

POLICIES ENSURING EQUITY IN ACCESS TO BASIC AND HIGHER EDUCATION: LESSONS FROM DEVELOPED COUNTRIES FOR VIETNAM

POLÍTICAS QUE GARANTEM A EQUIDADE NO ACESSO À EDUCAÇÃO BÁSICA E SUPERIOR: LIÇÕES DE PAÍSES DESENVOLVIDOS PARA O VIETNÃ

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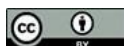
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Abstract

This study explores comparative policy approaches to promoting equity in access to basic and higher education in four developed countries: Finland, Canada, Japan, and South Korea. Using qualitative content analysis and comparative policy analysis, the research identifies four core elements of successful systems: strong legal guarantees for educational rights, needs-based funding mechanisms, inclusive institutional strategies, and transparent monitoring frameworks. The results show that equity is best achieved through an integrated and coherent policy structure that combines legislation, financial support, and institutional accountability. Drawing from international experience, the study proposes key policy directions for Vietnam, focusing on strengthening legal foundations, reforming funding systems, improving institutional inclusion, and applying digital transformation to ensure fairness in educational access and outcomes.

Resumo

Este estudo explora abordagens políticas comparativas para promover a equidade no acesso à educação básica e superior em quatro países desenvolvidos: Finlândia, Canadá, Japão e Coreia do Sul. Utilizando análise de conteúdo qualitativa e análise comparativa de políticas, a pesquisa identifica quatro elementos centrais de sistemas bem-sucedidos: fortes garantias legais para os direitos educacionais, mecanismos de financiamento baseados em necessidades, estratégias institucionais inclusivas e estruturas de monitoramento transparentes. Os resultados mostram que a equidade é melhor alcançada por meio de uma estrutura política integrada e coerente que combine legislação, apoio financeiro e responsabilização institucional. Com base na experiência internacional, o estudo propõe diretrizes políticas essenciais para o Vietnã, com foco no fortalecimento das bases legais, na reforma dos sistemas de financiamento, na melhoria da inclusão institucional e na aplicação da transformação digital para garantir a equidade no acesso e nos resultados educacionais.



Keywords: Educational Equity. Policy Analysis. Inclusive Education. Comparative Education. Access to Higher Education. Basic Education. Vietnam. Developed Countries.

Palavras-chave: *Equidade Educacional. Análise de Políticas. Educação Inclusiva. Educação Comparada. Acesso ao Ensino Superior. Educação Básica. Vietnã. Países Desenvolvidos.*

1 INTRODUCTION

Educational equity has become a central concern of global education agendas, reflecting the growing awareness that access to education remains deeply unequal across socioeconomic groups, genders, and geographic regions. Despite remarkable progress in expanding enrollment, disparities in opportunities and learning outcomes persist, especially between marginalized and privileged populations (UNESCO, 2020). Ensuring fair access to both basic and higher education is not only a moral imperative but also a precondition for sustainable development and social cohesion (Ainscow, 2016; Alcott et al., 2018). According to UNESCO's *Global Education Monitoring Report* (2017, 2020), equity in education encompasses fairness in access, participation, and outcomes, which are essential dimensions for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4: "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all."

Across the world, the evolution of education systems demonstrates that widening access does not automatically translate into equitable opportunities. Studies in OECD countries reveal that even with universal schooling, socioeconomic background continues to be a major determinant of educational attainment and achievement (OECD, 2018). Similarly, in higher education, the expansion of participation, sometimes referred to as the massification of education, has often intensified social stratification rather than reduced it (Marginson, 2016; Dias, 2015). In many developing and transitional economies, including Vietnam, students from rural or low-income families face persistent barriers such as high tuition costs, limited institutional support, and unequal distribution of resources (Rolleston & Iyer, 2019; Vu & Nguyen, 2018; Thu et al., 2024).

