

Investigating Equity and Social Justice Concerns in Teaching and Teacher Education

A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract

This paper delves into the themes of equity and social justice within the context of teaching and teacher education in India. It contends that social justice is contingent upon the realisation of equality in diverse social settings, measured through equitable outcomes. Central to this is the acknowledgment and embracement of diversity as a manifestation of equality, and inclusion as a tangible demonstration of fairness. Within the realm of education, diversity entails recognising and valuing differences, advocating for inclusivity, and striving for equity regardless of individual distinctions. This is a research-based paper, which aims to address pertinent questions, such as the prevalent issues of social justice in India and their implications on education. It also explores the significance of equity in education and proposes strategies for integrating issues of equity and social justice into the pre-service teacher education curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

The preamble of the Constitution of India declares India a sovereign, socialist, secular and democratic republic. The objectives stated by

the preamble are to secure justice, liberty and equality for all citizens, and promote fraternity to maintain the unity and integrity of the nation. But even after 71 years of adopting

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our constitution, we still feel free to discuss topics like, issues of equity and social justice. Why?

India is the largest democracy in the world with 1.3 billion population and it is a diverse country in terms of religion, caste, language, culture, etc. Ministry of Human Resource Development (2013) conducted a study on minorities, education. As per the Report of the Standing Committee of the National Monitoring Committee for Minorities Education, India is a multi-religious country with Hindus accounting for 80.5 per cent, Muslims 13.43 per cent, Christians 2.3 per cent, Sikhs 1.90 per cent, Buddhists 0.80 per cent and Zoroastrians (Parsis) 0.007 per cent, constituting an important part of the Indian diverse population. Moreover, India is a traditional country and the caste system is inbuilt in the society.

Within each religion, there are different sects or castes and there is a hierarchy in these castes, for example, in Hindus, there are Brahmins who are supposed to be the highest caste whereas the lowest caste is known as the Scheduled Caste. In Muslims, the hierarchy of castes is not as visible, but there are different sects and they are not allowed to mix or to make relations with each other, for example, marriage between two persons of different sects is not accepted. Thus, in Indian society, the caste system is fairly old which generated social hatred, and discriminatory feelings of high and low caste, and as a result of this, the lower category suffered for

centuries in the hands of the so-called upper caste. Moreover, there is a large disparity in the languages too. Hindi in the *Devanagari* script is the official language of the country but both, Hindi and English are collectively used by the Union Government for certain specified administrative purposes. Besides, the eighth schedule of the Constitution of India recognises as many as 22 scheduled languages and by some counts, there are over 200 languages and almost 1,600 dialects that are spoken in the country (Jain, 2017). The uniqueness of Indian society is 'unity in diversity'. However, it is a country where disparities still exist based on the education, economic and social status of people.

Education is an effective tool that can minimise these gaps and disparities. Kaur (2012) discussed the importance of equity in education, "The issues related to access and equity in education are highly influenced by the hierarchies of castes, gender, economic status and cultural diversities". Though India was widely acclaimed as a land of knowledge and wisdom during the ancient times access to education was not allowed for all the people of society. The marginalised groups of society were victims of social and economic injustice. "These centuries-old social prejudices and inequalities, based on caste at birth, continue to dog the modern Indian landscape. Extending educational opportunities to marginalised groups was considered a remedy to this long-

standing discrimination” (Kaur, 2012). The social reformers made several attempts to make education accessible to marginalised groups.

The Constitution of India has provided necessary safeguards by certain provisions that make positive discrimination in favour of the weaker and disadvantaged sections of society so that they could be able to avail the same opportunities as availed by well-off sections of the community. The unique feature of the Constitution of India is that while it upholds the principle of equality before the law, it provides for affirmative discriminatory actions to uplift the social, economic and educational well-being of disadvantaged groups. The Constitution recognises the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), minorities, and women as disadvantaged groups. The ultimate objective of the Constitution framers was to establish a casteless society within the framework of a welfare state by gradually eliminating caste hierarchy, caste distinction, and caste stigma to ensure the dignity of the individual and equality of status among all the citizens of India. The Constitution of India outlines principles of equality in Articles 14, 15, and 16. These ideals are reflected in different clauses of the Constitution. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and the equal protection of law to all persons. Article 15(1) prohibits discrimination

