

# Educational Equality or Educational Equity

PingPing Zhu Lincoln

**ABSTRACT:** Educational equality and educational equity are related yet different concepts although they are often used as exchangeable and substitutable, or mix-up and confused terms in literature. While equality focuses on the rights and benefits of citizens being the same, equity emphasizes the fairness to individuals being different. The two concepts overlap but contradict each other in implication and implementation. This article is to discuss the social, economic, educational, and psychological perspectives of educational equality and educational equity, to interpret the differences between the two concepts in both of their meanings and practices in the same and different areas, and to present a conceptual clarification and task-oriented solutions to dilemmas between educational equality and educational equity. It is an important task for governments and administrators to ensure citizens an equal educational opportunity in terms of acceptance, access, and assurance. However, educational equality is always relative and on the process towards its higher level both in quantity and quality depending on specific historical and social contexts. It is educators' responsibility to ensure students the equity of educational experiences in terms of appropriateness, adequacy, and attainment. However, educational equity is an ideal difficult to reach due to the varieties of individual students, in terms of their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, cognitive levels, capabilities, and learning styles, and the limitations on teachers' knowledge, skills, and professionalism. The article suggests a conceptual distinction between educational equality and educational equity to clarify their tasks, responsibilities, and practices, and welcomes discussion and debates on the issue.

**Keywords:** Educational Equality, Educational Equity, Elitism, and Egalitarianism

## Introduction

Equal education is an interdisciplinary concept that needs a multi-perspective interpretation. As an important social activity, education concerns every individual in societies. It is an integrated action involving social, economic, and educational sectors. There are two important concepts related to equal education in this discussion: educational equality and educational equity. The two concepts are related yet different but often used as exchangeable and substitutable, or mix-up and confused terms in literature.

## Literature Review

### Inclusive Educational Equity

Some scholars consider equity a paramount concern in education, which covers: 1) “the organiza-

tion of higher education institutions and their governance, funding, campus life, relationship to broader society, and proximal communities”; 2) “faculty livelihoods, labor practices, academic freedom, tenure, and the curriculum”; 3) “funding agencies, productivity expectation, prestige indexes, and the truncation of knowledge through capitalist practices”; and 4) “marginalized identities, opportunity to learn, access, persistence, attainment, pedagogy, and the social stratification produced by participation in higher education” (Pasque, Carducci, Kuntz, & Gildersleeve, 2012). Equity Issues for Today’s Educational Leaders: Meeting the Challenge of Creating Equitable Schools for All (Jenlink, 2009) mentions “three standards of equity in education: equity of access standard, equity of participation standard, and equity of outcomes standards, which serve as a foundation for an equity-based accountability system for creating an equitable school for all students.” According to this book, Equity of Access Standard assures access to educational facilities, resources, and programs and services by all individuals, and removes barriers to educational access. Equity of Participation Standard assures that programs and pedagogy promote and guarantee equal participation to all, and considers difference a defining factor of what is equitable in terms of process and participation, in particular with respect to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Equity of Outcomes Standard assures that educational outcomes not be correlated with gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic circumstances, and eliminates barriers that construct achievement gaps. The book uses the only term of equity to cover the main aspects of both educational equality and educational equity: access, participation, and outcomes. Its equity of access focuses on all individuals’ equal access to educational resources, which falls into the category of educational equality from social and economic perspectives. Its equity of participation focuses on all individuals to be accepted by various programs and pedagogy that recognize difference during the process of education. Its equity of outcomes implies that “Intended educational outcomes for minority students are equal to those of their majority counterparts.”

Inclusive educational equity is a comprehensive concept to be understood from four aspects as well as a social project to be implemented at four layers: students, educators, schools, and policies defined by Pasque, Carducci, Kuntz, and Gildersleeve. It also can be understood from three layers as well as a social project to carry out at three links: access, participation, and outcomes expressed in Jenlink’s book. However, a deep understanding and thorough discussion need a clarification to important terms to avoid conceptual and logical confusion.

#### Educational Equality and Educational Equity

Educational equality, educational adequacy, and educational equity are three related concepts on this matter. Educational equality is often linked to social justice and social mobility. That every individual has an equal right of education is a sign of democracy and one important aspect of human rights. Educational equality is an important aspect of social justice that brings more positive social changes. In literature, equal education is defined as:

- 1) Access to educational resources and facilities;
- 2) Equal instruction in all areas;
- 3) The same materials;

- 4) An educational environment without bias or bigotry and with proper language and positive interaction (OpenCongress, 2009).

