

# UNDERSTANDING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY THROUGH LECTURERS' VOICES: A MIXED-METHODS APPROACH

Vũ Thanh Loan

FPT University

LoanVT4@fe.edu.vn

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**Abstract:** Educational equity has become an increasingly important concern in higher education as universities seek to respond to the diverse backgrounds, abilities, and learning needs of students. This mixed-methods research investigates lecturers' perceptions and practices regarding educational equity at a Vietnamese university. A total of 40 lecturers took part in the study through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data, and thematic analysis was performed on the qualitative data. The results indicate that lecturers demonstrated high levels of equity awareness in their teaching, particularly in terms of fairness in assessment, inclusive teaching practices, and sensitivity to student diversity. However, larger institutional challenges and variation in students' backgrounds continued to pose barriers. In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of lecturers' perspectives within equity-oriented education initiatives; implications are drawn for professional development and institution-level policies to promote more equitable teaching.

*Keywords:* Educational equity; lecturers' perceptions; higher education

## THẤU HIỂU CÔNG BẰNG TRONG GIÁO DỤC THÔNG QUA TIẾNG NÓI CỦA GIẢNG VIÊN: MỘT PHƯƠNG PHÁP NGHIÊN CỨU HỖN HỢP

**Tóm tắt:** Công bằng giáo dục đang trở thành một vấn đề ngày càng quan trọng trong giáo dục đại học, đặc biệt trong bối cảnh các cơ sở giáo dục cần đáp ứng nhu cầu học tập đa dạng của người học. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp hỗn hợp này nhằm tìm hiểu quan điểm và thực tiễn của giảng viên về công bằng giáo dục tại một trường đại học ở Việt Nam. Bốn mươi giảng viên đã tham gia nghiên cứu thông qua bảng hỏi và phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc. Dữ liệu định lượng được phân tích bằng thống kê mô tả, trong khi dữ liệu định tính được xử lý bằng phương pháp phân tích chủ đề. Kết quả cho thấy giảng viên có nhận thức cao về công bằng giáo dục trong hoạt động giảng dạy, đặc biệt ở các khía cạnh như công bằng trong đánh giá, thực hành giảng dạy mang tính hòa nhập và sự nhạy cảm đối với sự đa dạng của người học. Tuy nhiên, những thách thức ở cấp độ thể chế cùng với sự khác biệt về đặc điểm và hoàn cảnh của sinh viên vẫn là những rào cản đáng kể đối với việc thực hiện công bằng giáo dục trong thực tiễn. Nghiên cứu khẳng định vai trò quan trọng của góc nhìn và kinh nghiệm của giảng viên trong việc thúc đẩy giáo dục theo định hướng công bằng, đồng thời đề xuất một số hàm ý đối với hoạt động phát triển chuyên môn của giảng viên và việc xây dựng chính sách ở cấp cơ sở giáo dục nhằm tăng cường thực hành giảng dạy công bằng hơn.

*Từ khóa:* Công bằng giáo dục; nhận thức của giảng viên; giáo dục đại học.

## 1. Introduction

Educational equity has become an increasingly important concern in higher education as universities seek to respond to the growing diversity of student populations. Rather than emphasizing identical treatment for all learners, educational equity advocates providing students with the support and learning opportunities they need according to their diverse backgrounds, abilities, and learning conditions (Espinoza, 2007; Schleicher & Zoido, 2016).

From this perspective, equity is closely associated with inclusive and responsive teaching practices that enable all students to participate meaningfully and achieve their learning potential (Ainscow et al., 2006). Lecturers play a central role in promoting educational equity because their beliefs, professional judgment, and instructional decisions directly influence students' learning experiences. Lecturers' understandings of educational equity shape how they design learning activities, assess student performance, manage classroom interactions, and respond to learner diversity (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Pantić & Florian, 2015). Consequently, educational equity is not determined solely by institutional policies but is also enacted through lecturers' everyday classroom practices.

