

## QUALITY, EQUALITY AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to clarify the concepts of quality, equality and equity in education and to understand their evolution in order to best identify all the semic aura relating to the subject. We will also show that educational inequalities in themselves have never ceased to be anchored in a nuanced way in the ideology of human beings. As part of a multidisciplinary field, these notions are imbued with a dynamic that is constantly being invented and reconstructed. Historically constructed, F. Dubet judges its full content when he confirms that “ *yesterday's inequalities are not always those of today and will not necessarily be those of tomorrow*”<sup>1</sup>. That said, it is no longer a question of equalizing the chances of access to school, but of guaranteeing fair academic competition. In this sense, we will show that historical evolution is more and more committed to progressing towards the concept of equity as a complement to that of equality.

**Keywords:** Quality, equality, equity, education

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The notions of quality, equality and equity in education as well as the related terms are interpreted differently from one discipline to another, and even from one research to another. Indeed, if there is consensus on the interest in quality and equality in education, the unified approach, both at the level of the definitions that forge its philosophy, and at the level of the determinants that regulate its use, probably defect. It is therefore up to us, for the sake of precision, to probe its contours and to reduce its full extent to what we deem useful in this respect.

### 2.0 QUALITY, EQUALITY AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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<sup>1</sup>Dubet, F., (2010). “Places and chances. Rethinking social justice”. Collection The Republic of Ideas, Seuil, 2010, p. 107.

The interest in wanting to define the diachronic evolution of terms makes it possible to understand that certain restrictive and static conceptions become obsolete. As a result, the challenges to be met are no longer limited to quantifying in a breathless way access to school, the generalization of which is struggling despite everything, but rather to seek a springboard for equitable and quality education, capable of supporting sustainable development of nations. The objective in this section is to describe how educational inequalities and their justifications have manifested themselves throughout history.

## 2.1 Educational Inequalities Before The 18th Century

The ancient civilizations that marked human history from the fifth millennium BC experienced apparent inequalities in the structures dedicated to education. The children of workers and peasants receive from their parents or their employers a limited and exclusively professional apprenticeship. Contrary to this, the elite class has access to a so-called "generalist and non-utilitarian" education. In these civilizations each individual is educated according to his place in the social scale. The system is dominated by religious men as guardians of spiritual values. The main purpose of education is to maintain the existing social order.

## 2.2 Ancient Civilizations

In ancient India, and as F. Gautier points out 2, functions within society are distributed according to a strict social hierarchy. At the top there is the Brahman "...Who was so not by birth, but because he aspired to preserve the spiritual and intellectual elevation of his race and therefore acquire a whole spiritual and occult baggage, which alone could qualify him for this task 3. Unlike the peasant, of lower rank " who fulfilled more humble functions" 4. The Brahmins fixed the limits of the teaching to be given to each according to his birth. Thus "The Mahâbhârata is a code of the warrior virtues of the Kshatriya , the Hamayana represents the ideal of the prince, while the vaifja , a member of the third caste, must, according to the Arthaçastra of Kautilya , "know well how to sow the seeds and to recognize the qualities of the soil (...), to know the weights and measures as well as the farming techniques 5". Access to education in ancient India therefore strongly depends on social rank. The Brahmins, being at the top of the hierarchy, are entitled to higher education. Middle-class citizens (accountants, administrators, etc.) benefit from an elementary education that hardly goes beyond utility, while the lower class, made up of workers, peasants and craftsmen, is completely excluded from the educational circuit 6.

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<sup>2</sup>Gautier F., (1999), "another look at India", Chapter 9: The third misinformation: the caste system, Section 3. Available at: <http://www.jaia-bharati.org/livres/other-regard/other-reg-chap9.htm>, consulted on April 5, 2016), Tricorne edition.

<sup>3</sup>ibidem, Chapter 9, Section 3.

<sup>4</sup>Same.

<sup>5</sup> The Thanh Khoi ., (1965), "Historical dimension of education", In: Tiers-Monde, tome 6, n°22. Education and development. P.338.

<sup>6</sup>Gal, R., (1991), "History of Education", PUF, Que Sais-je n° 310. P. 19.

Having almost the same social hierarchy, the particularity of ancient Egypt (4th millennium BC) lies in the importance given to writing . Invented on the shores of Sumer, it is considered to be a sacred skill, of divine origin and inspiration, placed under the patronage of a god of wisdom. The use of it was at the origin of the appearance of the social class of "scribes" <sup>7</sup>who mastered the secrets of writing and therefore occupied a place of choice in the administration of the country. Scribes received education in specific schools that offered utilitarian instruction. <sup>8</sup>An extract from the text of Khéty , dating from the beginning of the [XIIth dynasty](#) <sup>9</sup>, also known under the title "The Satire of the Professions", highlights the primacy of the class of scribes : "Happy is a scribe fit for his duties! There are few functions where one does not have a superior, except that of scribe: it is he who commands... The scribe manages to sit among the members of the assemblies (boards of directors of towns and villages ). No scribe fails to eat the victuals of the king's household. (...) You see, there is no profession that is exempt from a leader, except that of scribe, because the scribe is his own leader. If therefore you know how to write, everything will go very well for you; there should be no other professions in your eyes. (...)»

