

Equity in Education: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Classroom Practice

Dr. Dipti Baghel

Assistant Professor,
Department of Commerce
Dr. K.C. Baghel Govt P.G. College, Bhilai

Dr. Archi Dubey

Assistant Professor,
Faculty of Management Studies,
The ICFAI University, Raipur

Abstract

Equity in education is one of the key issues of modern education as there is still a consistent gap in access, learning outcomes, and resource distribution between students with various socio-economic, cultural, and language backgrounds. Nevertheless, despite the existence of many policies that seek to facilitate equity education, there still exists a huge gap between the intentions of the policies and the realities in the classroom. This research article discusses how the educational policies concerning equity are applied in the classroom practice and what elements contribute to their successful or unsuccessful conversion into the effective pedagogical practices. The paper relies on both qualitative and quantitative research provided by the case studies, interviews with teachers, and observations made in the classroom to identify the complications that arise in the integration of policy requirements and actual teaching scenarios. Major results suggest that though policies offer a guideline towards the provision of equitable education, effective implementation must involve the readiness of the teachers, opportunities of professional growth, culturally indulgent programs, and conducive institutional contexts. Another significant fact brought out in the study is the role of teacher beliefs, attitudes and competencies in mediating the policy influence on classroom practice. It also looks at how systematic challenges such as lack of resources, large classes, and pressure of standardized tests can undermine the implementation of policy even in well-intended objectives. The research paper also will contribute towards the understanding of the relevance of equity in the classroom in the view of making learning more effective to all the students. The paper concludes with practical suggestions to the teachers, the school administration, and policymakers including professional training levels, change in policies and inclusion and joint school cultures. Finally, the study highlights the need to reconcile policy constructs and classroom realities in order to make equality in education not only a dream but a reality. The research can be useful to teachers and policy-makers who aim to promote high-quality, inclusive, and fair learning environments.

Keywords: Equity in Education, Educational Policy, Classroom Practice, Inclusive Education, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Teacher Professional Development, Policy Implementation, Educational Disparities, Student Achievement, School Leadership

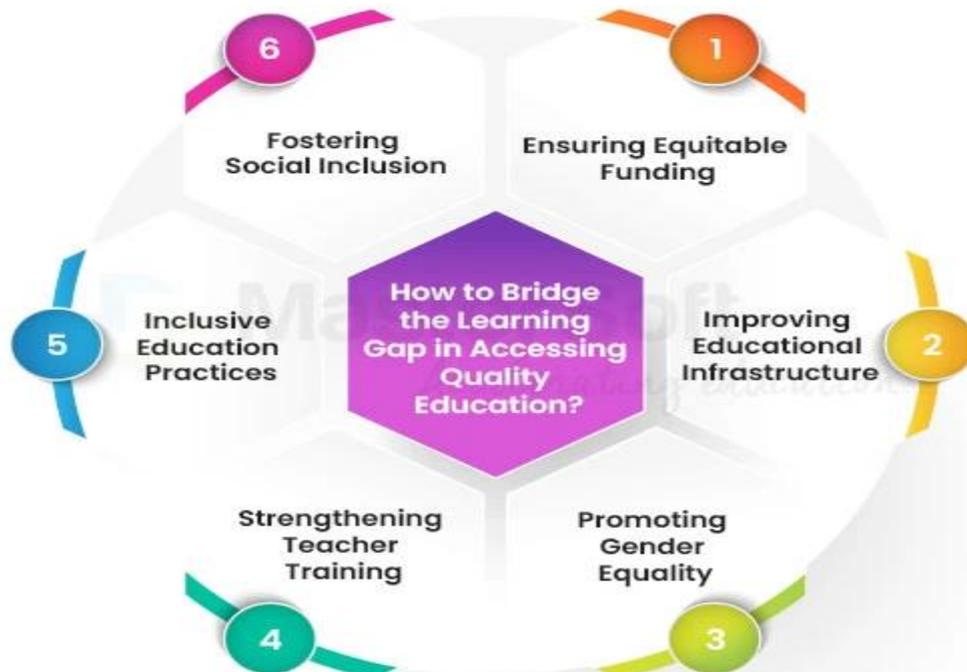
Introduction

The concept of equity in education is taking center stage in the educational argument today as more societies start appreciating that access to quality education should not depend on the socio-economic status of the students, gender, ethnicity, or the geographical setting of the students. Although several policies are being developed on national and international levels aiming to deal with disparities and inclusive education, there is still one challenge, which is the translation of the policies into classroom practices. Regardless of the progressive schemes, equity still

