



Reducing educational poverty and failure to study by observing educational justice in the education system of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Background and Aim: Educational justice is the foundation of thought and culture in a society, forming a part of cultural justice, and facilitates individuals' access to equal educational opportunities. The absence of educational justice slows the progress and development of human civilization and leads to the spread of class conflict, educational poverty, and school dropout. Therefore, this research compiles statistics on school dropouts and presents strategies to reduce poverty and dropout rates while maintaining educational justice. **Methods:** This research adopts a descriptive methodology and documentary analysis approach. Data have been collected by card-indexing from documentary sources such as articles, books, and credible domestic and international websites, as well as high-level documents including the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education and Training. **Results:** One of the essential indicators of justice-oriented policies is ensuring the opportunity for educational growth and equity for all people, regardless of gender, race, class, ethnicity, or color. **Conclusion:** The necessity of providing free and quality education and training for all individuals of school age is a fundamental concern referred to as educational justice. The existence of various challenges and obstacles in achieving this goal has led to inequalities and injustices.



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Introduction

Justice is the cornerstone of Islamic society and a fundamental principle of religion, encompassing various dimensions such as economic, political, judicial, ethnic, and social justice. Social justice, a significant aspect of justice, includes the concept of educational and training justice. Educational justice has always been a focal point for education experts (Jabbari, 2017). Justice is a term that has captivated many minds and languages for a long time. It has various dimensions, including economic, judicial, political, educational, ethnic, and more. Educational justice is one of the most fundamental aspects of justice. In our religious culture, as much emphasis is placed on knowledge and education, justice is also stressed as an essential principle. Our society's progress today is contingent on achieving educational justice. Educational justice can transform our education and training in all areas, facilitating the emergence of talents and capabilities on a macro level. In this era of wealth and injustice, justice is like a clear spring that can refresh the soul, especially its realization in education and training, which can bring a bright future for the children of this land.

The results of this year's university entrance exam indicate that admissions to top university majors are mostly from affluent areas, and among these areas, the more affluent ones have the highest acceptance rates. Additionally, admission statistics among the top 40 students reveal that 73% are from gifted schools, 13% from state model schools, and 14% from Shahed schools. These statistics indicate that 80% of this year's admissions are from 20% of the schools (Educational Program "Parshger" Archive, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, 1/6/2019).

If we do not adopt a justice-oriented approach in education today, class differences in the country's future will increasingly widen. A non-justice-oriented perspective means having advanced, well-equipped schools in some areas and deprived, hut-like schools in others; outstanding teachers for some schools, and tired or under-educated teachers for others. This is the exact opposite of a justice-oriented approach. The result will be that some of today's children (just because they are wealthy or live in affluent areas) will receive the highest

education, while others will remain at very low levels, not advancing and not developing their talents. Of course, justice doesn't mean treating all talents the same way; talents are different after all. We must not let any talent go to waste and should devise strategies for nurturing talents (Speech of the Supreme Leader in the Meeting with Teachers Nationwide, 2006).

Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, following the guidelines of the great leader of the Islamic Revolution and due to flaws observed in the education system, significant efforts have been made by the Ministry of Education and other responsible institutions to reform and fundamentally change this system. The results of previous studies and reports have been presented to the Council for Fundamental Transformation of the Education System, which has greatly benefited from these experiences, plans, and opinions (Council for Fundamental Transformation of the Education System, 1985).

Method

This research adopts a descriptive methodology and documentary analysis approach. Data have been collected by card-indexing from documentary sources such as articles, books, and credible domestic and international websites, as well as high-level documents including the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education and Training.

Results

Justice is rooted in human nature, and every person innately yearns for justice. This longing and fascination stem from the depths of their being. Justice is a comprehensive law that encompasses all aspects of human life and the universe's system revolves around it. If in a society, everyone receives their due rights, social justice among its members is observed. Social justice is a vast concept covering all aspects of human, physical, political, economic, cultural, judicial, and more. Justice is the loud voice of divine human nature that has been heard only with the soul throughout history and across the earth.

