Perceptions of College Students from Diverse Groups Towards Access and Equity in Higher Education in Mizoram

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the perceptions of diverse groups of college students regarding access and equity in higher education in Mizoram. The population of the present study comprises all students enrolled in the colleges of Mizoram affiliated with Mizoram University. The total sample comprises 1277 college students who were selected through purposive sampling. The diverse groups considered for the present study include gender, stream of study in college, geographical location, social category, and medium of instruction in school. Statistical techniques such as the t-test and one-way ANOVA were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that both the stream of study in college and the medium of instruction in school significantly influenced college students' perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

Keywords: *Access, Equity, Perceptions, Higher Education, Mizoram.*

Introduction

Higher education is vital for individual, social, and economic progress. However, a gap remains in higher education about access and equity. For decades many educational policies and commissions have defined access to education not just as the physical availability of educational institutions but as an inclusive system that provides adequate infrastructure, financial assistance, and a flexible curriculum tailored to the needs of diverse learners from all sections of society (Kothari Commission, 1966; University Grants Commission [UGC], 2007; Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha

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Abhiyan [RUSA], 2020; National Education Policy [NEP], 2020). Equity is defined as "the quality of being fair and impartial" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). In the educational context, equity refers to the fairness in ensuring educational rights of all, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographic location, and gender. To promote equity, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has placed strong emphasis on enhancing participation of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Minorities, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), and women in higher education (NITI for States, n.d.; RUSA, 2023). These definitions emphasise the need to remove barriers in higher education and create an equitable system for all. The present study will focus on the higher education scenario in Mizoram.

Regarding Higher Education, Mizoram was introduced to it with the establishment of Aijal College in 1958. Initially, it offered intermediate courses in arts; the college later expanded to offer bachelor's degrees in science, commerce, and arts. It was renamed Pachhunga Memorial Government College in 1965 and then to Pachhunga College in 1977, in honour of Mr. Pachhunga, a prominent businessman and politician who served as the chief patron of the college. In 1979, it became Pachhunga University College (PUC)when North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) included it as one of its constituent colleges. However, it was transferred to Mizoram University (MZU) in 2001 as its only constituent college. As of 2022, according to the report of the Mizoram University, College Development Council, 2022, there are 40 affiliated colleges under Mizoram University (Mizoram University, n.d.; Pachhunga University College, n.d.). Consequently, MZU, with its 40 affiliated colleges and PUC, functions as the major source of Higher Education in Mizoram.

Therefore, to have a complete view of the higher education landscape of Mizoram, systematic data is needed on access and equity in higher education from the perspective of students from diverse social categories, such as gender, stream of study in college, geographical location, social categories, and medium of instruction in school. These data will hence provide an understanding of the various issues of access and equity, which will be beneficial for the harmonious development of the educational system.

Methodology

The present study adopted a quantitative approach and employed a descriptive research design. The diverse groups considered in the study included gender (male/female), stream of study in college (arts/science/commerce), geographical location (rural/semi-urban/urban), social category (ST/SC/OBC), and medium of instruction in school (Class X).

Population and Sample

The population comprises all college students who are enrolled in the colleges of Mizoram affiliated with Mizoram University. A purposive sampling technique was adopted, and a total of 1277 college students were selected as the sample for the present study.

Tools used:

The present study used a self-developed survey questionnaire on access and equity in higher education in Mizoram as a primary tool for collecting data.

Data Collection:

The researcher was able to administer and collect the survey questionnaires from 1277 college students with the help of the Principal, teaching and non-teaching staff of the respective colleges.

Procedure

To study the perceptions of college students from diverse groups towards access and equity in higher education in Mizoram, the survey questionnaires, which had been administered to the samples, were then collected. Information from all the collected questionnaires was then coded, entered and scored in a Google Sheet. The data were then analysed using an independent-samples t-test and one-way ANOVA in SPSS.

Objectives of the study

1. To analyse the perceptions of students on access and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

2. To examine the perceptions of male and female students towards access and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

3. To evaluate the differences in perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various social categories.

4. To investigate the differences in perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various streams of study.

5. To identify the differences in perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from different geographical locations.

6. To examine the relationship between the medium of instruction at school and students' perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

Null Hypotheses

1. H01: There are no significant differences in the perceptions of male and female students towards access and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

2. H02: There are no significant differences in perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various social categories.

3. H03: There are no significant differences in the perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various streams of study.

4. H04: There are no significant differences in perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from different geographical locations.