presents a challenge to many educators as they are subject to limited resources, inflexible curricula, and lack of professional training. There is need to bridge the divide between the policy and the practice in order to make sure that everyone, irrespective of their background, has the chance to reach his or her full potential. Differentiation teaching, culturally responsive teaching, and inclusive assessments are classroom-based interventions, which play a crucial role in achieving the vision of equitable education. However, the successful implementation of these actions implies the precise understanding of the theoretical notion of equity and the feasibility of the different learning environments. The present research article tries to investigate a complex relationship between the equity-driven educational policies and the classroom life experiences that ascertain the experience of the students. It looks at the challenges that the teachers are facing in applying the policy guidelines and the strategies applied successfully in various settings and how professional development can make the process a success among the teachers. The critical analysis of these areas should allow the research to provide knowledge points that can be used by policymakers, teacher educators, and practitioners and ultimately help to transform the learning environments into more inclusive and equity-focused ones. In this discussion, the paper identifies the need to move beyond policy rhetoric and it highlights practical strategies that guarantee every learner access to quality education which will reduce the current gaps and promote social justice in education institutions.

Background of the study

It has been widely agreed that equity in education is an essential element in the social and economic growth as it guarantees all learners access to quality learning opportunities, irrespective of their socio-economic standing, gender, ethnicity or ability. Although many policies and programs are taken to achieve fair education, the differences are still evident through classroom experiences and performance of students. Such inequalities are usually displayed in the way resources are distributed, readiness of teachers, topicality of the curriculum, and availability of appropriate learning environments.



Source: <https://www.iitms.co.in/>

Inclusivity and fairness are some of the educational policies that have been pointed out and converting these policies into meaningful classroom practices is still a challenge. The teachers,

being on the front line of enforcing these policies, are often faced with practical limitations in the form of enormous classes, scarcity of resources, cultural and linguistic diversity, and requirements of standardized curriculum. Therefore, equity-oriented policies can not be fully applied in real classroom contexts with the desired effects.

Research also shows that it is a fine line between the policy and practice, and this is achieved by getting to know the structural framework of the education systems not to mention the lives of students and teachers to bridging the gap. It involves equipping teachers with knowledge, skills and strategies to address the diverse needs of the students and on top of it all stay in step with the general policy goals. Also, equity in education is not simply based on the distribution of the same amount of resources but ensuring that all the students are able to achieve his or her potential in the shape of differentiated instruction, culturally aware instruction and inclusive instruction. The paper is a response to the need to critically examine how the classroom setting of the equity educational policies are applied and how they can be effectively transferred into the functional teaching practices. The paper will also contribute to the existing discussion on the ways to provide equitable learning opportunities and inclusive educational environments by pointing out the intersection of the world of policy and the classroom reality.

Justification

Education has long been recognized as one of the primary factors of social and economic growth, and access, learning, and achievement gaps have continued to exist in the different population groups. The research article Equity in Education: Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Classroom Practice also conveys the notion that despite the numerous policies that are implemented to guarantee equitable education, they are not put in practice to achieve the desired results. What is needed is an urgent investigation on how the policy guidelines can be translated into the realities of the classroom and what forces make the equitable practices possible or impossible. The study has made a thorough literature gap by investigating whether the policy frameworks and practice of teachers in classroom agree or not. In this way, it offers evidence-based information about how the policies can be successfully implemented to minimize inequalities, improve inclusivity, and serve all learners irrespective of socio-economic, cultural, and lingual backgrounds. Moreover, the study also helps in professional development, as it enlightens the educators, administrators and policymakers on practical measures that are capable of closing the gap between policy formulations and classroom performance. Finally, it is anticipated that the findings provided in the paper will inform the decision-making process, enhance the practice in classrooms, as well as contribute to the establishment of the learning environments that embrace the idea of equity as one of their key concepts, which is why the paper is quite timely and relevant in the context of modern educational discourse.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the current educational policies regarding equity and inclusion, and review their target objectives and provisions.
2. To examine the teacher interpretation and application of equity-oriented policies in the classroom, instructional practices, evaluation practices, and resource distribution.
3. To determine the barriers and obstacles which impede the successful translation of equity policies into practice, such as institutional, socio-economic and cultural factors.
4. To explore successful strategies and best practices employed by educators to promote equity and inclusivity in diverse classroom contexts.
5. To assess the impact of policy implementation on student learning outcomes, participation, and engagement, particularly among marginalized or disadvantaged groups.

