Session 1, Track 2 | Paper Session: Education governance | Education financing

Time: Friday, 25th Sept. 2026
11:00am - 1:00pm

Chair: Barbara Schulte, University of Vienna

A critical assessment of the NEP-2020 and SDG 4: An Ethnographic study with special reference to the Tharu Tribe of Bihar state of India.

Ambedkar Kumar Sahu, Lalit Narayan Mithila University, India

Abstract
This research article presents a critical review of the National Education Policy (NEP-2020) by focusing on the socio-educational landscape of the Tharu tribe in Bihar. The primary objective of this study was to critically evaluate the impact of post-independence National Education Policies on the advancement of tribal education in Bihar. Furthermore, it investigated the strategic role of NEP 2020 in safeguarding and promoting the indigenous linguistic identity and cultural heritage of the Tharu community. Contemporary academic discourse consistently indicates that the Indian education system is navigating a profound crisis (Chanana, 2004; Govinda, 2011; Pathak, 2013). Within this turbulent period, the educational framework has increasingly become confined to the hands of the elite class (Bhadralok), exacerbating the divide between the privileged and the marginalised. Globally, the Global Education Monitoring Report 2024-25 reveals a distressing reality, with over 272 million children remaining out of school. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) team further warns that the world is significantly lagging in achieving its National Sustainable Development Goals by the 2025 milestone. In the Indian context, NEP-2020 and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) have established ambitious targets to drastically reduce school dropout rates and ensure universal access to quality education at all levels by 2030. However, within five years of its inception, the implementation of NEP-2020 has shown underwhelming results at the school level. Data from the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) highlights a concerning trend: school enrollment in India for 2023-24 decreased by 3.7 million compared to the previous year. Specifically, enrollment dropped from 251.7 million in 2022-23 to 248.0 million in 2023-24, with impoverished states like Bihar at the forefront of this decline. Furthermore, the Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) component—a cornerstone of the NIPUN Bharat mission under NEP-2020—remains largely unimplemented in rural tribal pockets. The ASER Report 2024 underscores this failure in Bihar's government schools, noting that "Grade 5 children are unable to read Grade 3 textbooks." Consequently, this study argues that such a precarious education system will hinder India's ability to meet its SDG 4 commitments. The research specifically contends that in the absence of a formal script and written records for the Tharu mother tongue, the policy's recommendation for mother-tongue-based education appears more as a political agenda than a pedagogical reality. This ethnographic inquiry, conducted in the Don area of West Champaran, Bihar, utilises in-depth interviews, field observations, and case studies to gather data. The findings suggest that NEP-2020 fails to align with the interests of the Tharu tribe, as the policy lacks visible, substantive efforts to revive and preserve the Tharu indigenous language.

Inequity in Education: Aspirations and Realignments in Burundi

Jaqueline Murekasenge, Hope Africa University, Burundi

Abstract
Access to education has been loudly proclaimed at global, national, and local levels. Yet, as the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals approaches, forecasts indicate that none of the SDG 4 targets will be achieved, particularly in the poorest countries of the Global South, such as Burundi. This paper draws on recent empirical research into community aspirations in the context of Burundi's Free Primary Education (FPE) policy, introduced in the early 2000s. While the policy announcement initially generated profound excitement and hope, its implementation has produced widespread disappointment and feelings of betrayal among people at local community levels whose educational aspirations were cut short despite their efforts.

Findings from people from different rural communities demonstrate that, despite severe socioeconomic challenges, families continue to hold on to aspirations. Economic hardship from the family to the national level, political instabilities, insufficient educational infrastructure, and the lack of adequate teaching and learning materials significantly constrain both teaching and learning processes, especially in rural areas. Yet paradoxically, hardship itself becomes a source of courage, motivating families to increase sacrifices for a better future, with education perceived as the primary pathway to achieve it. However, aspirations are increasingly redefined and realigned. Disappointment with the education system, weak policy implementation, unfulfilled promises in international and national discourses, and limited employment opportunities compel communities to recalibrate expectations. Aspirations shift from idealised visions of education to what is practically achievable—weighing the quality of schooling against realistic job prospects. In this context, the usefulness of education becomes the decisive factor, outweighing lofty policy declarations.