5. H05: There is no significant relationship between the medium of instruction at school and students' perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Objective-wise analysis and interpretation of data for the present study are as follows:

Objective 1: To analyse the perceptions of students on access and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

The perceptions of students on access and equity in higher education in Mizoram were studied using descriptive statistics such as the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. The analysis was done in SPSS, and the findings are presented in Table I.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of students' perceptions on access and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

	Access	Equity
N	1277	1277
Mean	140.58	155.54
Std. Error of Mean	0.36108	0.42671
Median	140.0	155.0
Mode	139.0	154.0
Std. Deviation	12.903	15.249

Variance	166.496	232.518
Skewness	0.549	-0.061
Std. Error of Skewness	0.068	0.068
Kurtosis	1.964	0.249
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.137	0.137
Range	104.00	97.00
Minimum	102.00	104.00
Maximum	206.00	201.00

Table 1 shows that there is little variation in the mean, median and mode values for both access and equity. Additionally, the skewness and kurtosis values are acceptable for both access and equity, indicating that the data are normally distributed, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1

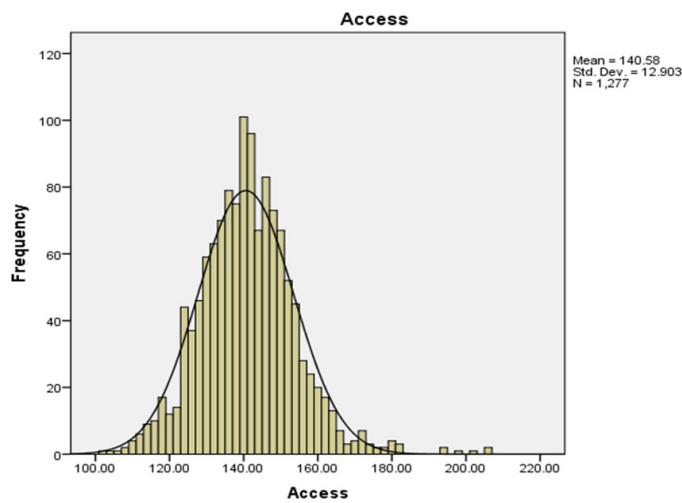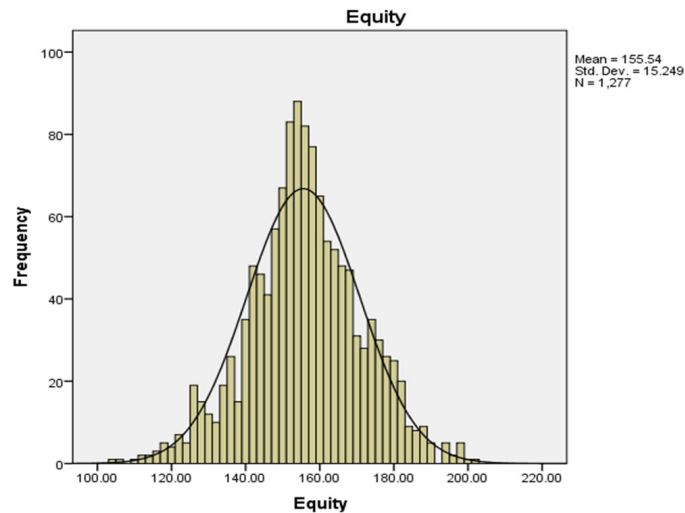*Histogram showing students' perceptions of access in higher education in Mizoram.*

Figure 2

Histogram showing students' perceptions of equity in higher education in Mizoram.

Objective 2: **To examine the perceptions of male and female students towards access** and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

For this objective, an independent sample t-test was used to examine the perceptions of male and female students towards access and equity in higher education in Mizoram. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Perceptions of male and female students towards access and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	SEM	C.V.
Access	Male	658	141	13	0.5	0.331
	Female	619	140	12.5	0.5	
Equity	Male	658	155	16	0.6	0.666
	Female	619	156	15	0.6	

Note. M-Mean, SD-Standard Deviation, SEM-Standard Error Mean, C.V.-Calculated Value.

Table 2 presents the analysis of a gender-wise perception of college students on access and equity, using an independent sample t-test. For access, the male students had a mean (M) = 141 and standard deviation (SD) =13, while female students had

M = 140 and SD=12.5, with calculated value (C.V.) = 0.331, which indicates no significant difference. For equity, the male students had a M =155, and SD =16, while the female students had M=156, and SD=15, with C.V. = 0.666, which indicates no significant difference. Therefore, the Null Hypothesis "H01: There are no significant differences in the perceptions of male and female students towards access and equity in higher education in Mizoram", is accepted.

Objective 3: To evaluate the differences in perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various social categories.

For this objective, descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA were used to study the perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various social categories. The findings are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Descriptive Analysis of perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various social categories.

Variables	Social Category of College Students	N	M	SD	SE
Access	ST	1254	140.6	13.0	0.4
	SC	18	139.7	8.4	2.0
	OBC	5	140.8	8.7	3.9
	Total	1277	140.6	12.9	0.4
Equity	ST	1254	155.6	15.3	0.4
	SC	18	149.6	13.8	3.2
	OBC	5	155.2	14.1	6.3
	Total	1277	155.5	15.2	0.4

Note. N-Total number of students, M-Mean, ST-Schedule Tribe, SC-Schedule Caste, OBC-Other Backwards Classes, SD-Standard Deviation, SE-Standard Error.

