

Equity Vs. Quality in English Language Learning: A Study of Universality Students' Perceptions

Lect. Sheimaa Ali Abdul-Hameed (Ph.D.)

Ministry of Education - General Directorate of Salah Al-Din
Education

Email. Sheimaaaldory73@gmail.com

الإنصاف مقابل الجودة في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية: دراسة حول تصورات الطلاب حول الشمولية

م.د. شيماء علي عبد الحميد

وزارة التربية المديرية العامة لتربية محافظة صلاح الدين

Abstract

Achieving both equity and equality has become a central goal in modern education systems, particularly and the process of learning the English language. Equity and education refer to providing all learners with fair opportunities and appropriate support according to their individual needs, while equality focuses on the effectiveness of teaching methods, curriculum design, and learning outcomes. This study explores the relationship between equity and equality in English language learning and how balancing these two concepts can enhance students' educational experiences. At highlights on the importance of inclusive teaching practices, equal access to learning resources, and strategies that maintain high academic standards. The study also discusses challenges that teachers and institutions may face when attempting to ensure fairness while maintaining the quality instruction. The findings suggest that integrating equitable practice with high- quality teaching approaches can improve language acquisition, increase student engagement, and promote better learning outcomes for diverse learners. Therefore, achieving a balance between equity and quality is essential for developing and effective and inclusive English language learning environment. **Keywords:** Equity, quality, English language learning.

ملخص

أصبح تحقيق الإنصاف والمساواة هدفاً محورياً في أنظمة التعليم الحديثة، لا سيما في عملية تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. يشير الإنصاف في التعليم إلى توفير فرص متكافئة ودعم مناسب لجميع المتعلمين وفقاً لاحتياجاتهم الفردية، بينما تركز المساواة على فعالية أساليب التدريس، وتصميم المناهج، ونتائج التعلم. تستكشف هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين الإنصاف والمساواة في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، وكيف يمكن للموازنة بين هذين المفهومين أن تحسّن تجارب الطلاب التعليمية. وتسلط الضوء على أهمية ممارسات التدريس الشاملة، وتكافؤ فرص الوصول إلى موارد التعلم، والاستراتيجيات التي تحافظ على معايير أكاديمية عالية. كما تناقش الدراسة التحديات التي قد يواجهها المعلمون والمؤسسات التعليمية عند محاولة ضمان الإنصاف مع الحفاظ على جودة التدريس. تشير النتائج إلى أن دمج الممارسات العادلة مع أساليب التدريس عالية الجودة يُمكن أن يُحسن اكتساب اللغة، ويزيد من تفاعل الطلاب، ويُعزز نتائج تعلم أفضل للمتعلمين ذوي الخلفيات المتنوعة. لذلك، يُعد تحقيق التوازن بين الإنصاف والجودة أمراً ضرورياً لتطوير بيئة تعلم لغة إنجليزية فعّالة وشاملة. **الكلمات المفتاحية:** الإنصاف، الجودة، تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.

Introduction

The main argument presented in the study on equity and equality in education published by the organization for Economic cooperation and development is that successful education systems should promote both equity and equality at the same time, rather than treating them as competing goals. Educational systems perform better when all students are provided with fair learning opportunities while maintaining high academic standards. (OECD, 2012).

Many debates and education arise from shifting the focus among three key elements: The learner, the teacher, and knowledge itself. Some educational perspectives emphasize the learner. Other approaches give more attention to the role of the teacher and the effectiveness of teaching methods. In contrast, higher education institutions often stress the importance of subject knowledge, academic content, and established standards. For this reason, effective teaching requires balancing these three components. Teachers should not concentrate on only one element but should integrate student needs, appropriate teaching strategies, and solid academy acknowledge. Moreover, teachers need to understand the social and philosophical factors that influence educational practices, particularly in contemporary educational environments. Within the context of English language learning (ELL), the tension between maintaining high linguistic standards (Quality) and ensuring all students have equal access to resources and support (equity) remains a critical challenge. Therefore, understanding universities students' perceptions as essential to identify the gaps between educational theories and the classroom reality.

Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness of education is often evaluated through two main dimensions: Quality and equity. The quality dimension focuses on the general level of students' learning outcomes among students. (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2008; Nachbauer & Kyriakides, 2020). In terms of equity, the mangle is to ensure that all students can achieve academic success regardless of their family background. (Charalambous et.al, 2018). However, it is still not entirely clear which is specific teaching and scroll factors influence the equity dimension. Most researchers on educational effectiveness mainly focus on quality, wider relatively few studies examine equity. (Atlay et.al, 2019 b; Nachbauer & Kyriakides, 2020). As a result, although much is known about factors affecting overall academic achievement, there is a still limited knowledge about the factors that influence achievement gaps. (Gustafsson et.al, 2018). Despite these general insights, there is a lack of research specifically addressing how these dimensions (quality and equity) intersect with an English language learning (ELL) environments other University level. (Garcia & Wei, 2020). Specifically, it remains unclear how students themselves perceive the balance between high academic standards and fail learning opportunities. (Pawan, et.al, 2017). This study addresses the gap by investigating university students' perceptions regarding equity and equality and their English language education.

Objectives of the study

1. To identify students' perceptions of equity in learning English.
2. To explore students' perceptions of quality in English language learning.
3. To compare the importance of equity and equality from students' perspectives.
4. To examine the relationship between equity and equality based on students' responses.

Questions of the study

1. What is the difference between equity and equality and English language learning?
2. What are students' perceptions of equity in learning English?
3. What are students' perceptions of equality and learning English?
4. Which is more important for students: Equity or quality?

Significance of the study

This study is important because English is a global language, and access to high-quality English education can affect the students' academic and the Professional futures. Understanding how to balance fairness and students can help teachers' schools and policymakers improve language education.

Scope of the study

This study focuses on third-year students at the College of education, university of Samarra during the academic year 2025-2026. it examines their perceptions of equity and equality and learning the English language.

Literature Review

1- Concept of Equity in Education

The concept of education of equity has received an increasing scholarly attention in recent years. (Scheurich et.al., (2017). To fully understand this concept, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the term "equity". In many discussions, however, the term is often confused with other related Concepts such as equality and justice, and these terms are sometimes used interchangeably. (Panthi et.al., 2018, Rasooli et.al., 2019; Shaeffer, 2019). Although these Concepts share certain similarities, they represent different perspectives with an educational context. (Robeyns, 2009). In particular, equity focuses on ensuring that learners receive the specific support and Resources they require to achieve academic success. (Minow, 2021). This perspective emphasizes addressing learners' diverse needs rather than treating everyone in exactly the same way. By contrast, quality mainly refers to providing all individuals with identical statement and equal distribution of educational resources. (Smith et.al.,)

Despite these differences, both equity and equality are connected to the border principle of Justice, which highlights the protection of equal rights and fairness within legal and social systems. (Stoll, 2011, P.36). To clarify their relationship among these terms, their conceptual overlap can be illustrated through a Boolean diagram.

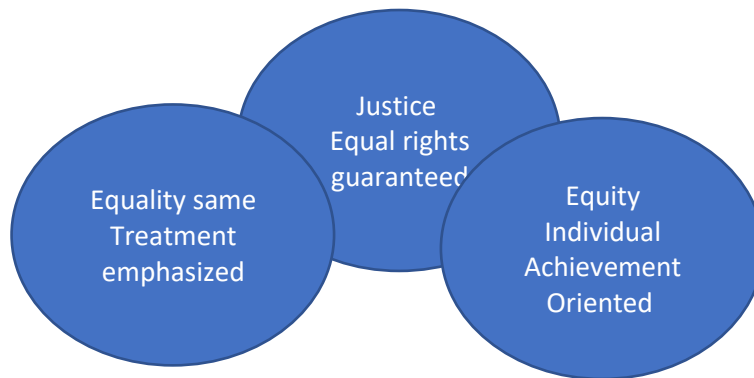


Fig. (1)

Boolean Diagram of the Overlapping terminology

The idea of educational equity has also been influenced by earlier research such as the work of Coleman et.al., (1966), which emphasizes the importance of equal educational opportunities in education. Later, scholars including Gipps and Stobart (2009), Klenowski (2009) and McLaughlin (2010), similarly argued that providing equal educational opportunities for all learners as Central to achieving educational equity. In this context, Blankstein et.al., (2016, P:3) define education equity as a commitment to ensure ensuring that every student obtains the support and opportunities necessary to succeed academically. Therefore, many scholars agree that educational equity carries broader and deeper implications for educational systems. (Barrow & Grant, 2019) depicts a situation in which each individual, respective of race, gender, family background, or any other personal marker, can be endowed with an equal opportunity to fulfill his or have academic potential.

