

Book and media reviews

Addressing educational inequalities in southern contexts

Rose P., Arnot M., Jeffery R. and Singhal N. (Eds) (2021). *Reforming education and challenging inequalities in southern contexts: research and policy in international development*. Oxford: Routledge. 260pp., (paperback) ISBN: 978-0-367-74093-1; (hardcover) 978-0-367-26489-5; (ebook) ISBN: 978-0-429-29346-7

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This book is a labour of love dedicated to the late Professor Christopher Colclough, who inspired research on educational inequalities and evaluation of access to education in different southern contexts. It is an insightful book for students, academics and researchers who are interested in educational inequality, reform and development. The different chapters use different disciplinary lenses such as economics, sociology, gender studies, political science, education studies, disability studies, and human rights to understand educational inequalities in the global south. As a person interested in gendered inequalities, families and access to education, I was particularly drawn towards the chapters which focus on gender and identify the family as the key gendered site influencing unequal access to education.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part explores the historical, economic and political aspect of educational inequalities and educational reforms across and within different countries in the global south. The second half includes chapters which are based in specific countries and focus on how families are involved in engaging with different kinds of inequality as students access education.

The chapters in the first half of the book raise important questions for policy makers, educational planners, and administrators. They explore state-funded schooling, public-private partnerships, gendered inequalities, educational financing, and how different countries produce different patterns of educational returns. All the chapters in the first half acknowledge that although there has been significant improvement in access, education continues to be unequal in multiple ways. The third chapter was of particular interest to me, as it argues in favour of southern countries financing educational access through domestic revenue. This raises questions about how and to what degree international human rights agencies and charitable organisations which work towards universal education and schooling could be involved in global south contexts where universal education is financed through domestic revenue.

The sixth chapter, which concludes the first part of the book, presents a compelling argument advocating a need to understand gender-frameworks and inequalities and how positive educational reforms can be inadvertently undermined by the individual perceptions and prejudices of the different stakeholders involved in executing educational reforms within their country. This chapter, which looks at wider political and economic contexts across the world, is well-placed. It provides an effective bridge into the book's second part, where the chapters focus on stakeholders such as families, students, and teachers.

The seventh and eighth chapters explore how education is perceived by families in rural communities who are struggling with poverty and gendered norms. These chapters present how families in Pakistan are patriarchal and embedded within rural communities. In India, similar gendered patterns have been defined as patrilocal (Mukhopadhyay and Seymour 1994; Mukhopadhyay 2019); educational decisions made within the family prioritise the needs of the male family members and female sexuality is monitored. It has been argued that in India the improvement in women's access to education continues to be geared to patriarchal and gendered political norms (Chakravarti 2012), in order to create educated mothers and partners for a socially mobile family. This pattern can be discerned in the eighth chapter, which focuses on gendered educational access in Pakistan. While the seventh chapter is primarily focused on class-based inequalities, the eighth chapter introduces gendered inequalities. Inequalities based on gender, sexuality and poverty are further explored in the ninth chapter, which looks at Ugandan communities.

The last three chapters in the book, focussing on Ghana, India and Pakistan, raise important questions about the relevance of curriculum, pedagogy and educational purpose. The eleventh chapter insightfully explores disability and inclusive schooling in India. It critically highlights the need to develop non-ambiguous inclusive practices which are relevant to the cultural and social setting of India, in a very different context from the global north. The author recommends that teachers be significant stakeholders who need to be involved in policy

making and planning processes to improve inclusive schooling. The second part of the book resonates with the argument advanced in the sixth chapter - that stakeholders be involved when educational reforms and policies are developed and implemented.

The findings and observations made in the book's different chapters are congruent with the findings and observations of my doctoral thesis (Thomas, 2021), which explores how families are involved in making gendered educational decisions. In addition, my experience of being part of research teams in India studying gender and education has been greatly indebted to collaborations with local stakeholders, key informants and gatekeepers who provide information and access to communities, institutions, families, and students. The different chapters of this book reiterate the significant contribution that a collaborative approach in the development of contextual knowledge and information can make towards bringing about positive social change.

This book, across its twelve chapters which are arranged into two distinct and complementary parts, advocates for a collaborative outlook towards educational reforms to address different and contextual educational inequalities. Additionally, the work of the authors who have contributed towards this book—especially in the co-written chapters and collaborations with authors placed in the global south—provides a collaborative and international development of knowledge and research which is relevant and based on the contextual examination of social, historical, economic and political inequalities.

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