The idea of establishing a society and a state based on the solid foundation of justice is as old as history, and many thinkers have addressed it. Human incapacity to externalize the concept of justice from the mental realm and implement it in the fabric of society has turned this goal into a human ideal.

The sustainability and endurance of governments depend on creating conditions for the establishment of justice and fairness in society. A religious government, by fostering justice and eliminating poverty and discrimination, ensuring livelihood for people, guarantees the true development and perfection of humans in material and spiritual matters. Justice holds a lofty place in a religious government, especially in the ideal government of the end times.

Justice is among the historical-political concepts that have been a human ideal from the past to the present. This concept is one of the serious demands of humanity that forms the basis of human rights. The Oxford English Dictionary defines justice as maintaining rights, or the exercise of authority and power, and defending rights by determining rewards or punishments. However, closer to our purposes is the concept of social justice as fairness and impartiality, adjudication with truth and correctness, and other similar concepts (Hosseinzadeh & Naseri, 2008). Justice requires equality in the context of equal entitlements. It should be noted that not observing individual entitlements and treating everything and everyone the same is the very essence of injustice (Rezaeian, 2005).

In fact, there are differences between the two concepts of justice and fairness; fairness is ensuring others' rights are respected and not violated. In contrast, justice is maintaining balance and equality in all matters according to their circumstances and, beyond behavior, pays attention to inclinations, desires, and inner feelings.

Educational Justice:

Educational justice has always been a focus for education specialists throughout all eras. They have continually strived to design curricula that increasingly lean towards justice-based learning theories. In the early part of the current century, providing education based on talents gained attention, and in the latter half, the slogan of educational justice and equal educational opportunities emerged. However, specific policies and methods have been adopted in each period to align with the intended goals.

In recent years, educational justice has been the focus of education experts. This justice includes: justice in resources (input), justice in the process, and justice in the outcomes of teaching-learning activities. Educational justice is achieved when learners can reach the ultimate

goals through the inputs and processes in the educational environment (Sanagou, Nomali, & Jouybari, 2011).

One of the most effective ways to achieve social justice is to provide equal opportunities for all members of society to access education and training. All humans have the right to equal education. In the current world, education and training and how they are accessed are indicators of social advancement. Countries, especially developing ones, strive to create equal access opportunities to education and training (Abdous, 2002).

Educational justice refers to providing equal opportunities tailored to each individual's unique needs, as educational needs vary among individuals (Dehghani, 2005). Equal opportunity means preventing, eliminating, or reducing discrimination among individuals based on gender, race, physical condition, age, language, and social class. On a macro level, equal opportunities represent a humanistic and justice-oriented view considered a hallmark of a developed society. On a micro level, equal opportunities and educational justice are tools and mechanisms that foster creative thinking and ensure equal capability development for all. Equal opportunity refers to a situation where even those without wealth or membership in specific groups (groups with special facilities and privileges) have the chance for social mobility through education and learning (Mohammadi & Dehghan, 2004).

Despite achievements in educational justice, the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990, starting with a preamble about failures in achieving access and equality in education, stated that over 40 years ago, nations around the world talked about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the right to education for all individuals (UNESCO, 2003). Thus, it seems that while specific strategies for establishing educational justice have been employed by experts, the presence of educational injustices indicates that many of these strategies have been unsuccessful, and a need for a change in perspective and educational strategies by experts is evident.

Justice in the educational environment is realized for learners when they can achieve academic, ideological, ethical, and social goals through the inputs and processes in the educational environment. Equality in the first dimension of educational justice means that

economic, social, ethnic, and physical conditions should not impact the educational process. Educational justice is not about allocating equal resources and attention to all individuals, but rather about allocating resources proportionate to learners' conditions. Since learners' conditions during the educational period vary greatly, educational justice requires identifying and creating justice among ethnic and economic groups (Tanha, 2004).