However, the four points above can be categorized to distribution of educational resources (point 1 & point 3) and teaching including methodology, measures, and mentality (point 2 & point 4).

Educational equality, educational adequacy, and educational equity all pursue an equal education. However, due to the respective angles and focuses, their interpretations can be very different. For instance, on the issue of distribution of educational resources, the argument based on educational equality is that spending a bounty of unexpected resources on those whose chances are already better than other children's chances is unjust. It concentrates on equalizing the new educational resources on those with lower than the median prospects. But the argument based on educational adequacy is that spending those resources on the more advantaged, or higher achieving, children is nothing unjust as long as they will be educated to be responsible members of the elites they join (Brighthouse & Swift, 2009). If we interpret this issue based on educational equity, both above-mentioned arguments are one-sided. Educational equity focuses on the quantity neither on the lower level students for equal outcomes nor on the advanced level students for high achievement but on the quality of appropriateness to every student. When we look at the distribution of educational resources from the perspective of educational access and participation, it falls into the concept of educational equality, but if we look at the issue from the perspective of educational appropriateness, it falls into the concept of educational equity. The former is the social and economic aspects of an equal education, or educational equality; the later is the educational and psychological aspects of an equal education, or educational equity.

#### Confucius' Wisdom on Educational Equality and Educational Equity

Confucius is a great educator in ancient China, and presented the concepts of educational equality and educational equity in classic Chinese 2500 years ago. In the Western Zhou Dynasty, the government ran two types of schools: central schools (Guo Xue) and local schools (Xiang Xue). Different from the public schools run by governments nowadays, they were part of the noble education that was difficult for the civilian population to get in. It was Confucius who started the private education in China that was much cheaper than the public schools then. The Confucius private school was open to civilians including those who were really poor. As long as the student brought 10 bunches of meat, he could get into the school. Due to the cheap tuition, students like Yan Hui, Zi Lu, and Ran You who were from poor families could be admitted and became successful. Among the educational concepts raised by Confucius, "You Jiao Wu Lei" (有教無類) and "Yin Cai Shi Jiao" (因材施教) are the most famous and meaningful ones (Yu, 2013). "You Jiao Wu Lei" means to provide education to everybody regardless of his social status and economic situation, which is the basic content of educational equality. "Yin Cai Shi Jiao" means to provide appropriate education to individual students based on their needs and learning abilities, which is the key of educational equity. These two concepts are the most important educational concepts of Confucius that touch the core of education: whom to teach and how to teach. Confucius not only pointed out the two main educational principles that have been the focuses in education, but also practiced these ideas as a teacher in his school. In other words, Confucius was the first educator who raised

the ideal of educational equality and educational equity and put them into practice.

In literature, educational equality and educational equity are considered the same concept by some researchers but two different concepts by others. The intention of this article is to clarify the two concepts in their meanings and practices, and to discuss the differences and dilemmas concerning the two concepts. The two concepts are overlap yet contradict each other in implication and implementation. It is an important task for governments and administrators to ensure citizens an equal educational opportunity in terms of acceptance, access and attainment. However, educational equality is always relative and on the process towards its higher level both in quantity and quality depending on specific historical and social contexts. It is educators' responsibility to ensure students the equity of educational experiences in terms of appropriation, adequacy, and attainment. In order to clarify the two concepts and to avoid related confusions, this article classifies educational resources related issues to educational equality and teaching related issues to educational equity including educational adequacy, and focuses on social, economic, and informational implications of educational equality and educational, psychological, and cultural implications of educational equity. The former can be considered the hardware of an equal education, the later the software. In conclusion, according to this article, the concept of educational equality includes Confucius "You Jiao Wu Lei", Pasque, Carducci, Kuntz, and Gildersleeve's educational equity, Jenlink's Equity of Access, and OpenCongress' Points 1 and 3; the concept of educational equity includes Confucius "Yin Cai Shi Jiao", Jenlink's Equity of Participation and Outcomes, and OpenCongress' Points 2 and 4. However, the philosophical division and interpretation of educational equality and educational equity in this article are different from those in literature.

### **Social, Economic, and Informational Perspectives**

As mentioned in literature review, the conceptual relationship of educational equality and educational equity are multiple: inclusive, overlap, contradictory, or confused. This article, however, identifies educational equality as the 3 As of acceptance, access, and assurance from social, economic, and informational perspectives with Confucius "You Jiao Wu Lei" as the ideological origin and a pioneer action. Educational equality can be interpreted from three aspects: social justice of equal educational opportunity, equal share of educational resources, and equal access to educational information that is as important as other educational resources and facilities. The goal of educational equality is for all students to be educated through an equal distribution of educational resources in a broad range. They are the three layers of educational equality within an equal education: social or political, economic, and informational equality of education, which can be classified as 3 As: acceptance, access, and assurance. They are the material basis and hardware of equal education.

