Journal of Educational Sciences *(JES)*

Original Article

Fall & Winter, 2026, 33(2), 157-176. ISSN (E): 2588-672x
DOI: 10.22055/EDUS.2025.50193.3785 https://education.scu.ac.ir/

An Analysis of School Principals' Perspectives on Reducing Educational Inequalities

Ali Moramazi[1], Saeed Farahbakhsh[2], Iraj Nikpay[3]

1. PhD student in Educational Management, Department of Educational Sciences, Lorestan University, Khorramabad, Iran.
2. Associate Professor of Educational Management, Department of Educational Sciences, University of Lorestan, Khorramabad, Iran.
3. Associate Professor of Educational Management, Department of Educational Sciences, University of Lorestan, Khorramabad, Iran.

Article Info

Received: 08 Oct 2025
Revised: 11 Jan 2026
Accepted: 25 Jan 2026
Published: 23 Aug 2026

Corresponding Author:
Ali Moramazi

Email:
ali.moramazi71@gmail.com

Keywords:
Educational Justice; Border Regions; School Principals; Educational Inequality; Khuzestan Province

Abstract

Achieving educational justice is one of the fundamental requirements of the education system, especially in disadvantaged and border regions. The purpose of this research is to achieve educational justice in the border cities of western Khuzestan province by analyzing the perspectives of school principals on reducing educational inequalities. The research approach was qualitative, utilizing an interpretive phenomenological strategy. Participants were selected through purposeful, criterion-based sampling, choosing individuals who possessed the highest level of knowledge and experience related to the research topic. The sample size was determined based on theoretical saturation; meaning that the interview process continued until the point of saturation-that is, until encountering repetitive data. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, with a total of 15 school principals from the border cities of western Khuzestan province. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis based on the model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings indicated that six main categories play a key role in achieving educational justice and reducing educational inequalities, which are: 1) structural and managerial challenges of educational justice, 2) infrastructural and geographical inequalities and the digital divide, 3) school management strategies for reducing inequality, 4) human resource challenges and teacher professionalization, 5) contextual educational justice: the need for localization and flexibility in educational programs, and 6) the role of local community participation and social capital. The results of this research can contribute to a deeper understanding of the educational challenges in border and disadvantaged regions, and provide practical solutions for achieving educational justice and reducing educational inequalities within the country's education system.

How to Cite: Moramazi, A., Farahbakhsh, S., & Nikpay, I. (2026). An Analysis of School Principals' Perspectives on Reducing Educational Inequalities, *Journal of Educational Sciences (JES)*, *33*(2), 157-176. https://doi.org/10.22055/edus.2025.50193.3785 [Persian]

Authors retain the copyright and full publishing rights. Published by Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz. This article is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY NC)

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Educational justice constitutes one of the fundamental principles of educational systems because it seeks to ensure that all learners have equitable opportunities to access high-quality education regardless of their geographical location, socioeconomic background, or cultural circumstances. Beyond equal access to schooling, educational justice encompasses the fair distribution of educational resources, the provision of supportive learning environments, and the removal of barriers that prevent students from achieving their full potential. These issues become particularly significant in border regions, where geographical isolation, economic deprivation, limited infrastructure, and social inequalities often restrict educational opportunities. In Iran, the western border cities of Khuzestan Province face multiple educational challenges arising from uneven resource distribution, infrastructural limitations, and contextual conditions that differ substantially from those of urban centers. School principals, as key educational leaders, play a crucial role in identifying these challenges and implementing strategies that promote equitable educational opportunities. However, limited research has examined educational justice from the lived experiences of school principals working in disadvantaged border contexts. Therefore, the present study aimed to explore school principals' perceptions of the factors influencing the realization of educational justice in the western border cities of Khuzestan Province and to identify practical strategies for reducing educational inequalities.

Method

This study adopted a qualitative research design using an interpretive phenomenological approach to explore participants' lived experiences and interpretations of educational justice. Participants consisted of 15 school principals from the western border cities of Khuzestan Province who were selected through purposive criterion-based sampling based on their professional experience and familiarity with the educational conditions of border schools. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, ensuring that no substantially new insights emerged during the interview process. Data were gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews that encouraged participants to reflect on the challenges, opportunities, and leadership practices associated with educational justice. The interview transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, involving familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, prolonged engagement with the data, member checking, peer review, and continuous comparison of interpretations were employed throughout the analytical process.

Results

The thematic analysis identified six interconnected themes that collectively explain the realization of educational justice in the western border cities of Khuzestan Province. The first theme concerned structural and managerial challenges, including administrative constraints, unequal policy implementation, and limitations in educational governance. The second theme highlighted infrastructural and geographical inequalities, emphasizing inadequate educational facilities, transportation difficulties, unequal access to digital technologies, and the persistent digital divide. The third theme focused on school leadership strategies designed to reduce educational inequalities through collaborative management, local problem-solving, and adaptive decision-making. The fourth theme addressed challenges related to human resources, particularly teacher recruitment, professional development, retention, and the need to strengthen instructional

quality. The fifth theme emphasized the necessity of localized and flexible educational policies capable of responding to the distinctive cultural, geographical, and socioeconomic characteristics of border communities. Finally, the sixth theme identified community participation and social capital as essential mechanisms for supporting schools, strengthening educational opportunities, and fostering collaborative solutions to local educational challenges. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that educational justice emerges through the interaction of institutional, geographical, educational, and community-related factors.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that educational justice in border regions cannot be achieved solely through the equal distribution of educational resources or standardized national policies. Instead, educational justice should be understood as a multidimensional and context-dependent process that requires the integration of effective educational leadership, localized policymaking, equitable infrastructure, qualified teachers, and active community participation. The perspectives of school principals reveal that educational inequalities are deeply embedded within broader structural and geographical conditions, making context-sensitive educational planning essential for achieving sustainable improvements. Furthermore, the findings highlight the critical role of school leaders as mediators between national educational policies and local community needs, enabling schools to adapt educational practices to complex regional realities. From a theoretical perspective, this study extends current understandings of educational justice by demonstrating how institutional, human, geographical, and social factors interact to shape equitable educational opportunities in marginalized contexts. From a practical perspective, the findings provide evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, educational authorities, and school leaders seeking to reduce educational inequalities in border regions through localized planning, improved infrastructure, enhanced teacher professional development, equitable resource allocation, and strengthened partnerships with local communities. Future research is recommended to examine the transferability of these findings across other border regions and disadvantaged educational settings using comparative qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches.

Author Contributions: In this research, the research design, data collection process, analysis, and interpretation of findings were conducted by the researchers through discussion and exchange of ideas.

Acknowledgments: We express our gratitude and appreciation to the participants and interviewees in this research who assisted us in completing this project.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors acknowledge that there is no conflict of interest in this article.

Funding: The current research did not receive financial support from any institution and institution, and all expenses during the research implementation process were borne by the researchers.

Data Availability Statement: For the sake of transparency, supporting documents for this research will be provided by the corresponding author upon reasonable and justified request.

AI Use Statement: The authors state that no assistance from artificial intelligence tools was made in the process of drafting, writing, editing, translating, or preparing this article.

Ethical Approval: All stages of the research were carried out in accordance with the rules and principles