Educational justice is one of the most fundamental aspects of organizational justice that can transform all higher educational areas and provide opportunities for the emergence of talents and capabilities on a macro level. Educational justice means recognizing humans equally and providing opportunities to claim rights for all individuals. It can be said that today's societal progress is contingent on achieving educational justice. Creating a stress-free learning environment, bringing students to growth and maturity, implementing educational rules and regulations equally for all, and providing opportunities to gain skills and readiness for the job market are aspects of educational justice (Sanagou et al., 2011).

Educational justice allows each learner to learn according to their individual differences, cognitive level, and learning speed, making the learning process more flexible. Therefore, it can be inferred that when the content is aligned with the learner's developmental characteristics, the individual feels that the stored concepts in their mind are connected and continuous with new concepts.

Educational Justice from the Constitutional Perspective:

From the constitutional perspective, providing free education and training for all at all levels is one of the government's most critical duties for justice, independence, and national cohesion, and education and training are considered a universal opportunity. Article 30 of the Constitution states that education and training are a universal right, and during the final review of the Constitution in the parliament, short but interesting discussions arose among members when Article 30 was proposed. After the principle was presented by the Vice-President of the Parliament (Martyr Beheshti), he emphasized that currently, it is the right of the nation to benefit from it for free. Article 43 also states that the principles of the country's

economic system must aim to eradicate poverty and deprivation, ensuring that basic needs, including education and training, are met.

The Constitution presents three measures for educational justice in the aforementioned articles:

First: Education and training must be a universal opportunity for all at all levels. Everyone should have the right to benefit from education and training.

Second: Education and training are a free universal right. Based on this, the opportunity must be provided for different social classes to utilize free education and training.

Third: Education and training are an essential and universal need. This essential need should carry the most educational and training benefits for the most deprived members of society to eradicate poverty and deprivation.

Educational Justice as a Key Pillar of the Education System:

Educational justice is one of the most crucial pillars of the education system. The right to education, as a fundamental public right, is considered a vital and basic right in every individual's life. Therefore, educational justice in public education is of great importance. The enrollment of children of compulsory school age is the first educational issue. In fact, enrolling all children reaching school age, having competent teachers, appropriate educational books, and sufficient facilities and equipment in schools are among the considerations in educational justice. The weakness or absence of educational justice leads to the failure to enroll compulsory school-age children, student dropouts, and the stratification of the education system. Education is the most significant wealth distributed in society, allowing people to analyze their problems and develop their talents. However, we must not forget that equal access to education does not ultimately result in equal academic outcomes, as some groups of people enjoy cultural, economic, and social privileges that allow them to progress further and faster than others, which perpetuates discrimination. It seems that what is taught in books is written for a specific class that does not connect with the real lives of others, further disengaging many less capable students from learning, leading to educational issues like dropping out or failing grades.

Educational Poverty:

One of the functions of the education system is to eradicate poverty in society. If the government provides schools and teachers, educational poverty will be eliminated. It should be noted that educational poverty creates economic poverty. The quality of education is an important index.

Educational poverty is one of the barriers to development that must be overcome. Many countries with equal educational indicators at the primary level enjoy better conditions in reducing economic inequalities. Therefore, we must have a more comprehensive and deeper perspective and seriously pursue educational poverty. Unequal distribution of educational resources, or in other words, neglecting the crucial principle of educational justice, is also a significant factor in creating poverty and educational discrimination.

After economic and social poverty, educational poverty should also be added. Recently, the announcement of the results of national university entrance exams has influenced the social, cultural, and even political atmosphere of the country, sparking scientific and social discussions and various reactions. Unfortunately, such issues are temporary and limited to specific times, and experts and relevant authorities rarely continuously address educational inequalities. More distressingly, no one is accountable for all this educational injustice and discrimination. However, this opportunity should be seized, even temporarily, to address the evident educational discrimination, hoping that educational authorities will wake up to educational demands, at least within the framework of Article 30 of the Constitution, which considers free education until the end of secondary school as a government duty.