The challenge of achieving equity extends beyond mere access to include meaningful participation and completion. Research shows that underrepresented students often experience systemic disadvantages linked to race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or income (Atherton et al., 2016; Booi et al., 2017; Chiwandire & Vincent, 2019). Developed countries have implemented a variety of policy approaches to counter these disparities,

such as affirmative action in Brazil (Childs & Stromquist, 2015; Vieira Schwambach & Arends-Kuenning, 2019), targeted financial aid in the United Kingdom (Evans & Donnelly, 2018; Wyness, 2016), and inclusion strategies for Indigenous and minority students in Australia and Canada (Gore et al., 2017; Kearney & Glen, 2017). These experiences demonstrate that comprehensive policy frameworks, combining legal guarantees, funding mechanisms, and institutional reforms, can significantly improve equity in education (Salmi, 2018; Salmi & D'Addio, 2021).

Vietnam, like many emerging economies, has made strong commitments to ensuring universal access to basic education and expanding higher education participation. However, persistent inequalities remain between urban and rural regions, majority and minority ethnic groups, and socioeconomic strata (Linh & Thuy, 2018; Vu & Nguyen, 2018; Thu et al., 2024). While government initiatives such as tuition exemption programs, scholarships, and targeted support for disadvantaged learners have yielded progress, the effectiveness and inclusiveness of these policies vary considerably. This underscores the importance of learning from international experiences and adapting successful models to Vietnam's socioeconomic and institutional context.

This paper aims to analyze policies that ensure equity in access to both basic and higher education in selected developed countries and to draw lessons applicable to Vietnam. By reviewing international frameworks and good practices, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing policy discourse on inclusive education and to inform reforms aligned with Vietnam's goals under the National Education Development Strategy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The following sections present the theoretical foundation, comparative analysis of selected countries' policies, and implications for enhancing educational equity in Vietnam.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concepts and approaches to educational equity

The concept of educational equity extends beyond simple equality of access to encompass fairness in opportunities, participation, and outcomes for all learners, regardless of their background or circumstances. UNESCO (2017, 2020) defines equity as the process of ensuring that all learners receive the resources and support they need to

reach comparable levels of achievement. This principle recognizes that individuals start from unequal positions and therefore require differentiated interventions to achieve genuine equality of opportunity. Ainscow (2016) argues that educational equity involves removing barriers to participation and creating inclusive systems that respond to the diversity of students. Similarly, the OECD (2018) highlights that equity is achieved when personal or social circumstances, such as gender, ethnic origin, or family background, do not determine educational success.

From a theoretical perspective, several frameworks have been developed to explain and operationalize equity in education. The social justice approach, rooted in the work of Rawls and further advanced in education studies, emphasizes fairness in the distribution of opportunities and benefits within the education system (Klees, 2016). The capability approach, proposed by Amartya Sen, focuses on expanding learners' real freedoms to pursue valuable educational and life goals rather than merely providing formal access (Walker, 2019). The human rights-based approach treats education as a fundamental right, requiring states to guarantee both access and quality for all learners (Coomans et al., 2005; Fait, 2015). These perspectives collectively frame equity as a multidimensional goal that includes access, participation, outcomes, and empowerment.

In practical terms, equity in education is often analyzed through two complementary dimensions: horizontal equity and vertical equity. Horizontal equity refers to treating similar individuals equally, ensuring that all students with comparable needs receive similar opportunities. Vertical equity, on the other hand, requires treating different individuals differently, providing additional support to those facing disadvantage (Alcott et al., 2018). This distinction underpins many inclusive education policies worldwide, which aim to provide targeted interventions for marginalized groups such as students with disabilities, ethnic minorities, refugees, and those from low-income families (AHEAD, 2019; UNESCO, 2020; UNHCR, 2020).

Equity should also be understood as dynamic rather than static, evolving with broader social and economic transformations. Marginson (2016) notes that mass higher education has increased participation rates but also reinforced social hierarchies when equity mechanisms are insufficient. Similarly, research by Dias (2015) in Portugal and Salmi (2018, 2020) at the global level demonstrates that equitable education systems require continuous policy innovation in financing, governance, and institutional practices. These findings emphasize that achieving educational equity is not limited to access

policies but demands a systemic approach encompassing curriculum design, assessment practices, resource allocation, and institutional accountability.