2- Concept of Equality in Education

Education equality is viewed as a broad and multi-dimensional concept that includes numerous elements. (Sallis, 2002). The main goal of education is to empower learners by equipping them with knowledge, practical skills, and positive values. Therefore, it is important that individuals receive high- quality education because it supports the idea of lifelong learning quality education also plays an important role and shaping a person's thinking and well view, how long individuals to understand life from different perspectives. Consequently, the standards of education that a person receives scan influence their everyday life, lifestyle, and the way they make decisions. Kenyatta (2015) emphasizes that providing people with equality education helps create a promising future for individuals society, and even the global community. The universal development of Educational requires the continuously growth of the educational system, including schools, teachers, and students. Teachers are considered a vital part of the educational process and act as an important Force embedding a fair, knowledgeable, and the progressive Society (National Education Policy, 2020) Teachers are responsible for delivering knowledge, developing students' skill, and the promoting ethical values. They also manage their learning process by applying different teaching strategies.

3- According to an English Language Learning

Means giving students fair opportunities to learn English successfully, students' income from different social, cultural, and educational background, which may affect their learning process. For this reason, teachers should provide different kinds of support based on students' need rather than giving the same instruction to everyone. (Jim Cummins, 2000). Using strategies such as a group work, interactive activities, and culturally relevant materials can help students participate more actively in their classroom these strategies allow learners to develop their languages skills in a supportive environment. (Dornyei, 2001).

4- Quality in English Language Learning

Quality in English language learning is considered an element in achieving successful language acquisition. Learning English effectively involves more than memorizing vocabulary or understanding grammatical rules. It requires the use of appropriate teaching methods, meaningful interaction and the classroom, and a supportive learning environment that encourages students to participate actively. When these factors are present, when was armor likely to improve their languages skills and develop confidence in using English and different situations.

One important aspect that influences the equality of language is the teaching approach adopted by an instructor. Teacher who applies communicative and interactive methods create opportunities for students to participate English it through discussions, groups activities, and the problem- solving tasks. Such approaches allow to use the language in realistic contexts and help them develop different language skills in an integrated way. Another factor that supports effective language learning is the availability of appropriate education resources. Modern textbooks, multimedia tools, and online platforms can make lessons more engaging and interactive for students. (Harmer, 2001) In addition, learners' motivation plays an important role in language acquisition. Students who are motivated are more willing to participate practice and continue and proving their languages skills. (Dornyei, 2001). Furthermore, exposure to authentic language through Media, communication, and real- life situations help learners and understand how the language is actually used and improves their overall proficiency. (Brown, 2007).

5- Challengers and Balancing Equity and Equality

Balancing equity and equality and education is a major challenge for modern educational systems. Equity refers to providing fair learning opportunities for all students regardless of their social, economic, all cultural backgrounds, why are the quality refers to maintaining high standards of teaching, curriculum, and learning outcomes. Education systems aim to achieve both goals, however, differences students' backgrounds often create and equal learning opportunities. As a result, policy makers and educators must develop strategies that ensure fairness in access to education without reducing academic standards. (OECD, 2012; Schleicher, 2018). One of the main challenges is there an equal distribution of educational resources. Schools are located in disadvantaged or rural areas frequently face shortages of qualified teachers, limited learning materials, and inadequate infrastructures. These inequalities can significantly affect the students' academy performance and limit their chances of achieving high learning outcomes. Consequently, students and well- resourced schools often perform better than those and under-resourced environments, which makes it difficult for education systems to maintain both equity and high educational quality. (OECD, 2012; Darling Hammond, 2012). Another challenge is the diversity of learners' needs and socio-economic background. Students differ in terms of language proficiency, cultural background, family support, and learning abilities. Therefore, teachers are required to adopt inclusive and differential teachings strategies that address these differences. However, larger class sizes limited professional training, and insufficient institutional support may prevent teachers from effectively meeting the needs of all learners. This situation can lead to achievement gaps between different groups of students and may reduce the overall effectiveness of the education system. (Ainscow, 2020; UNISCO, 2017). Educational policies and accountability systems also create challenges when trying to balance equity and equality. Many educations system emphasize standardized testing, rankings, and Performance indicators in order to improve educational equality. Although these measures can encourage higher academic standards, they may also disadvantage students from marginalized backgrounds who do not have equal access to educational support. Therefore, policymakers must design education systems that promote high performance while also supporting fairness and inclusion in schools. (OECD, 2018; Readon, 2016). In conclusion, achieving a balance between equity and equality learning requires coordinated efforts and educational policy, teacher training, and resource allocation. Governments and education institutions must provide additional support for these advantaged schools and students while maintaining strong academic expectations. When education systems successfully integrate inclusive practices with high- quality teaching, they are more likely to create fair learning opportunities and improve educational outcomes for all learners. (OECD, 2012; Ainscow, 2020). This highlights the importance of developing inclusive educational policies that ensure equal opportunities while maintaining high standards of teaching and learning.

