



Equality of Opportunity in Education

Dear Readers,

The educational goal of a country is to provide individuals social, economic and social benefits by equipping them with certain qualifications. At the national level, education aims to make peaceful, tolerant, non-violent, economically qualified human capital, and as a social purpose, to educate individuals who protect the national interests of the society in which they live. For this reason, every country is developing policies to raise the education level of the society. By doing so, they want to increase the quality of human capital by providing all citizens with access to education.

Equality of opportunity typically refers to justice and impartiality. In other words, it is a nation-state's treating all its citizens equally. According to the definition of OECD (2007), equality of opportunity is equal attitude and equal behaviour of the State to all its citizens, regardless of gender, socio-economic status and ethnicity (p. 29). Equality of opportunity in education is that all individuals living within the borders of the nation-state have the right to equal access to the most appropriate educational services which can develop their abilities and skills, without being exposed to discrimination. Equality of opportunity in education is affected by economic, geographical, social, political and individual factors.

The economic power of the country, the income level of the family, the profession of the parents and income distribution are the economic factors affecting the equality of opportunity in education. These variables are also affecting the access to education due to the reasons arising from their relations with each other in the context of economic factors (Metek, 2009, p.38). According to Zhang (2002), in countries where income distribution is not justified, national education expenditure shifts more towards rich, which in turn increases the inequality of opportunity in education. Because, in the countries where justice is not provided in the distribution of income, the wealthy group holds political power, which will obstruct the redistribution of income and cause the next generations to be less equal (p. 24). This fact is an obstacle for national development especially in countries where both public and private sectors provide educational services, as wealthy people increase their opportunity to receive education from the private sector and take more share of the country's economy in the formation of human capital.

At the beginning of the geographical factors affecting equality of opportunity in education is the distinctness between village-city and regions. In villages or undeveloped regions, variables such as the low enrolment rates especially for girls, financial incapability of families, high student-teacher ratio, inadequate number of teachers, child labour and unregistered employment negatively affect the equality of opportunity in education.

Gender discrimination, religion, differences in language, ethnic discrimination, population, and social education imbalance are social factors that affect equality of opportunity in education. Both in developed and developing countries, women are disadvantaged in access to education compared to men. According to a research of UNESCO (2013), 25% of women in 35 of the 75 developed and developing countries are uneducated (<http://www.education-inequalities.org/> 26th of February, 2018).

As the determiner and follower of educational policy, the state can also be a part of the factors that can lead to inequality of opportunity in education. This situation called as the political factor in the literature. According to Zoraloglu, the political group who holds the power may perceive the views of a particular group as a threat to their political interests and create difficulties for them in receiving education. This situation increases the inequalities within the country and weakens the socio-economic development (As cited in Yardımcıoğlu, 2012, p. 45).

One of the factors affecting equality of opportunity in education is individual differences such as intelligence level, potentials, biological status. These factors are not the result of an externality or any other policy outcome, rather they are the factors that come from human nature. In this case, the source of differences that affect the equality of opportunity in education is hereditary competence.

Government intervention is inevitable for taking precaution for economic, geographical, social, political and individual factors that create inequality of opportunity in education. To eliminate economic factors, states have an impact on policies of educational spending. The state can provide distribution of public education expenditures according to the economic situation of the citizens. The government can reduce the negative impact of geographical factors by applying mandatory service to teachers, developing technical and physical facilities of schools based on regional differences, and applying incentive policies for local people to work together with schools. Social factors are at the forefront of factors that negatively affect equality of opportunity in education and are almost impossible to resolve without state intervention. For this reason, the legal regulation of the state, the use of sanctioning power can reduce the negative direction of this effect. Constitutional arrangements are important to be made to eliminate the political factors that caused by the state itself and to put all the encompassing laws. In order to minimize the individual factors, mainstreaming education is effective in this respect.

In educational systems where equality of opportunity is ensured, each individual acquires the ability to receive an appropriate education. According to Karakutuk (2012), education systems with equality of opportunity in education;

- provide social continuity by transferring culture and lifestyle, language and values of society to future generations,
- enable the majority to be influential on government, teach the principles of democracy and transform it into a lifestyle for students,
- train productive individuals, avoid extravagance in use of county's resources and provide sensitivity towards the environment (p. 18).

Education provides prestige and income for individuals. For this reason, equality of opportunity in education in a society will provide social progress, quality improvement of human capital and economic development. In short, it will create positive externalities. At the core of educational policies is to reduce poverty, to have a more capable, potentially high workforce, and to reduce class divisions. In order for these policies to be successful, ensuring equality of opportunity in education should be of top priority.

Sincerely,

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