in an increasingly globalized world.

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