



## THE IMPACT OF EXCLUSION ON MINORITIZED LEARNERS: PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY AS AN IMPERATIVE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Emmanuel Lucas Nwachukwu<sup>1\*</sup>, Victoria Azuka Chukwuma<sup>2</sup>, Gift Adaoma Ubani<sup>3</sup>, Godson Chidi Nwokorie<sup>4</sup>, Christopher Chinedu Joseph<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,5</sup> National Institute for Nigerian Languages, Nigeria

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Uwajumogu College of Education, Imo state, Nigeria

\*Corresponding author: [nwachukwuemmanue@gmail.com](mailto:nwachukwuemmanue@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

Despite global advocacy for educational equity, many educational systems continue to inadequately support minoritized learners, particularly those from low-income families and ethnic or racial minority groups, who face systemic barriers such as underrepresentation, economic disparities, discrimination, and unequal access to resources. This study addresses the critical research problem of how exclusionary practices in education limit the potential of marginalized learners and hinder broader social development, highlighting the urgent need for equity-focused interventions. By conducting a systematic literature-based analysis of studies published between 2010 and 2024, this paper identifies recurring patterns of exclusion, effective strategies for fostering inclusivity, and policy gaps that perpetuate educational inequities. Key findings indicate that equity-oriented educational policies—such as targeted resource allocation, culturally responsive curricula, and inclusive pedagogical practices—significantly enhance the academic outcomes, social mobility, and career opportunities of minoritized learners. The study contributes to the discourse on inclusive education by providing evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and educators, demonstrating that sustainable social development is attainable only when educational systems actively prioritize inclusivity and equity. These findings underscore the necessity of comprehensive, systemic reforms to ensure that no learner is left behind, thereby promoting broader societal well-being and reducing inequalities.

### INTRODUCTION

Education inequity remains a significant impediment towards achieving social development, particularly for minoritized learners who often bear the brunt of systemic bias and failures. This challenge is exacerbated by a confluence of economic, cultural, and institutional factors that perpetuate cycles of poverty and marginalization. (Voulgarides, 2025) Understanding the multifaceted impact of education inequity and exploring viable solutions are critical to breaking this vicious cycle and ensure an inclusive path to social development. The persistence of inequities within educational systems presents a significant barrier to achieving social justice and social development. (Rana, 2024) As global efforts intensify to address inequalities in education,

educational institutions at different levels stress the importance of providing equitable opportunities that accommodate the needs of all learners. However, despite the ongoing progress recorded, minoritized learners, that is, those from economically disadvantaged, physically challenged, ethnic, and racial minority backgrounds continue to confront systemic hurdles. (Bottia, et al, 2021) These issues remain particularly relevant in contexts where social mobility and economic stability are tightly linked to educational attainment and other achievements after schooling.

For minoritized learners, those from ethnic minorities, economically disadvantaged backgrounds, or underserved countries, this reality diminishes their access to learning opportunities. A child in a rural



Nigerian village may attend a school with no electricity, insufficient textbooks or no textbooks, and overcrowded classrooms, which is quite common, while their counterparts in a more affluent urban area enjoys modern facilities and smaller class sizes. This unequal access sets the stage for a cascading effect of poor academic outcomes, limited social mobility, and entrenched inequality. (Assari & Zare, 2024)

In understanding the link between educational equity and social development, this study examines the relationship between education and broader societal well-being. Education systems that prioritize inclusivity can mitigate existing societal divides, creating environments that allow all learners to realize their potential. However, for this vision to be realized, it is crucial to examine the factors that contribute to exclusion in education. The study thus underscores the need to address these challenges comprehensively, by examining evidence-based strategies that aim to establish a genuinely inclusive educational framework.

## METHODS

This study adopts the Ecological Systems Theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner to examine how exclusion on minoritized learners impacts educational equity and social development.

*Ecological Systems Theory* (Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1977)

Urie Bronfenbrenner, a psychologist, devoted his life's work to studying childhood/learners development. He firmly believed that an individual's development is influenced by a series of interconnected environmental systems, ranging from the immediate surroundings (e.g., family) to broad societal structures (e.g., economy), which he called the Ecological System Theory. Bronfenbrenner's model comprises four systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner's four systems in his Ecological Systems Theory explain how various environmental

layers influence a child's development and progression. (Bronfenbrenner, 2000) Understanding these systems is crucial to achieving educational equity:

### *Microsystem*

This is the immediate environment, such as family, school, and peers. For minoritized learners, supportive teachers and inclusive classrooms can directly enhance their learning experiences and address disparities.