Categorizing schools into gifted, public model, trustee-managed, non-profit, and other types and segregating students is a very effective factor in reproducing educational inequality and ultimately causes students from lower social classes with fewer resources to fail in the cycle of academic and educational competition and entry into top university programs. Unequal distribution of educational resources is also a significant factor in creating poverty and educational discrimination.

Educational Dropout:

Literacy in all its dimensions is a primary condition for empowering individuals to face

the modern world. Everyday life without some level of education and literacy faces many difficulties. Social relations, health and wellness, shopping, consumption, travel - all daily activities require a level of knowledge only attainable through education. Illiteracy and low literacy are both causes and perpetuators of many social problems. School dropout, school leaving, and educational dropout are always considered events that expose individuals to many risks and failures in life and future. Therefore, literacy and the number of years an individual spends in education are criteria for assessing health and success, considered in the "Human Development Index." This matter has far-reaching individual consequences and significant social implications. The literacy rate of a population is an indicator of societal development. Although the meaning and scope of literacy have expanded in today's world, merely being able to read and write is not enough. To improve the quality of life, communication literacy, media literacy, health literacy, emotional literacy, and many other skills have been added to the scope of literacy, enabling individuals to cope with complex and challenging situations in the modern world. The literacy of the population has been a significant social goal for decades, seemingly achieved in developed countries but still inaccessible for some developing countries and rural communities. Numerous national and international laws guarantee the education of children and adult literacy; laws that prohibit child labor and prioritize children's education and play, and laws that consider literacy education as one of the fundamental responsibilities of governments. Furthermore, beyond this, they include the principles of free and compulsory education and literacy education in their texts. Education and literacy are not only criteria for evaluating individuals but also important metrics for assessing government performance.

Complete educational coverage of a country's children is a sign of good governance. In the global culture, free and compulsory education for the compulsory school-age group (approximately 6 to 18 years old, with slight variations between countries) is accepted, and governments are obligated to provide educational facilities for this age group. Therefore, the responsibility for children's educational dropout primarily lies with

governments and highlights weaknesses in the educational system. Although this phenomenon is sometimes explained based on parental incompetence or economic poverty, it should be noted that the role of educational policies and programs is much more significant than other individual and family factors.

The realities show that most children out of school, especially working children, are in vulnerable situations that lead to various social issues. Child labor often prevents their education, depriving them of the opportunity to attend school or forcing them early school leaving. Working and street children, domestic children, and runaway children quickly encounter various hardships and issues that challenge social monitoring and support organizations, imposing significant costs on social management at a macro level.

In this regard, it can be said that "educational dropout" is a "social harm." Illiteracy is a fundamental issue in the social system that gives rise to many other problems. Whether the responsibility for this phenomenon lies with families or governments, effective plans and programs must be devised to control it, the prerequisite of which is gaining a sufficient and credible understanding of the current situation.

Describing and realistically explaining the state of educational dropout in Iran requires clarifying three issues. First, we need to clearly understand the characteristics of our statistical population and who is considered an "educational dropout?" Second, it is necessary to have an accurate statistical picture of the target population. Third, we need to acquaint ourselves with existing legal documents and understand what policies and laws have been written about this?

Elaborating on these three issues is important because as long as we do not know who we mean by educational dropouts, how many they are, and what policies and laws are related to them, we cannot propose an effective idea or program. This report is divided into two parts: describing the current state of educational dropout and illiteracy, and then explaining the current state.

Defining Concepts and Examples The first question is: Who is considered an "educational dropout?" What are the examples, and what characteristics does this statistical population have? It seems that in the Iranian educational

system, there is no conceptual and operational consensus in defining and delineating the phenomenon of "child educational dropout." The concepts of educational dropout child, child out of school, working child, street child, house child, school dropout, injured child, child without or with negligent guardianship, and child deprived of education are terms that are used interchangeably in official documents, the oral literature of managers and policymakers, and in the media.