6- Strategies for Promoting Equity and Quality in the Classroom

According to Soika (2020), there are several strategies that teachers can implement to promote equity in the classroom including the following:

1- Reflect on Personal Beliefs

Teachers should start by examining their own attitudes and assumptions. In some cases, educators may have unconscious biases that are influenced by their cultural background or previous experiences. Recognizing these biases allows teachers to create a more balanced and fair learning environment where every student is a treated equally.

2- Reduce Race and Gender Barriers

Teachers should make efforts to reduce barriers related to race and gender and the classroom. This includes avoiding stereotypes, not expecting students to represent their entire cultural group, and maintaining high expectations for all students regardless of their background.

3- Establish an Inclusive Classroom Climate

Creating a respectful and supportive classroom atmosphere is essential. From the beginning of the course, teachers should set clear guidelines that encourage respectful discussions and ensure that all students feel safe sharing their ideas and perspectives.

4- Use Classroom Space Flexibility

The physical arrangement of the classroom can influence student participation. Teachers' kind of promote collaboration and engagement by organizing activities such as a group discussion, pair group, and cooperative learning instead of relying only on traditional lecture- based instruction.

5- Address Different Learning Styles and Abilities

Students have different learning preferences and abilities. Some learners may also have disabilities but Effect how they receive information. Therefore, teachers should use have your anointing of teaching materials such as visual aids, audio resources, and multimedia tools to support different learning needs.

6- Use Technology in an Inclusive Way

Technology can be an effective tool and education, but it should be used carefully. Teachers need to ensure that digital resources are accessible and suitable for all learners, including those who may have these abilities.

7- Beware of Religious and Cultural Holidays

Teachers should consider the cultural and religious diversity of their students when a planning assignment, exams, all important activities. Being a flexible with deadlines during important holidays demonstrates respect for students' beliefs and promotes fairness in the classroom.

7- Achieving Quality Education

1- Creating a Positive Classroom Environment

A while-organized the classroom environment is essential for the promoting quality education. Factors such as proper seating arrangement, lighting, ventilation, and classroom organization can motivate students and encourage them to participate activity in learning. A comfortable and orderly classroom helps students feel more interested and ready to learn, while a poorly arranged classroom may reduce motivation and decorate negative attitudes toward learning. (Harvard, 1973; Farrant, 1997; Adesina, et.al., 1995).

2- Maintaining Discipline and Order

Maintaining discipline is another important strategy in a classroom management. Clear rules and expectations help students-respect authority and develop self-control and cooperation. When discipline is maintained, the classroom becomes peaceful and organized, allowing effective teaching and learning to take place. (Ali, 2007; Cohen et.al., 2002).

3- Effective Use of Instructional Materials

Using instructional materials such as charts, diagrams, and visual aids help students understand lessons more clearly. These materials support the teaching a process and make learning more interesting. When teachers use visual resources to can learn through both sight and hearing, which improves understanding and retention. (Adesina, et.al., 1995).

4- Time Management

Effective time management is important for successful classroom activities. Teachers should be planned their lessons carefully and organized daily or weekly schedules to ensure that enough time as a provided for explanations, practice, and evaluation. Proper use of time increases the efficiency of the teaching and learning process. (Ali, 2007).

5- Effective Communication

Communication between the teacher and students play an important role in a classroom management. Clear expectations, listening to students, and giving guidance help and create a supportive learning environment. That communication also makes lessons easier to understand and improve their relationship between teachers and learners. (Adesina et.al., 1995).

6- Sustaining Students' Interest

Teachers should use different teaching methods and techniques to keep students interested in the lesson. When lessons are varied and engaging, students are more likely to participate actively and remain focused during class from activities. (Idu, 2012).

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive quantitative research design to investigate university students' perceptions of equity and equality and learning English.

Participants

The participants of this study are third - year students from the Department of English at Samarra university. The population consists of (78) students. A sample of approximately (55) students was selected using a random sampling method to ensure fair presentation of the population. The participants vary in gender, age, and duration of learning English.

Instrument

The main instrument used in this study is a structural questionnaire titled " equity Vs. Quality in the process of English language learning" the questionnaire consists of five sections:

Section 1: Demographic information (gender, age, educational level, and duration of learning English)

Section 2: equity in learning English (5 statements)

Section 3: Quality of learning (5 statements)

Section 4: Equity Vs. Quality comparison.

Section 5: One open- ended question

The questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= sit wrongly agree) to measures students' responses.

Data Collection

The data were collected by distributing the questionnaire to students during class time. Participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential and used only for academic purposes. They were asked to answer honestly.