#### Acceptance

Acceptance to education or quality education, in other words, to local schools or to private schools, indicates the social perspective of educational equality. Social justice of education ensures an equal social and political environment for every learner to be educated. However, equal acceptance is a relative concept with specific connotation and denotation in terms of the extent of equality, the scope of school,

and the objects of acceptance. In the US, it has taken many steps and efforts to reach this starting point of bringing the equal acceptance to vulnerable groups by American educational systems and schools, including “Brown v. Board of Education, Lau v. Nichols, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and the Women’s Educational Equity Act passed in 1975” (Jenlink, 2009). These are the important legal steps for equal acceptance in the US. In ancient China, women were kept out of both public and private schools until the Republic of China was established in 20<sup>th</sup> century. In People’s Republic of China found in 1949, every Chinese citizen has an equal acceptance to a local school literally, although the gap in educational resources is huge among local schools in different regions.

As mentioned above, public schools in many countries are open to every school age student in the area. In this sense, it ensures an equal acceptance to everyone regardless of the social-economic status of his/her family. However, the acceptance to good public schools is only equal to those whose family can afford an expensive home in the area. In addition, within a school, there are key classes consisted of strong students and taught by experienced and quality teachers, that are open only to certain number of students. In order to send their children to a key school or a key class in either a key school or a regular school, parents have to either pay extra including moving to an expensive area, or find a connection to ensure their kids’ acceptance to the class or the school they wish. This brings a Matthew effect on real estate that produces expensive “housing of school district,” and on equal acceptance that students from richer family or with connections have more chances to get into key classes and key schools (Yi, Zhang, & Shen, 2013).

In the case of private schools, the acceptance is equal only before the money. Ma (2007) did a statistics on expenses of private schools in 18 main cities and provinces in China between 2003 and 2005. Difference among these 18 areas is from \$ 200 each year at the lowest range and \$ 2, 000 at the highest. But, the cost of private schools in China has increased greatly during last decade. For instance, the school fee of a private international school in Shanghai has reached more than \$ 30, 000 per year, which amounts about an average salary for 4 years in Shanghai. In the US, the cost of private schools is about twice as much as that amount.

For college enrolment, countries have their standards for an equal acceptance. In the US, college enrolment is based on SAT scores, recommendations from high school teachers, and community works. In China, the most important weight for the equal college acceptance is the results of entry examinations. However, these standards of equal acceptance ignore the unequal acceptance at elementary and secondary schools students may have experienced including the opportunity of community works, not to mention those scores, words of recommendations, or activities sometimes cannot show the real picture of a particular student. Thus, it is only equal before the grades, numbers, or information that is possibly biased and one-sided, which does not consider the factor of unequal acceptance affecting college admission, for instance, a student could not be accepted by a program that is crucial to college entry.

While it is relatively simple to ensure an equal acceptance provided in forms and systems, it needs much more detailed works in practice to ensure an equal access to educational resources for all students.

### Access

Equal share of educational resources ensures sufficient materials and equipment to all students, teachers, and schools as well as students' access to suitable teachers and schools. Equal distribution of educational resources involves many aspects of a society or a country, which includes urban-rural structure, quantity and quality of educational resources based on overall economic strength and government's policies on education. It also involves complicated management and integrated strategies of educational institutions. An uneven distribution of educational resource occurs in many countries and regions and the ways to deal with vary, but they are common in depriving of students' equal access to learning materials, high quality teachers, and educational facilities.

In China, the differences in educational funding between urban and rural areas, and between the eastern and western areas are huge. For instance, the ratio of educational funding between urban and rural areas is 2.5 ~ 3: 1, and the ratio between the eastern and western areas is 2 ~ 2.5: 1. In 2000, average educational funding for each elementary student in Shanghai was 2,791 RMB, but only 261 RMB in Henan province, and the former is 10.69 times as much as the later. The average public funding for each elementary student in Shanghai was 448 RMB, and less than 9 RMB in Shanxi province, and the former is 49.78 times as much as the later (Yang, 2006). Due to the serious differentiation of local education and the big gap between urban and rural areas in educational resources, the government is taking some steps to equalize the access to educational resources. Decisions made at the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenary meeting of the 18<sup>th</sup> session of the Central Committee of Communist Party included "expanding the coverage of quality educational resources through information technology" (Zhang, 2013), and "balancing the allocation of educational resources in urban and rural areas through standardizing the public schools, exchanging job rotation of principals and teachers, and distinguishing key schools and key classes to avoid the Matthew Effect (Yi, Zhang, & Shen, 2013).