Acquiring the secrets of writing at the time was also an issue of social power. Another statement by the scribes Akhtoy (9th or 10th Dynasty) and Amenemope (Ramses, 1298-1232) taken from the work of [J. Leif \(1966\)](#), shows us to what extent the class of scribes encourages their children to learn to replace their parents in the social rank and escape the common fate <sup>10</sup>. "... it is the scribe Akhtoy who, to encourage his son Pepi in the thankless study of letters, draws a satirical picture for him of the thousand disadvantages of mechanical trades, which he opposes to the happy destiny of the scribe, to the nobility of this profession of chef; same admonition put under the name of Amensmope , first royal archivist under Ramesses II (1298-1232)".

The same situation was experienced in societies such as Persia from the 6th century BC. J.-C .. Sparta , and Athens . Indeed in these societies, only a military and moral education was provided to boys from the nobility. In Athens as in Rome, education remained forbidden to slaves, but accessible to citizens of certain social ranks who not only had access to education, but were also obliged to do so by force of law. Poor citizens, mostly craftsmen, receive a minimum of education, then go to their trades, unlike rich citizens, who were educated in schools of " Rhetoricians " and "Sophists" <sup>11</sup>, this allowed them to access to the noblest political and legal careers.

The case of China is particularly different. For more than two millennia, the Chinese Empire was governed by the doctrine of Confucius <sup>12</sup>(551-479 BC), which tends to build a stable

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<sup>7</sup>Marrou, H., (1958), "History of Education in Antiquity", Seuil.

<sup>8</sup>Leif J., Biancheri A., (1966), "Philosophy of Education", volume 3, The teaching doctrines by the texts, Delagrave.

<sup>9</sup>Twelfth Dynasty kings reign from [-1991 to -1786 / -1785 / -1783](#) ( [D.B. Redford](#) , [N. Grimal](#) , [D. Arnold](#) )

<sup>10</sup>Christophe, C, (2003), "History of social and educational inequalities, sociology of educational inequalities, egalitarian ideal", University of Rouen.

<sup>11</sup>Ibidem. P.17.

<sup>12</sup>Confucius is a [Chinese philosopher](#) . He is the most significant historical figure of Chinese civilization. He is considered [China 's first "educator"](#) . Its doctrine established as [a state religion](#) as early as the [Han dynasty](#) and

and balanced society. The first condition is above all the instruction of the members of society. A famous phrase from the great founder of the Chinese education system Confucius sums up the four ideal stages of Chinese culture: "To perfect oneself, to administer one's house, to govern the Empire, to pacify the world." Now, this training is essentially acquired through an education that does not recognize social classes. Every individual, whatever his origin, is responsible to the city. "Correct education is the necessary virtue".<sup>13</sup> The system must open the way to an equality governed by the harmony of natural laws. If the prince succeeds in his mission, which is to make peace and well-being reign, the people will be virtuous: "The Kimtze (the good man) has the virtue of the wind, the people have the virtue of the grass. The grass bows where the wind blows".<sup>14</sup> Note that despite the recognition of education for all in the Chinese empire, access to education remains reserved in the vast majority of cases to the sons of the nobility.

### 2.3 The middle Ages And The Birth Of The Principle Of Equality In Education

It was not until the Middle Ages that the idea of equality before knowledge was born, expressed as compulsory education for all without exception. At this period of history and more specifically, with the advent of Christianity, and subsequently of Islam, equal access to knowledge found its legitimacy in religious texts.

The advent of Christianity defended the idea that the filiation of all individuals goes back to God, father of all men. It will follow in particular that humans are all brothers and equals, without distinction of race, social class or sex. In his "Letter to the Galatians" (III, 2), Paul says: "There is no longer either Greek or Jew; there is no longer a slave or a free man; there is no longer a man or a woman; for you are only in Christ Jesus.". The ideas of the Epistle of Paul are seen by many philosophers as being the first contemporary postures which refuse social exclusion.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the advent of the Christian religion defended an egalitarian relationship between individuals. Thus, the stratification of citizens into distinct groups poses a problem to the principle of equality defended by Christianity. Any unequal distribution of rights among men is perceived as a violation of the religious principle. On the other hand, each individual is required to know the religious texts. This implies that all citizens must be educated, whatever their social position.

