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Equity in the classroom

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Abstract

The theme of equity in the classroom is particularly relevant and necessary in the current context of education. The choice of this theme is motivated by several important factors that underline the need for a systematic and rigorous approach in the study of educational equity.

Equity in education represents a fundamental pillar for sustainable social and economic development. In a constantly changing society, where ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity is increasingly pronounced, ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students becomes extremely necessary. The study of equity in the classroom allows for the identification and addressing of inequalities that affect the educational success chances of students from different backgrounds.

Conducting a dissertation on the theme of equity in the classroom will allow me to develop advanced research skills, critical thinking, and analytical competencies. These skills are essential for my career in the field of education and will enable me to significantly contribute to the development of more equitable educational policies and practices. Additionally, this research will facilitate collaboration with other professionals in the field of education, encouraging the exchange of ideas and experiences.

Keywords: *equity, education, school, access, quality, resources*

Introduction

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The theme of equity in the classroom is particularly relevant and necessary in the current context of education. The choice of this theme is motivated by several important factors that underline the need for a systematic and rigorous approach to the study of educational equity.

Equity in education represents a fundamental pillar for sustainable social and economic development. In a constantly changing society, where ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic diversity is increasingly pronounced, ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students becomes extremely necessary. The study of equity in the classroom allows for the identification and addressing of inequalities that affect the educational success chances of students from different backgrounds.

Conducting a dissertation on the theme of equity in the classroom will allow me to develop advanced research skills, critical thinking, and analytical competencies. These skills are essential for my career in the field of education and will enable me to significantly contribute to the development of more equitable educational policies and practices. Additionally, this research will facilitate collaboration with other professionals in the field of education, encouraging the exchange of ideas and experiences.

The concept of equity in education is fundamental to building a just and inclusive society and ensuring that all individuals have an equal opportunity to reach their full potential. In a world characterised by diversity and social inequalities, equity means more than simply ensuring equal access to education; it also involves promoting equality of opportunity, treating differences differently to ensure equal outcomes and creating an educational environment that recognises and values diversity and inclusion.

In Romania, as in many other countries, educational inequalities persist, disproportionately affecting pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. The paper is structured in two main sections: a theoretical section comprising descriptive chapters specific to the chosen topic and an empirical research section, each addressing key aspects of educational equity.

Equality and fairness are two words that are used synonymously, but in reality the words are semantically different, they do not mean the same thing. Although they are similar, it is very important to note the

differences between them. Equality implies identical treatment of all individuals, while equity recognises their specific differences and needs, proposing tailored measures to ensure fair outcomes. If the government pays for every child's education at school, then we are talking about equality, equity, on the other hand, refers to, for example, college admission based on aptitude and merit, ensuring equitable access to resources for all students (Gandhari, 2021).
All children should have access to the resources necessary for a quality education, however, it is true that some children need additional support to succeed (Pitts, Hudson, Reeves, Christenbery, & 7 Johnson, 2020), especially children of low socioeconomic status. Equality of opportunity in inclusive education is about living together and learning together.

The revision of the speciality literature.

Education in Romania and the education system have started to become part of a series of European strategic initiatives. Using a series of indicators developed in the framework of OECD or UNESCO programmes, the analysis places the Romanian education system on a scale of European systems. The main benchmarks used for this purpose can be associated with the degree of accessibility to education, the level of budget made available to education officials and the results obtained by students in internationally standardised tests. Focusing the analysis on the dimension of access to education, in the evolution that European education systems have undergone throughout recent history, a number of distinct stages can be highlighted, such as the ‘stage of discipline’ between 1880-1914), the 'stage of intelligence' 1914-1950, the ‘stage of discipline’ between 1950-1980 and the ‘stage of quality’ from the 1980s until now (Neagu, 2012, pg. 361-364).
According to the American Association, the term equality is defined as “access to channels of communication and sources of information that are made available on equal terms to all, and the term equity is derived from fairness as uniform distribution, where everyone is entitled to the same level of access and can use it if they choose”. No one has an unfair advantage according to this concept of equity (Lane & & Waldron, 2021). Everyone has equal opportunity and access, subsequently having the right to choose what they think is best, which does not imply that

the individual is necessarily equal. Bitzer (2010) believes that these opportunities should be open and equal, with some choosing to use them while others choose to ignore them (2010).