In the US, the overall difference in educational funds among areas is not as big as that in China. Public schools are funded by a combination of local, state and federal taxes. "The higher spending districts were spending more than twice as much as the lower spending districts." "More difficult to quantify are inequalities within districts; but they are not insignificant." "More experienced teachers are likely to concentrate in schools in which working conditions are easier" and have more students with high achievement from better socio-economic residential areas. Rich parents spend more money in order to provide their children an access to prestigious private schools that have better teachers and facilities. There are around 70% of judges and barristers attended independent schools whereas the proportion of the whole population attending independent schools is around 7% (Brighouse, Tooley, and Howe, 2010).

Access to high quality educational resources directly affects students' learning results, chance of

college enrollment, and social mobility. An equal access to a suitable school for all students depends on overall balanced economic and social development among different areas and the development of teacher education that brings up more qualified teachers who can provide appropriate instructions in suitable methods. It is relatively easier to ensure an equal access to educational resources through educational policies, balanced budget, and macro and micro management in schools and school districts. But it is much more difficult to remove those stereotypes, biases, and prejudices in social media and public opinions of the main stream.

### Assurance

Equal exposure to educational information ensures students and parents to be aware of all the developments and possibilities that are important for them to make their educational decisions. Assurance means an equal position to be noticed or exposed to the best possible educational opportunities. In theory, with an equal acceptance to a neighborhood public school and an equal access to basic educational resources and information, anybody has an equal assurance for opportunities that lead to his/her potentials and success.

Educational information and parents' awareness and understanding of it play an important role in ensuring equal acceptance and access that are equal only to people who have enough information and are prepared for them. Parents with better education "were better able to understand the public sources of information, including the information offered by the schools themselves" (Brighouse, Tooley, and Howe, 2010). With more updated educational information parents can make better educational choices for their children.

Educational information is composed within an ideological social media, influenced by public opinion, and delivered in a linguistic format through certain devices or channels. This means that the way and format educational information is delivered are favorable to some student groups than others in terms of students' native languages and residential areas. For instance, the educational policy in China used to be urban-biased or urban priority. In 1950s, more than 80% of population was illiteracy, and majority of them were living in rural area. Students in those areas had no schools to attend, not to mention to get any educational information for advancement, and 41% of colleges were located in 6 major cities (Bao, 2011). The inequality in receiving educational information also happens in the same area or between near by areas. Parents of students living in poverty have much less involvement in school activities, and have a difficult time communicating with their children, which blocks two links of information flow. In many schools throughout the US, Anglo students from middle to high socioeconomic groups dominate the honors and advanced placement classes. One of the main reasons is that students from disadvantaged families were less likely to be advised to take the more challenging courses than students with the same test scores of higher socioeconomic status (Jenlink, 2009). Another important reason is the language barrier to receiving educational information that occurs to both students and their parents of minority groups. Less educational information means less educational opportunities, which causes students from disadvantaged groups to be lost at the starting line.

Assurance of educational information to every student involves economic development, educational advancement, unbiased social media as well as the measures of delivering educational information including the language and technology used and the guiding public opinion and ideology. With various combinations of factors mentioned above, countries, areas, and school districts are moving towards the same direction at different paces.

In conclusion, educational equality at social or political-economical layer provides learners an equal acceptance and access to a quality education, and educational equality at informational layer provides students an assurance to educational information they need to make a plan, to be pared, and to promote to their individual potentials. However, in order to realize their educational dreams, students need to be put in an appropriate program within a healthy school culture through teachers' equitable teaching methods.

### **Educational, Cultural and Psychological Perspectives**

While educational equality in this article focuses on the 3 As of acceptance, access, and assurance, educational equity focuses on the 3 As of appropriateness, adequacy, and attainment from educational, cultural, and psychological perspectives with Confucius "Yin Cai Shi Jiao" as the primary principle in teaching methodology, measures, and mentality. This article, for the first time, considers educational equality the hardware of an equal education that ensures students the material equality of education from social, economic, and informational aspects, and educational equity the software of an equal education that ensures students the spiritual equity of education from educational, cultural, and psychological aspects.