The instruction, at the beginning of the Middle Ages, remains encouraged by the Church, which recommends to the parents the importance of the religious instruction.<sup>16</sup> The latter no longer has only a utilitarian and professional vocation as in ancient civilizations, but it is also

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which was not officially banished until the beginning of the 20th century, with a resurgence in 1973 (see [Critique of Lin Piao and Confucius](#)). His main disciples are named the [Twelve Philosophers](#) and honored in [Confucian temples](#).

<sup>13</sup>[Lê Thành Khôi](#); Op. cit. P. 339.

<sup>14</sup>Ibidem, P 339.

<sup>15</sup>Christophe, C., Op.cit , P 19.

<sup>16</sup>Riche, P., (1969), "Education and Culture in the Barbarian West, VI ° -VIII ° s", Ed, Seuil, pp. 500-529.

an objective in itself . It is in this that the aristocrats install their children in the religious schools which contribute, in spite of their vocation, to the instruction of the elite 17.

We have to wait for the advent of Islam, which defended equal access to knowledge. Moreover, according to the Muslim religion, only moral values and works count. Education is not linked to race, culture or social condition. The foundations of the social morality of Islam are not only spiritual, they invite to persevere to attenuate any form of inequality in the society. Through this aspect, the ethics of Islam clearly expresses the aspirations of the poorest social classes.

It is useful to specify in this regard that Islam was born from the call to read “ Ikrae ! », « Read, in the name of your Lord who created, who created man from an adhesion. Lily! Your Lord is the Most Noble, who taught by the pen (the pen), taught man what he did not know 18. These verses, the first of the Koran, denote all the importance that the divine message grants to the quest for knowledge. Several verses of the Koran and prophetic traditions insist on the importance of learning and the transmission of knowledge. In the Koran (Sura 58, verse 11): “God will raise in degrees those of you who believe and those who receive knowledge. » . The Prophet Mohammad said: "The search for knowledge is a duty for every Muslim" (Ibn Mâjah ). He also insists that: "Whoever embarks on a path to seek knowledge, God will facilitate him by this, the path to Paradise" ( Muslim ). Islam considers the effort made in the search for knowledge, its acquisition and its transmission as one of the paths that lead to Paradise.

Through the theological conception of Islam, which opposes the society of inequalities, the citizen's commitment to this political and spiritual community is a commitment to combat and vigilance where the conscience, always active, must ensure the protection of the right to equality.19

Acquiring and transmitting knowledge are a duty and a right to be exercised in the city. Also, access to knowledge is not exclusive in the Muslim community. On the contrary, it is a collective and popular attribute that scholars must constantly share with citizens through continuous consultation. The socio-economic privileges which symbolize inequality before knowledge are extremely denounced, in accordance with the basic principles of Islam.

Compared to contemporary societies, the Muslim community was distinguished by flexible and non-hierarchical structures 20. The learning course was open, decentralized, and accessible to all without any formal hierarchy 21, resulting in relatively broad learning 22.

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<sup>17</sup>Leon , A., (1990), "History of education in France", PUF, What do I know? No. 393, 6th ed.

<sup>18</sup>Sura 69 of the Qur'an.

<sup>19</sup>Meziane, A., (2013), "The idea of social inequality among Arab thinkers"; available at: <http://fr.calameo.com/read/000691273db45525749fb>

<sup>20</sup> Cheddadi , A ., (2012), "Ibn Khaldoun and education", Encyclopedia of the Agora, File: [Ibn Khaldoun Abd al-Rahman](http://agora.qc.ca/documents/abd_al-rahman_ibn_khaldoun--ibn_khaldun_et_leducation_par_abdesselam_cheddadi) , available at [http://agora.qc.ca/documents/abd\\_al-rahman\\_ibn\\_khaldoun--ibn\\_khaldun\\_et\\_leducation\\_par\\_abdesselam\\_cheddadi](http://agora.qc.ca/documents/abd_al-rahman_ibn_khaldoun--ibn_khaldun_et_leducation_par_abdesselam_cheddadi)

<sup>21</sup> Gellner, E., (1983), 'Nations and nationalism', 2nd edition , Cornell University Press. P.65.

This basic education, which here combines religion and morality, is a process that does not stop at a specific stage or age, but lasts a lifetime, as this saying attributed to the Prophet Mohammed evokes: " Learn the science from the cradle to the grave ”.

### 3.0 EQUALITY IN EDUCATION BETWEEN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

Between the 18th and 19th centuries, the debate on education was not accepted in the name of the principle of equality. We can identify two distinct ideas: the first goes against universal access to education and which is moreover that of several intellectuals of the time such as Rousseau (1712-1778), Voltaire ( 1694-1778), Diderot (1713-1784). The second was in favor of greater equality of access to education, supported by Montesquieu (1689-1755), Rollin (1661-1741), Condorcet (1743-1794).