Research methodology

The purpose of this research is to measure the level of effectiveness of education policies and programs in achieving equity goals.
The overall objective of the research is to analyse educational policies on equity: educational policies and programmes implemented at local, regional or national level to promote equity in access to education, educational resources and learning opportunities.
The specific objectives of this research involve the following:
SO1. - Identify good practices on improving equity policies in education leading to a reduction of school drop-outs.
SO2. - To establish the relationship between educational policies and programmes to promote equity in education and achievement gaps between students from different socio-economic or ethnic groups.
SO3. - Highlight the influence of resources and services on achievement gaps for rural and urban students.
SO4. - Emphasise the importance of teachers' responsiveness to the individual needs of pupils in terms of equitable access and participation of all potential beneficiaries in quality education in both rural and urban areas.
Research hypotheses
In order to achieve the proposed objectives, we have established the following hypotheses:
I.1.1: If good educational practices that ensure equity in education are implemented, then dropout decreases.
I.2.1: If educational programmes promoting equity in education are implemented, then achievement gaps between students from different socio-economic or ethnic groups can be reduced.
I.3.1: If educational resources are provided in all schools, then gaps in pupil performance are reduced.
I.4.1: If teachers adapt to the needs of all pupils, then equitable access and participation of all beneficiaries in quality education is ensured.

After establishing the research topic, according to the first part of the paper, the theoretical part, the objectives and hypotheses necessary to achieve the proposed goal were formulated. Subsequently, subjects were selected to provide data relevant to the research topic. They gave their informed consent and answered all the questions in the questionnaire and interview.

Participants, who were chosen based on eligibility requirements and provided informed consent, were asked to complete the questionnaires individually, without discussing or sharing their responses with their peers. In the focus group, participants provided timely responses in Google forms and no significant difficulties were encountered. This approach ensured the collection of authentic and relevant data for the research conducted.

The research was conducted in Google forms and consisted of a questionnaire for teachers on identifying the effectiveness of educational policies and programs in achieving equity goals, and Google forms in which we had a set of 10 interview questions. After data collection, the data were processed and interpreted.

Analysis and interpretation of the research data

The questionnaire contains a series of 16 items addressed to teachers, each item having multiple response options. Subjects can choose one or more answers, depending on the item. This questionnaire is designed to identify existing educational programs and policies and factors that influence equity in the classroom.

The semi-structured interview contains 10 questions asked of teachers. The interview was conducted in Google Forms and distributed to urban and rural teachers. The semi-structured interview grid is developed in relation to the proposed research aim and objectives.

The micro-survey sample consists of 80 teachers. The group of teachers has been divided according to their working environment (rural and urban), so the research includes 40 urban and 40 rural teachers.

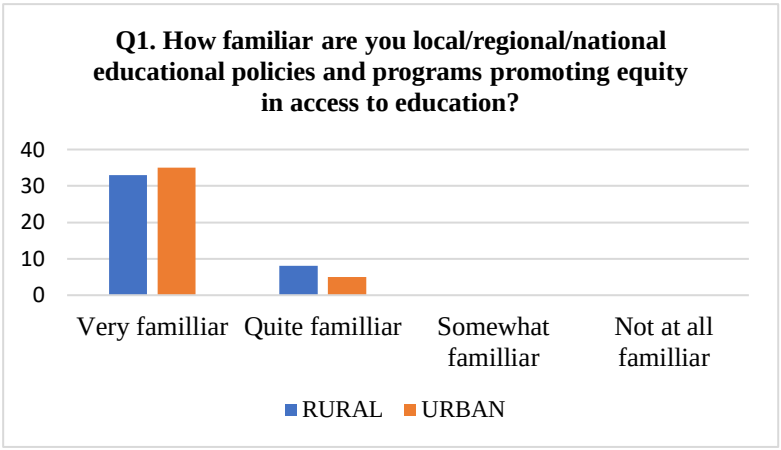


Figure 1 - Familiarization of teachers with Local/Regional/National Educational Policies And Programs Promoting Equity In Access To Education

Teachers are very familiar with local/regional/national education policies and programs to promote equity in access to education (33/40 rural teachers and 35/40 urban teachers) and fairly familiar (8/40 rural teachers and 5/40 urban teachers). There are no teachers who stated that they are not very or not at all familiar with local/regional/national education policies and programmes to promote equity in access to education.

We note that in both rural and urban areas, there is a high level of familiarity with educational policies and programs for equity. This suggests an effective distribution of information and resources related to educational policies, regardless of the environment in which teachers work. However, there is a slight difference in the percentages of teachers who are very familiar and those who are fairly familiar, indicating room for improvement in communication and ongoing training, particularly in rural areas.

Familiarizing educators with policies and programs that promote equity in access to education is essential for ensuring quality and equitable education for all students. Well-informed teachers are better prepared to implement these policies and adapt teaching practices to the diverse

needs of students, thus contributing to reducing educational inequalities and promoting an inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Q2: Which of the following policies or educational programs do you believe has the greatest impact on promoting equity in access to education in our community?