The software for an equal education or educational equity focuses on teaching subjects, contents and methodologies that are appropriate, adequate, and attainable for every student. Educational equity can be interpreted from many teaching related aspects: learning content equal to all students in terms of students being interested in; teaching methodology equal to all students in terms of students receiving an equal amount of knowledge input; teaching measures including equipment, technology, and linguistic intermediary that are equal to all students in terms of students' competence and proficiency; and educational programs equal to all students in terms of students being included according to their individuality. All these principles are included in, or interpreted with, Confucius "Yin Cai Shi Jiao." The goal of educational equity is to teach students in a way so that they can reach their potentials. There are three layers of educational equity within an equal education: educational, cultural and psychological equity of education, which can be classified as 3 As of appropriateness, adequacy, and attainment.

#### Appropriateness

Educational equity at the intelligential layer offers suitable educational content both in quality and quantity according to learners' needs and pace. Students are diverse which brings challenges to every aspect of education including curriculum, class allocation, and teaching methods. To meet these challenges, American schools provide mainly two tracks of special education for students at the two ends: the



most advantaged and the least advantaged including programs aiming at student groups of language proficiency, disability, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and autism.

Provided that the advanced group in special education was taken care of, students fallen into the category of special education still only account a small portion of student body. There are two groups of students whose needs are hidden or overlooked: minorities and the majority of students in the middle range. As above-mentioned, minority students are at a disadvantageous position in the language used in classrooms as a teaching measure, which affects their absorbing the knowledge delivered in various subjects. Their weakness in receiving the educational information cannot be made up only through the language programs in special education, not to mention those minority students whose linguistic competence is in the middle range and who are not included in special education programs. In addition, their cultural alienation has not been brought enough attention, yet it is critical to an equal education as well as educational appropriateness. Beside the least advantaged and the most advantaged, majority students fall in between. How can an equal education integrate their needs? What kinds of programs will help the majority to reach their potentials?

To ensure educational appropriateness, it is important to link the knowledge students learn and the way they learn including their cultural background, potentials and learning styles such as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic ones (Lincoln, 2011). Thus, educational appropriateness, adequacy and attainment are integrated.

### Adequacy

Educational equity at the cultural layer ensures students to receive adequate knowledge to reach their potentials based on their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

As Carter (2012) has found, students' identities are multidimensional that include a range from race, ethnicity, class, gender, attitudes, opinions, cultural tastes, and philosophical differences. Schools also have different socio-cultural climates that produce certain policies, practices, codes, pervasive ideas, and approaches to educational equality and educational equity. Students "with one type of cultural ethos may make sense of a particular educational practice differently from students who share a similar identity but attend a school with sharply different cultural ethos."

Minority students were born and grown up or have spent the critical years in different cultural environments. They came to the current country as foreigners speaking different languages. Their language weakness may be taken care of through programs in special education, but it is hard for them to reach the native level, which affects their assurance to educational information including access and understanding. In addition, their cultural alienation has kept them away from the main stream, which indicates their disadvantages in information and opportunity. Although the Affirmative Action in the US aims at supporting minorities to be promoted, or at least treated equally as majority, "in fact, social disadvantage gives a student no claim to extra resources whereas 'natural' disadvantage does" (Brighouse, Tooley, &

Howe, 2010). To many students, the cultural adequacy of education is not from the curriculum or classroom activities but from their own racial or ethnic groups. “To them, an affinity to one’s own racial or ethnic group members is as a ‘natural’ social condition, the result of shared histories and cultural narratives and social and economic locations.” Even tastes and participation in school activities “generally tend to be associated with ascribed racial identity” (Carter, 2012). In order to ensure students both majority and minority to enjoy the adequacy of education, schools and teachers need to include as many cultural elements as possible into the curriculum and classroom activities so that they are equal as well as adequate to students from any ethnic groups.

### Attainment

While educational individuality ensures students to learn what they are interested in and what they are capable to learn, the equal access to educational information guarantees learners the equal educational messages according to their ways of receiving these messages. A pure auditory delivery of knowledge will not have the same educational input to both visual and auditory learners. It does not provide an equal access to these two types of learners; therefore, different learning results are partially because of an unequal access to educational information not based on students’ effort but on their learning styles.