#### 3.1 Opposition to equality in education

At the time , the issue of inequality in education was considered fair especially by the bourgeoisie and the nobility, but also by some philosophers who did not even raise political debates about it. . According to Rousseau (1712-1778) and Voltaire (1694-1778), the social interest, requires a minimal education for the poor citizens and a superior education for the rich class which forms within the limit of the necessary: political leaders, priests , doctors and expressly forbids high education to the poor class.

J, J. Rousseau explains that there are two kinds of men: the poor, judged "inferior" and unworthy, and the rich, judged "superior" and worthy. Consequently, education must be a privilege reserved for the rich. “ The poor do not need education; that of his condition is forced; he could have no other: on the contrary, the education which the rich receive from his state is that which suits him the least, and for himself and for society. ”<sup>23</sup>. Rousseau justified his opposition to the instruction of the people by the following stance: "Do not instruct the child of the villager, for it is not proper for him to be instructed," he writes in the *New Heloise* . In the same book, he adds: "Those who are destined to live in rural simplicity do not need to be happy to develop their faculty, and their buried talents are like the gold mines of Valais as the public good." does not allow us to exploit. ”

Despite the fact that he recognized the equal dignity of men, Voltaire 1766 considers that the instruction of the working class is useless as long as it is likely to disorganize society. Generally presented as a defender of the poor class, he justifies his position by affirming that “ It is not the maneuver that must be instructed, it is the good bourgeois, the inhabitant of the cities . ". He continues, “ When the populace begins to reason, all is lost. ”.

The instruction of the poor class according to Voltaire can bring misfortune to this category. That said, the justification for excluding the underprivileged class from education finds its origin in the invariability of the professional positions offered by the State. The poor do not need to raise their level of education, they must remain poor, because society always needs a

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<sup>22</sup> Makdisi , G., (1990), “The rise of humanism in classical Islam and the Christian West”, Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>23</sup>Page 29 of the Complete Collection of the Works of JJ Rousseau " [Émile, or Education](#) "



worker; "The knowledge of the people should not extend beyond their occupations" Voltaire 24.

### 3.2 Adherence to a popular instruction:

Contrary to Rousseau and Voltaire, Montesquieu expressed the most widespread opinion at the time: "The little people must be enlightened (...) and restrained by the gravity of certain characters " 25. As for Rollin ( 1661-1741), he advances: "that we see every day that as the sciences pass among new peoples, they transform them into other men ... we are born in the darkness of ignorance, the Education gives our thoughts and our reasonings justness and exactness. It accustoms us to put order and arrangement in all the matters of which we have either to speak or to write. It presents to us as guides and models the most enlightened and wisest men of antiquity . The works of Condorcet (1743-1794) which promote popular education, deserve to be underlined. Its legitimacy as regards the instruction of the people is the product of a long series of reflections and observations on the development of the human spirit. He defined a relationship that binds educational institutions (both causes and consequences of progress in science and technology) to the indefinite improvement of the human species, which therefore presents a character of necessity. According to Condorcet, if education is generalized , "there arises a greater equality in industry, and consequently in fortunes; and the equality of fortunes necessarily contributes to that of instruction; while the equality between peoples, and that which is established for each, still have a mutual influence on each other. Egalitarian education corrects other social inequalities, instead of fortifying them.<sup>26</sup>

Condorcet envisages that the education to be offered in primary schools should focus on reading and writing in addition to the rules of arithmetic and the development of the first moral ideas and the rules of conduct that derive from them. Access must be facilitated for all. To this end, for the primary cycle, each group of houses containing 400 inhabitants should have a school and a teacher. In his five Memoirs on Public Instruction,<sup>27</sup> Condorcet traced the founding principles of the egalitarian school which can be summed up as follows: "(1) The knowledge to be taught is that which removes the person from a relationship of dependence (reading, counting, writing, etc.). (2) The school must teach what no other institution can teach more adequately. (3) The knowledge produced in scholarly institutions must fall back for the direct benefit of society as a whole".

## 4.0 EQUALITY IN EDUCATION IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

The objective of this section is to identify the evolution of demands for an egalitarian school during the 19th and 20th centuries. This imposes us in fact, given the multiplicity of

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<sup>24</sup>Ferdinand, B., Dictionary of Pedagogy, volume I, p. 113.

<sup>25</sup>Montesquieu, "Complete Works", ed. Laboulaye , Volume 3. Paris (1876)

<sup>26</sup>Condorcet, N., (1795), "Sketch of a historical picture of the progress of the human mind", Projects, Sketch, Fragments and Notes.

<sup>27</sup> | *ibidem* .

interpretation, with a work of clarification by illustrating since the beginning of the 19th century to our days, the direction that took the term of equality.

