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## SOCIAL EQUALITY AND INCLUSION AND LEARNERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS DIVERSITY

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**\*Roxanne Desiree H. Detablan**

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Master of Arts in Teaching major in Social Studies Valencia Colleges (Bukidnon)

Incorporated Hagkol, Valencia City.

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\*Corresponding Author: Roxanne Desiree H. Detablan

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of social equality and inclusion on learners' equity perspectives and attitudes toward inclusion and diversity in the public elementary schools of the San Fernando I District, Division of Bukidnon. A researcher-made survey questionnaire was utilized to gather data from learners and teachers. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the Pearson  $r$  Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. The findings indicate that social equality and inclusion yielded a Very High Impact across all measured dimensions of learners' equity perspectives, specifically concerning Access to Educational Resources, Teacher Support and Fair Treatment, Socioeconomic Disparities, School Policies, and Peer Relationships. Furthermore, learners demonstrated a Positive Attitude toward inclusion and diversity, acknowledging their importance. Crucially, a strong, significant positive relationship was established between the impact of all social equality factors and learners' attitudes toward inclusion and diversity, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis. The study concludes that all aspects of social equality profoundly influence learners' perceptions of equity. This mandates a holistic, systems-wide approach that prioritizes the interpersonal aspects of equity, such as fair treatment and unbiased support from teachers, as the most direct means of strengthening positive attitudes. Practical recommendations include mandating annual, evidence-based diversity training for teachers and empowering learners as "Inclusion Advocates" to foster a self-sustaining culture of belonging.

**KEYWORDS:** *Social Equality and Inclusion on Learners' Equity Perspectives in Public Schools.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Social inequality, characterized by unequal access to resources and opportunities, significantly influences learners' experiences and perspectives in public schools. Factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geographic location can create disparities that affect students' academic performance, social interactions, and overall well-being. Understanding how these inequalities shape learners' perceptions of equity is crucial for fostering inclusive educational environments. This research topic is essential as it aims to explore the complex relationship between social inequality, inclusion efforts, and the development of equity perspectives among students, ultimately promoting fairness and justice in education.

The Philippine Constitution explicitly mandates the promotion of social justice and equal access to education. Article XIV, Section 1 states that the State shall protect and promote the right of all citizens to quality education at all levels and shall take appropriate steps to make such education accessible to all. Furthermore, DepEd Order No. 72, s. 2003, emphasizes inclusive education as a strategy for increasing participation of all children, particularly those experiencing marginalization. These legal and policy frameworks underscore the importance of addressing social inequalities and promoting equity within the Philippine education system.

A 2019 study by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) indicated that children from indigenous communities and those living in geographically isolated areas face additional barriers to accessing quality education, further exacerbating existing inequalities (UNICEF, 2019). These statistics highlight the urgent need to address social inequalities and promote inclusive practices to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all learners.

While numerous studies have examined the impact of social inequality on academic outcomes, limited research specifically focuses on how these inequalities shape learners' perspectives on equity in the Philippine context. Existing literature often provides a broad overview of social disparities but lacks in-depth exploration of the specific mechanisms through which these disparities influence students' understanding and attitudes towards fairness and inclusion. This research aims to address this gap by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between social inequality, inclusion efforts, and the development of equity perspectives among learners in public schools.

The impact of social inequality and inclusion on students' equity perspectives in public schools is a complex topic fundamentally linked to the systemic imbalances inherent in societies. Social inequality, which includes gaps in socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, and other characteristics, profoundly influences the educational experiences and outcomes of students. Inclusion seeks to establish a learning environment in which all students, irrespective of their origin or circumstances, are regarded, respected, and supported. The interaction between these two forces significantly affects learners' perceptions of fairness, justice, and equity in their educational environment and beyond.

Social inequality can show in multiple forms inside public educational institutions. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may lack access to vital resources, including decent healthcare, nutritious food, and secure housing, adversely affecting their academic performance and general well-being. Students from racial and ethnic minorities may encounter prejudice, stereotyping, and cultural insensitivity, resulting in feelings of marginalization and disengagement. Students with impairments may face physical and attitudinal obstacles that restrict their participation and access to educational opportunities. Such experiences can undermine students' perception of equity, causing them to view the educational system as prejudiced and inequitable.

Effectively implemented inclusion activities can alleviate the adverse impacts of socioeconomic inequality and foster a more equitable educational environment. Inclusive approaches entail establishing a hospitable and friendly educational environment, delivering tailored instruction to accommodate the varied needs of learners, employing culturally sensitive curricula, and cultivating healthy connections among students from diverse backgrounds. When students perceive themselves as appreciated, respected, and supported, they are more inclined to cultivate a robust feeling of belonging and a conviction that the educational system is just and just.