Although equity is frequently foregrounded in educational policies and institutional mission statements, how these principles are translated into classroom practices is influenced to a large extent by the personal perceptions and experiences of teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016). For this reason, exploring teachers' perspectives is critical to understanding how these principles are enacted within actual teaching contexts. Although educational equity has been widely discussed in educational research, previous studies have primarily focused on policy frameworks, structural factors, or student learning outcomes. Comparatively less attention has been paid to how lecturers themselves understand educational equity and translate these understandings into everyday teaching practices. Since lecturers work within different institutional contexts, curricular requirements, and student populations, their enactment of equitable teaching is often shaped by contextual constraints as well as their professional beliefs. Therefore, examining lecturers' perspectives is essential for understanding how educational equity is interpreted and implemented in real classroom settings.

Moreover, lecturers' enactment of educational equity is influenced by contextual factors such as curriculum requirements, assessment policies, class size and student group diversity. Despite this, empirical research examining lecturers' perceptions of educational equity remains limited, particularly in higher education contexts outside of Western education systems.

To address this research gap, this study examines how lecturers conceptualize educational equity and how these conceptualizations are reflected in their teaching practices. Combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interview findings, the study takes a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of lecturers' perspectives. By foregrounding lecturers' voices, this research seeks to provide empirical evidence to inform discussions of educational equity and to support professional development and institutional initiatives that promote more equitable pedagogies in higher education institutions.

Accordingly, this study aims to investigate lecturers' perceptions and experiences of educational equity in Vietnamese higher education. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1. *How do lecturers in Vietnamese higher education perceive educational equity and its key dimensions?*
2. *In what ways are lecturers' understandings and beliefs about educational equity reflected in their classroom practices?*
3. *What challenges and contextual factors do lecturers encounter when attempting to implement educational equity in higher education?*

## 2. Literature review

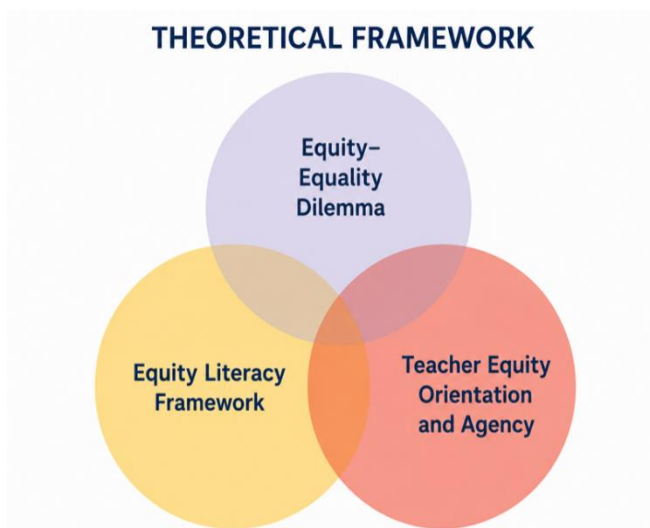
The literature on educational equity has expanded considerably over the past two decades, reflecting growing concern over how higher education institutions can respond to increasingly diverse student populations. Previous research has examined educational equity from various theoretical and empirical perspectives, including equality versus equity, inclusive pedagogy, teacher agency, and institutional support. Building on this body of work, the present review synthesizes key theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to establish the conceptual foundation for the current study.

### 2.1 Theoretical framework

Educational equity is a multidimensional construct that cannot be adequately explained through a single theoretical perspective. Accordingly, this study integrates three complementary theoretical perspectives: Espinoza's (2007) distinction between equality and equity, the Equity Literacy framework (Bukko & Liu, 2021), and teacher agency theory (Pantić & Florian, 2015; Varier et al., 2024). Together, these perspectives provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how lecturers conceptualize and enact educational equity within institutional contexts.

#### Figure 1

*Theoretical framework*



The first theoretical foundation is Espinoza's (2007) distinction between equality and equity. Espinoza argues that equality refers to providing identical educational inputs, whereas equity requires adapting educational opportunities to learners' diverse needs and circumstances. This distinction provides the conceptual basis for interpreting lecturers' understandings of fairness throughout the present study.

Second, the study utilizes the equity literacy framework, as advocated by Bukko and Liu (2021), to contextualize lecturers' perceptions. This framework suggests that achieving equity requires lecturers to possess the mindset and capabilities to detect, challenge, and remediate inequities in the classroom. This concept aligns closely with the dimensions such as inclusive strategies of teaching and lecturers' awareness of student diversity as reflected in the study's questionnaire.