## 4.1 School For All

The 19th century actually announced the advent of school for all. The aim was to widen access to the school. Blais, Gauchet and Ottavi (2002) note that the conception of equality in education during the 19th century was very clear: “ It is a question of ensuring the right of all to education. If all individuals are equal in rights, equal before the law and equally eligible for all political office, they should have an equal right to instruction and education . (Blais et al., 2002).

Equal access thus appears to be the overriding concern that was at the origin of the fight for free education and compulsory schooling. In fact, access to school for all should not be hindered either by cost or by the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of families. In most democratic countries, several laws have been put in place to guarantee general access to schooling. In France, Guizot's law 28(1833) obliges each municipality to finance at least one school. Jules Ferry and Paul Bert introduced free education on June 16, 1881 and compulsory schooling on March 28, 1882. The reasons put forward at the time by Jules Ferry were purely humanistic and ethical: “Equality (...) is the very law of human progress! It is more than a theory: it is a social fact, it is the very essence and legitimacy of society....The work of our time (...) it is a generous work and I define it thus: to make disappear the last, the most frightening of the inequalities which come from the birth, the inequality of education. This is the problem of the century and we must focus on it 29” .

From the beginning of the 20th century, equality of access to school was almost achieved in most democratic countries. The famous “baby boom” of the 1960s, associated with the establishment of various laws to extend the compulsory period of schooling to 16 years, caused a massive influx in primary schools. Through this generalization of education, the educational systems of the countries have undergone a significant evolution, this evolution has not been without effects on socio-educational inequalities. Indeed, once access to school is satisfied, the very concept of equality in education has been extended to other issues.

## 4.2 From An Egalitarian School To A Fair School

However, from the 1960s, many studies began to analyze the determinants of academic success ( Bourdieu and [Passeron](#) , “ [The heirs](#) (1964), the reproduction (1970)”; Coleman report (1966) and that of the INED in France 1962). These studies reveal that the academic success of students is correlated with social origin. That said, the debate on equality at school, which is strongly linked to social equality, is no longer identified only with the schooling of all children, but everyone must start in the same school, in the same conditions. The ideal is to erase the effect of social origin, so that the best wins.

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<sup>28</sup>This law proposed by [François Guizot](#) , [Minister of Public Instruction](#) in the [first Soutl government](#) , is one of [the major texts](#) which responds to article 69 of the [Charter of 1830](#) , which had provided for public education and academic freedom.

<sup>29</sup> Ferry , J. , (1870), “Discourse on equality of education”. Speech in the Salle Molière, April 10, 1870.



By following this meritocratic model, the school should organize a fair competition, everyone takes part in this competition and in the end, the inequalities that will emerge are indisputable because the school puts the merit of individuals at stake. F. Dubet, affirms that equal opportunity is the model which imposes itself with force for an obvious reason: "we are in societies where the historical trend is very clear, constantly affirming that we are equal, From this point of view, the children of workers or executives must have the same chance of success . This model of equal opportunity consists of correcting inequalities between social classes through the role of the school, which redistributes individuals in social positions according to their merits. However, aiming for greater equality of opportunity is not without its drawbacks. First of all, it is very difficult to significantly correct the accumulated inequalities. In a way, reasoning in terms of equal opportunities means that if there are 30% of workers' children in society, we should have 30% of these children in the elite. This tends to naturalize the social pre-requisites of departure and empowers individuals by forgetting that their successes or failures stem in part from their socio-economic characteristics ( Duru-Bellat , 2009).

Other research work has raised the issue of justice in education. From this point of view, the recent recourse to the concept of equity has contributed to the reformulation of this question. At the beginning of the 1980s, several initiatives were adopted in the United States, the United Kingdom and France, to correct the inequalities deemed unfair in terms of education. Thus equal treatment is reviewed in the name of taking into account individual differences from the outset. The notions of equality of access, treatment, and opportunities fundamentally suppose that: all pupils must have the same education in order to raise their educational levels. However, the work of P. Bourdieu, in particular the thesis of "reproduction" and "the heirs" denounced the ability of the school to equalize the chances of promotion for all students. In this perspective, a new concept will emerge: the equality of results will appear as a criterion for assessing the justice of the school system. Treating all students equally or guaranteeing them the same conditions of schooling, regardless of their initial situation, can reinforce other inequalities. The urgency is to rethink educational strategies in favor of disadvantaged subjects.

## **5.0 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

The concepts of quality, equality and equity sometimes admit several interpretations and the difficulty of an attempt at definition results from the different connotations which their underlying beings can have. Clarifying these concepts will help, on the one hand, to remove the confusion that generally exists between equality and equity, and on the other hand, to define the nature and extent of their interaction with the concept of quality.