against any citizen on grounds of sex, caste, religion or race. Article 16(1) ensures equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State (Articles 14, 15 and 16—Equality Code of Constitution). Article 17 provides for the abolition of untouchability, and the enforcement of any disability arising from it was made punishable as an offence according to law. Since education is a powerful tool to address the issues of equality and social justice, the amendment in Article 21 (A) gives the right to free and compulsory education to all children between 6 and 18 years of age, irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. (Constitution of India— Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2013)

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The rationale for the above study lies in the recognition of the critical role that education plays in shaping societies and fostering social justice. In the context of India, where significant disparities exist in accessing quality education and opportunities, addressing issues of equity and social justice within the educational system is paramount. By examining the challenges and implications of social justice issues in education, the study seeks to shed light on the barriers that hinder equitable access to education and contribute to systemic inequalities.

Furthermore, understanding the importance of equity in education is essential for creating an inclusive learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of all learners. Equity ensures that every student has access to the resources, support, and opportunities necessary to thrive academically and personally. Therefore, by investigating how equity can be integrated into the pre-service teacher education curriculum, the study aims to equip future educators with the knowledge and skills needed to promote fairness, and inclusivity in their classrooms.

Overall, the rationale for this study lies in its potential to inform policy and practice in teacher education, leading to the development of more effective strategies for addressing social justice issues and promoting equity in education across India.

The purpose of this paper is to study the issues of equity and social justice in teaching and teacher education in India. For this, a small research (descriptive research) was conducted to find out the answers to the following questions by going through literature and also with the help of discussion with different teacher educators and pre-service teachers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the prevailing social justice issues in India, particularly within the realm of education?
2. How do these social justice issues impact various facets of education, including access, quality and inclusivity?
3. What is the significance of equity in education, particularly in the context of addressing social justice concerns?
4. What strategies and approaches can be employed to integrate principles of equity and social justice into a pre-service teacher education curriculum effectively?

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify and analyse key social justice issues in India, focusing on their implications for education.
2. To examine the influence of social justice issues on various aspects of education, including access, quality and inclusivity.
3. To explore the importance of equity in education, and its role in addressing disparities and promoting fairness.
4. To explore various methodologies and pedagogical approaches for incorporating principles of equity, and social justice into pre-service teacher education programmes.
5. To assess the effectiveness of existing initiatives, and interventions aimed at integrating equity and social justice principles into teacher education curricula and practices.
6. To propose recommendations and guidelines for enhancing

the integration of equity, and social justice components into the pre-service teacher education curriculum thereby, fostering a more equitable and inclusive educational system in India.

METHODOLOGY

Population

The population of the present study will be all students of pre-service teachers and teacher educators of teacher education institutions in Delhi.

Sample

A sample is a small proportion of a population selected for observation and analysis. The researcher will purposefully select the sample for achieving the objectives. The sample for the present study is comprised of all the teacher educators and all the second year students of B.Ed. of the Department of Teacher Training and Non-Formal Education (IASE) (pre-service teachers) of Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

Data collection is an important part of the research. To collect the requisite data for any kind of a research paper, the author uses appropriate tools and suitable techniques. For the present study, the author developed two questionnaires (tools) and techniques which are as follows:

1. Questionnaire for teacher educators

A questionnaire serves as a data collection tool where respondents provide written answers to questions and statements. In this study, the questionnaire will gauge the perspectives of teacher educators regarding the concept of 'equity and social justice in India as well as in education'.

The questionnaire comprises of two sections. The first section focuses on inquiries about issues related to social justice in India. The second section assesses respondents' perceptions concerning social justice in education and equity in education.

2. Questionnaire for pre-service teachers

A questionnaire serves as a data collection tool where respondents provide written responses to questions and statements. In this study, the questionnaire aims to understand the perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding the concept of 'equity and social justice in teaching and teacher education'.