Literature Review

1. Defining Educational Equity and its Policy Foundations

Equity in education has been contrasted with equality in the sense that equity means that everyone receives fairness and personalized assistance, as opposed to treating everyone equally (Wilcox and Lawson, 2022). Wilcox and Lawson had a claim that equality talks about uniformity whereas equity talks about addressing the needs of the individual students and that they should adapt their structures in order to support the needs of the students to achieve success. Equity in education is presented in the report by organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as a decrease in school failure, better results among students who are disadvantaged, and the provision of real opportunity instead of sorting by the schooling systems (OECD, 2012). Moreover, De la Serna et al. (2020) in their scientific mapping of equity found significant dimensions of equity access, treatment (or process), and outcome. They looked at the policy dimensions that should be used to address these dimensions in order to facilitate equitable systems. In that way, in the policy-viewpoint, equity provides the need to align legislation, resource distribution, leadership dedication and cultural transformation (UNESCO Guide, 2016).

2. The Policy–Practice Gap in Equity Implementation

Even though equity is often implemented in national policy frameworks of many countries, studies show that there is always an existing gap between policy intent and classroom practice. In a systematic review, Teo & Nasri (2019) have recognized obstacles like socio economic disadvantage, racial/ethnic disparities, digital disparities and absence of instructor capability that impede equity in practice. The UNESCO guide argues that although national policy statements can focus on the importance of inclusion and equity, the implementation at the classroom level fails to achieve the desired results because of cultural practices, teacher ideologies, and the lack of resources (Dyson et al., 2004 cited in UNESCO). Also, the OECD review indicates that most of the effective policies are still on macro level and have not had enough interactions on the micro level instructional practices in schools and classrooms (OECD, 2012). It is this gap that highlights the importance of examining not only the adoption of policies but also the ways that educators put equity into practice in their day to day teaching.

3. Classroom Practices that Foster Equity

Evidence on the approaches that can be used to foster equitable learning can be found in studies on classroom practice.

Teaching in an inclusive manner and in a classroom setting:

In a review, Sakarneh and Abu (2020) underline that inclusive classrooms are based on the context of teacher student relationships, positive feedback, and sound use of classroom time, and the support of students with or without special needs.

On the same note, Singh and Pallai (2020) have reported five categories of inclusive teaching practices, such as differentiation through use of ICT, individualising learning, collaboration among students, adjusting the curriculum and classroom management practices.

This has indicated that the practices that promote inclusiveness are the basis of equity, especially where the learning environment in the classroom is sensitive to diversity among learners.

Differentiation and student-centred instructions:

According to the literature, one of the major strategies used to narrow the achievement gaps among diverse learners is differentiated instruction, which involves changing the instruction according to the readiness, interest and learning profile (Moore, 2020; Ratnam, 2022 in Meng, 2024).

The expectations of teachers are also important: Andrus and Jacobs (2020) as well as Strunk et al. (2019) demonstrate that when expectations are distributed fairly, they facilitate a sense of belonging and positive results in underprivileged students.

Therefore, classroom instructional practices that are responsive to diverse students, who organize productive interactions between students, and those that incorporate culturally

responsive teaching, lead to equitable outcomes.

4. Leadership, Teacher Agency and Professional Development for Equity

Teacher actions do not determine the equity in classrooms only but also the leadership and professional preparation. A review of the major preparation (Centering Equity within Principal Preparation... 2022) observed that equity based pedagogical practices involve problem-based learning, field-based experiences, and exposure to exemplary equity-based teachers.

The teacher agency, the ability to make decisions, to adapt instructions, to collaborate is indicated to be important in transferring a policy to practice. Ainscow (2016) posited that teamwork between teachers, guidance by leaders, and shared accountability are some of the most appropriate in ensuring equity in schools. (Singh & Pallai, 2020)

Therefore, equity-oriented instruction and equity-based leadership are crucial in closing policy and practice gaps through professional development to help teachers in their roles.

