

## *The Concept of Educational Equity: A Study of Brazilian Scientific Production*

Otavio Correia de Melo Neto, Universidade Federal de Alagoas, Brasil  
Paula Orchiucci Miura, Universidade Federal de Alagoas, Brasil  
Adélia Augusta Souto de Oliveira, Universidade Federal de Alagoas, Brasil  
Alcimar Enéas Rocha Trancoso, Universidade Federal de Alagoas, Brasil  
Raíssa Matos Ferreira, Universidade Federal de Alagoas, Brasil  
José Werverton Pereira da Silva, Universidade Federal de Alagoas, Brasil  
Analice Tenório Bernardo, Universidade Federal de Alagoas, Brasil

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### **Abstract**

The “Observatório de Equidade Educacional: da pesquisa à inovação (Educational Equity Observatory: from research to innovation)” carries out an investigation into the construction of the concept of educational equity. This digital platform evaluates, monitors and tracks public data on Brazilian education, a proposal linked to the Center for Excellence in Social Technologies, the Psychology Institute of the Federal University of Alagoas, in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Brazilian government. This study deals with Brazilian academic production on the concept of educational equity, with the following questions as triggers: How has Brazilian conceptual production of equity taken place in terms of historical and social development? What is the relationship between the concepts of equity, gender, race, ethnicity, social class and socioeconomic status, considering the Brazilian educational reality? We used meta-synthesis (exploration, cross-referencing, refinement, description and interpretation) with data from the Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior. The descriptors “education” and “equity” were used, with mandatory presence in the title of articles published between 2000 and 2022. The results of 29 articles, after applying the filters, indicates the concept of equity as a guiding principle for public policies in various educational areas, such as mathematics education, physical education, inclusion of people with disabilities and educational policies during the Covid-19 pandemic. A relationship is observed between educational equity and gender, race, ethnicity, social class and socioeconomic status, considering the Brazilian educational reality. The synthesis relates equity to justice, based on UNESCO definitions.

Keywords: Basic Education, Educational Equity, Intersectionalities

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## **Introduction**

This study discusses the academic Brazilian production about the concept of educational equity. It is part of a project called: “Observatório de Equidade Educacional (Educational Equity Observatory)” TED 11970, MEC/SEB/NEES-UFAL, with the support of the Education Ministry (MEC) by the Secretary of Basic Education, in partnership with the Center for Excellence in Social Technologies (NEES) from the Federal University of Alagoas (UFAL).

It presents the following trigger questions: How has Brazilian conceptual production of equity taken place in terms of historical and social development?; What is the relationship between the concepts of equity and gender, race, ethnicity, social class and socioeconomic status, considering the Brazilian educational reality?

The trigger questions of this study refer to the use of the term equity in the educational field. In this sense, we turn to the studies produced by the research group Epistemology and Psychological Science (CNPq/Ufal) about the production of concepts.

In view of this, it is essential to highlight that the United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) and the Ministry of Education have been producing researches that aim to improve the Brazilian educational quality and equity. Considering that, it is pointed out that these studies provide indicators capable of contributing in the evaluating process of educational quality and equity.

Therefore, educational equity is a central topic to a national and international policy. However, it is necessary to understand the concept, the ways how its concept is used and possibilities of developing indicators that might contribute to public management. Below, it is presented the methodological path used in this research.

## **Data Production and Analysis Procedures**

In this research, it utilized articles as the analytical *corpus*. The data are from the platform Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) (Brasil, 2024) and the database Google Scholar-SciELO. The descriptors "education" and "equity" were used, with mandatory presence in the title of articles published between 2000 and 2022. As described on the website, Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES), this database is one of the more expand and vast Brazilian scientific collection and this platform is responsible for gathering and turn available national material, besides other materials signed by international editors and teaching and research institutions in Brazil (Brasil, 2020).

In addition, it stands out that the material available corresponds to millions of scientific periodicals of complete texts, hundreds of these materials are diverse, such as, articles, references, audiovisual material, technical standards, dissertations, theses, among others (Brasil, 2020).