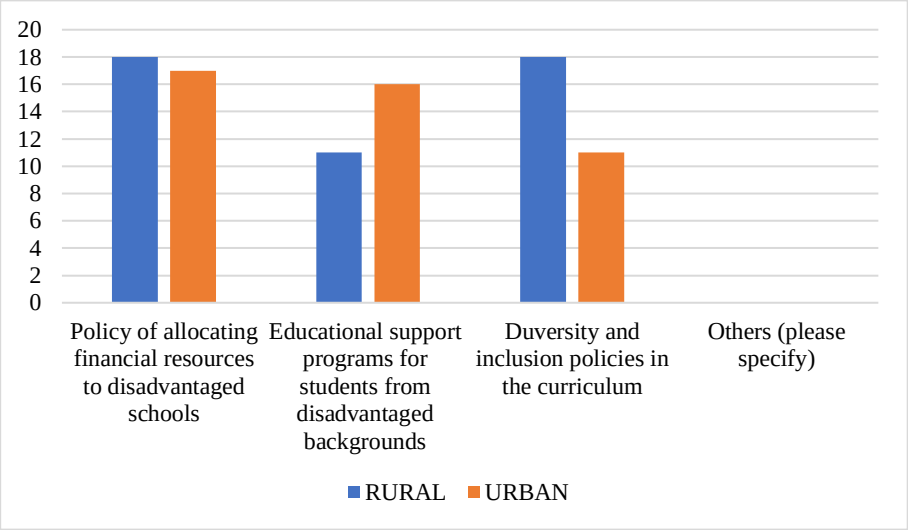


Figure 2 - The impact of education programmes on promoting equity in education

Most teachers believe that among educational policies or programs, the policy of allocating financial resources to disadvantaged schools has the greatest impact in promoting equity in access to education in our community (18/40 rural teachers and 17/40 urban teachers). Other policies mentioned by teachers were: educational support programmes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (11/40 rural teachers and 16/40 urban teachers) and diversity and inclusion policies in the curriculum (11/40 rural teachers and 7/40 urban teachers).

The policy of allocating financial resources to disadvantaged schools is considered most important by the majority of rural teachers (18 teachers).

Educational support programmes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and diversity and inclusion policies in the curriculum are

considered equally important by an equal number of teachers (11 teachers each).

Teachers' responses indicate that all three types of education policies and programs are crucial to promoting equity in education. Allocation of financial resources, individualised educational support and diversity in the curriculum are essential elements which, when implemented effectively, can contribute significantly to reducing educational inequalities and creating a fairer and more inclusive education system. These findings underline the importance of a comprehensive and well-coordinated approach to promoting equity in education, tailored to the specific needs of different school communities.

Q3: How do you rate the effectiveness of policies and programs in ensuring equitable access to education for all students?

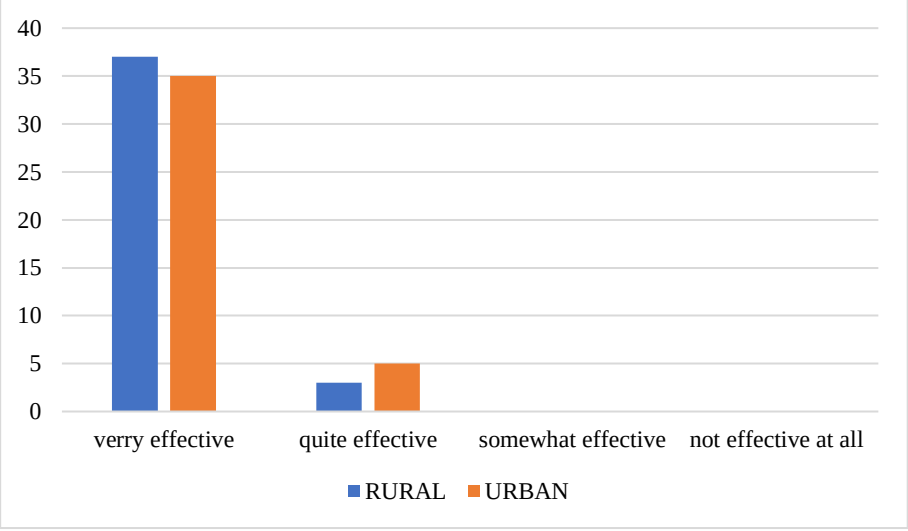
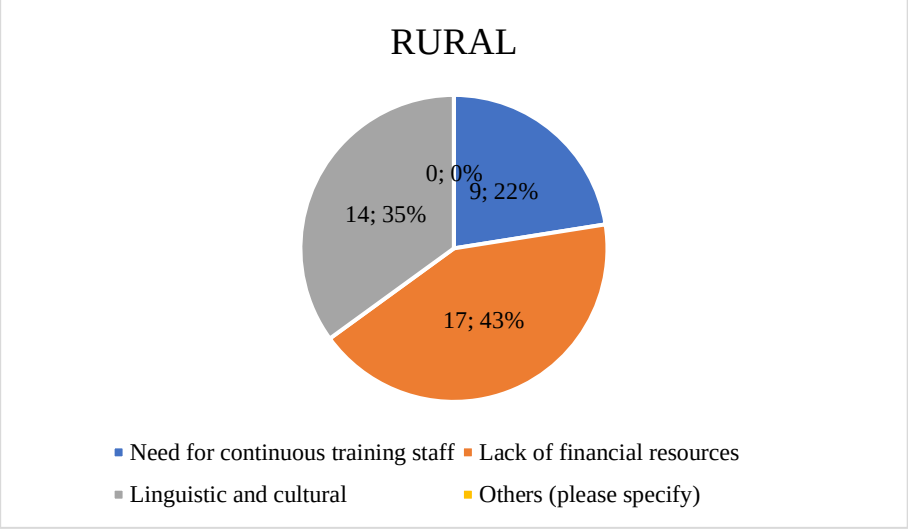