Educational equity at psychological layer ensures students an equal access to educational information to reach their potentials based on their learning styles. Landu and Dubyak (2014) discuss the importance of understanding students’ learning behavior and educators’ teaching styles. They point out that educators’ personal qualities of classroom behavior and teaching methods can increase student satisfaction, and that the most successful instructors provide varied methods related to course objectives (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2014, from Landu & Dubyak, 2014). In order to choose the teaching methods that bring learning satisfaction, educators must have the knowledge of varied learning styles. There are mainly three learning styles: visual, auditory, or kinesthetic ones (Lincoln, 2011). Learning style affects how we perceive, organize, and process information. Felder and Silverman (1988, from Landu & Dubyak, 2014) describe the different ways on five factors due to varied individual learning styles: 1) Perceive information by sensory or intuitive means; 2) Perceive information most effectively visually or auditorily; 3) Organize information inductively or deductively; 4) Process information actively or reflectively; and 5) Progress towards understanding concepts sequentially or holistically. If educators apply a single teaching method that only matches students with one type of learning style, students with different types of learning styles would be disadvantaged. Due to the inappropriate teaching methods, these students do not have an equal access to the information passed by the teacher in classroom as other students since their ways of perceiving, organizing, and processing information do not match the teaching style applied, thus they have less chances to reach an equal attainment, not to mention a full attainment of the knowledge they are supposed to master.

### **Dilemmas between Educational Equality and Educational Equity**

Literally, the core meaning of equity is fairness whereas the core meaning of equality is the quality of being the same. The author of this article interprets “fairness” as metaphysical equality or equity, and

“the quality of being the same” as physical fairness or equality. Based on the meanings of “equity” and “equality,” educational equality indicates the opportunity to get the same education whereas educational equity implies the opportunity to get an appropriate education.

### Equal Education and Quality Education

In theory, physical fairness and metaphysical equality are different concepts; the former emphasizes the material quantity of being equal, and the later focuses on the spiritual quality of being equal. They are only parallel at the material basis for both equity and equality. Educational equality and educational equity are also different concepts in educational theory; the former focuses on equal acceptance to schools, equal access to educational resources, and equal assurance of information and opportunities for being successful, and the later emphasizes on appropriate subjects, adequate contents, and maximum attainment for being educated fairly in terms of suitable learning quality and quantity to reach the potentials. Educational equality emphasizes the material side of an equal education to balance off what social inequality had deprived of some students their right of getting an equal education. Educational equity emphasizes giving students different but appropriate education so that all students are equal not on what they get but on what they produce, not on the same subjects they learn but on how they learn.

The concept of “Equal Education” is based on educational equality, which can be understood from two perspectives: 1) citizen’s equal rights and social justice, and 2) the same subjects of instruction and academic standards to every citizen. The meaning of “equality” within this concept focuses on individuals’ equal rights to receive education, to study the same basic subjects necessary for being a citizen, and to be evaluated by the same academic standards. However, there are two counter-arguments to the concept of “Equal Education”. First, it is impossible to provide an equal instruction within a context with many variables, such as the access to educational resources, quality of teaching staff and educational administrators, educational values of families in communities, etc. Second, if we provide an equal instruction to individuals with different social and cultural backgrounds and academic orientations, equality in practice implies inequality in theory. Thus, “Equal Education” is more of a slogan or an ideal that can never be reached. It is a principle to guide us towards a phenomenon of political correctness that can only be closer but can never be reached.

In principle, all people should get an equal instruction. But equal education can be looked at from the equal quality of teachers who give instructions, from the content of instruction in its quality and quantity, or from the suitability of content to students in terms of their interests, needs, and achievements. None of these three aspects will reach the absolute standard of equality. But if we change the angles from absolute to relative, and from concrete quantity to abstract quality, we can reach an equal education in its theoretical meaning, or we can name it quality education.

The concept of “Quality Education” is based on educational equity, which implies suitable curriculum, teaching methods, and achievable academic challenge to individual students. However, the meaning of “quality” within this concept is a relative speaking, which can be contradictory to the concept of

“Equal Education.” An educational program that is of quality to one student could be of no quality to another student for the important standard of quality education exists in whether it stimulates that particular student’s motivation and brings out the best outcomes from the very student. In this sense, quality education cannot be equal to every student, but suitable to individuals’ characteristics and needs as Confucius’ “Yin Cai Shi Jiao” implies.

### Elitism and Egalitarianism

Elitism and egalitarianism are theories that have opposite views on the relationship between liberty and equality. As the representative of elitism, Robert Nozick claims, “If it came about in accordance with the rules of acquisition, transfer and rectification, then it is no unjust, however unequal it may be.” “It is unjust to force a person to work for another’s benefit” (Kilcullen, 1996). Elitism believes that competence must be the scale of education; justice is to judge a person according to his capability; survival of the fittest is the equality; education cannot make everyone without distinction to accept the same education; intelligent people should receive the advanced education, and mediocre people general education; and educating students according to their competence so that every one gets what he deserves and reaches his full potential. Based on these arguments elite education or meritocracy have developed in theories and practices in many countries.