The search for articles was made with the following descriptors: “education” and “equity”, with the mandatory presence in the title of the published articles between the years 2000 and 2022. This study was carried out between May 2023 and January 2024. A meta-synthesis was used. The study from Cavalcante & Oliveira (2020, p. 85) affirms that a meta-synthesis aims

to characterize and identify specificities from different kinds of bibliographic reviews. About this, the authors highlight the capacity of a meta-synthesis to produce a critical and interpretive review on qualitative studies (Cavalcante & Oliveira, 2020, p. 97).

According to Cavalcante & Oliveira (2020), the meta-synthesis has five stages: 1) Exploration: in this stage, it is necessary the definition and use of descriptors to select the study in database; 2) Refinement: corresponds to data treatment stage with the definition of inclusion and exclusion criteria to improve selection of studies; 3) Cross-referencing: in this stage, it is carried out a comparative analysis between selected data previously aiming to approach the chosen topic in historical and social terms; 4) Description: corresponds to the detailed description of the theory, methods and results obtained with the selected data; 5) Interpretation: this stage aims to carry out an interpretative synthesis, looking for similarities, contradictions and innovation on the selected data.

The initial result was 33 articles from the Google Scholar-Scielo database and 58 from Portal de Periódicos da Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES). CAPES. After the three first stages, 29 articles were obtained.

Emphasizes that twenty of the twenty nine articles analyzed were published in co-authorship. There is a diversity of periodics and subjects approached in the researches, especially in higher education. The 29 analyzed articles were produced by 67 authors - women and men - and distributed in 28 periodics, mostly in education and social sciences areas.

### **The Concept of Educational Equity**

From the analyzed material, it is observed studies that associate equity to justice, based on the views of the author John Rawls expressed in his Theory of Justice. Costa & Soares (2015, p.172) affirms that John Rawls became the main author in this discussion because of the Theory of Justice, published in 1971. The main topic discussed by the author is how to discuss the relationship between equity and justice, also giving due attention to each specificity of modern societies, these peculiarities unravel conflicts connected to social, economics and political inequalities.

In addition to that, Costa & Soares (2015, p. 127) reaffirm Rawl's contributions as they expose how the author reformulated the concept and, consequently, put this concept in the justice field to be used as a way to mediate conflicts from groups that are part of a democratic society. Costa & Soares (2015) also emphasize the equity constitutes a principle. The goal is not to guarantee parity to the developing standards, but ensure that the minimum is assured.

The interpretation indicates the concept of equity as a guiding principle for public policies in various educational areas, such as: Mathematics Education (Silva, 2016, Santana *et al.*, 2022); Physical Education (Beltrami, 2000, Baptista & Baptista, 2017); Inclusion of people with disabilities and educational policies during the Covid-19 pandemic (Regis & Kabengele, 2018, Araújo, 2020, Garcia e Michels, 2021).

The study of Silva (2016) is called Equity and Mathematics Education. It was published in the journal Mathematics Education Research. As its goal, the study aims to make evident the main topics and contradictions related to this concept (Silva, 2016, p. 400). This study adopts John Rawl's concept of justice as equity.

Silva (2016) affirms that the meaning of equity is justice and not equality. The author also emphasizes that, according to Rawls, the theory of justice as equity deals with the inequalities from the point of view of the citizens, in other words, their perspectives are considered throughout all their lives. There are, basically, three contingencies able to affect this point of view: the original social class, natural talents and bad or good luck throughout life (Silva, 2016. p. 414).

Santana *et al* (2022) published a study called Northeast Mathematics Education Network: Professional Development and Statistics Teaching on a Critical and Equity Perspective, on the Brazilian Journal of Science Teaching and Technology (RBCET). It had as an objective to present the planning of teaching to be developed in Math classes involving local and global elements linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. In this sense, Santana *et al.* (2022) affirm that the term equity appears related to justice and equality.

Beltrami (2000) published a study that also understands equity as a principle, coming from the idea of social justice, albeit a fallacious one that has been turned into a trap by the World Bank's proposal. According to Beltrami (2000, p.154), if physical education is an activity that helps to preserve the individual bodies of an age, sex and social condition, it is an ethical obligation to ensure that the less privileged have the right of access physical education just as much they are ensured to have water to satisfy their biological needs.

Therefore, age, sex and social conditions become elements that constitute an idea of equity, in the sense that the author understands as a right of every and each person, specially, the ones in social and economic disadvantages, developing actions that help preserve the body heritage (Beltrami, 2000).