Figure 3 - Effectiveness of education policies and programmes in ensuring equity in education

Teachers rate the policies and programmes, in ensuring equitable access to education for all students, as very effective (37/40 rural teachers and 35/40 urban teachers), with a few teachers rating them as quite effective (3/40 rural teachers and 5/40 urban teachers). None of the teachers rated them as not very or not at all effective.

The overwhelming majority of teachers in both settings consider policies and programmes to be very effective in ensuring equitable access to education. This reflects a generally positive perception of the impact of these policies and programmes.
The minor difference between rural (92.5% very effective) and urban (87.5% very effective) environments suggests that teachers in both environments have similar confidence in the effectiveness of these initiatives.
The slight difference in the percentages of teachers who consider the policies and programs quite effective (7.5% rural vs. 12.5% urban) may suggest a slightly more critical or demanding perception of urban teachers. This could be related to the greater complexity of educational problems encountered in urban areas.

Q4. Which of the following do you consider the biggest obstacles in implementing policies and programs to promote equity in education?



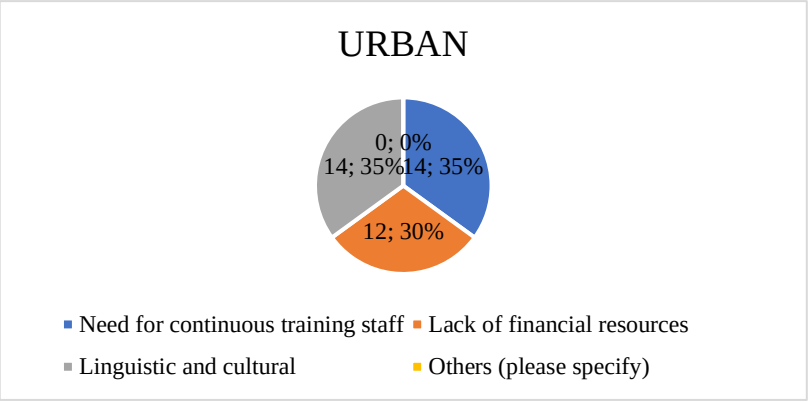


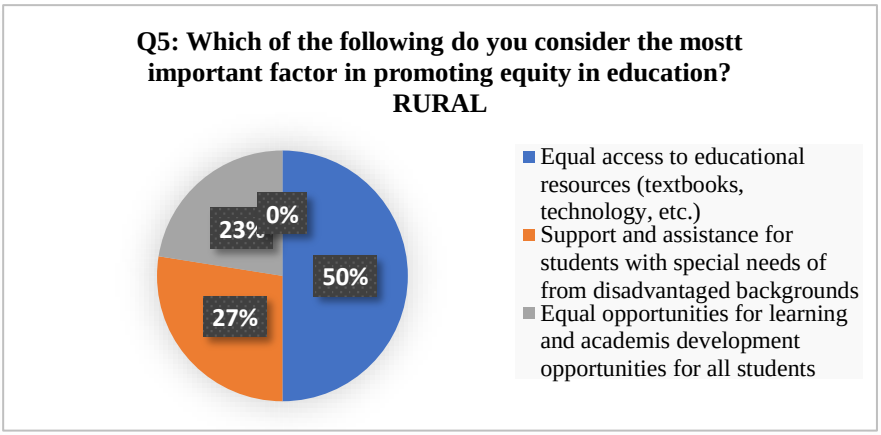
Figure 4 - Barriers to implementing education policies and programmes to promote equity in education

The biggest obstacles encountered by teachers in implementing policies and programmes to promote equity in education are: language and cultural barriers (14/40 rural teachers and 14/40 urban teachers), lack of financial resources (17/40 rural teachers and 12/40 urban teachers), need for continuous teacher training (9/40 rural teachers and 14/40 urban teachers).

As mentioned above, lack of financial resources is seen as the biggest problem in rural areas, indicated by 17 teachers. This reflects the difficulties of rural schools in accessing the necessary funds for the effective implementation of educational policies. The next obstacle mentioned by 14 teachers in rural areas is the language and cultural barrier, indicating the linguistic and cultural diversity that can affect the integration of pupils.