As the representative of egalitarianism, John Rawls claims two principles of justice. First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that: a) they are to be of the greatest benefit to the least-advantaged members of society; b) offices and positions must be open to everyone under conditions of fair equality of opportunity (Clayton, 2001, & Daniels, 2003). Egalitarianism thinks that people without talents need more educational opportunities and more educational resources; screening education that put students in different classes and different schools according to their competence is a social injustice; and public education is to provide every child an opportunity to free education.

The influence of elitism and egalitarianism in education is reflected in the discussion, debates, and dilemmas between educational equality and educational equity. Deep understanding in theories helps educators make decisions and take actions to combine them in practices towards an equal education. The realization of metaphysical equality relies spiritual means whereas the realization of physical fairness needs material basis. In practice, educational equality more focuses on benefiting the least advantaged to protect their civil rights and rights as citizens. But the goal of educational equity is to ensure every one’s potential to be reached, which is compatible with meritocracy. As the material supply depends on the needs of programs that cannot be absolute equal, some programs can much more expensive than others. However, in reality the social effects and consequences are often different between programs for least advantaged and those for highly talented from wealthy family for political correctness and popular interpretation of human rights.

Based on the principle of educational equality, affirmative action is the policy of favoring members of a disadvantaged group who are perceived to suffer from discrimination within a culture (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014). For the purpose of educational equality, many countries take affirmative actions in varying degrees. On the other hand, many educators advocate meritocracy “where individuals are able to advance on the basis of their talent and effort” (Brighouse, Tooley, & Howe, 2010), which can be considered a practice of educational equity.

While governments, educational institutions and teachers work together towards educational equality and educational equity, most of parents focus on their own children’s benefits, and their understanding of educational equality and educational equity is more or less based on their children’s situation. For instance, some parents focus on “facility, distance, safety, convenience, and locality,” others consider their children’s personality and teaching methods of schoolteachers. There are more parents who display “a consistent concern with the social origins of the likely peer group, and an interest in having the child among bright children” (Brighouse, Tooley, & Howe, 2010). Parents are busy moving their children to schools that either having good facilities, experienced teachers, or having more highly motivated and talented students. Thus, parents’ choices created a phenomenon of social inequality that better schools enroll more advanced students, which speeds the social and economic segregation.

In addition, governments do not have enough money to provide every school district the same amount or more than enough resources to meet the needs of various programs. Even if the government can ensure an equal distribution of educational budget from the top, there are two factors maintaining the inequality on this matter at intra-district level and within district level. In the US, “the main source of local funding in the vast majority of districts is a real estate tax,” and “the higher spending districts were spending more than twice as much as the lower spending districts.” The other factor is the inequality within the districts; for instance, social-economic residential segregation brings schools different populations (Brighouse, Tooley, & Howe, 2010).

Even if the government has enough educational resources for every school district, it still cannot guarantee every student to reach the maximum achievement. First, equal educational resource does not always have a positive relation with achievement, or does not necessarily lead to a reduction in achievement gap. The connection does not exist between educational excellence and educational equality but between educational excellence and educational equity. Second, some school districts “concentrate resources on those with very low levels of talent and motivation, in order to produce more equal levels of achievement across the board.” But it can be “a simple waste of educational resources” and “at the expense of other children” (Brighouse, Tooley, & Howe, 2010). This practice also violates both educational equality and educational equity for it distributes the educational resources neither equally nor according to students’ needs to reach their potentials. In China, this was done in an opposite way of spending more money on those with highly talented and highly motivated. Based on the principle of educational equity, this might bring out more absolute achievement and contribute more to society. Third, it is easy and visible to reach the equality in formality or on the material level, but difficult to realize the es-

sential and potential equity. We cannot exchange a material equality with an essential inequity. Fourth, in order to implement the principles of educational equality and educational equity, we should separate education with politics to avoid the political correctness interfering with the implementation of educational equality and educational equity, and distinguish the concept of political democracy from educational sociology.

There are other dilemmas such as those between talent and capability, meritocracy and achievement gap, equality of educational opportunity and quality of education, adequacy of teaching methodology and learning content, teachers' professionalism and students' effort. However, within the conceptual framework of educational equality and educational equity with interpretations in material, moral, and meritorious terms supported by educational practices, educators can have a deep understanding on the meanings and perspectives of educational equality and educational equity, and find their conjunctions towards an equal education.