### *Mesosystem*

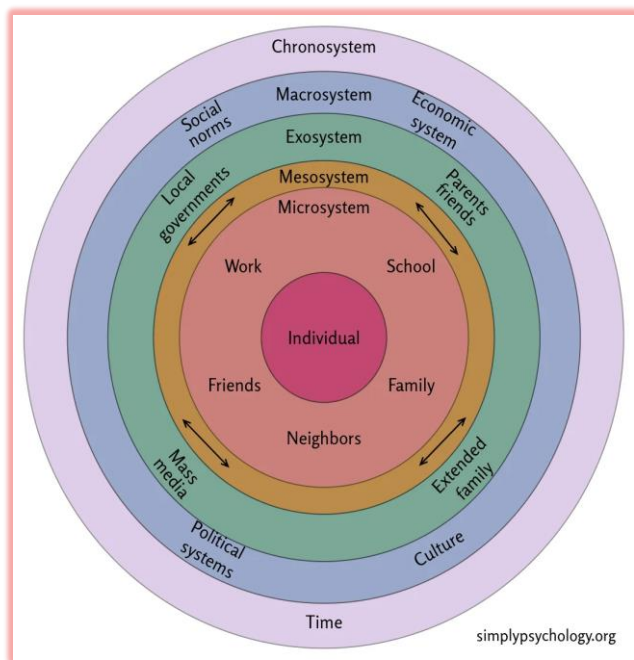
This system reflects interactions between microsystems, such as the relationship between a child's family and their school. Positive collaboration between families and educators can bridge different learning gaps and bring a sense of belonging for minoritized learners.

### *Exosystem*

This includes external environments that indirectly influence the child, such as parents' workplaces or government policies. Addressing inequities in these areas, like advocating for equitable funding in schools serving marginalized communities, can significantly impact learners' opportunities.

### *Macrosystem*

The broader cultural and societal context, including values, laws, and norms. Transforming systemic biases and promoting policies that support diversity and inclusion can create equitable education systems that benefit minoritized groups. By addressing inequities at all levels of these systems, educators and policymakers can better support minoritized learners and ensure fairness in educational opportunities.

**Fig. 1**

### **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory – developed by SimplyPsychology.org**

The theory underscores that a learner's progression from classroom to society is not merely a result of individual effort or innate ability but is deeply influenced by multiple environmental systems, ranging from their immediate surroundings to the broader sociopolitical context. (Wang, Huang, Lim, & Zhang, 2024). For minoritized learners, who often face systemic barriers and marginalization, this perspective highlights the importance of addressing inequities across these interconnected systems. By addressing inequities across these systems, Bronfenbrenner's theory provides a holistic approach to achieving educational equity. It emphasizes the role of education not only as a pathway for individual empowerment but also as a transformative tool for advancing social development, making it indispensable to the conversation about minoritized learners.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **The Problem Context**

Educational exclusion manifests in various forms, including inadequate funding for schools in low-income areas, biased curricula that fail to represent diverse perspectives, and disciplinary practices that disproportionately affect minoritized students. Such exclusionary practices create an environment where these learners are not only deprived of quality education but also subjected to a hostile climate that undermines their self-esteem and academic motivation. Research indicates that students who experience marginalization are more likely to drop out of school and less likely to pursue higher education, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty and disenfranchisement. (Gonzalez-Morales, et. al., 2025, Prakhov, & Sergienko, 2017).

The pursuit of social development is intrinsically tied to the establishment of equitable educational opportunities. (Li & Jha, 2024) Education remains the cornerstone of societal progress, empowering individuals to rise above socioeconomic barriers and contribute meaningfully to their communities, the nation and the world. However, the persistent exclusion of minoritized learners from equitable educational access poses a significant impediment to achieving this goal.