The need for continuous teacher training is mentioned by 9 teachers in rural areas and 12 in urban areas, underlining the need for continuous professional development to meet new educational requirements.

In conclusion, the chart indicates that in both rural and urban areas, the lack of financial resources, linguistic and cultural barriers, and the need for continuous teacher training are major obstacles in implementing educational equity policies and programs. Addressing these obstacles through appropriate policies, adequate funding, and continuous training programs is essential for promoting equity in education and ensuring an inclusive and quality educational environment for all students.



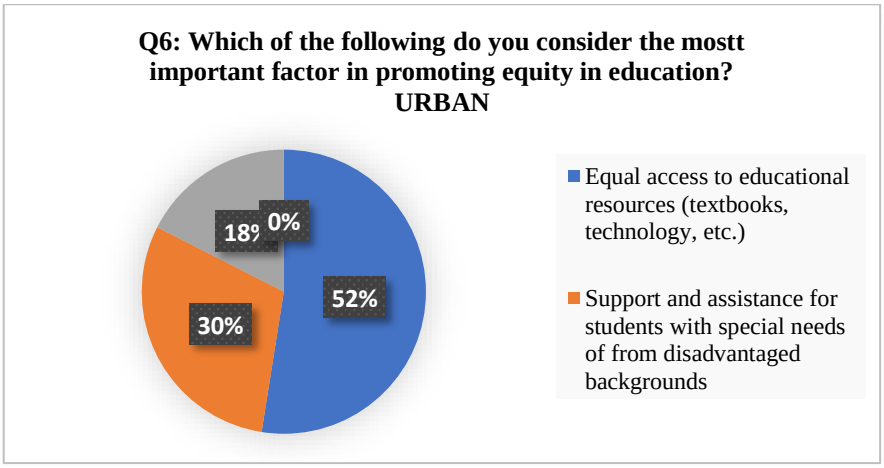


Figure 5 - The most important factors in promoting equity

Teachers consider the most important factors in promoting equity in education to be: equal access to educational resources (20/40 rural teachers and 21/40 urban teachers), support and support for students with special needs or from disadvantaged backgrounds (11/40 rural teachers and 12/40 urban teachers), equal opportunities for learning and academic development for all students (9/40 rural teachers and 7/40 urban teachers).

As the graph shows, the majority of teachers in both settings consider equal access to educational resources (textbooks, technology, etc.) to be the most important factor in promoting equity in education. 50% of rural teachers and 52.5% of urban teachers indicated this option,

suggesting a shared concern about the need for adequate resources for all students. 22.5% of rural teachers and 17.5% of urban teachers cited equal opportunities for learning and academic development as most important.

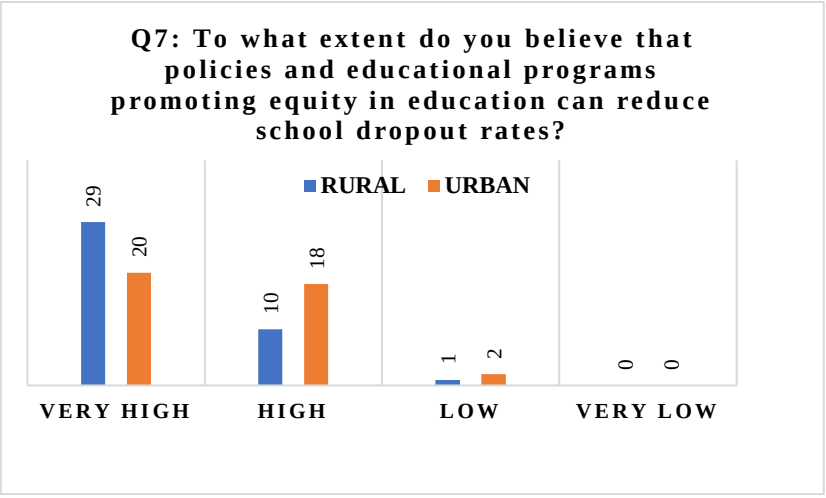


Figure 6 - The extent to which equity policies and programmes can reduce early school leaving

According to the chart, teachers believe that educational policies and programmes to promote equity in education could reduce school drop-out to a very large extent (29/40 rural teachers and 20/40 urban teachers), to a large extent (10/40 rural teachers and 18/40 urban teachers), to a small extent (1/40 rural teachers and 2/40 urban teachers) and no teacher believes that educational policies and programmes to promote equity in education could not reduce school drop-out.

The majority of teachers believe that educational policies and programmes to promote equity can reduce school drop-out to a very large extent. This indicates a high level of confidence in the effectiveness of these policies.