The cultivation of learners' equity views is essential for promoting a more just and equitable society. When students comprehend the fundamental reasons of social inequity and possess the information, abilities, and disposition to confront injustice, they are more inclined to become proactive and engaged citizens who champion constructive social change. Consequently, it is imperative for public schools to tackle socioeconomic inequality and foster inclusion to develop students' equity perspectives and enable them to construct a more equitable society.

Social inequality can lead to feelings of marginalization, disengagement, and decreased motivation among learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. These negative experiences can hinder their academic progress and limit their opportunities for future success. For teachers, addressing the diverse needs of students from varying socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds can be challenging, requiring additional training and resources to effectively promote inclusion and equity in the classroom.

The exploration of the effect of social inequality and inclusion on learners' equity perspectives is crucial for promoting a more just and equitable education system. By understanding how these factors influence students' attitudes and beliefs, this research can inform the development of targeted interventions and policies that foster a sense of fairness, empathy, and social responsibility among learners. Ultimately, this study is essential for creating inclusive educational environments that empower all students to reach their full potential, regardless of their socioeconomic or cultural background.

### ***Theoretical Framework of the Study***

This study is anchored on Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Reproduction (1977). Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of socioeconomic Reproduction, presented in 1977, provides a critical framework for analyzing the perpetuation of socioeconomic disparities throughout generations via several social systems, particularly education. The theory asserts that individuals from diverse social classes possess differing quantities of "capital," encompassing economic capital (financial resources), cultural capital (knowledge, skills, and preferences esteemed by the dominant culture), and social capital (networks of relationships and connections).

Bourdieu contends that schools, instead of functioning as impartial entities, frequently perpetuate prevailing social hierarchies by privileging the cultural capital of the dominant class, consequently disadvantaging children from lower socioeconomic strata. This paradigm is pertinent to the investigation of the "Effect of Social Inequality and Inclusion on Learners' Equity Perspectives in Public Schools," as it elucidates how structural disparities affect students' perspectives of equity and justice within the educational system.

This study applies Bourdieu's theory to examine how independent variables—access to educational resources, teacher support and equitable treatment, socioeconomic disparities among students, school policies on inclusivity, and peer relationships and social integration—contribute to the perpetuation of social inequalities and influence learners' perceptions of equity. For example, inequitable access to educational resources, including excellent

textbooks, technology, and extracurricular activities, can intensify existing inequities in cultural capital, disadvantaging pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Likewise, if educators inadvertently favor kids who embody the cultural capital esteemed by the ruling class, it may result in biased treatment and perpetuate inequitable outcomes. School rules regarding inclusivity, or the absence thereof, can either disrupt or reinforce social structures, influencing students' perceptions of belonging and equity. Peer connections and social integration can mirror and perpetuate existing social differences, shaping learners' perspectives on equality and inclusion.

### ***Significance of the Study***

This study was conducted as the researcher believes that it would gain and provide significance to the following group of beneficiaries:

To the learners, this research on the influence of social disparity and inclusion on students' equity perspectives in public schools is crucial, as it elucidates how social disparities, and inclusive behaviors affect their ideas of fairness and equality. By comprehending these dynamics, educators can formulate methods to cultivate a more equitable learning environment, so fostering equal chances and outcomes for all students.

To the teachers, this study is essential for them, as it offers insights into how socioeconomic disparities and inclusive practices shape learners' conceptions of justice. By comprehending these processes, educators can customize their pedagogical approaches to rectify equity disparities, encourage inclusive environments, and cultivate a sense of belonging among learners. This can strengthen teacher-student connections, boost classroom management, and eventually result in more effective pedagogical approaches that accommodate varied learners and foster academic achievement.

To the school heads, this study is important for them, as it provides critical insights for fostering equitable educational settings. By comprehending the influence of socioeconomic inequities and inclusive behaviors on students' views of equality, school administrators can formulate policies and programs that foster equity, diversity, and inclusion. This may result in improved student performance, elevated school reputation, and more conformity with educational standards.

To Valencia Colleges (Buk.) Incorporated (VCI), this study is pertinent to VCI as it corresponds with the institution's purpose to advance social justice and educational excellence. This research examines how disparities and inclusive practices influence students' perceptions of equality, thereby supporting the college's dedication to confronting

systemic educational inequities. It may guide curriculum development, improve teacher training programs, and bolster VCI's initiatives to promote a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### ***Definition of Terms***

For better understanding between the researcher and the readers, the following terms are defined operationally as follows.