Baptista & Baptista (2017) published a study called Physical fitness test in physical education: justice as equity in the right to education. Also adopting the justice concept of John Rawls. This research aimed to reflect about the legitimacy and limitations of the requirement needed in specific skills tests for students to enter higher education courses in Physical Education, raising questions about justice and the right to access education (Baptista & Baptista, 2017, p. 205).

The authors affirms, based on the Rawls theory (2000), the justice as equity in the higher education grounds on the moment that would exist equity in opportunities and permanence of all students that would wish and had condition to study in the higher education (Baptista & Baptista, 2017, p. 207).

The study of Regis & Kabengele (2018) entitled, “The person with disabilities and access to education: a policy for equity, published in *Perspective in Dialogue: Journal of Education and Society*”, aimed to verify the possibility to promote social inclusion of people with disabilities by having access to education. The authors defined equity in the public policies field.

Araújo's (2020) study entitled *Inclusion and Equity in Educational Opportunities: the deaf students in the context of inclusive education*, published in the *Journal of Education, Arts and Inclusion (REAI)*, presents reflection on the inclusion of deaf students in mainstream schools. The main goal of the study was to realize a critical and reflexive analysis about the inclusion of deaf students in a mainstream school from the perspective of a deaf student (Araújo, 2020,

p. 218). According to the author, inclusion and equity are correlated. Equity is understood as an opportunity of learning.

The study of Garcia & Michels (2021) called Education and Inclusion: equity and learning as capital strategies. The authors comprehend equity as a principle affirming that they discussed international guidelines of educational policies between 1990 and 2020 and analyzed three different generations of Brazilian special education policies, related to the education and inclusion of education and equity and learning strategies (Garcia & Michels, 2021, p.1). It is pointed out that equity appears as a guideline for policies and educational practices. Therefore, the authors base their reflections on equity considering Unesco's contributions.

In a nutshell, considering the limitations from the search criteria used in this presented research, it is emphasized that this contributions to the constructions of a concept initiated by indicating the relationship between equity and socioeconomic, gender and racial conditions of the students marking the necessity of not take it tacitly, but relate it to concrete actions of social transformation.

## **Conclusion**

The production of this meta-synthesis enabled the conceptual understanding of educational equity in terms of historical and social development. This study seeks to contribute in the process of bringing educational analysis and public policies closer, especially considering the diversity of conceptual aspects discussed, as well as the production and data analysis used in the studies.

It is observed that the authors point to the equity theme in the abstract and goals of the articles. The discussions about equity make an interlocution to Social Sciences, Human Sciences, Applied Social Sciences, besides getting closer to the area of Health. As for the objectives of the studies, most of the productions explicitly state what they intend to approach throughout the articles.

About the studies related to Education, most of the researches involved discussions related to equity and higher education. As it was pointed out earlier, there are studies that approach the concept of equity defined as a regulatory principle and articulate the concepts of quality and equity, as well as the tensions between equality and equity.

In view of this, it was noted that from 2002 onwards, the researches focused on the construction of equity as a evaluating phenomenon. Thus, it is emphasized two perspectives already presents in Beltrami (2000) and that perpetuate in the concept discussion during all the time period analyzed: the relationship between the term equity and factors such as gender, race, socioeconomic level and school effectiveness, adding the idea of opportunity equality and educational quality as synonym of equity.

The interpretative synthesis indicates a relationship is observed between educational equity and gender, race, ethnicity, social class and socioeconomic status, considering the Brazilian educational reality. As for the production of the concept of educational equity over the period analyzed, the ideas of John Rawls and his Theory of Justice are prominent.

About the documents used also to discuss the concept of equity, it is highlighted international productions: UNESCO Guidelines, documents from the World Bank and the ABC of Women

Worker's Rights and Gender Equality da International Labour Organization It is worth noticing that there are studies based on the definition of equity as a regulatory principle of justice, present on the UNESCO Guide, developed in 2019.

In this sense, Soares, Santos & Lopes (2020) affirm that equity should guarantee a vision leading to justice and fair processes, considering the promotion of an actually inclusive e equality equity (Soares, Santos & Lopes, 2020, p. 2). It is expected to collaborate to advance academic-scientific production, aiming to encourage the production of new studies about the debated theme and possible improvements in the fight for an inclusive society.

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2

**Contact email:** alcimar.trancoso@nees.ufal.br