In conclusion, the chart highlights a significant concern regarding the increasing dropout rate, particularly in rural areas. It is imperative to adopt and implement effective and sustainable measures to address the

factors contributing to this issue. An integrated approach, which includes economic support, access to resources, and robust educational policies, is crucial to ensuring an equitable and inclusive educational environment.

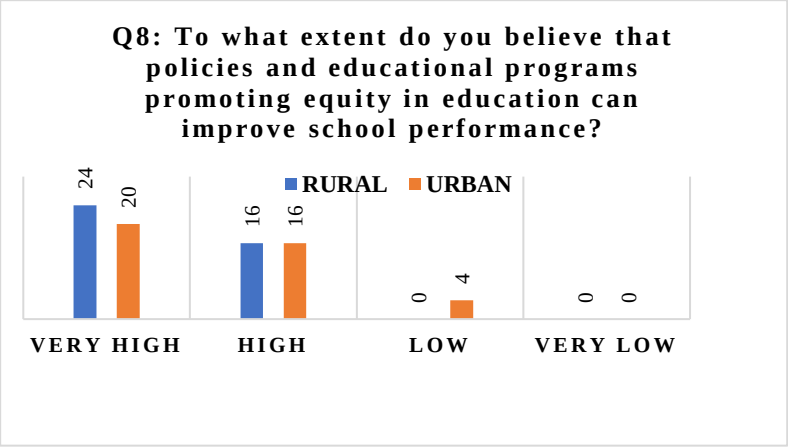


Figure 7 - The extent to which education policies and programmes promoting equity in education can increase school performance

Teachers believe that educational policies and programmes to promote equity in education can increase school performance to a great extent (24/40 rural teachers and 20/40 urban teachers), to a great extent (16/40 rural teachers and 16/40 urban teachers). There were also 4/40 urban teachers who felt that to a small extent school performance could be increased through educational policies and programmes to promote equity in education. None of the teachers believed that these policies and programmes would not lead to an increase in school performance among students.

Therefore, the majority of teachers (24) in rural areas and a considerable proportion of teachers (20) in urban areas believe that educational policies and programmes have a very high impact on increasing school performance. This suggests that educational interventions are perceived to be highly effective in improving academic achievement. 16 teachers/rural believe that the impact is high, indicating significant recognition of the benefits of these policies, even if not at the maximum level. Similar to rural, a considerable proportion of teachers (20) in

urban areas see a very high impact of educational policies and programmes on school performance.
In order to be able to measure both quantitatively and qualitatively the research carried out, we applied a semi-structured interview to the teachers, online, on google forms, where we obtained the following data:

Q9: What are the policies and educational programs that you have observed being implemented in your school to promote equity in access to educational and educational resources?

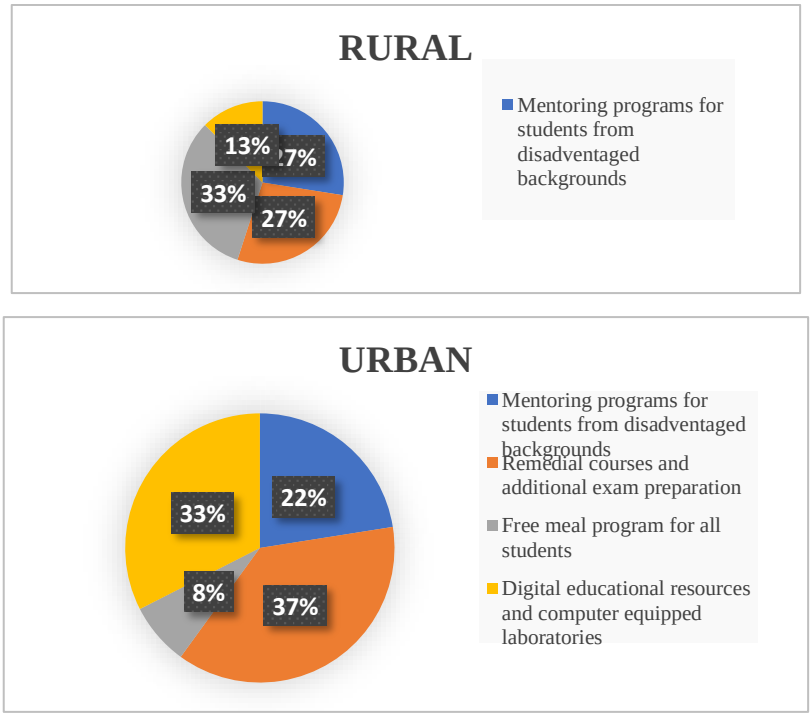
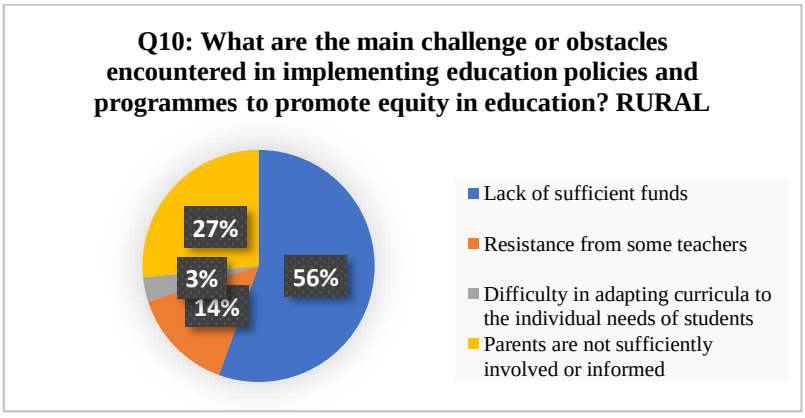