2.2 Review of previous studies

A considerable body of international research has examined the issue of equity in education, addressing its conceptual foundations, determinants, and policy responses. Studies across different education systems have consistently shown that structural inequalities related to socioeconomic background, ethnicity, gender, and disability continue to influence both access to and success within educational systems (Ainscow, 2016; OECD, 2018; UNESCO, 2020). These inequalities persist despite substantial global efforts to expand participation and ensure inclusiveness under the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Early studies in the United States and Europe linked educational inequality to social stratification and segregation. Research by Crain (1974) and Kluger (1975) documented how school desegregation policies sought to address racial disparities, while later work by Orfield and Frankenberg (2014) and Freeman et al. (2005) showed that new forms of resegregation had emerged, limiting the impact of earlier reforms. In developing countries, similar concerns have been observed in relation to economic inequality and access to quality education (Borooah, 2017; Rolleston & Iyer, 2019). These studies highlight that equitable access requires more than universal enrollment; it depends on addressing deep-rooted structural disadvantages within society.

In the field of higher education, numerous scholars have investigated the effects of massification on social mobility and inequality. Marginson (2016) analyzed the global trend toward high participation systems and concluded that expansion alone does not ensure equity unless accompanied by redistributive and inclusive policies. Dias (2015) reached similar conclusions in the context of Portugal, finding that while access had widened, the benefits remained unevenly distributed across social classes. Comparable findings were reported by Gök (2016) in Turkey and Wainer and Melguizo (2018) in Brazil, where affirmative action policies sought to redress long-standing inequities but required continuous evaluation to maintain their effectiveness.

Empirical research has also explored the impact of specific policy interventions. Affirmative action programs in Brazil and India have demonstrated mixed outcomes:

while they have increased access for underrepresented groups, concerns remain about long-term academic performance and social integration (Childs & Stromquist, 2015; Daniyal, 2018; Vieira Schwambach & Arends-Kuenning, 2019). Similarly, studies on financial aid policies in developed countries, such as those by Evans and Donnelly (2018) and Wyness (2016), reveal that tuition fees and student debt remain major obstacles for disadvantaged students, despite the availability of bursaries and grants. Herbaut and Geven (2019) synthesized quasi-experimental evidence showing that targeted outreach programs and financial support mechanisms can reduce inequality, but their effectiveness depends on implementation quality and institutional commitment.

Another stream of literature has examined inclusion and access for marginalized groups, including students with disabilities, refugees, and ethnic minorities. Chiwandire and Vincent (2019) emphasized the importance of sustainable funding models to support inclusive education in African higher education institutions. Research from Europe and North America has focused on integration measures for refugees and migrants, such as through initiatives like the European University Association's Refugees Welcome Map and the DAFI scholarship program supported by UNHCR (European University Association, 2020; UNHCR, 2020). AHEAD (2019) and Tuomi et al. (2015) further highlighted the role of institutional networks and adaptive learning environments in promoting equity for students with disabilities.

Comparative studies have provided valuable insights into policy design and effectiveness. Salmi (2018, 2020) conducted a global review of equity policies in higher education, identifying common instruments such as need-based financial aid, affirmative action, and open learning pathways. Salmi and D'Addio (2021) expanded this analysis by examining the conditions that make inclusion policies successful, emphasizing political will, regulatory frameworks, and systematic monitoring. OECD (2018) and UNESCO (2020) have similarly stressed that achieving educational equity requires integrated approaches linking early childhood, primary, secondary, and tertiary education systems.

In Vietnam, research on educational equity remains limited but growing. Studies by Linh and Thuy (2018), Vu and Nguyen (2018), and Rolleston and Iyer (2019) have documented persistent disparities in educational access and outcomes between rural and urban regions, and between majority and minority ethnic groups. These findings suggest

that while the Vietnamese government has made significant progress in expanding access, deeper challenges remain in ensuring fairness in opportunity and resource distribution.