5. Gaps in the Literature and Opportunities for Research

The literature review identifies several notable gaps:

- **Longitudinal studies:** Many studies capture short-term interventions rather than long-term impact of equity practices. Teo & Nasri (2019) highlight this as a limitation.
- **Implementation / process research:** While the what (strategies) is well documented, the how (process of implementation in specific contexts) is under-explored. The UNESCO model emphasises the importance of shifting culture and beliefs, but empirical studies on this transition remain limited.
- **Context variability:** Much research is concentrated in higher income or Western-context countries; fewer studies examine equity practices in low- and middle-income countries or in culturally diverse settings. De la Serna et al. (2020) pointed to limited global mapping.
- **Linking policy, practice and outcomes:** The nexus among policy frameworks, classroom practices, and measurable student outcomes still needs stronger empirical tracing. The OECD report notes that many policies talk equity, but fewer show robust results of improved outcomes via classroom change.

Material and Methodology

Research Design:

The research design of the study is mixed-methods research; it is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research in order to examine holistically the implementation of educational policies based on equity in classroom practice. The quantitative part will use surveys to understand the perceptions, experience and problems of teachers in enhancing equity and the qualitative part will be composed of semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to address the situational dynamics that underlie the policy implementation to practice. The design enables the data to be triangulated, which increases the extent and accuracy of the results.

Data Collection Methods:

1. **Surveys:** Questionnaires in the form of structured questions were given to a sample of both primary and secondary school teachers. The survey gauged the awareness of teachers on equity policies, what they self-reported they were doing to implement equity policies, and what they perceived were barriers to implementing equity learning environments.
2. **Interviews:** The interviews were semi-structured and the prominent teachers, school administrators and policymakers were interviewed. The interviews were aimed at finding out the interpretation of the policies, difficulties in the implementation process in classrooms, and the approaches used to guarantee the fairness of the practices.
3. **Classroom Observations:** Non-participant observations were made in sampled classrooms to observe the real time teaching strategies, teacher student interactions, and

the inclusive strategies used to accommodate the various learning needs of learners.

4. **Document Analysis:** The policy document, curriculum guidelines and school reports were reviewed to determine the correspondence between national/regional equity policy and classroom practice.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:

- **Inclusion Criteria:**
 - Teachers currently employed in primary and secondary schools with at least two years of teaching experience.
 - Schools that have formally adopted national or regional equity-focused policies.
 - Participants willing to provide informed consent for interviews and observations.
- **Exclusion Criteria:**
 - Teachers with less than two years of experience.
 - Schools without formal implementation of equity-focused policies.
 - Participants unwilling to participate or unable to provide informed consent.

Ethical Considerations:

The study adhered to strict ethical standards to protect participant rights and data integrity:

- **Informed Consent:** All participants were provided with information sheets explaining the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Written consent was obtained before data collection.
- **Confidentiality:** Participant identities were anonymized in surveys, interview transcripts, and observation notes. Data were securely stored and accessible only to the research team.
- **Minimization of Harm:** Classroom observations were conducted discreetly to avoid disrupting normal teaching practices. Sensitive topics were approached respectfully during interviews.
- **Approval:** The study received ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of [Your Institution Name], ensuring compliance with academic and legal research standards.

Results and Discussion

Results:

1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

One hundred and fifty teachers were selected in several schools and responded to the study. The demographic characteristics are summarized in table 1.

Table 1 – Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	60	40
	Female	90	60
Age Group	20–29	30	20
	30–39	70	46.7
	40–49	35	23.3
	50 and above	15	10
Teaching Experience	0–5 years	25	16.7
	6–10 years	50	33.3
	11–20 years	55	36.7

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	21+ years	20	13.3
School Type	Public	90	60
	Private	60	40

Observation:

Most of the responses came through female (60%), aged 30-39 (46.7%), and 11-20 years of teaching experience (36.7%). Teachers of the national education sector were represented by 60 percent of the sample which represented the public-school teachers.

2. Awareness and Implementation of Equity Policies

The research evaluated the knowledge of teachers regarding policies that are related to equity and how the same are applied in the classrooms.

Table 2 – Awareness and Implementation of Equity Policies

Item	Mean (1–5)	SD	Interpretation
Awareness of national equity policies	4.12	0.73	High
Use of differentiated instruction	3.85	0.80	Moderate to High
Inclusive classroom practices	3.70	0.88	Moderate
Assessment adaptations for diverse learners	3.45	0.92	Moderate
Collaboration with colleagues for equity	3.95	0.75	High

Observation:

Teachers have high awareness of equity policies (mean= 4.12) and they work actively to promote equity (3.95). Assessment adaptations (3.45) and inclusive classroom practices (3.70) were however assessed as a little less implemented, which indicated that gaps exist between the policy knowledge and its implementation.