Figure 8 - Educational Policies and Programmes observed in schools

For the question Mentoring Programmes for Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds:
Rural: 11 teachers noted the implementation of these programs, suggesting a continued concern for supporting vulnerable students.
Urban: 9 teachers noted these programmes, indicating that mentoring is recognised as an essential strategy in both rural and urban settings.
For the question Free food programme for all students:

Rural: 13 teachers noted this program, highlighting the importance of providing adequate nutrition for all students.
Urban: Only 3 teachers mentioned this programme, which may suggest either more limited implementation or lower visibility in urban areas.
For the question Remedial and additional exam preparation courses:
Rural: 11 teachers reported the existence of these courses, highlighting the need for additional academic support.
Urban: 15 teachers mentioned these courses, indicating a greater focus on additional preparation in urban areas.
For the question Digital educational resources and computer equipped laboratories:
Rural: 5 teachers noted these resources, suggesting a greater need for investment in technology in rural areas.
Urban: 13 teachers noted these resources, indicating a more extensive implementation of technology in urban areas.
Mentoring programmes and free meals are key to supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds, reducing disparities and promoting social inclusion, and remedial and extra training courses are vital to improving academic performance and ensuring that all students have an equal chance of success.
Investment in digital educational resources is important in the digital age, ensuring that pupils have access to the tools needed for a modern and relevant education.



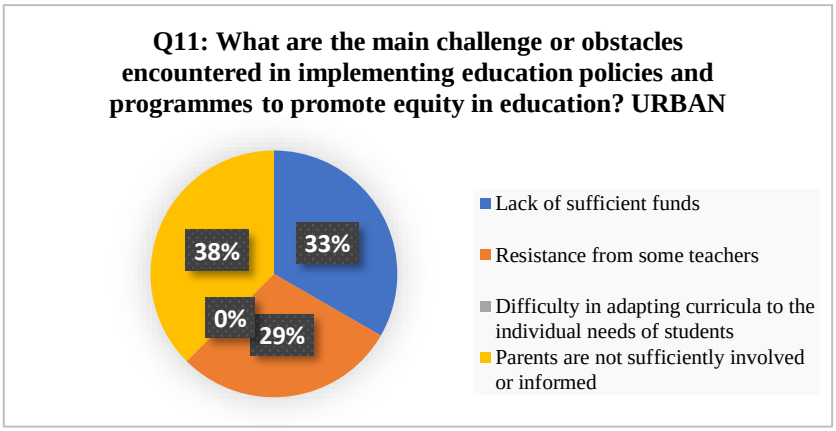


Figure 9 - Main challenges or obstacles encountered in implementing education policies and programmes to promote equity in education

In rural areas: Lack of sufficient funds - This is the biggest challenge, with 23 respondents indicating this. Lack of financial resources can hinder the implementation of programmes needed to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and affect the quality of education.
Parents are not sufficiently involved or informed - 11 respondents consider insufficient parental involvement to be a major problem. This can reduce the effectiveness of educational programmes, as parental support is essential for the educational success of students.
Resistance from some teachers - 6 respondents indicated teacher resistance as a barrier. Changes in teaching methodologies and adapting to new policies may be met with resistance from teachers, affecting program implementation.
Difficulty in adapting curricula to the individual needs of students - No respondents indicated this as a major problem in rural areas, which may suggest that although difficulties exist, it is not perceived as significant as other challenges.

Urban: Lack of sufficient funds - 8 respondents indicated lack of funds as a problem. Altho*ugh it is a challenge, it appears to be less critical than in rural areas.*
Parents are not sufficiently involved or informed - 9 respondents see this as a significant problem in urban areas as well, showing a common problem between rural and urban environments.

Resistance on the part of some teachers - 7 respondents identified this as a problem, indicating that there are also difficulties in the urban environment with teachers adapting to and accepting new educational policies.

Difficulty in adapting curricula to the individual needs of pupils - 16 respondents identified this as a major problem in urban areas, suggesting that, despite available resources, personalisation of education remains a challenge.