Overall, the literature indicates that equity in education is a multidimensional issue requiring coherent policy strategies, adequate funding, and institutional accountability. Comparative evidence from developed countries offers valuable lessons for Vietnam, particularly in designing inclusive policies, strengthening support for disadvantaged learners, and creating monitoring systems that promote transparency and continuous improvement. These themes form the foundation for the comparative policy analysis presented in the next section.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study applied a comparative policy analysis to examine how developed countries have designed and implemented policies ensuring equity in access to both basic and higher education. The research was conducted through a systematic review and comparison of national education frameworks, policy instruments, and implementation mechanisms across selected countries. The purpose was to identify successful practices and extract policy lessons that could be adapted to Vietnam's educational context.

3.2 Data sources and collection

The study was based entirely on secondary data collected from official and scholarly sources. The main data sources included policy documents, legal frameworks, and national education strategies of the selected countries; international reports and databases published by global organizations such as OECD and UNESCO; peer-reviewed academic studies indexed in Scopus and Web of Science; and Vietnamese education laws, decrees, and ministerial documents. All documents were retrieved, reviewed, and organized according to thematic relevance to ensure accuracy and comparability. The data collection process took place over a four-month period and focused on retrieving the most recent and comprehensive policy materials available.

3.3 Research approach

The study adopted a qualitative content analysis to interpret and synthesize information from the collected documents. Each document was carefully reviewed to identify its objectives, principles, and implementation mechanisms related to educational equity. The analysis proceeded through three main steps:

Descriptive synthesis, summarizing the key components and policy directions of each national framework;

Comparative examination, identifying convergences and divergences among the selected countries;

Analytical integration, drawing out policy implications relevant to Vietnam's education system.

Throughout the process, data were coded and categorized into key thematic areas, including legal frameworks, financial mechanisms, institutional strategies, and monitoring systems.

3.4 Country selection and analytical focus

Four developed countries were selected for comparison based on their advanced education systems and their established track records in promoting equity in education. The selected cases included Finland, Canada, Japan, and South Korea. These countries were chosen because they represent diverse governance structures, economic contexts, and approaches to ensuring fairness in educational access.

The analysis concentrated on four main policy dimensions:

The legal foundation for guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities in education;

Funding mechanisms and public expenditure distribution to support equitable access;

Institutional and administrative measures for inclusion and participation;

Evaluation and accountability systems that ensure equitable outcomes across different social groups.

4 FINDINGS

Table 1

Overview of Policy Dimensions

Policy Dimension	Finland	Canada	Japan	South Korea
Legal Framework	Education is a constitutional right; the Basic Education Act (1998) guarantees free and compulsory schooling for all students (Future Policy, 2024).	Provincial education acts define inclusion and accessibility, with federal coordination promoting equal opportunity (OECD, 2020).	The Constitution and Basic Act on Education (1947) ensure fairness and lifelong learning (MEXT, 2023).	National laws emphasize equal opportunity, focusing on regional equity and access for disadvantaged groups (UNESCO, 2020).
Funding Mechanisms	Fully state-funded basic education and need-based support for higher education (OECD, 2022).	Decentralized funding, equalization transfers among provinces, and large-scale bursary programs (OECD, 2020).	Mixed funding model with targeted tuition waivers and merit-based aid (MEXT, 2023).	Centralized funding system with national scholarships for low-income and rural students (UNESCO, 2020).
Institutional Strategies	Local autonomy under national standards, inclusive curricula, and welfare services (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre [FINEEC], 2020).	Collaborative governance across levels of government, diversity programs in universities (Universities Canada, 2019).	Community partnerships and individual learning support (MEXT, 2023).	Equity-based admissions and digital inclusion strategies (UNESCO, 2020).
Monitoring and Evaluation	National data platform tracking equality indicators (FINEEC, 2020).	Regular equity audits and outcome evaluations (OECD, 2020).	National reports on access and outcomes (MEXT, 2023).	Integrated database linking performance and funding (UNESCO, 2020).