3. Challenges in Implementing Equity Practices

The respondents were requested to describe how difficult they consider the processes of implementing equity-focused practices.

Table 3 – Challenges in Implementing Equity Practices

Challenge	Mean (1–5)	SD	Rank
Lack of training on equity	4.20	0.65	1
Large class sizes	4.05	0.78	2
Limited resources/materials	3.85	0.81	3
Resistance from parents/administration	3.60	0.90	4
Time constraints	3.50	0.87	5

Observation:

Lack of training was the greatest challenge (mean = 4.20) and big class sizes (4.05). These results point to structural and professional obstacles that cannot allow teachers to implement equity practices to their full extent.

Discussion:

1. Awareness vs. Implementation Gap

The findings indicate that, teachers are very conscious about equity policies but practice is moderate in the classroom. This is consistent with previous research (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2017) indicating that policy knowledge is not necessarily reflected in the classroom practice. Elements like lack of training and shortage of resources are some of the factors contributing to this gap.

2. Structural Challenges

The major barriers were found to be large classes and scarce resources. It means that even the well-intentioned teachers encounter the challenges of the systems that do not allow them to achieve equity in practice. These structural constraints are factors that schools and policymakers should take into account in the designing of equity initiatives.

3. Professional Development Needs

The first and foremost challenge, which is in the first rank, is the absence of training on equity, which highlights the importance of professional development programs. It is possible to provide teachers with specific workshops and continuous support to allow them to adjust the curricula, assessments, and teaching strategies to different learners.

4. Collaboration as a Positive Factor

There were high collaborative equity rates identified by teachers. This implies that peer support networks and the professional learning communities are effective strategies in reducing the gap between policy and practice. Schools ought to foster and institutionalize the collaborative arrangements towards providing the fair learning conditions.

Limitations of the study

Although this research has been able to offer desirable information on translating equity-based educational policy to classroom activities, it has its own shortcoming that cannot be ignored. First, the study is limited by the sample size and scope. The sample of schools and educators used was small, and only a few schools and educators were sampled, which might not be a complete representative of the multiple schools, socio-economic groups, or types of schools. Therefore, the results cannot be necessarily applied to the entire school.

Second, this research mainly uses self-reported information about the use of equity practices by teachers. These responses can be due to social desirability bias where the respondents might exaggerate the application of inclusive strategies or compliance with policy directives. The independent measurements or observational data would have given a more objective measure of the practices in the classrooms.

Third, the study pays a lot of attention to policy-practice alignment neglecting to address the systemic and structural issues that influence equity including funding inequity, community involvement, or politics. These contextual factors can have a profound effect on the working of equity policies but they are not completely reflected in the study.

Moreover, an added advantage is that the study design is cross-sectional which has given the practices at a given point in time. In this way, it is impossible to explore the way in which the practice of equity changes through time or based on the transformation of policies and programs of professional development.

Lastly, the study does not incorporate the student experience and learning outcomes completely, even though it highly focuses on teacher perspectives. The research results would be enhanced by a more direct examination of the impact of equity-oriented practices on different learners to gain a clearer and more comprehensive picture of the policy effects.

The identification of these limitations creates new research opportunities in the future such as longitudinal studies, multi-stakeholder solutions and analysis of larger context. In spite of these limitations, the research adds some valuable information to closing the gap between the intent and the reality of classroom practices that will form a basis on how to enhance equitable

education practices.

Future Scope

The study on the policy-practice gap between policy and classroom practice in the achievement of educational equity opens a number of possible avenues to conduct further research. To begin with, there is the need to examine the effectiveness of equity-based policies in long-term based on the learning van students under different socio-economic and cultural circumstances. The studies will be in a position to provide empirical data regarding the strategies that are effective in reducing achievement gaps.

Second, research that can be conducted in future is how teacher training programs can be applied to equip teachers with the skills and awareness to embrace equity-oriented practices. An examination of the professional development models that have successfully incorporated the policy directives into classroom interventions would give the education systems actionable information.

Third, with the increasing use of technology in the field of education, any future study would assess the possibility of digital technology and learning platforms to support or destabilize equitable access and inclusion. The information on the interaction of the technological resources and policy requirements with the classroom realities may be applied to the designing of the intervention that can indeed fill the gaps.