*Access to Educational Resources.* Access to Educational Resources refers to the availability of textbooks, digital learning tools, libraries, and well-equipped classrooms that ensure all students, regardless of socioeconomic background, have equal learning opportunities.

*Learners' Attitude Toward Inclusion and Diversity.* Learners' Attitude Toward Inclusion and Diversity refers to students' beliefs, feelings, and behavioral intentions regarding the acceptance and integration of diverse individuals in educational settings.

*Peer Relationships and Social Integration.* Peer Relationships and Social Integration refers to the level of acceptance and interaction among students from different cultural, economic, and social backgrounds, impacting their sense of belonging and engagement in school activities.

*School Policies on Inclusivity.* School Policies on Inclusivity refers to the presence of institutional policies that promote diversity, equity, and non-discrimination, such as scholarship programs, anti-bullying initiatives, and inclusive curriculum design.

*Socioeconomic Disparities among Learners.* Socioeconomic Disparities among Learners refers to the differences in students' economic backgrounds that influence access to school materials, participation in extracurricular activities, and overall academic performance.

*Teacher Support and Fair Treatment.* Teacher Support and Fair Treatment refer to the extent to which teachers provide equal attention, guidance, and academic encouragement to students from diverse backgrounds, ensuring that biases do not affect learning experiences.

### ***Insights Gained***

The study on social equality and inclusion in public schools reveals that fostering equity in learners' perspectives entails creating an environment where all students, regardless of background or ability, have equal opportunities to participate fully in academic and social activities. It highlights that effective inclusive education is not merely about placing students in mainstream classrooms but ensuring active participation, acceptance, and support among peers and educators. Social inclusion promotes the development of friendships, communication skills, and a sense of belonging, which are critical for learners' overall

success. School leadership and policies play a crucial role in creating a supportive climate that challenges prejudice and bias while providing the necessary resources and to uphold fairness and inclusion.

### **The Methodology**

This chapter is composed of the research design, research locale, respondents of the study, the sampling procedure, the research instrument, data gathering, scoring procedure, validation and try out of instrument, and statistical treatment of data.

### ***Research Design***

This study was performed by applying the descriptive-correlational research design. It delved on the impact of social inequality and inclusion on learners' equity perspectives in public schools in San Fernando I District, Division of Bukidnon.

Data on the demographic profile of respondents in terms of age, sex, and family's monthly income and the impact of social inequality and inclusion on learners' equity perspectives in public schools were gathered by using the researcher-made questionnaire and learners' attitude toward inclusion and diversity were based on the respondents' answers to the survey-questionnaire as well.

### ***Research Locale***

This study was conducted in the San Fernando 1 District-Division of Bukidnon during the 2024-2025 School Year. San Fernando is a municipality situated in the landlocked province of Bukidnon. The municipality covers an area of 705.06 square kilometers, or 272.23 square miles, constituting 6.72% of Bukidnon's total area. The population, as determined by the 2020 Census, was 63,045.

The cities closest to San Fernando, as measured by great-circle distance, are Valencia, Bukidnon, Malaybalay, Tagum, Davao del Norte, Panabo, Cagayan de Oro, and Davao City. The nearest municipalities are Cabanglasan, Bukidnon; Quezon, Bukidnon; Lantapan, Bukidnon; Maramag, Bukidnon; Talaingod, Davao del Norte; and Don Carlos, Bukidnon. The distance from the national capital is 877.61 kilometers (545.32 miles). The following list delineates certain distance measurements.

San Fernando, a municipality in Bukidnon province, Philippines, is a flourishing community situated among the region's picturesque landscape. San Fernando, situated in the northern region of Bukidnon, is notable for its abundant agricultural resources and picturesque

landscapes. The town is encircled by lush mountains and productive plains, creating an optimal setting for agricultural pursuits and other rural ventures. Agriculture serves as a vital economic engine, with products such as corn, rice, and vegetables thriving in the municipality's fertile soil.

### ***Respondents of the Study***

The learners in Grades 4, 5, & 6 in San Fernando I District, Division of Bukidnon, for the School Year 2025-2026 were requested to participate as respondents of the study. Learners play an important role in addressing inequities and fostering fair environments through their interactions, learning methods, and attitudes toward peers who come from underrepresented groups. Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents by school.

### ***Sampling Procedure***

This study applied the sampling guidelines established by Gay (1976), a prominent authority in educational research methodology. These procedures emphasize selecting samples that ensure representativeness and reliability, allowing for the generalization of findings to the target population. According to Gay's guidelines, a sample size of 20% of the population is considered sufficient for random sampling in relatively small populations to maintain statistical validity and minimize sampling error.

### ***Research Instrument***

The researcher was the one who personally crafted the instrument of this study. It is a survey-questionnaire which is composed of three parts.