The third theoretical perspective concerns teacher agency. Drawing on the work of Varier et al. (2024) and Pantić and Florian (2015), equity is explored through the lens of lecturers' equity orientation, which comprises lecturers' beliefs and the intrinsic motivations underlying their adaptation of instructional and assessment practices. At the same time, the framework acknowledges that lecturers' agency is constrained by structural conditions and institutional conditions such as class size and standardized curricula. The interplay of personal beliefs and institutional pressures provides an analytical lens for interpreting the qualitative findings concerning the tension between educational ideals and classroom reality.

In Vietnam, equity has traditionally been framed as equal access, particularly in policy discourse. However, recent studies suggest that while learner-centered reforms are emerging, the pedagogical enactment of equity remains uneven and context-dependent (Nhan et al., 2025; Tran & Marginson, 2018). Classroom practices continue to be influenced by traditional norms and institutional expectations (DeJaeghere et al., 2024), highlighting equity as a situated and negotiated construct.

Taken together, these three theoretical perspectives suggest that educational equity is not merely an educational ideal but a dynamic process shaped by the interaction between lecturers' professional beliefs, classroom practices, and institutional conditions. This integrated framework underpins both the research design and the interpretation of the findings.

## **2.2 Equity in teaching and classroom practices**

Educational equity in classroom practice can be observed in practices such as inclusive instruction, differentiated instruction and fair assessment. Differentiated practices are consistent with equity as responsiveness (Espinoza, 2007), and inclusive practices reveal lecturers' capacity to notice and respond to learner diversity (Bukko & Liu, 2021; Strunk & Locke, 2019).

Nevertheless, the implementation of these practices remains constrained, particularly in Vietnam. Teaching is often shaped by exam-centered systems and prescribed curricular standards, which constrain teaching methods and limit the potential for instructional adaptation. Empirical research (Louie, 2017) has shown that although lecturers recognize student diversity, equity-oriented practices are often implemented partially and informally.

### **2.3 Lecturers' beliefs, equity orientation, and instruction**

Lecturers' equity orientation - that is, their beliefs, attitudes and motivations toward fair treatment and inclusive practices - is foundational to how they enact educational equity in their teaching. Research has suggested that lecturers with a strong equity orientation are more likely to approach assessment and teaching practices through the lens of equity and student-centered learning. For example, studies of K-12 teachers have shown that teachers' motivations and beliefs about social justice have influenced how they design and implement assessment practices to promote equitable student outcomes (Varier et al., 2024).

In addition, the development of equity literacy - the knowledge, dispositions, and skills required to identify and address educational inequities is increasingly recognized as an essential component of teacher education. Equity-oriented teacher education programs aim to develop pre-service teachers' ability to identify structural barriers and implement equitable practices. Such preparation has been shown to influence both teachers' classroom behavior and their belief systems (Bukko & Liu, 2021).

### **2.4 Professional learning and contextual constraints**

Beyond individual beliefs, lecturers' ability to enact equity is shaped by professional learning environments and contextual conditions. Research on equity-themed professional learning suggests that school contexts, leadership styles, and support systems influence lecturers' interpretations and applications of equity practices. When supportive environments foster reflection and experimentation, lecturers are better able to engage with equity challenges in productive ways, while negative contextual pressures can impede sustained commitment to equitable teaching (Haneda et al., 2024). Therefore, lecturers' implementation of educational equity depends not only on individual commitment but also on supportive institutional environments that encourage equity-oriented professional learning.

### **2.5 Research gaps**

Although educational equity has received increasing scholarly attention, several important gaps remain. First, relatively little research has explored educational equity from lecturers' perspectives within Vietnamese higher education. Existing studies in Vietnam have primarily examined educational equity from policy, access, or system-level perspectives (Nguyen et al., 2025; Tran & Marginson, 2018), with limited attention to lecturers' own understandings and classroom enactment of equity. Second, previous international research has tended to focus on specific aspects of educational equity, such as conceptualizing equity (Espinoza, 2007), equity literacy (Bukko & Liu, 2021), teacher agency (Pantić & Florian, 2015), equity-oriented professional learning (Haneda et al., 2024), or policy and teacher education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016), rather than examining how university lecturers interpret and enact educational equity in their everyday classroom practices, particularly in non-Western higher education contexts. Third, although both quantitative and qualitative approaches have been widely employed in educational equity research (Haneda et al., 2024; Jurado de Los Santos et al., 2020), relatively few studies have adopted mixed-methods designs that integrate large-scale quantitative evidence with in-depth qualitative insights into lecturers' perceptions and practices. Addressing these gaps, the present study investigates lecturers' perceptions and enactment of educational equity through a theoretically grounded mixed-methods design.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design**