This "double betrayal"—in both access and quality—extends beyond disappointment. It severs aspirations and leaves young people vulnerable to unsafe and unsustainable alternatives. The refrain of "there is no option" has become a chorus, justifying decisions that may lead to harmful paths and reflecting a dangerous resignation at micro, meso, and macro levels. Will decision-makers continue to ignore the aspirations of young people and families? A persistent disregard of the lived realities and their interpretations by people at local community levels risks undermining any strategy aimed at realising the right to education and perpetuates inequity.

Public-Private Partnerships and Education Financing: Implications for Access and Equity in Pakistan

Gul Muhammad Rind, University of Autonomous Barcelona, Spain & Sukkur IBA University, Pakistan

Abstract

Pakistan has the highest number of out-of-school children globally, estimated at 26 million. It further exacerbates learning inequalities associated with geographic location, rural–urban divides, gender, and ability status. Insufficient public financing, therefore, remains a primary barrier to addressing these systemic challenges to achieve SDG-4. External support for education declined and is further likely to decline in the coming years. In response, the Government of Pakistan, with support from donor agencies, has increasingly promoted private provision of education, including low-Cost Private Schools. These schools operate within PPP frameworks and are presented as innovative mechanisms for education financing and service delivery.

In response to this demand, a growing number of private education providers have emerged over the past two decades. Many of these providers explicitly target poor and marginalised communities after identifying unmet demand and market opportunities; however, such schools frequently operate within weak or inadequate regulatory environments. In an effort to regulate private provision while maintaining the principle of equity, the governments of Pakistan have promoted PPPs. Under the PPP framework, the flagship LCPS models in the provinces of Sindh and Punjab operate as Foundation Assisted Schools (FAS). Collectively, PPP schools and other LCPS now account for over 40% of total student enrolment in the country. Despite these perceived advantages, critics argue that LCPS models under PPP frameworks continue to pose significant challenges for poor households related to affordability, hidden costs, and exclusionary practices. Against this backdrop, the paper critically examines PPPs as innovative education financing instruments in Pakistan, with a specific focus on their implications for access to and equity in education. The paper employs innovative blended financing as a conceptual framework to analyse how PPPs can mobilise investment from multiple stakeholders by aligning public, private, and philanthropic resources. Methodologically, it draws on a scoping review and document analysis to investigate PPPs and innovative financing in Pakistan.

The findings indicate that Pakistan has established large-scale, low-cost private schooling models under PPP frameworks and has mobilised funds from provincial governments, donors, philanthropists, and corporate actors. Nevertheless, mobilising private capital through mechanisms such as loans and social impact bonds remains limited or difficult to scale, while weaknesses in PPP policies, regulatory frameworks, and risk-sharing arrangements continue to undermine long-term sustainability and equity. Further, given Pakistan's tight fiscal landscape, the importance of domestic resource mobilisation through improved tax systems and tax justice is a sustainable and equitable pathway for increasing education financing.

Between Equity and Market: Tuition, "Socialisation," and Access to Quality Education in Vietnamese Public Schools

Thi Thanh Lan Tran, Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences, the University of Augsburg, Germany

Abstract

Access to quality education remains an important topic across national contexts. While global discourse on educational inequality often focuses on social stratification, less attention has been paid to institutional logics that shape educational opportunities. This paper draws on the sociological perspective that positions educational institutions not merely as mirrors of social stratification but as active producers of it (Emmerich 2025, Emmerich & Hormel 2013) to examine the mechanism of producing educational inequality in accessing to quality learning environments.

The study focuses on the Vietnamese public school system, where state policies of tuition and the so-called "socialisation of education" (xã hội hóa giáo dục) have been introduced since 90s and framed as public participation in educational development. This paper examines how the institutional practices and logics of school financial aspect shape learning environments and quality, using qualitative data, including semi-structured interviews with teachers and policy documents.

Findings reveal that the “socialisation of education” policy on one hand significantly improve school infrastructure and program diversity in some contexts, on the other hand, enables the institutionalisation of diverse fee structures, and the normalisation of family co-financing as a condition of educational access and quality. This gives rise to commodification in Vietnamese public schools. Consequently, it generates inequality, particularly unequal learning environments (even within the same school), differentiated access to educational programs based on families' ability to pay, and a growing financial burden on lower-income families. The study highlights tensions between the equity commitments embedded in educational policy discourse and the pursuit of development in education. Commodified public schools intensify existing social disparities through their everyday operational logics.

These findings contribute to broader international conversations about the relationship between educational financing, access, and quality and the commitment of SDG4 to inclusive and equitable education for all.