### **5.1 Quality In Education**

Attempts at definition generally seek to portray the concept of quality in education and to make it an almost central theme. Indeed, the documentation consulted includes various interpretations that we will reduce to two types of approach: the first defines quality in education based on the results obtained, the second considers the importance of the means mobilized as an indicator of quality subject to the existence of a positive effect between these means and the quality of school acquisitions.

UNESCO, in its monitoring report on education for all (2005) entitled "Requirement for quality", identifies two principles that characterize most attempts to define quality education 30: " The first identifies the development cognition of all learners as the major explicit goal of all education systems. Therefore, their success in this regard is an indicator of quality. The second emphasizes the role of education in promoting values and attitudes related to good citizenship and in creating conditions conducive to creative and emotional development ”.

The World Bank highlights the ambiguity that characterizes the notion. However, the definition it gives in its report entitled: “ Priorities and strategies for education (1995)” , insists on the importance of results as indicators of quality. She states that “ an adequate definition must include student outcomes. Most educators would also like to include the nature of the educational experience helping to produce such results 31.

In addition to the importance of results in the assessment of quality in education, the sixth objective of the Dakar Framework for Action expands the aforementioned definitions by considering the concept of equality as being intimately linked to quality : "Improving the quality of education is about ensuring excellence so that recognized and quantifiable learning outcomes are achieved for all (especially in reading, writing, numeracy and life skills )”.

Coombs (1985), in his book entitled “The global crises in education of the 1980s”, agrees that quality in education must take into account societal changes and individual aspirations. “... the qualitative dimension means much more than the quality of education as it is usually defined and judged by the performance of pupils in traditional terms of curricula and standards. Quality (.....) also depends on the relevance of what is taught and learned, how this meets the current and future needs of the learners concerned, given their particular circumstances and perspectives. » 32.

Jarousse and Mingat (1993) 33refer to the characteristics of the school context to define quality in education: “ An education is of quality if the characteristic factors of school organization are favorable (qualified teachers, small class sizes, teaching materials for use by pupils and teachers available in quantity and quality .” This definition contains several components and highlights the involvement of multiple factors (characteristics of teachers, characteristics of classes, quality and quantity of teaching tools).

These definitions show how difficult it is to define this concept. On the one hand, a quality education must favor the academic success of the learners, and on the other hand allow the individual to integrate harmoniously into his environment and to adapt to the transformations of his environment. Moreover, in a world in perpetual transformation, the quality standards of

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<sup>30</sup>Education for All Global Monitoring Report, (2005), Ed. UNESCO, P 16.

<sup>31</sup>Bank World , 1995, p. 46

<sup>32</sup>Coombs, P, H., (1985), “The world crisis in education the view from the eighties” New York Oxford University Press, p. 105, Available at: [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/Pnaar713.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pnaar713.pdf)

<sup>33</sup>Jarousse J.P and Mingat , A, (1993). "For a quality policy for primary school in Africa" Revue d'économie du développement. p29.

the past today risk not meeting the quality standards of tomorrow. <sup>34</sup>They are indeed relative to certain conditions in relation to time, place, learners and their circumstances <sup>35</sup>. Likewise, they cannot be considered as static standards. It is precisely for this reason that the definition of quality in education goes hand in hand with the multiplication of its attempts to measure it.

The International Association for the Assessment of Achievements (IEA) <sup>36</sup>establishes periodic surveys on this subject (TIMSS; PIRLS). These surveys provide comprehensive tools for comparing the quality of education systems. Indeed, the scores produced in addition to the questionnaires on the family and educational background demonstrate the importance and complexity of this evaluation exercise. Most of the indicators produced are flow; structures, and performance results (age, sex, socio-professional categories of families, class size, characteristics of schools and teachers, etc. ).

## 5.2 Equality In Education

The notion of equality is subject to several interpretations in the field of education. Let's start first with the definition of Grand Robert which considers that, " equality is assimilated to persons, things having the same quantity, dimension, nature, quality or value". This definition aligns with that of Alain Ray's French-language historical dictionary, which indicates that the term equality "is used by extension to designate the fact, for humans, of having the same rights, of being of equal conditions (1647) ”.

Girod <sup>37</sup>, defines equality as " [...] the uniform distribution, in the population of a country or region, of all kinds of advantages and disadvantages over which society exercises any influence " (Girod, 1993 , p. 3).

The definition proposed by Cuin (1999, p. 281) in the dictionary of sociology considers equality to be " a uniform distribution of a socially valued material or symbolic good among the members of a society. Existing inequalities between individuals can affect any kind of possessions (wealth, education, information, etc.), qualities (prestige, age, state of health, etc.) and achievements (diploma, physical performance, authority , etc.) ”.