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design to obtain a comprehensive understanding of lecturers' perceptions and enactment of educational equity in Vietnamese higher education. In this design, quantitative and qualitative data were collected during the same phase of the study, analyzed independently, and subsequently integrated during the interpretation stage. The quantitative component provided an overall picture of lecturers' perceptions across key dimensions of educational equity, whereas the qualitative component offered in-depth explanations of how lecturers understood and enacted these principles in their classroom practices. The convergent design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to compare, corroborate, and complement findings from both datasets, thereby enhancing the credibility and richness of the study.

#### **3.2 Research context and participants**

The study was conducted at a Vietnamese higher education institution, where lecturers serve a diverse student population in terms of academic readiness, socioeconomic background, and learning needs. In the quantitative phase, a study sample of 40 in-service lecturers participated in the study. A convenience sampling technique was used to select participants, based on their availability and willingness to take part in the research. From the survey participants, twelve lecturers were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews using a maximum variation sampling strategy. Selection criteria included teaching experience, disciplinary background, gender, and variation in questionnaire responses regarding educational equity. This approach ensured that the interview sample represented diverse professional experiences and perspectives rather than a single dominant viewpoint. The interview participants had between two and twenty years of teaching experience and represented different academic disciplines within the university. Such diversity enhanced the richness of the qualitative findings and strengthened the credibility of the thematic analysis.

Moreover, the university's institutional framework does not contain an explicit, standalone equity or inclusion policy; rather, these principles are generally embedded within its mission statement. Equity-oriented professional development (PD) is also not formalized. Furthermore, even though some lecturers reported participating in occasional workshops, there is no consistent, systemic professional development on equity literacy, leaving professional development largely decentralized and reliant on departmental initiatives.

#### **3.3 Data collection instruments**

##### ***Questionnaire***

Quantitative data were collected using a self-report questionnaire designed based on the study's theoretical framework, which conceptualizes educational equity as a multidimensional construct, including fairness, inclusivity, responsiveness, and institutional support. This framework guided the identification of the questionnaire constructs and the development of the questionnaire items.

The questionnaire was developed through a systematic three-stage process. First, the conceptual dimensions of educational equity were identified from the theoretical framework underpinning the study, particularly Espinoza's (2007) distinction between equality and equity, the equity literacy framework (Bukko & Liu, 2021), and teacher agency theory (Pantić & Florian, 2015; Varier et al., 2024). Second, questionnaire items were adapted from existing literature and refined to fit the Vietnamese higher education context. Finally, the draft instrument was reviewed by two experts in educational research before being pilot-tested with a small group of university lecturers to improve wording, clarity, and content validity. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire demonstrated satisfactory content validity through expert review and was pilot-tested to improve wording and clarity.

Internal consistency of the instrument was confirmed through reliability analysis, which showed that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability. A total of 40 lecturers completed the final questionnaire and their responses were then analyzed quantitatively to examine patterns of perceived educational equity based on the theoretical background.

### *Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 lecturers, selected from among the survey participants through purposive sampling. Participant selection was guided by the theoretical framework, which sought diverse viewpoints in terms of key variables, including teaching experience, disciplinary background, and engagement with equity-oriented practices. This approach enabled the study to explore how educational equity is conceptualized and implemented in various contexts.

Open-ended questions were developed based on the theoretical framework to explore lecturers' understanding of the key dimensions of educational equity including fairness, inclusion, and institutional support, as well as their classroom practices, and the contextual constraints they encountered. This alignment enabled qualitative data to elaborate on and complement the quantitative findings through the same conceptual lens.

An interview protocol was developed based on the theoretical framework and the quantitative findings. Questions explored lecturers' understandings of educational equity, classroom practices, perceived challenges, and institutional support. The semi-structured format allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring consistency across interviews.

The interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and were conducted in the participants' preferred language. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was conducted using the theoretical framework as an analytical guide. Initial coding categories were derived deductively from the theoretical framework while remaining open to emergent themes. This approach enabled both the validation of the theoretical framework and the identification of new insights into educational equity.

Data saturation was reached, as common thematic areas around lecturers' understandings of equity, pedagogical practices and institutional constraints emerged across interviews, with no substantial new themes identified in the later stages of data collection. The qualitative findings

were subsequently integrated with the quantitative results to provide a comprehensive understanding of educational equity grounded in lecturers' voices.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively, in terms of frequencies, means, and standard deviations to find trends in lecturers' perceptions regarding educational equity. These analyses gave an overview of lecturers' perceptions of various equity-related components of their teaching practice.

Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. The researchers first familiarized themselves with the interview transcripts through repeated reading. Initial codes were then generated and grouped into broader categories according to conceptual similarities. Candidate themes were reviewed, refined, and defined through iterative discussions among the research team. Although the coding process was informed by the theoretical framework, the researchers remained open to inductively emerging themes that reflected participants' lived experiences. To enhance analytical trustworthiness, coding decisions were revisited throughout the analysis and discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached.

Following the separate analyses, the quantitative and qualitative data were integrated during the interpretation stage to provide a more comprehensive understanding of lecturers' perspectives. Areas of convergence and divergence between the two data sets were identified to strengthen the interpretation of findings.

Integration of the quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during the interpretation stage. A side-by-side comparison was conducted to identify areas of convergence, complementarity, and divergence between the two datasets. Quantitative findings provided an overview of lecturers' perceptions, whereas qualitative findings were used to explain, elaborate, or contextualize these patterns. The integration process enabled the researchers to generate meta-inferences regarding lecturers' enactment of educational equity by combining statistical trends with participants' lived experiences.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues were considered throughout the research. Participation was completely voluntary and all individuals were aware of the aims of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participants were assigned pseudonyms and data were securely stored and utilized solely for research purposes.

## **4. Findings**

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings. Quantitative findings are presented first, followed by qualitative findings. The two datasets are then integrated.

## 4.1 Quantitative findings: Lecturers' perceptions of educational equity

### 4.1.1 Overall perceptions of educational equity

Descriptive statistical analysis showed that lecturers generally held positive perceptions of educational equity. According to Table 1, all equity-related dimensions had mean scores above the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale, indicating that participants had a strong understanding of equity principles.

**Table 1**

*Lecturers' perceptions of educational equity (N = 40)*

Equity dimension	Mean	SD
Fairness in assessment	4.32	0.54
Responsiveness to learner diversity	4.18	0.61
Inclusive teaching practices	4.05	0.66
Equitable access to learning opportunities	4.12	0.59
Institutional support	3.46	0.73

Table 1 shows that lecturers reported the highest level of agreement with fairness in assessment ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ), followed by responsiveness to learner diversity ( $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ). Inclusive teaching practices ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ) and equitable access to learning opportunities ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) also received relatively high ratings. Institutional support for educational equity received the lowest mean score ( $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ).

### 4.1.2 Lecturers' views on equity in classroom practices

More detailed analysis of individual questionnaire items indicated that lecturers held various perspectives regarding the enactment of equity in their everyday teaching practices (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Lecturers' responses to selected equity-related statements*

Statement	Agree/ Strongly agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/ Strongly disagree (%)
I modify my instruction to accommodate the various learning requirements of my students.	82.5	12.5	5.0
Fair and transparent criteria are used to evaluate each student.	87.5	10.0	2.5
I have enough time to assist students who require further assistance.	57.5	27.5	15.0
Equitable teaching methods are supported by institutional policies.	45.0	32.5	22.5

According to Table 2, while a significant majority of lecturers reported adapting their teaching to meet diverse learning needs (82.5%) and using transparent and fair assessment criteria (87.5%), far fewer indicated that they had time (57.5%) or institutional support (45.0%) to apply these strategies consistently.

## **4.2 Qualitative findings: Lecturers' voices on educational equity**

Thematic analysis of the interview data resulted in three major themes that reflect lecturers' understandings and experiences of educational equity.