The comparison highlights a consistent pattern of legally grounded, well-funded, and data-driven systems. Finland and Canada demonstrate decentralization combined with accountability, while Japan and South Korea operate under centralized systems that emphasize consistency and technological inclusion.

Table 2

Legal Foundations for Educational Equity

Legal Component	Finland	Canada	Japan	South Korea
Right to Basic Education	The Constitution and Basic Education Act guarantee free basic education for all (European Agency, 2023).	Provincial acts ensure universal access coordinated at the national level (OECD, 2020).	The Constitution establishes education as a right and obligation (MEXT, 2023).	The Framework Act on Education emphasizes fairness and inclusion (UNESCO, 2020).
Non-discrimination	Protected under the Constitution and Education Equality Law (European Agency, 2023).	Provincial human rights frameworks and federal inclusion policies (OECD, 2020).	Equal opportunity clause in the Basic Act on Education (MEXT, 2023).	Legal mandate to prevent regional or income-based discrimination (UNESCO, 2020).

Access to Higher Education	Equal access and state support for higher education institutions (Future Policy, 2024).	Expansion policies and inclusive admissions systems (Universities Canada, 2019).	Transparent national entrance and scholarship policies (MEXT, 2023).	Equity-oriented admissions emphasizing socio-economic diversity (UNESCO, 2020).
Accountability	Periodic evaluation of equality and participation (FINEEC, 2020).	Annual federal and provincial performance reporting (OECD, 2020).	Regular national quality assessments (MEXT, 2023).	Outcome-based reporting linked to funding (UNESCO, 2020).

Finland's comprehensive legal framework and Canada's decentralized but coordinated model both highlight strong state accountability for equal access. Japan and South Korea ensure inclusion through statutory guarantees and national oversight mechanisms.

Table 3

Funding Mechanisms and Resource Allocation

Financial Element	Finland	Canada	Japan	South Korea
Public Education Budget	National funding based on local needs and equity indicators (OECD, 2022).	Shared federal-provincial funding with transfers (OECD, 2020).	Mixed national and local funding (MEXT, 2023).	Centralized funding with strong support for rural and low-income areas (UNESCO, 2020).
Tuition in Basic Education	Free for all students (InfoFinland, 2023).	Free and publicly funded (OECD, 2020).	Free and compulsory through secondary level (MEXT, 2023).	Free for all students (UNESCO, 2020).
Tuition in Higher Education	Low or free with needs-based stipends (OECD, 2022).	Variable, offset by scholarships and grants (OECD, 2020).	Moderate, with targeted aid programs (MEXT, 2023).	Moderate, offset by national scholarships (UNESCO, 2020).
Needs-based Aid	Large-scale grants and student aid schemes (ASEF, 2021).	Widespread bursaries for disadvantaged students (OECD, 2020).	Merit and need-based scholarships (MEXT, 2023).	Comprehensive national student aid system (UNESCO, 2020).

Equitable funding is a consistent priority across all systems. Finland and Canada focus on redistributive models tied to socio-economic need, while Japan and South Korea provide centralized financial aid complemented by local or institutional programs. Needs-based funding is the most effective mechanism for minimizing disparities.

Table 4

Institutional and Administrative Strategies

Institutional Element	Finland	Canada	Japan	South Korea
Governance Structure	Decentralized with strong local autonomy (FINEEC, 2020).	Federal–provincial coordination (OECD, 2020).	Centralized with local flexibility (MEXT, 2023).	Centralized system guided by digital inclusion priorities (UNESCO, 2020).
Inclusive Learning Support	Personalized student support, counseling, and welfare (European Agency, 2023).	Support centers in universities and community programs (Universities Canada, 2019).	School-community partnerships for individualized guidance (MEXT, 2023).	Digital platforms and mentoring systems (UNESCO, 2020).
Inclusion of Marginalized Groups	National inclusion programs for all levels (FINEEC, 2020).	Indigenous and minority inclusion frameworks (Universities Canada, 2019).	Regional inclusion policies (MEXT, 2023).	National strategy on inclusive digital education (UNESCO, 2020).