Data Analysis

1. Descriptive Statistics (Demographics)

Variable Category Frequency (n) Percentage (%)

Gender Male 19 34.5%

Female 36 65.5%

Age 20-21 25 45.5%

21-22 15 27.3%

+23 15 27.3%

Educational Level University – 3rd Stage 55 100%

Duration of Learning English Less than 5 years 14 25.5%

5–10 years 37 67.3%

More than 10 years 4 7.3%

Key finding: Most respondents are female (65.5%), aged 20-21 (45.5%), and have been learning English for 5–10 years (67.3%).

2. Perceptions of Equity and Quality (Quantitative)

2.1 Equity in Learning English

· Access to resources is equal: Mean $\approx$ 1.5 (low to moderate agreement)

· Equal opportunities in class: Mean $\approx$ 1.8 (moderate agreement)

2.2 Quality of Learning

· Effective teaching methods: Mean $\approx$ 1.6 (moderate effectiveness)

· Modern learning materials: Mean $\approx$ 1.9 (lower availability)

2.3 Overall Priority (Equity vs Quality)

· Equity more important than quality: $\sim$ 40%

· Quality more important than equity: $\sim$ 60%

Key finding: The majority of students ($\approx$ 60%) believe Quality is more important than Equity in learning English.

3. Thematic Analysis of the Open-Ended Question

Question: "What is more important in learning English: equity or quality? Why?"

3.1 Overall Stance (Based on 55 responses)

Stance Approximate % Example Verbatim

Quality is more important $\sim$ 55% "Quality helps students understand sentence structure correctly".

Both are equally important $\sim$ 25% "Both are essential; quality provides knowledge, equity ensures it reaches everyone"

Equity is more important $\sim$ 15% "Equity gives fair opportunities for all students despite differences".

Unclear / other $\sim$ 5% "IT IS very good" / "Fairness"

3.2 Key Themes (Reasons Given)

A. Arguments for Quality (most common):

- Effective learning: good teaching, clear explanations, and useful materials lead to real proficiency.
 - Avoiding fossilized errors: Low-quality instruction causes long-term mistakes.
 - Outcome-focused: Quality has a stronger direct impact on results and fluency.
- "Without quality, students may not learn English correctly even if they have equal access."

B. Arguments for Equity:

- Fairness and opportunity: All students deserve a chance regardless of background or level.
 - Preventing exclusion: Without equity, weaker students are left behind.
 - Motivation: Low-level students lose motivation when placed with successful students without support.
- "Equity means every student gets the right support to learn English well, regardless of their level."

C. Arguments for Both (balanced view):

- Quality ensures high standards; equity ensures access for all.
- The best system combines both, but quality often has a stronger effect.
- Equity in teaching + quality in assessment.

"Both are essential and complement each other. Quality ensures high standards of learning, while equity ensures that every student has the same opportunity to reach those standards."

3.3 Representative Long Answer (Selected)

"In my opinion, quality is more important. To truly master a language, learners need access to accurate materials, qualified instructors, and effective methodologies. Even if access is equal, low-quality instruction can lead to fossilized errors and a lack of real-world fluency, which ultimately hinders the learner's professional and academic growth."

4. Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

Aspect	Quantitative Finding	Qualitative Finding	Conclusion
Priority	60% prefer quality	~55% explicitly say quality	Consistent: Quality is viewed as more impactful.
Equity perception	Moderate (mean ~1.5-1.8)	Equity seen as "fairness" and "opportunity"	Equity is valued but secondary to quality
Quality perception	Moderate (mean ~1.6-1.9)	Quality linked to "effective teaching" and "real learning"	Students want better quality, especially modern materials.

5. Final Conclusions

Based on 55 responses from 3rd-stage university students:

Students clearly prioritize quality over equity in learning English.

While both concepts are valued, quality (effective teaching, clear methods, good materials) is seen as the primary driver of actual language proficiency. Equity is recognized as important for fairness and access, but most students believe that without quality, equal access does not lead to successful learning outcomes.

A minority argue that equity should come first because it ensures all students can benefit from whatever quality exists. However, the dominant view—supported by both closed and open-ended responses—is that quality has a stronger impact on real learning.

Final recommendation for educators:

- Invest first in improving teaching quality (methods, materials, instructor training).
- Then ensure equitable access so all students can benefit from that quality.

Conclusions

In conclusion, equity and equality are complementary elements in the process of learning English as a foreign language. Educational systems that aim to achieve high-quality language education must also ensure equitable opportunities for all learners. When teachers consider students' diverse backgrounds, abilities, and learning needs, they can design more effective instructional practices that enhance both fairness and Academic success. Consequently, promoting equity while maintaining educational quality plays a vital role and improving students' English language learning outcomes and supporting a more inclusive educational system.

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