#### Mutual Complementary

As mentioned above, educational equality can be interpreted at the physical level from social, economic, and informational perspectives, and educational equity can be understood at the metaphysical level from educational, cultural, and psychological perspectives. In emphasizing on equal acceptance, access, and assurance, the main goal of educational equality is to protect the right of education for disadvantaged people out of democratic principles and social justice. Aiming at appropriateness, adequacy, and attainment, educational equity is to provide everybody including disadvantaged, advanced, and the majority in between an education that is most suitable, receivable, and resultant. While educational equality ensures the physical need of an equal education, educational equity sets a metaphysical guidance to an equal education. Educational equality treats every individual as an equal social being, whereas educational equity looks at every individual as a pure learner with different biological features and psychological characteristics. Educational equality provides a material environment or hardware for running an equal education whereas educational equity provides a road map or software for running a successful and essential equal education. As a social activity, educational equality is the basis of an equal education; as a teaching practice, educational equity is the fundamental goal of an equal education. In conclusion, educational equality and educational equity are two concepts on the same topic that are related, contradicted, overlap, and complementary. The best way to clarify these two concepts is to interpret them at different levels, from different angles and perspectives, and through their respective practices.

Logically, these two concepts do not always have a positive relation, or they are not always compatible. There are four possible combinations between them: educational equality and educational equity (positive + positive), educational equality and educational inequity (positive + negative), educational equity and educational inequality (positive + negative), and educational inequality and educational inequity (negative + negative). In the first model of educational equality with educational equity, regardless of his/her background in race, culture, socioeconomic status, interests, career track and other characteristics, every student will be ensured with a good school, good teachers, and enough other educational re-

sources. In addition, every student is learning what he/she is interested in and what he/she will need in the most efficient way. Only this model can produce a truly equal education in which every student is possibly reach his/her potentials.

In the second model of educational equality with educational inequity, every student has an access to the educational resources he/she needs. However, he/she might be put in a school that is to his/her disadvantages in terms of school culture, content and levels of subjects, communication with teachers and students, and adaptation to classroom atmosphere and teaching methods. Educational equity is the necessary condition for students to reach the potentials. Without educational equity, educational goal cannot be reached, and equal education does not exist. In the third model of educational equality with educational inequality, problems will occur in educational materials and equipment shortage that are crucial for running some programs. This will seriously affect school districts where more low-income or minority families gather. In the fourth model of educational inequality with educational inequity, school segregation comes out of social separation. Education does not play a role of social mobility equally for every one. Educational resources are not evenly distributed that there is a huge uneven among schools. In addition, teaching methods applied are not in all students' favour but in one group of students' favour. All these inequality and inequity deteriorated the achievement gap among students. Division of the four models is not based on a detailed quantitative data but on a vague qualitative standard.

In reality, the first model is still just an ideal that takes much longer time to be realized. "Inequity is endemic in all school settings," all stakeholders "are confronted with the responsibility of addressing issues of equity and working to eliminate inequity daily" (Jenlink, 2009). However, it is a huge social and educational project that needs coordination and cooperation in distribution of educational resources, training and allocation of educational manpower, cultural and ideological understanding and tolerance. The characteristics of, and relations between, educational equality and educational equity have brought challenges to all professionals involved.

## **Conclusion**

While educational equality focuses on the educational rights and benefits of citizens being the same, educational equity emphasizes the educational fairness to individuals being different.

Equal education is neither a political slogan or an ideal, nor a practice of streaming. It is an interdisciplinary issue in the fields of sociology, education and psychology. It is a comprehensive project that needs to be dealt with democratic policies, individualized curricula, and scientific teaching methodologies.

An equal education goes beyond political equalization. It is an issue of tri-disciplinary. Its sociological meaning lies in the social justice in terms of equal educational opportunity regardless of learners' political and economical status (In Confucius' words, "You Jiao Wu Lei"). Its educational meaning refers the educational suitability according to students' individuality (In Confucius' words, "Yin Cai Shi Jiao").

Its psychological meaning reveals the important aspect of educational equity in terms of accessibility of educational information (In author's word, "Zonghe Jiaoxue Fa", meaning, comprehensive teaching methodology). Educational equity is an issue of society, curriculum, and teaching methodology. The realization of educational equity needs a project combining efforts from governments, educational administrators, and classroom teachers.

Educational equality and educational equity are different terminologies in terms of conceptual domains, theoretical and practical implications. Educational equality pursues equal share at surface and material level whereas educational equity strives for deep and spiritual satisfaction. Both educational equality and educational equity advocate equal educational resource and opportunity, but the former focuses on equal resource and access to education for everyone, and the later emphasizes on receiving targeted educational resource and educational opportunity. What educational equality pursues belongs to part of human rights, and what educational equity asks for are the issues of appropriateness of educational content, level, and methodology. Educational equality aims at an equal share in every aspect of education whereas the goal of educational equity is for everyone to possibly reach his/her potentials.

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