### ***4.2.1 Equity as fairness rather than sameness***

In line with the above high quantitative scores for fairness and responsiveness to students' differences, lecturers tended to see equity as fairness rather than treating all students identically. Participants often linked equity with adjusting teaching methods and assessment to meet students' diverse abilities, learning needs, and backgrounds. Instead of promoting equal procedures, lecturers emphasized the role of appropriate support to allow all learners to achieve effectively. As one participant noted, "Equity does not mean giving each student the same assignment or the same grade. It means providing them with what they need to succeed-even if that looks different." (Teacher 7)

From this perspective, lecturers see equity as a flexible and needs-oriented process involving instruction and assessment. The data from interviews also suggest that these understandings are shaped not only by personal teaching experiences, but also by institutional expectations regarding assessment practices. These findings are consistent with the survey results, suggesting that lecturers' strong support for educational equity reflects a well-established understanding of equitable teaching within their institutional context.

### ***4.2.2 Tensions between equity ideals and classroom realities***

Despite their strong knowledge of equity principles, many lecturers reported an ongoing tension between their equity-oriented beliefs and their practical limitations. Barriers to the consistent implementation of equitable practices included large class sizes, heavy workloads, and standardized assessment requirements. "I know some students need more support, but with limited time and many students, it is difficult to provide that support in practice." (Teacher 19) This theme helps to account for the lower quantitative ratings regarding time availability and institutional support.

### ***4.2.3 Institutional context as both enabler and constraint***

Lecturers expressed different perceptions to institutional support. Some indicated that they received encouragement from the institutional leaders to implement inclusive teaching practices and participate in professional development, while others perceived that equity was emphasized in institutional rhetoric but was not sufficiently supported in practice. "We talk a lot about equity in meetings, but there are few concrete guidelines or resources to help lecturers apply it in the classroom." (Teacher 31) This theme highlights the role of institutional context in shaping lecturers' ability to enact equity, complementing the quantitative finding that institutional support received the lowest mean score.

## **4.3 Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings**

Overall, both datasets converged in demonstrating that lecturers reported strong commitments to educational equity, particularly in relation to fairness in assessment and responsiveness to learner diversity. The qualitative findings complemented the survey results by

illustrating how these principles were enacted in everyday teaching and by identifying contextual factors that constrained their implementation. Together, the integrated findings provide a comprehensive picture of lecturers' perceptions and experiences of educational equity.

## **5. Discussion**

This study examined how lecturers perceived educational equity through a theoretical lens that defined educational equity in terms of responsiveness, inclusion, fairness, individual agency and the institutional context. By integrating quantitative and qualitative findings, the study offers insight into the processes through which equity is conceptualized and negotiated in practice.

### **5.1 Lecturers' conceptualizations of educational equity**

The findings suggest that lecturers conceptualize educational equity primarily as responsiveness to learner diversity rather than identical treatment. This is consistent with Espinoza's (2007) distinction between equality and equity, whereby equity reflects the process of adapting learning conditions to meet diverse student needs.

This finding also echoes Jurado de Los Santos et al. (2020), who contend that equity means acknowledging variations in learners' backgrounds and using such differences to provide meaningful learning opportunities. It is also consistent with Schleicher and Zoido's (2016) view that equitable systems emphasize outcomes rather than equal inputs.

One important contribution of this study is the identification of assessment fairness as the most salient dimension of equity in lecturers' thinking. While existing studies (e.g., Varier et al., 2024) have emphasized equity orientation as a critical driver of assessment practices, the current study extends this argument by showing that lecturers operationalize equity through transparency and consistency in grading. Unlike previous studies that have broadly associated equity with inclusive pedagogy, the present study demonstrates that lecturers primarily operationalize educational equity through assessment-related practices.

These findings suggest that within higher education contexts, equity is mediated by professionally regulated practices, such as assessment, rather than being understood solely in broad pedagogical terms.

### **5.2 Enactment of equity and practical constraints**

The discrepancy between lecturers' strong equity beliefs and their reported classroom practices reflects the complex interaction between individual agency and institutional constraints. The findings also reveal a gap between lecturers' equity-oriented beliefs and their actual classroom practices. This tension can best be understood through the theoretical lens of the study, particularly the interplay between teacher agency and structural constraints (Pantić & Florian, 2015).