Each country operationalizes equity through institutional flexibility and community participation. Finland and Canada prioritize decentralized governance and local innovation, while Japan and South Korea strengthen inclusion through structured national coordination and technological advancement.

Table 5

Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Monitoring Element	Finland	Canada	Japan	South Korea
Equity Indicators	Participation and completion indices by region and group (FINEEC, 2020).	Socio-economic status indicators integrated into federal reporting (OECD, 2020).	Student performance and access data collected by MEXT (2023).	National equity indicators linked to funding distribution (UNESCO, 2020).
Transparency	National open data portal (FINEEC, 2020).	Public education reports across provinces (OECD, 2020).	Annual white paper on education (MEXT, 2023).	Public dashboards on equity metrics (UNESCO, 2020).
Evaluation Cycle	Annual reporting and policy feedback (FINEEC, 2020).	Periodic national reviews (OECD, 2020).	Five-year national evaluations (MEXT, 2023).	Continuous digital monitoring (UNESCO, 2020).

Data transparency and performance-based monitoring are key strengths in Finland and South Korea, where education data inform resource allocation. Canada and Japan emphasize periodic reviews and regional reporting. Continuous monitoring ensures accountability and long-term sustainability of equity policies.

Table 6*Transferability to Vietnam*

Policy Element	Transferability	Key Conditions	Adaptation for Vietnam
Legally guaranteed right to equitable education	High	Requires strengthened legal instruments	Amend the Education Law to incorporate explicit equity clauses (European Agency, 2023).
Needs-based funding formula	High	Reliable data system and transparent budgeting	Develop provincial-level equity indicators linked to education budgets (OECD, 2022).
Inclusive institutional services	Medium	Capacity and human resources	Establish school- and university-based support centers (FINEEC, 2020).
Data-driven monitoring	Medium	IT infrastructure and open data policy	Create a national equity dashboard to track performance and inform funding (UNESCO, 2020).

Vietnam can effectively adapt key mechanisms such as need-based funding, inclusive institutional support, and data-driven monitoring. Legislative clarity and reliable education data are essential prerequisites. Lessons from Finland and South Korea are particularly applicable, given their integration of transparency, accountability, and performance-based funding. Acknowledgment: This study is the result of the research project coded b2025-hvq.01.

5 POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR VIETNAM

Establishing a Comprehensive Legal and Policy Framework: Vietnam should strengthen its legal foundation for educational equity by incorporating explicit provisions on non-discrimination, inclusive education, and equal opportunity into the Education Law and related regulations. It is essential to define clearly what “equitable access” means within the Vietnamese context to guide policy implementation and accountability. The national education strategy should also specify measurable targets for inclusion, focusing on marginalized populations such as ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and children from low-income households. In addition, equity should be recognized as a shared responsibility of ministries, local governments, schools, and communities.

Reforming Funding Mechanisms Toward Equity-Based Allocation: Promoting fairness in education requires reforming financial allocation policies to focus on real needs rather than uniform distribution. Vietnam should adopt a funding model that prioritizes disadvantaged regions and groups by integrating social and economic indicators such as income levels, infrastructure gaps, and access to educational services.

A national system of scholarships and financial aid should be developed to replace fragmented support programs, ensuring that all eligible students benefit transparently and consistently. Local authorities should also be granted more flexibility in managing education budgets, combined with clear accountability standards to prevent inefficiency or misuse.

Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Inclusive Practices: Schools and universities play a central role in translating policy into practice. Educational institutions should be empowered to design and implement inclusion-oriented programs that respond to the specific needs of their learners. This includes the development of inclusive curricula, individualized learning support, and school-based counseling services. Teacher training institutions must integrate inclusive education principles and multicultural awareness into professional development programs. In higher education, the establishment of equity and inclusion units within universities can help monitor student support and foster an inclusive academic environment. Collaboration among schools, families, and local communities should be formalized to create a sustainable network of support for students.