The questionnaire consists of questions that explore the respondents' perspectives on equity and social justice in teacher education curriculum of pre-service course (B.Ed.). These inquiries are framed in light of issues in social justice in India, social justice in education and Equity in Education.

Students were instructed to fill out the questionnaire by referring to

their B.Ed. curriculum and reflecting on their experiences throughout the course over the past eighteen months.

3. Analysis of the Literature

PROCEDURE

Planning is essential to carry out any work successfully. Without planning, the successful completion of any work is next to impossible. The objective can easily be achieved with the planned scheme.

The following steps will follow to collect data:

- Developing and implementing a questionnaire for teacher-educators to assess their views on the concepts of 'equity and social justice in India, and in education'.
- Designing and conducting a questionnaire for pre-service teachers to gauge their perceptions regarding the concepts of 'equity and social justice in teaching and teacher education' within the pre-service teacher education curriculum.
- Evaluation of the literature (including pre-service teacher education curriculum, relevant papers, and articles).

ADMINISTRATION OF TOOLS

In the present study, since the author is a teacher educator in the Department of Teacher Training and Non-Formal Education (IASE), Faculty of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia, she asked for permission from the head of the department for

the collection of information from the students and teacher educators of the same department.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to constraints of time and resources, the present study will be delimited in the following areas; the study will be confined to the Department of Teacher Training and Non-Formal Education (IASE), Faculty of Education, Jamia Millia Islamia.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

Qualitative data analysis requires the researchers to systematically search, categorise, integrate and interpret the data collected in the study. The analysis involves describing what is in the data. Interpretation involves making sense of what the data mean. There is no single, agreed-upon approach for qualitative data analysis. The method selected depends in part on the topic chosen and the researcher's analytic ability. In the present study, the data was analysed qualitatively.

By analysing the literature and the responses of teacher educators on the questionnaires qualitatively, the following points emerged:

Issues in Social Justice of India

In Indian society, the challenge of social justice is a complex and critical issue, particularly concerning social divisions based on class or caste. Before delving further into this discussion, it is essential to clarify the

terms 'social justice' and 'equality'. Jain (2017) explored social justice issues in education, "Social justice evolves from the establishment of social norms, order, law and morality, embodying principles of fairness, righteousness, and equitable treatment for all individuals. Equality, in this context, entails treating people fairly and impartially, regardless of socio-economic status, background, region, religion, caste, race, etc. Equality serves as the foundation for social justice, creating an intrinsic link between the two concepts".

Upon reviewing the completed questionnaires from teacher educators, the overwhelming consensus is that social justice is universally recognised as a broad and critical concern spanning diverse societies. It encompasses a range of issues including racism, human rights violations and the pursuit of equality. Social justice embodies the principle of justice for society as a whole, striving to ensure that all individuals have equitable access to resources and are treated fairly, irrespective of variables such as colour, caste, gender, religion, hometown, income level or disability.

A significant majority, approximately 60 per cent of teacher educators, affirmed that the primary objective of social justice is to eradicate discrimination and promote equality throughout society. This acknowledgment underscores the foundational role of social justice as

an essential element of human rights advocacy.

Upon analysing the questionnaires completed by pre-service teachers, it was evident that justice, particularly towards marginalised sectors of society, is perceived as essential for achieving equality by nearly all respondents. Social justice is described as the establishment of an equitable, and fair relationship between individuals and society as evidenced by the distribution of wealth, social privileges, and opportunities for personal growth. Close to 70 per cent of pre-service teachers identified the objective of social justice as the elimination of inequalities, and the provision of equal opportunities in both social and economic realms

This principle upholds the ideals of liberty and equality for all members of society, striving to maximise the development of their capabilities. The concept of social justice emphasises the impartial allocation of economic resources and opportunities, without discrimination based on factors such as caste, language, region, sex and race. Moreover, social justice necessitates the acknowledgment and embrace of diversity as a reflection of equality, with inclusion serving as a tangible demonstration of equal treatment. Social justice issues in India span various aspects, including race, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, education and mental or physical ability.