Consistent with Haneda et al. (2024), lecturers in this study felt that contextual factors, such as workload, large class sizes, and standardized curricula, prevented them from providing individualized support. This helps explain the lower quantitative ratings on time availability and institutional support.

Importantly, this study goes beyond identifying barriers by demonstrating how lecturers negotiate equity within those same constraints. Instead of implementing differentiated instruction as planned, many lecturers simply made adaptive adjustments, including in assessment practices, suggesting that equity enactment in practice is often partial and pragmatic and does not always mirror theoretical ideals.

### **5.3 Institutional support and professional responsibility**

The low perception of institutional support points to an important disconnect between equity as a policy discussion and equity as classroom practice. While equity is part of institutional rhetoric, the absence of formal policies and structured professional development impedes any practical implementation.

This is consistent with Haneda et al. (2024), who point out that institutional factors have a powerful impact on lecturers' involvement with equity-oriented practices. It is also consistent with Pantić and Florian (2015) who argue that inclusive education requires systemic support rather than relying solely on individual lecturers.

Meanwhile, the study also reveals lecturers' professional sense of responsibility. While few lecturers received any institutional direction, many adapted practices to meet diverse learners' needs. It reflects their professional agency in responding to contextual constraints, as suggested by the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

However, leaning toward individual effort in this manner can result in uneven implementation of equity across classrooms, with the risk of replicating inequities rather than curbing them. Notably, this finding adds to the literature on balancing teacher agency with institutional accountability.

## **6. Conclusion**

A mixed-methods approach was utilized in this study to investigate lecturers' perceptions of educational equity, and how these perceptions are reflected in their teaching practices. The study foregrounds lecturers' voices to demonstrate how educational equity is not only conceptualized but also enacted in a higher education context. The results suggest that lecturers generally have strong equity-focused beliefs, especially about fairness in assessment and responsiveness to student diversity. These perceptions indicate an understanding of equity as helping learners according to their needs rather than treating all learners the same.

Concurrently, a noticeable disconnect emerged between lecturers' equity-related goals and their classroom practices. Key findings suggest that institutional constraints, workload pressures, and limited structural support significantly affect lecturers' ability to implement equitable pedagogies. The findings further indicate that achieving educational equity depends not only on lecturers' professional agency but also on institutional conditions that support equitable teaching. By integrating quantitative trends with qualitative insights, the study provides a nuanced account of both lecturers' commitments to equity and the challenges they face in practice.

## 6.1 Limitations

Several limitations need to be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, the study was carried out with a relatively small sample of lecturers from a single higher education institution. Although appropriate for an exploratory mixed-methods design, this limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Second, due to the use of self-report data collection, social desirability bias may have influenced the findings, as the participants might have described their beliefs and practices in ways they perceived as professionally appropriate. Finally, because the study was cross-sectional, it reflects lecturers' perceptions at a single point in time and does not consider that understandings or practices may change over time.

## 6.2 Implications

Although this research has limitations, it provides several valuable implications for educational practice and research. This study enhances existing literature on educational equity by placing the voices of lecturers at the forefront, showing that educational equity is a negotiated process shaped by the complex interplay between beliefs, practices, and institutional context.

The mixed-methods approach further strengthens this theoretical contribution by blending quantitative patterns with qualitative insights to deliver a richer picture of equity in practice. In doing so, it addresses a limitation of previous studies, which have typically focused on policy (Jurado de Los Santos et al., 2020) or teacher beliefs while paying less attention to how these are enacted in classroom practice.

Although these findings are context-dependent, they provide important guidance for similar higher education settings characterized by diverse student populations and standardized institutional structures. Future research could extend this work by incorporating students' perspectives or examining how sustained professional development influences equity-oriented practices over time.

These findings also demonstrate the need for professional development programs that equip lecturers with practical strategies for implementing equitable assessment and support for diverse learners in their everyday teaching. At the institutional level, the findings demonstrate the need for clearer policies, resources, and supportive structures that enable lecturers to put equity into practice.

For future research, this study highlights the benefits of incorporating the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, such as students and administrators, and adopting longitudinal designs to explore how equity-based beliefs and practices develop. Overall, the study also highlights the importance of listening to lecturers' voices in developing meaningful and sustainable educational equity policies in higher education.

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