Q12: What are you suggestions or recommendations for improving educational policies and programs to promote equity in education?

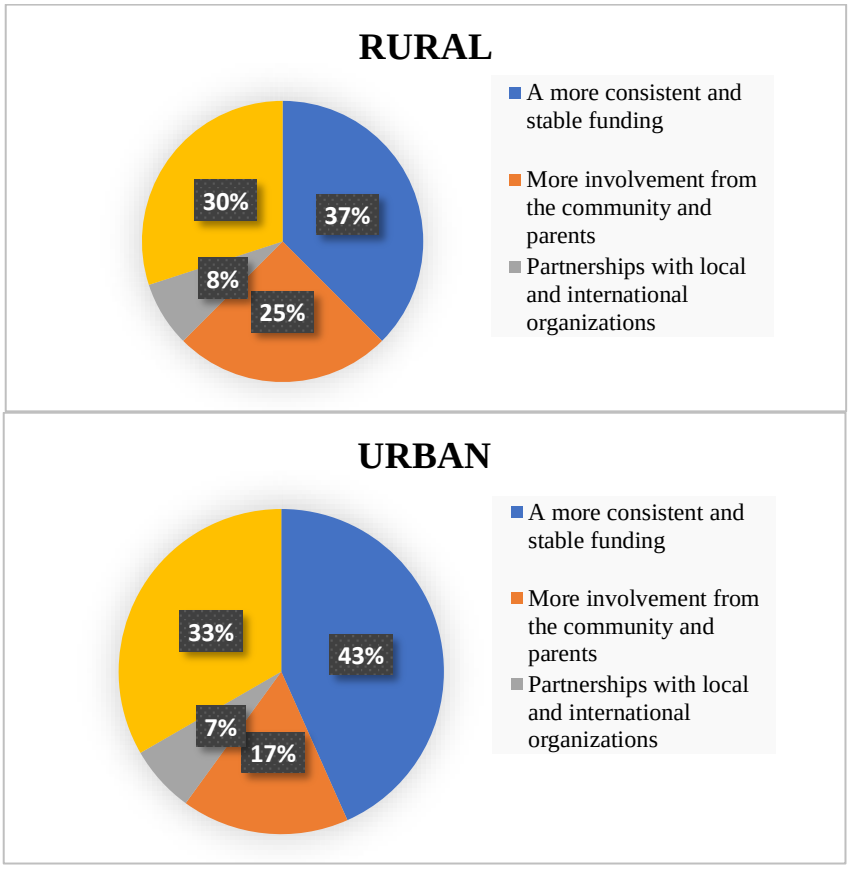


Figure 10 - Suggestions and recommendations for improving education policies and programmes to promote equity in education

Teachers' suggestions or recommendations for improving educational policies and programs to promote equity in education are: partnerships with local and international organizations (12/40 rural teachers and 20/40 urban teachers), more consistent and stable funding (15/40 rural teachers and 13/40 urban teachers), more community and parent involvement (10/40 rural teachers and 2/40 urban teachers), ongoing teacher training in inclusive teaching methods (3/40 rural teachers and 5/40 urban teachers).

Adequate funding can cover the costs of educational resources, school infrastructure and competitive salaries for teachers, which contributes to creating a quality educational environment accessible to all pupils.

Parent and community involvement can increase support for students, helping to develop a more inclusive and supportive educational environment that meets the needs of all students, and partnerships can bring additional resources, expertise and opportunities for collaboration, improving access and quality of education. In urban settings, active parental and community involvement can help reduce educational disparities and create a more supportive and collaborative educational environment.

Conclusions

Following the analysis of the data collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with teachers in rural and urban areas, the following general conclusions can be drawn:

The majority of teachers, both rural and urban, are very familiar or fairly familiar with educational policies and programs to promote equity in education. This reflects an increased awareness of the importance of equity and diversity in schools.

The policy of allocating financial resources to disadvantaged schools is considered the most impactful in promoting equity. Educational support programmes for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and diversity and inclusion policies in the curriculum are also valued for their significant contribution.

Teachers are largely actively involved in the implementation of educational policies and programmes for equity. This underlines teachers' personal and professional commitment to promoting an inclusive educational environment.

Existing policies and programmes are considered to be very or fairly effective in ensuring equitable access to education for all students. However, there are still significant obstacles, such as lack of financial resources and the need for continuous teacher training.

Lack of sufficient funding and insufficient parental involvement are the main obstacles encountered in both environments. These challenges point to the need for additional strategies to increase community involvement and secure the necessary resources.

The research findings highlight the importance of an integrated and collaborative approach to promoting equity in education. Active community involvement, adequate financial support, continuous teacher training and flexibility of education policies are key elements in ensuring equitable access to education for all students. These findings provide a solid basis for the development of effective and sustainable strategies to improve educational equity in Romania.

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