Social Justice in Education

These issues of social justice affect education directly as the marginalised and poor get segregated from the mainstream and the efforts of governments fall flat due to the absence or lack of will of persons responsible for the implementation of Government policies. (Smith, 2018)

Upon reviewing the questionnaires completed by teacher educators, it was apparent that an overwhelming majority (95 per cent) acknowledged education as a fundamental necessity. They emphasised that diversity in education involves recognising and respecting individual differences, and actively working to promote inclusion and equity. Equity, according to their perspective, entails ensuring uniformity in lifestyle for all individuals, even if it means unequal distribution of resources and access.

Additionally, approximately 40 per cent of teacher educators highlighted the establishment of government-appointed commissions and committees in India to address issues related to access, and enrolment in education for all children. They underscored the inadequacies in achieving social justice for marginalised populations, particularly in ensuring quality education. Consequently, the Government of India initiated various schemes aimed at promoting social justice for marginalised segments of society.

The findings are supported by B. Kaur, (2012). According to

her, in the realm of education, equity is perceived as a benchmark for fairness, achievement and opportunity. Advocates for social justice advocate for equitable outcomes for all students. In the classroom, equity is characterised by meeting the individual needs of students. When teachers actively listen to and respect their students, fostering mutual trust, a conducive learning environment is created. This approach fosters teacher satisfaction and student engagement in the learning process.

Equity in Education

“While equality entails treating every student identically, equity involves ensuring that each student receives the necessary support to thrive academically” (Burke, and Whitty, 2018). According to teacher educators, achieving equity in education necessitates implementing systems to guarantee that every child has an equal opportunity for success. Equity, they argue, is the epitome of true equality. When discussing accessibility and inclusivity, equity becomes indispensable, particularly concerning all resources, including education.

Nearly 80 per cent of teacher educators emphasised the paramount importance of quality in education, which often faces compromise. Equity holds significant relevance in education, particularly in a diverse nation like ours, as it catalyses positive progress across

social, economic and political spheres. Burke, and Whitty, (2018) emphasised the importance of equity in education. Without ensuring equity, equal participation of citizens from various regions, economic strata and occupations cannot be guaranteed. This holds particularly true in education, as it serves as the engine driving progress in our country's economy.

Equity and Social Justice in Pre-Service Teacher Education Curriculum

When it comes to education, it is the most powerful weapon that could bring radical change in society. It is such a weapon that not only helps in individual development but also helps in building the structure of society. (Burke, and Whitty, 2018)

The teacher is the most resourceful person in the society. She is one of the main sources, besides parents who can instil the spirit of equality and social justice in the young minds who will learn ethics by practising it in the classroom, and when they leave school as adults and enter society they will practise what they had learned in school.

It is, therefore, essential to incorporate the issue of equality and social justice in the curriculum of the teacher education programme.

Pupil teachers also came from varied diverse backgrounds. Here they learn to work with their fellow mates irrespective of caste, religion, language, gender, state, etc. Being

with them for at least two years helps them to change their thinking and attitude towards others, leading to fostering and maintaining social justice, and equality for all.

When these trained teachers enter the school, they are expected to treat their students equally, and work for the enhancement of learning and development of the personalities of their students. These teachers can help in creating a trustful environment in the school. These children will eventually lead the nation, establishing social justice and equality in society.

It is, therefore, the duty of all teachers training colleges to prepare teachers to meet the challenges of teaching a diverse population of school children. Teacher education curriculum should incorporate such curriculum and co-curricular programmes to develop socio-political understanding, and proper teaching skills among the pre-service teachers.

According to Burke, and Whitty (2018) 'teacher education curriculum planners have to develop and implement their curriculum in such a way that the issues of equity and social justice are incorporated into the pre-service teacher education curriculum'. Thus, any curriculum concerned with the field of education should inclusively deal not only with the prospects of education but also with its socio-economic implications. When we talk of education and the holistic development of a human being, society plays a major role in it because

it provides sources of acquiring knowledge, therefore, an educational system holds accountability to it. It should be justified on the grounds of equality irrespective of the cultural, economic, religious, social and physical characteristics of a person.