Although in reality, these situations are often intertwined and sometimes overlap, effective planning in this area requires a clear and accurate picture of each of them. Separate definitions of these situations are essential for effective action. Children who, instead of being in class and school, are street vending, children who have been kept out of school due to injured or neglected parents, or children who cannot enroll in schools due to their guardians' financial incapacity, and various reasons for educational dropout (dropping out of school) share one thing in common: they are all "out of school," although the reasons for their dropout vary. But when we say "educational dropout," who exactly do we mean?

Conclusion

Educational dropout and illiteracy are two states that have detrimental consequences for social life. Both are products of poverty, negligence, and deprivation, and they give rise to a wide range of social issues and problems. Among these, the dropout of children from school is of much greater importance and is linked to more problems and difficulties.

The statistics provided for children who have dropped out of school are so scattered and heterogeneous that it is difficult to say how many are currently out of school. This dispersion results from the use of various definitions and examples for children out of school. Working and street children, injured children, house children, school dropouts, neglected or orphaned children, and children out of school are all somehow related to the phenomenon of educational dropout.

The population of dropouts, with the aforementioned range of examples, has been reported to be anywhere from one hundred and thirty thousand to over three million. This is while data on disabled children who have dropped out of school and identity-less children

(without birth certificates) are not separated and unavailable.

Official statistics (2016 census) indicate 8,795,552 illiterate individuals (aged 10-49) in the country. These figures are announced while the Literacy Movement Organization had previously outlined the eradication of illiteracy in the under-50 population by 2014, 2015, 2018, and 2022 in three strategic plans developed in 2008, 2011, and 2013, but these goals have not yet been achieved.

According to the Ministry of Education data for the 2016-2017 academic year, there were 747,911 dropouts across all educational levels.

According to the 2016 Population and Housing Census, the number of individuals aged 6-19 who are entirely out of school (either illiterate or currently not studying) is 2,386,120, constituting 14.7% of the total population in the 6-19 age group in the country. This figure is much higher than the rates reported by other official sources.

In addition to the dispersion of statistics, in the area of laws, policies, and programs related to compulsory education and literacy, we are faced with a large array of legal documents. It seems that the laws and policies emphasize more on the responsibility of families to send children to school than on the responsibility of the educational system. Accordingly, monetary fines and legal prosecution have been considered for guardians whose children are out of school.

It is essential to distinguish between the two states of "educational dropout" and "children who have dropped out of school." So far, policymakers have mainly focused on "children who have dropped out of school," acknowledging their social existence and considering rules, laws, programs, and budgets for attracting them to school. However, the direct goal of educational policies and laws should be to make the occurrence of "educational dropout" improbable.

Solutions:

Blocking the origins of illiteracy by covering deprived and rejected children and simultaneously revising the programs, missions, and operational methods of the Literacy Movement Organization (as per the order of the Supreme Leader dated 19 February 2009).

Mandating responsible institutions and intervening bodies to collect, register, and report accurate periodic data on school-age children,

differentiated by age, gender, regional distribution, disability, and identity.

Facilitating the development of strategic cooperation between "corporations with social responsibility," "non-governmental organizations," and philanthropists towards implementing innovative programs for "the development of educational equity and support for dropouts."

Annually producing and publicly releasing the index of "educational coverage rate and the rate of dropouts, differentiated by educational level, province, and gender," for the age group of 5 to 18 years (indices 1, 2, and 3 of the resolution of the 886th session of the Supreme Council of Education).

Annually producing and publicly releasing the index of "student retention rate, meaning the percentage of students entering each educational level who remain in the formal education system until the end of the level, differentiated by educational level, province, and gender" (index 26 of the aforementioned resolution).

Adapting to the demands of the 21st century and redefining the "education poverty line" from the current status (i.e., complete inability to read and write) to "at least 8 years of education" (as commonly defined in the United Nations Human Development Report).

Establishing a special section "Development of Children's Educational Equity" in the annual budget and national development programs.