Enhancing Monitoring, Data Systems, and Accountability: Reliable and transparent data are the foundation for effective educational equity policies. Vietnam should develop a national education equity database to track access, participation, and learning outcomes across regions and social groups. This system should enable the Ministry of Education and Training and local departments to make data-informed decisions on planning and funding. Public reports on key equity indicators will improve accountability and encourage social dialogue about fairness in education. Regular internal and external evaluations are also necessary to assess policy impact and ensure that progress is maintained over time.

Promoting Digital Transformation and Technological Inclusion: Digital transformation is a critical factor in reducing educational inequality, particularly between urban and rural areas. Vietnam should expand access to digital infrastructure, internet connectivity, and digital learning resources for all students. The development of open educational resources and hybrid learning platforms will make education more flexible and accessible. Teacher capacity in digital pedagogy must also be strengthened to ensure the effective use of technology in inclusive education. At the same time, special support

programs should be provided for students who lack access to digital tools, ensuring that digital inclusion is both equitable and sustainable.

Fostering Intersectoral and International Cooperation: Achieving educational equity requires coordination beyond the education sector. Vietnam should enhance cooperation among ministries, especially those responsible for labor, health, and social affairs, to address the root causes of educational disadvantage. Stronger partnerships with international organizations and development agencies can provide technical assistance, comparative data, and opportunities for policy learning. Participation in global education initiatives will allow Vietnam to benchmark progress, exchange best practices, and align national strategies with international standards of inclusive and equitable education.

Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability of Equity Policies: The sustainability of equity policies depends on political will, financial commitment, and public support. Education investment should be viewed as a strategic priority that contributes directly to national development and social stability. Long-term plans should include mechanisms for maintaining funding, capacity development, and continuous policy innovation. Public communication campaigns can raise awareness about educational equity and encourage the active participation of communities, enterprises, and civil organizations. A sustainable system of equitable education requires consistency in leadership, transparency in implementation, and adaptability to new social and technological changes.

6 CONCLUSION

This study examined how developed countries have designed and implemented policies to ensure equity in access to both basic and higher education, and how these experiences can inform education reform in Vietnam. The comparative analysis of Finland, Canada, Japan, and South Korea shows that educational equity is achieved not through separate initiatives but through coherent policy systems that integrate legal, financial, institutional, and monitoring dimensions.

The findings confirm that a solid legal foundation is essential for guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities in education. Countries that clearly define education as a right within their legislation tend to maintain more inclusive and accountable systems. Equally important are funding mechanisms that prioritize socio-economic need and target resources to disadvantaged regions and groups. The experiences of Finland and Canada

demonstrate that fair resource allocation and social welfare support can effectively reduce disparities, while Japan and South Korea highlight the benefits of coordinated national strategies and technological innovation for promoting fairness.

Institutional flexibility and inclusive governance also play a crucial role in advancing equity. Allowing schools and universities to adapt national policies to local conditions while maintaining accountability through central oversight provides a balance between autonomy and responsibility. In addition, monitoring and evaluation systems that rely on transparent data collection and equity indicators enable evidence-based policymaking and ensure that progress toward inclusion can be measured and sustained over time.

For Vietnam, these lessons suggest that equity should be treated as a guiding principle of the education system rather than a separate policy goal. Strengthening the legal framework, reforming funding allocation toward equity-based models, expanding institutional capacity for inclusion, improving data transparency, and promoting digital inclusion are key directions. Long-term political commitment, sustainable investment, and cross-sector collaboration will be essential to translate these recommendations into lasting results.

By learning from international experience and adapting it to national conditions, Vietnam can gradually build an inclusive education system that provides every learner, regardless of background or location, with equal opportunities to access quality education and contribute to the country's development.

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Authors' Contribution

Both authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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