Boyadijeva, Ilieva-Trichkova, & Todorov, (2024) submitted that educational equity implies fairness in the distribution of educational resources, opportunities, and outcomes, ensuring that learners most in need, regardless of their background, have the tools to succeed. Unfortunately, minoritized groups, including those marginalized by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or disability, often face structural barriers that limit their access to quality education. These inequities manifest through underfunded schools, discriminatory practices, and narrow curricula that fail to reflect diversity. The result is a system that not only denies equal opportunity but also entrenches societal hierarchies.



At the heart of the problem lies the exclusionary nature of the educational systems around the world, Debnath, (2020) noted that they are often designed to serve dominant cultural and socioeconomic norms. Minoritized learners, by virtue of their distinct identities, are frequently relegated to the periphery, where their unique needs and potential are overlooked. This exclusion is not merely a matter of access but extends to the quality and relevance of education received. The lack of responsive and inclusive pedagogy, alienates learners and suppresses the development of society. (Jacquart, Scott, Hermberg & Bloch-Schulman, 2019)

The exclusion of minoritized learners has far-reaching implications, both for the individuals affected and for society at large. At the individual level, exclusion undermines self-esteem, academic performance, and long-term opportunities. Research has revealed that learners from marginalized backgrounds are more likely to drop out of school, and underperform academically compared to their privileged peers. The psychological toll of exclusion manifest in feelings of inferiority, alienation, and frustration further compounds these challenges, creating a vicious cycle of disenfranchisement.

Educational equity is not merely a moral imperative; it is a pragmatic necessity for achieving inclusive and sustainable social development. When all learners, irrespective of their backgrounds, are given equal opportunities to succeed, societies benefit from a more skilled and empowered populace. Minoritized learners, when afforded equitable education, often emerge as agents of change, challenging stereotypes and driving innovation within their communities. Thus, addressing educational inequity is integral to breaking the cycle of poverty and marginalization that inhibits societal progress.

On a societal level, the exclusion of minoritized learners perpetuates inequality and stifles social development. By failing to harness the potential of all citizens, societies forego the innovation, creativity,

and diversity of thought that are critical to progress. The economic cost of educational exclusion is also profound, as uneducated or undereducated populations contribute less to the workforce and rely more heavily on social support systems.

### **Implication for Minoritized Learners**

Inequity in education perpetuates a vicious cycle of poverty and marginalization. For minoritized learners, the lack of equitable access to quality education translates into fewer opportunities for higher education and gainful employment. This educational disadvantage creates a widening income gap, as individuals from marginalized groups remain confined to low-paying, unstable jobs or are excluded from the labour market entirely. For example, some rural communities in Nigeria often face intergenerational poverty linked to educational inequity. Despite affirmative action policies, children from these communities frequently drop out of school due to financial constraints and government neglect. Without an adequate education, they are unable to compete for skilled jobs, thereby perpetuating their socio-economic exclusion.

Education is a fundamental driver of personal development and societal advancement. However, inequity in education continues to marginalize certain groups, disproportionately affecting minoritized learners who are excluded or underserved due to factors such as ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and disability. These inequities manifest in access, quality, and outcomes, creating systemic barriers that perpetuate cycles of disadvantage. The impact of such disparities on minoritized learners is profound, touching every aspect of their academic, social, and emotional well-being.

### ***Exclusion and Barriers to Access***

One of the most visible effects of inequity in education on minoritized learners is their exclusion from schooling opportunities. Barriers to access often arise from geographic disparities, socio-economic constraints, and discriminatory practices. For



instance, rural and impoverished communities frequently lack adequate educational facilities, forcing children to travel long distances or forego schooling altogether. Similarly, systemic gender biases in certain cultures restrict girls' access to education, with harmful consequences for their lifelong opportunities.

An example is Nigeria's northern region, where cultural and socio-economic factors limit girls' enrollment in schools. Despite policies promoting universal basic education, early marriages, economic hardship, and cultural resistance obstruct girls' participation. The result is a glaring disparity in literacy rates between boys and girls, reinforcing a cycle of poverty and limiting the full realization of these girls' potential.

#### *Quality of Education and Learning Disparities*

Even when minoritized learners gain access to education, they often encounter schools that are under-resourced and staffed by inadequately trained teachers. Educational inequity is exacerbated by poor infrastructure, outdated curricula, and insufficient teaching aids, all of which undermine learning outcomes. (Sakamoto, 2024) For learners from marginalized backgrounds, this gap in quality compounds existing disadvantages, leaving them ill-prepared for higher education or the workforce.