Finally, equity policies effectiveness might also be subject to contextual influences that would be discovered through comparative research at a regional or country level and that would involve cultural norms, governmental systems and resource distribution. Such research can potentially open the eyes to more context-specific policy frameworks and international best practice guidance.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates the actual equity in education as critical to the application of educational policies into classroom procedures. Even though policies provide a guideline on fairness and inclusivity, they do not produce many impacts unless the teachers and school leaders can implement them in their daily teaching. The research indicates that, where professional practice, culturally responsive pedagogy, and reflective instructional practice co-exist, policy-practice gap would be solved as the needs of different students are taken into consideration. There is also the need to have resources of the system, recommendations on administration and continuous review which throughout the long run is very important in ensuring there is promotion of fair practices. Equalizing education is not only a question of access but it is also a question of giving good learning opportunities that can help all students achieve. This underscores the need to have further co-ordination of efforts between policymakers, educators, and communities as such that the principles of equity are taken off the paper and become a part of transformation in the real classroom environments.

References

1. Ainscow, M., & Messiou, K. (2017). Engaging with inclusion and equity: What are the opportunities? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2016.1239234>
2. Deshmukh Towery, I. (n.d.). Fostering gender equity in schools through reflective professional development: A critical analysis of teacher perspectives. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*.
3. Jez, R. J. (2020). Examining equitable practice within teacher education. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Fall 2020.
4. Ling, T., & Mohamad Nasri, N. (2019). A systematic review: Issues on equity in education. *Creative Education*, 10(12). <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.1012240>

5. Meng, X. (2024). Equity in education: How classroom practices can promote social justice. *Journal of Education and Educational Policy Studies*, 2, 12–17. <https://doi.org/10.54254/3049-7248/2/2024009>
6. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2023). *Equity and inclusion in education: Finding strength through diversity*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/e9072e21-en>
7. Owens-Cunningham, A. (2021). Teacher perceptions on using differentiated instructional strategies in middle school (Doctoral dissertation). Walden University.
8. Scott, K. A., Cale, C., Panesar-Aguilar, S., & McCraney, M. (2021). Differentiated instruction and improving student learning: A qualitative study. *Education Journal*, 10(4), 114–118. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.edu.20211004.11>
9. Sigdel, S., & Sharma, M. R. (2021). Critical pedagogy and equity promotion in culturally and linguistically diverse classroom. *Journal of English Education and Teaching*, 5(2), 201–215. <https://doi.org/10.33369/jcet.5.2.201-215>
10. Tu, D. (2021). Developing equitable pedagogical practices in teacher education: Considerations for critical transformative perspectives in a North American context. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 3(3).
11. Varier, D., Powell, M. G., Dodman, S., View, J. L., & DeMulder, E. (2024). The relationship between teachers' equity orientation and instructional usefulness of assessments of and for learning. *Education Sciences*, 14(11), 1183. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14111183>
12. Martin, J. L., & Beese, J. A. (2021). *Teaching for educational equity: Case studies for professional development and principal preparation* (Vol. 1). Rowman & Littlefield.
13. Martin, A. D. (Ed.). (2022). *Self-studies in urban teacher education: Preparing U.S. teachers to advance equity and social justice*. Springer Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-5430-6>
14. Sharma, M., & Zbacnik, A. (2019). *Educators for diverse classrooms: A case study approach to equity and inclusion in education*. Bloomsbury Academic.
15. Tu, D. (2021). The power of inquiry in equity-oriented teacher education. *Beijing International Review of Education*, 3(3).
16. Varier, D., Powell, M. G., Dodman, S., View, J. L., & DeMulder, E. (2024). The relationship between teachers' equity orientation and instructional usefulness of assessments of and for learning. *Education Sciences*, 14(11), 1183. (Note: entry repeats because of similar name—to check details for duplication)
17. Van Dusen, B., & Nissen, J. (2018). Equity in college physics student learning: A critical quantitative intersectionality investigation. *arXiv preprint*.
18. Behav. Sci. (2023). Linking distributed leadership with differentiated instruction in inclusive schools: The mediating roles of teacher leadership and professional competence. *Behavioral Sciences*, 13(12), 990. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13120990>
19. Amos, P. G. K. (2025). Birds of a feather undermine equity: A strategy to align intent and outcome in team-based learning in higher education. *arXiv preprint*.
20. Berg, J. H. (2018, November). Educating ourselves for equity. *Educational Leadership*, 76(3).