Part I is about the demographic profile of respondents in terms of age, sex, and family's monthly income.

Part II is on the level of social equality and inclusion on learners' equity perspectives in public schools in terms of access to educational resources, teacher support and fair treatment, socioeconomic disparities among learners, school policies on inclusivity, and peer relationships and social integration. Columns for the choices are based on the Five-Point Likert Scale. The respondent checked the column for his/her chosen answer.

Part III is about the level of learners' attitude toward diversity.

### ***Scoring Procedure***

The data were interpreted using the rating scales below. For the level of social inequality and inclusion on learners' equity perspectives in public schools, the mean was interpreted using the Five-Point Likert Scale.

### ***Data Gathering Procedure***

This study adhered to the Standard Operational Procedure of Valencia Colleges (Bukidnon) Inc. The researcher initially obtained the approval and endorsement letter from the Dean of the Graduate School. It was thereafter submitted to the Superintendent of Schools for the Bukidnon Division. Upon obtaining the necessary permissions, the researcher sought authorization from the Public Schools District Supervisor of San Fernando I District, Division of Bukidnon. Subsequently, the researcher approached the heads of the selected schools to obtain permission to perform the study on their campuses. The questionnaires were disseminated to the chosen respondents.

### ***Statistical Treatment of Data***

The following statistical tools were used in this study:

Mean and standard deviation were applied to determine the level of social equality and inclusion on learners' equity perspectives in public schools in terms of access to educational resources, teacher support and fair treatment, socioeconomic disparities among learners, school policies on inclusivity, and peer relationships and social integration.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Participation in the study is entirely optional. The researcher prioritizes careful consideration, safety, and confidentiality of the responders. Respondents receive informed consent forms along with detailed environmental information. The researcher takes measures to prevent any bias in the respondents' answers and instead records their input. The respondents' identities are concealed to safeguard their anonymity and maintain the integrity of the study. Throughout the study, participants have the option to refuse to answer any question.

### **Summary**

This study was conducted to examine the level of social equality and inclusion of learners in San Fernando I District, Division of Bukidnon. Specifically, this study sought to determine the level of social equality and inclusion on learners' equity perspectives in public schools in terms of access to educational resources, teacher support and fair treatment, socioeconomic

disparities among learners, school policies on inclusivity, and peer relationships and social integration; determine the level of learners' attitude toward inclusion and diversity. It also attempted to find out the significant relationship between the level of social equality and inclusion of schools on learners' equity perspectives in public schools in terms of access to educational resources, teacher support and fair treatment, socioeconomic disparities among learners, school policies on inclusivity, peer relationships and social integration and the level of learners' attitude toward inclusion and diversity.

### ***FINDINGS***

This study uncovered the following findings:

There was a very high level of social equality and inclusion on learners' equity perspectives in public schools in terms of access to educational resources, teacher support and fair treatment, socioeconomic disparities among learners, school policies on inclusivity, and peer relationships and social integration.

The learners' attitude toward inclusion and diversity was rated as high wherein the learners have positive attitudes toward diversity, recognizing their importance.

There was a significant relationship between the level of social equality and inclusion of schools on learners' equity perspectives in public schools in terms of access to educational resources, teacher support and fair treatment, socioeconomic disparities among learners, school policies on inclusivity, peer relationships and social integration and the learners' attitude toward inclusion and diversity.

### ***CONCLUSIONS***

The conclusions drawn in this study stem from the findings.

The finding indicates that all aspects of social equality and inclusion profoundly influence learners' perceptions of equity. It is very important to use a holistic, system-wide approach. To keep every learner feeling included and treated fairly in public schools, we must always support fair disciplinary procedures, make sure that teachers have solid support systems, and make sure that all learners have equal access to all educational resources.

### ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

The findings and conclusions of this study include the following recommendations:

The teacher may adopt a holistic classroom management model that prioritizes both consistent and fair discipline and equal access to all classroom resources. Furthermore,

teachers may participate in professional development focusing on unconscious bias to strengthen the delivery of consistent support and fair treatment for every learner.

Learners may be empowered as "Inclusion Advocates" by actively seeking out and engaging with classmates from diverse backgrounds in collaborative activities. This action is important because it translates their positive attitude into tangible, supportive peer relationships, which reinforces the school's social equality and enhances the motivation of all students.

The school head may mandate annual, evidence-based diversity training for all teaching personnel, focusing specifically on implicit bias and procedural fairness in disciplinary actions and grading. Furthermore, resources may be allocated to establish mentoring programs that foster supportive teacher-student relationships, as this is the most critical factor for learners' positive attitude toward school inclusion.

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