Teacher expectations and biases also play a significant role in the learning experiences of minoritized students. Studies indicate that educators, whether consciously or unconsciously, may harbor lower expectations for students from underprivileged or minority groups. This phenomenon adversely affects learners' self-esteem, motivation, and performance. For example, in multi-ethnic classrooms, students from indigenous or migrant backgrounds may feel alienated due to linguistic or cultural disconnects between their home and school environments, hindering their academic progress.

#### *Psychosocial and Emotional Impact*

Educational inequity does not solely affect academic achievement; it profoundly impacts the psychosocial well-being of minoritized learners. Persistent exclusion and discrimination create a hostile learning environment, contributing to feelings of inferiority and alienation. Marginalized students may experience stigma, bullying, or microaggressions from peers and educators, leading to heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and disengagement from school activities.

For instance, students with disabilities often face physical and attitudinal barriers that impede their learning experience. In many schools, the lack of inclusive teaching strategies or specialized support services denies these learners equitable participation, eroding their sense of belonging and agency. The psychosocial toll of such exclusion often results in higher dropout rates and limited prospects for personal and professional growth.

#### **Implications for Social Development**

Education is not merely an individual endeavour but a cornerstone of societal development. According to Eizadirad, (2019) educational inequity is a significant driver of social stratification and inequality. When certain groups of students, particularly those from racially and ethnically minoritized backgrounds, are systematically denied access to quality education, it creates a socio-stratified and hierarchical society. This stratification is evident in the disparities in access to opportunities and resources, which are often determined by one's race and socioeconomic status.

Equitable access to quality education is essential for achieving socio-economic growth. Conversely, inequity in education creates significant impediments to societal progress, deepening divisions, perpetuating inequality, and hindering collective prosperity. The repercussions of educational inequity on the social development of society are profound and far-reaching. The economic implications of educational inequity are profound. A





well-educated workforce is essential for economic growth and development, and when large segments of the population are denied access to quality education, it hampers the overall economic potential of a society. (Coleman, & Ellis, 2023)

Educational equity is directly tied to social development. When marginalized learners gain equitable access to quality education, they are more likely to achieve academic success, pursue meaningful careers, and contribute to the economic stability of their communities. (Pellegrini & Dell'Anna, 2021) This chain of positive outcomes extends beyond individual success, impacting broader societal goals, including poverty reduction, reduced inequality, and enhanced social cohesion. Societies that prioritize inclusive education witness a ripple effect, wherein improved educational outcomes lead to a more skilled workforce, greater economic productivity, and a higher standard of living for all.

In the long term, the integration of equity-focused practices within education has the potential to bridge the social divides that have historically hindered collective progress. By breaking down barriers to educational access, societies can create opportunities for upward mobility among marginalized groups, thus fostering a more inclusive and equitable social fabric.

Educational exclusion of minoritized learners entrenches systemic inequality and perpetuates cycles of intergenerational poverty. When access to quality education is unattainable particularly in economically disadvantaged regions, learners from ethnic, socio-economic, or rural minorities are disproportionately affected. In parts of Nigeria for example, many rural communities continue to suffer from entrenched poverty, as children lack equitable educational opportunities, are compelled to drop out, and cannot compete for skilled jobs reproducing socio-economic exclusion. This pattern reflects a broader issue, where educational disadvantage

restricts socio-economic mobility and reinforces marginalization among minoritized learners.

Beyond denying academic opportunity, this exclusion profoundly impacts psychosocial well-being and identity development. Minoritized students often experience lower self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and diminished sense of belonging. These learners are subjected to many biases, endure psychological stress and diminished academic outcomes. Similarly, structural discrimination such as racially disparate practices also contributes to a hostile learning environment that places minoritized learners at risk of psychological harm and even exclusionary practices such as quotas. A lack of culturally responsive instruction and meaningful student-teacher connections further alienates these learners, undermining motivation, engagement, and academic success.

Inextricably linked with societal progress, inclusive education is essential for sustainable social and economic development. Equitable, well-resourced educational system empowers marginalized students to fulfill their academic potential, pursue meaningful careers. This cultivates a virtuous cycle: improved educational outcomes yield enhanced workforce competence, reduced poverty, and stronger social cohesion. Conversely, failing to integrate minoritized learners deepens existing inequalities, generating stratified societies and stunted collective advancement.