Planning a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education and the "National Media" in the sixth development plan, focusing on the participation of provincial broadcasting in the five provinces with the weakest educational indices, to enhance households' trust in the formal educational structure.

Facilitating the implementation of the Supreme Leader's directive for the development of educational equity (with emphasis on immigrant children).

Involving all media, particularly national media, in persuading public opinion about the "undeniable" and "inherent" right of all 5 to 18-year-old children "residing in Iran" to quality education and transparent information about the strengths and weaknesses of programs implemented pursuant to the Supreme Leader's directive, and encouraging citizens to voluntarily redirect financial and operational

resources from less prioritized areas to the development of children's educational equity.

Executive and financial participation of revolutionary foundations and governing institutions under the supervision of the Supreme Leader, to expedite the implementation of the Supreme Leader's directive regarding free education rights for all immigrant children.

Facilitating the activities of non-governmental organizations, especially those active in developing children's educational equity, recognizing the status of these civil organizations as independent critics of national policy-making, and utilizing their accumulated experience in designing national policies for children's educational equity development.

Utilizing communication innovations, information technology, and virtual spaces to enhance the quality of education for low-income students and those facing discrimination.

Allocating special funding to rural and nomadic schools, all schools in the five provinces with the weakest educational indices (Sistan and Baluchestan, West Azerbaijan, Hormozgan, Golestan, and South Khorasan), schools in the peripheral areas of metropolitan cities, and schools for students with disabilities.

Developing educational equity by reducing centralization and capital dominance in curricular content, increasing school-centeredness in budget and human resource management, and facilitating and diversifying public participation in education.

Paying special attention to enriching equity-focused education for children and adolescents as a replacement for oil capital, to stabilize the "resistance economy."

Special focus on developing non-cognitive skills in children and adolescents (such as creativity, teamwork, financial intelligence, self-confidence, etc.), as key skills determining the quality level of a country's population in the 21st century.

Recommendations:

Based on all that has been discussed about educational dropout and illiteracy, the following package of recommendations is offered at two levels, supervisory and structural reforms:

Supervisory level:

To date, laws and regulations have been mainly developed emphasizing the deterrent role of families. Therefore, measures have been taken

to penalize and prosecute guardians of children who drop out of school. The question now is to what extent have responsibilities and duties of the educational system and its role as a facilitator been emphasized? Is family negligence the cause of dropout, or is it the weakness and shortcomings of the educational system? Should laws and oversight focus more on one or the other? Hence, it is suggested that instead of emphasizing regulations for imposing fines or legal prosecution of guardians and considering them offenders and criminals, we should insist on "the government's obligation to provide free education" and make educational facilities accessible to all. The Islamic Consultative Assembly should also seriously oversee the implementation of Article 30 of the Constitution and other laws related to free education and provision of educational facilities and tools for all school-age individuals.

Structural reform:

Literacy education, backed by a century of legislation, financial expenditure, and the establishment of organizations and formal structures, has not eradicated illiteracy to date. The origins of illiteracy have not been blocked, and the phenomenon of educational dropout continues to justify the existence of the Literacy Movement Organization. As long as illiteracy persists, organizations, programs, and literacy education activities will continue. On the other hand, since 1979, the Literacy Movement Organization has been mandated in various policies, laws, and programs to eradicate illiteracy and bring it to zero. However, such a goal has not been achieved to date. Therefore, it is suggested that legal and organizational structures in the literacy education field be reorganized and redesigned, especially considering blocking the origins of illiteracy by covering deprived children and revising the programs, missions, and operational methods of the Literacy Movement Organization (as per the order of the Supreme Leader dated 19 February 2009).

The Literacy Movement Organization, as the responsible body in the literacy education field, in cooperation with other members of the Literacy Support Council, is required to register the names, characteristics, and addresses of illiterate individuals in the national database of illiterates.

The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare, the Statistical Center of Iran, the National Organization for Civil Registration, municipalities, non-governmental organizations, and private institutions, is obliged to identify and attract school-age children who have dropped out of school.

Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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