However, equality as such remains an ideal which can only be defined by antonymy. In the dictionary of social policy, Levy (2002) understands by inequalities "differentiated access to important social goods". On the other hand, the term inequality is used to state any difference

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<sup>34</sup>This is particularly true currently if we take into consideration the change in school practices induced by the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic.

<sup>35</sup>Coombs, P, H., Op. cit., P. 105.

<sup>36</sup>In addition to the work of the IEA, several studies have been developed in recent years on the African continent to draw lessons on the key factors for improving the quality of learning. Particular mention should be made of the reflection of ADEA which gave rise to the document entitled "The challenge of learning: improving the quality of basic education in sub-Saharan Africa" and the research of UNESCO within the framework of its global monitoring report on EFA in 2005, which focused on "the demand for quality", and CONFEMEN's reflection and orientation documents on the theme of quality, including that on "Strategies for a successful overhaul of education systems”.

<sup>37</sup>Girod, R. (1993). "Social inequalities, what do I know? , Puff , Vendôme, P 127.

that is not fair. <sup>38</sup>In the field of education, this difference is most often interpreted in terms of advantage or disadvantage of material or symbolic means, such as economic, cultural variables, power or influence.<sup>39</sup>

Pierre Merle, considers that equality in education often refers to two different ideas. First, they refer to a statistical reality that is often referred to as equal access to school <sup>40</sup>and that can only be achieved once access reaches all social strata. The second idea refers to the methods of treatment which must be egalitarian for all students.

To better clarify Merle's idea, the distinction made by Prost <sup>41</sup>, in his book on the democratization of education, is relevant. According to him, equality at school can be expressed in two different but complementary ways: a quantitative equality and a qualitative one. He estimates that if for example 10% of individuals have cars, quantitatively the difference is between those who have cars and those who do not. But when 100% of individuals have cars, the difference is of a qualitative nature, it is between those with luxury cars and those with low-end cars <sup>42</sup>. Starting from this example, Prost considers that the generalization of access to school has not been accompanied by qualitative equality which, if necessary, would have generated, among other advantages, the weakening of the link between social background and academic achievement.

Along the same lines, Dubet (2009) insists on the difficulty of implementing the concept of equality in education between socially different students. In his article entitled: "The pitfalls of equal opportunities", he considers that the generalization of education has effectively enabled students to go to school, but at the same time it has contributed to changing the nature of educational inequalities. He adds that the collective equality that has been created includes in itself qualitative inequalities that are becoming extremely strong. " The justice done to individuals in the name of equality sometimes turns into collective injustice" (F. Dubet, 2009).

Swanson and King, 1997 <sup>43</sup>, consider inequality to be a commonly accepted concept in students' school experience, both for teachers and parents: "it is obvious that not all students are de facto equal. But, since our modern societies recognize equality as one of the most important values, its justification in the field of education legitimizes its acceptance" (

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<sup>38</sup>Fiant, N., (2012). "Towards a fairer school: Between description, understanding and management of the system", University of Mons, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. P12.

<sup>39</sup>Ibidem. P.11.

<sup>40</sup>Merle, P., (2002), "The democratization of education". Paris: La Découverte, coll , Sociological benchmarks.

<sup>41</sup>Prost, A. ( , 1992). "Has education been democratized? » . Paris: PUF.

<sup>42</sup>Several French authors refer to this distinction of Prost (for example, Duru-Bellat and Kieffer, 2000; Goux and Maurin , 1995, Thélot and Vallet, 2000). (Cf. page 6 of the article entitled: democratization or increase in educational inequalities? available at: [http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/pop\\_0032-4663\\_2002\\_num\\_57\\_4\\_7310](http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/pop_0032-4663_2002_num_57_4_7310) .

<sup>43</sup>Swanson, AD, & King, RA (1991), School finance: its economics and politics. White Plains, NY; Longman. Pub Group.

Hutmacher et al. 2001) 44. In other words, if unequal levels of achievement are worth justifying, unequal treatment deserves more.

To do this, it is necessary to take into account other, more truthful criteria to pass judgment on the legitimacy or otherwise of these inequalities. This is where the notion of fairness comes in.

### 5.3 Equity In Education

Equity is related to the concept of equality which is dissimilar and complementary to it. Le Grand Robert (1979 edition) considers fairness to be a “ Notion of natural justice in the appreciation of what is due to each person; this conception of a natural justice which is not inspired by the rules of law in force ”. The egalitarian distribution of the educational service does not correspond to equity in the strict sense of the term. “ It's a fair measure, which makes it possible to make a form of inequality acceptable. Equity refers to a moral judgment that questions the injustice of observed inequalities and the basic principles that justify their acceptance . ( Fleurbaey , 2003a) 45.