Here, an attempt has been made to critically evaluate the curriculum of B.Ed. course, which follows the NCTE guidelines, to see how far the curriculum is responsible for inculcating the values of social justice inequality among the students. The author asked the students of B.Ed. of IASE, Jamia Millia Islamia to critically analyse their curriculum in light of social justice and equity, and give the answers to the questions given in the questionnaire. All the teacher educators were also requested to fill the questionnaire, but only 20 questionnaires were received back.

The teacher educators and the students of IASE feel that social justice and equity are simultaneously inculcated in the students through the curriculum of B.Ed., and these two things are one of its key strategies. They feel that IASE is just like a society where equal opportunities are provided to all students irrespective of their race, disability, sex, religion, caste or place of birth. The teacher educators of the pre-service teachers found several things in the B.Ed. curriculum through which elements like social justice and equality (and equity) are imbibed. The author summarises the responses of teacher educators and of the pre-

service teachers under the following headings:

1. Curricular: Syllabus (Theory Papers)

Issues of social justice and equity are part of different papers, for example, Paper I: Conceptual Foundation of Education— Social aims of education, Sociological basis of education (social equality, justice and education); Paper II: Contemporary India and Education— Education of the marginalised group; Equity and Equality in Education, Inequality and Marginalisation in the field of education (SC, ST, OBC, Minority, Women and Disabled); Paper V: Gender, School, and Society— Gender and Social Institutions, Towards equality—Status of women in India; and Paper IX: Pedagogy of Social Science— Causes and Sources of Inequality in Indian Society.

2. Co-curricular Components

There are several components in the curriculum of B.Ed. which include social justice and equality:

(a) NSS (National Service Scheme)

- (i) A seven-day NSS camp is a compulsory component of the curriculum in IASE, Jamia Millia Islamia. During the camp one can feel the feeling of equality, i.e., no discrimination exists based on class, religion, caste, sex, course, etc.
- (ii) Everyone is involved in one or the other task. No one is left out. A large number of activities are organised from cleaning

and beautifying the premises to cultural programmes. It brought out the inner talents of students. It gives an equal opportunity to love, cooperate, share resources available, take initiative, team-building and strategise things. Students interacted with each other, and tried to understand each other's viewpoints, thinking and culture.

- (iii) The same food is given to all and distributed equally to everyone.
- (iv) It raises the feeling of equality and respect for all professions. Social justice is all about distributing resources fairly, and treating everyone equally so that they can feel safe and secure physically, and psychologically.

(b) Seminar Discussion

- (i) Seminar discussion is another compulsory component of the curriculum. In these classes, students freely discuss the issues regarding current social issues and education.
- (ii) All the students are provided a platform to talk about their views, opinions, and experiences. Equal opportunities are given to all. Conversations enable students to voice their concerns and questions.
- (iii) Through this, the value of equality and social justice is experienced. Social justice

cannot be achieved through specific means of instruction, it can be experienced.

(c) Sports

- (i) Games and sports are also compulsory components for all students.
- (ii) Handy footy (a special type of football), tug of war, and cricket are specially designed games to give the opportunity for boys and girls to play together as a team.
- (iii) There are many activities like obstacle relay race, sack race and three-leg race which show us how the specially-abled person faces difficulties in general work.

(d) Craft

- (i) There are eight crafts in the curriculum; tie and dye, gardening, paper crafts, electrical gadgets, interior decoration, wood crafts, music, soft toy making, etc. Any one of these can be opted for by the students. There is no restriction in choosing these crafts based on gender, class, or religion. A girl can opt for gardening or wood crafts and a boy can opt for interior decoration, tie and dye, or soft toy making.

(e) Classroom

- (i) Classroom discussions gave ample opportunities to learn about equality, how to become a good unbiased teacher, etc.