### **Recommendations**

Educational inequity has profound and far-reaching effects on minoritized learners, impacting their academic outcomes, psychological well-being, and social development. Addressing these inequities requires a comprehensive and responsive approach that considers the systemic barriers faced by these learners and leverage their strengths to promote academic success and complete well-being. Several strategies have been identified to address the inequities that hinder educational access for



marginalized learners. First, equitable funding mechanisms are essential to ensure that all schools, regardless of geographic or socioeconomic location, have the resources to provide quality education. Such funding models can counteract the adverse effects of economic disparity, allowing students from low-income families to access a comparable quality of education to their more privileged peers.

Second, teacher training programs focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion are necessary to equip educators with the skills and knowledge to foster inclusive learning environments. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping the educational experiences of marginalized students, and their awareness of issues related to equity can profoundly influence student outcomes. Additionally, implementing culturally responsive pedagogy can make educational content more relevant and accessible to diverse student populations, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement.

Third, policy reforms aimed at deconstructing systemic biases within education can contribute significantly to improving educational equity. To address the broader social implications of educational inequity, it is essential to adopt policies and practices that promote educational equity and social justice. This includes implementing frameworks like the E2: Equity and Excellence Framework, which provides a comprehensive and informed pathway towards advancing educational equity. (Coleman, & Ellis, 2023) Such frameworks emphasize the importance of amplifying the voices of those most at risk of experiencing inequities and creating inclusive educational environments that promote social development.

Policies that address issues such as standardized testing biases, tracking practices, and discriminatory disciplinary actions can create a more just educational landscape. These reforms must be complemented by efforts to increase the representation of marginalized groups within school

leadership and decision-making roles, ensuring that policies reflect the interests and needs of all learners.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The current research on the impact of exclusion on minoritized learners focused on academic and socioeconomic outcomes. However, there remains a significant gap in understanding the long-term psychological effects of exclusion, such as how these experiences shape the emotional well-being, self-esteem, of these learners across different stages of their academic and personal lives. Further investigation is needed into how exclusionary practices may hinder or influence the development of social and emotional competencies, and how these impacts persist or evolve into adulthood. Therefore, future studies should examine the psychological well-being in minoritized learners who face exclusion, with a focus on identifying protective factors such as family and community that may mitigate negative consequences.

While much research on exclusion in education focuses on individual-level experiences or immediate academic consequences, there is a notable gap in understanding the structural and institutional mechanisms that perpetuate exclusion. These mechanisms include school policies, teaching practices, curriculum design, and disciplinary actions that disproportionately affect minoritized learners. The systemic nature of exclusion is often underexplored, leaving a void in knowledge about how these institutional practices contribute to sustained inequities in educational outcomes.

Future studies should shift focus from individual exclusionary experiences to systemic and institutional factors that sustain exclusion. This includes examining how school policies, curriculum development, teacher training, and administrative decisions contribute to the marginalization of minoritized learners. Research could also analyze how these institutional practices perpetuate cycles of



disadvantage, creating barriers to educational equity that extend beyond the classroom.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that educational inequity significantly affects minoritized learners across multiple dimensions, including access to quality education, academic achievement, psychosocial well-being, and socio-economic mobility. The literature analysis reveals that systemic barriers—such as underrepresentation, discriminatory practices, and unequal resource distribution—perpetuate cycles of disadvantage and limit the ability of these learners to achieve their full potential. By examining evidence from various contexts, the study finds that inclusive policies, equitable allocation of resources, and culturally responsive pedagogical practices consistently improve academic outcomes and social opportunities for minoritized learners.

These findings directly support the study's objectives of understanding the impact of exclusion and identifying strategies to promote educational equity. The study recommends that policymakers and educators implement measurable interventions, such as targeted resource programs, inclusion-focused curricula, and continuous monitoring of equity indicators, to ensure that minoritized learners receive fair and supportive education. Future research should evaluate the effectiveness of specific equity-based interventions in diverse educational settings and explore the long-term impacts on social mobility and community development. By addressing systemic exclusion in a concrete and evidence-based manner, educational systems can move toward more equitable and socially responsible outcomes.

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