Demeuse and Baye (2005) 46 explain in this regard that: "a fair education system is a system that aims for a certain type of equality, at the risk of admitting, in order to achieve this, certain inequalities considered to be fair" (p.167 ). From this point of view, equality and equity are therefore two concepts that are closely linked and at the same time different. The notion of equity surfaces when inequality takes hold ( Hutmacher et al. 2001).

Although there are differences between equality and equity, it seems, according to the details of sociologist Alain Mingat in his article published in the economic review 47, " That the term equality (or inequality) rather has a factual connotation, whereas the term equity or (justice), which maintains obvious relations with that of equality, also incorporates value judgments and moral conceptions. Equity also relates to the personal characteristics of individuals and how the school deals with these characteristics”.

We can conclude that the notions of equality and equity are complementary, “ equity is not opposed to equality. On the contrary, it presupposes the search for more demanding equality criteria ” 48. This complementarity is of major importance, it implies the need to clarify unjust inequalities. Indeed, if a school system presents inequalities (for example, if it treats pupils differentiated by their starting characteristics in different ways) this unequal treatment

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<sup>44</sup> Hutmacher , W., Cochrane, D., & Bottani , N. (2001). In pursuit of equity in education: using international indicators to compare equity policies. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. Istance , D. (1997). Education and equity in OECD countries. Paris: OECD.

<sup>45</sup> Fleurbaey , M., (2003a), “Neither perfectionist nor welfarist : the index of prime goods is possible”, *Revue de philosophie économique*, no 7, pp. 111-135.

<sup>46</sup> Baye, A. (2005), “Between efficiency and equity: what the OECD indicators mean”. In M. Demeuse , A., Baye, MH, Straeten, J., Nicaise, A. Matoul ( dir .), “Towards a fair and efficient school. 26 contributions on education and training systems”. Brussels: De Boeck, coll. “Economy, Society, Region”.

<sup>47</sup> Mingat , A., (1988), “Measurement and analysis of equality and equity in education”, *Revue économique*. Vol 39, n°1, pp. 93-112.

<sup>48</sup> [Fitoussi](#) , J. P and [Rosanvallon](#) , P., (1996), “the new age of inequalities”, Editions du Seuil, p. 99.

is not unfair, since it aims to make the system more equitable. Thus, some inequalities may be considered fair, while other equalities may conversely not be.

Grisay and Demeuse (1989) <sup>49</sup>specified the terms to be equalized in order to make the education system more equitable. They consider that any policy that envisages equity in education must take into account three considerations: “ (1): Equal access : all learners must have the same chances of access to education regardless of their socio-economic origins , thanks to a sufficient supply and quality. (2): Equal treatment : which takes into consideration the means allocated to the different socioeconomic groups, in particular the level of teacher training, the quantity and quality of teaching tools. And finally (3): Equality of results : everyone must have a minimum level of education, for example at the end of primary school each student must master the skills allowing him to continue his studies without failure”. Grisay , A., (1989). At the level of primary education, inequalities of treatment are fair when they aim to make the achievements of pupils equal regardless of socio-economic and cultural characteristics. Thus, in an education system that aims to be equitable, the impact of the initial characteristics of students and their families should be low: the academic success of students is largely independent of their family and socio-economic background as well as of the school environment. On the other hand, in an unfair education system, the impact of these variables is significant: the academic success of students depends largely on their family environment and their schooling environment <sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Grisay , A., (1989). “What efficiency indicators for schools? A study of a contrasting group of 'performing' and 'low-performing' colleges”. University of Liege ; Experimental Pedagogy Service

<sup>50</sup>Hutmacher , W., Cochrane, D & Bottani , N. (eds) (2001). “In Pursuit of Equity in Education. Using international indicators to compare equity policies”. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.



## 6.0 CONCLUSION

Throughout history, various conceptions of equality have been revealed and the principles of equality and equity take on varied, even complementary meanings. In ancient civilizations (ancient India, ancient Egypt, Persia, Sparta, Athens and Rome) the question of equality or equity in school did not arise and there was a school for aristocracy, one for the bourgeoisie and no schools for the others. Ancient China is an exception where access to knowledge was dictated by the construction of a stable and balanced society. The Middle Ages was characterized by the claim of the idea of equality before knowledge. Indeed, the advent of Christianity, and subsequently of Islam, equal access to knowledge finds its legitimacy in religious texts. From the 19th century onwards, the debate on generalized access to education was gradually combined with the equality of results. In the 20th century, this equality takes on a moral meaning where the school must correct the initial inequalities. It is no longer a question of equalizing opportunities, but rather of giving more to those who have less and of guaranteeing "fair school competition". That said, the debate on equality in education is no longer identified with the sole fact of schooling, but is it still necessary that all children, regardless of their starting conditions, be able to access quality education.

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