- (ii) Teaching students about making positive change in the world by connecting with them, and discussing real-world problems and multiple perspectives.
- (iii) Everyone gets an ample chance to express themselves not only in the classroom but also through writing assignments on different issues, for example, in the CFE paper they got an assignment where they had to talk about their stereotypes and prejudices with their respective partners, and about how the school helps in strengthening or breaking off those prejudices?
- (iv) Social justice is identifying and acting upon the power that we have to make positive changes in behaviour. Teachers of IASE do every day in many ways:
 - Healthy discussions on different topics.
 - All viewpoints are accepted.
 - There is the liberty of language in classrooms. Students can talk in whatever language they feel comfortable with.
- (f) Assessment
 - (i) Assessment is done by individual teachers based on the work, and performance of students which gives a feeling of social justice and equality. All the teachers sit together and do the required moderation not only in all subjects but in all the components of the curriculum

like games, NSS, CCA, crafts, etc. And, set a range of marks for all the components.

(g) School Internship Programme

- (i) In the first year of the course, they get a chance to understand and discuss the concepts, and issues related to social justice and equality through various components of the curriculum, and in the second year of their course they get a chance to implement these in real-life classroom situations through their school internship programme.

The issues of social justice and equality have been addressed in the programme and the most important part had been the discussions which made us feel that teaching is a two-way process where equal opportunities were to be given to every student to express and take part, and there should be no scope for discrimination on any basis. To understand social justice and equality better we should think about these issues in our own lives. Do we treat all people equally? Do we have any stereotypes or prejudices? When we are free from prejudices only then we can establish social equality and justice.

Social justice and equality can be first established in educational institutions, and only then in society. The future educators who are coming from the B.Ed. course is progressing in the direction of becoming more

sensitive to the issues of inequality, injustice, discrimination, persecution and political manipulation in the field of education, but there is still a long way to go.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This paper has critically examined the intersection of social justice, equity, and teacher education within the context of India. Through the exploration of issues related to caste, religion, language and economic disparities, it is evident that these factors significantly influence various aspects of society, including education. The findings underscore the pressing need for a comprehensive approach to teacher education that prioritises inclusivity and addresses systemic inequalities.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Persistence of historical inequalities:** Despite constitutional safeguards, historical inequities based on caste and religion continue to impact Indian society, including the educational sector. These disparities manifest in access to education, quality of education and opportunities for advancement.
2. **Role of teacher education:** Teacher education emerges as a critical factor in addressing social justice issues by shaping the perspectives and practices of future educators. The curriculum and pedagogical approaches in

teacher education programmes play a pivotal role in fostering inclusive teaching practices and promoting social justice within schools.

3. **Embracing diversities:** Recognising the diversity within India as a strength, this paper emphasises the importance of leveraging diversity to create a more inclusive and equitable educational system. Teacher education programmes should equip pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to embrace diversity, and create inclusive learning environments.
4. **Government initiatives:** While affirmative actions outlined in the Constitution of India aim to address inequities, Government initiatives alone are insufficient without a concerted effort in teacher education. Teacher education programmes must go beyond compliance, and actively integrate principles of social justice and equity into their curricula and practices.

IMPLICATIONS

1. **Curricular reforms:** There is a pressing need for curricular reforms in teacher education programmes to explicitly integrate social justice and equity components. This includes revisiting existing modules, incorporating diverse perspectives and offering practical tools for future educators.

2. **Inclusive pedagogies:** Teacher education programmes should prioritise inclusive pedagogies that transcend stereotypes and biases. Pre-service teachers should be equipped with strategies to create inclusive and welcoming environments in their classrooms
3. **Community engagements:** To bridge the gap between theory and practice, teacher education should incorporate community engagement strategies. Pre-service teachers should be encouraged to participate in community initiatives that promote social justice through education.
4. **Continuous professional development:** Continuous professional development programmes are essential to keep educators updated on evolving societal dynamics and effective strategies for promoting social justices.
5. **Advocacy and awareness:** Beyond the classroom, advocacy and awareness campaigns are needed at both institutional and societal levels to challenge stereotypes, and promote a collective understanding of the role of education in societal transformation.

In conclusion, the implications of this paper underscore the crucial role of teacher education in shaping a generation of educators committed to social justice and equity. By implementing the suggested reforms and fostering a culture of inclusivity, the educational landscape in India can become a catalyst for positive social change. However, the journey towards equity and social justice in education is ongoing, requiring active participation from all stakeholders.

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