Table 3 shows a descriptive analysis of college students' perceptions on access and equity in higher education in Mizoram based on their social category, such as ST, SC and OBC. The respective means for the access scores of college students from the various social categories are ST (M=40.6), SC(M=139.7), and OBC(M=140.8). There is a minimal difference in their mean value, and the total mean value for access is M=40.6 with SD=12.9. The respective means for the equity scores of college students from the various social categories are ST(M=155.6), SC(M=149.6), and OBC(M=155.2). There is a minimal difference in their mean value, and the total mean value for equity is M=155.5 with SD=15.2.

Table 4

Perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various social categories.

Variables	Sources of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P
Access	Between Groups	13.6	2	6.8	0.041	0.960
	Within Groups	212435.7	1274	166.7		
	Total	212449.3	1276			
Equity	Between Groups	642.8	2	321.4	1.383	0.251
	Within Groups	296050.4	1274	232.4		
	Total	296693.2	1276			

Note. df-Degree of Freedom, SS-Sum of Squares, MS-Mean Square, F-ANOVA Value.

Table 4 shows the result of one-way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance), which was conducted to examine significant differences in the perceptions of access and equity among college students of Mizoram based on their social categories (ST, SC, OBC). The ANOVA table reveals that there are no statistically significant differences in the category-wise perceptions of college students for both access and equity scores. This aligns with the descriptive analysis in Table 3. Hence, the null hypothesis, "H02: There are no significant differences in perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various social categories", is accepted.

Objective 4: To investigate the differences in perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various streams of study.

For this objective, one-way ANOVA was used to study the perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various streams of study. The findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various streams of study.

Variables	Sources of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p
Access	Between Groups	1739.249	2	869.625	5.258	0.05
	Within Groups	210710.092	1274	165.393		
	Total	212449.341	1276			

	Between Groups	6195.736	2	3097.868	13.586	0.01
Equity	Within Groups	290497.437	1274	228.020		
	Total	296693.173	1276			

Note. df-Degree of Freedom, SS-Sum of Squares, MS-Mean Square, F-ANOVA Value.

Table 5 displays the analysis result of one-way ANOVA that was run to compare the mean score of college students' perceptions on access and equity based on their stream of study (Arts, Science, and Commerce). The ANOVA table reveals that there are, in fact a statistically significant differences in the perceptions of college students based on their stream of study for both access and equity scores. Hence, the null hypothesis, "H03: There are no significant differences in the perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from various streams of study", is rejected.

Objective 5: To identify the differences in perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from different geographical locations.

For this objective, one-way ANOVA was used to study the perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from different geographical locations. The findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from different geographical locations.

Variables	Sources of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p
	Between Groups	813.852	2	406.926	2.450	0.087
Access	Within Groups	211635.488	1274	166.119		
	Total	212449.341	1276			
	Between Groups	702.730	2	351.365	1.512	0.221
Equity	Within Groups	295990.443	1274	232.332		
	Total	296693.173	1276			

Note. df-Degree of Freedom, SS-Sum of Squares, MS-Mean Square, F-ANOVA Value.

Table 6 shows the one-way ANOVA result of college students' perceptions on access and equity in higher education in Mizoram based on their geographical location (urban, rural, and semi-urban). The ANOVA table reveals that there are, in fact, no statistically significant differences in the perceptions of college students

based on their geographical location for both access and equity scores. Hence, the null hypothesis "H04: There are no significant differences in perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram among students from different geographical locations" is accepted.

Objective 6: To examine the relationship between the medium of instruction at school and students' perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

For this objective, one-way ANOVA was used to study the Relationship between the medium of instruction at school and students' perceptions of access and equity in higher education. The findings are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Relationship between the medium of instruction at school and students' perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram.

Variables	Sources of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p
	Between Groups	294.712	2	147.356	0.885	0.413
Access	Within Groups	212154.629	1274	166.526		
	Total	212449.341	1276			
	Between Groups	7834.705	2	3917.352	17.277	0.001
Equity	Within Groups	288858.468	1274	226.733		
	Total	296693.173	1276			

Note. df-Degree of Freedom, SS-Sum of Squares, MS-Mean Square, F-ANOVA Value.

Table 7 shows the one-way ANOVA result of college students' perceptions on access and equity in higher education in Mizoram based on the medium of instruction in school (medium of instruction at class X). The analysis indicated that there is no statistically significant difference in access scores (F=0.885, not significant). This indicated that the perceptions of college students on access in higher education in Mizoram are not influenced by the medium of instruction in school. However, the analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in equity scores (F=17.277, p<0.001), meaning the differences occurring due to chance are less than 0.1%. This means that the perceptions of college students on equity in higher education in Mizoram are significantly influenced by their medium of instruction in school. Hence, the null hypothesis, "H05: There is no significant relationship between the medium of instruction at school and students' perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram", is partially rejected, and it is proven that the college

students' perceptions of equity in higher education in Mizoram are significantly influenced by their medium of instruction in school.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings indicated no gender-based differences in the perceptions of college students on access and equity in higher education in Mizoram. This reveals that the education system in higher education in Mizoram does not practise any form of partiality. Additionally, factors such as gender, social category, and geographical location are not barriers to access and equity in higher education in Mizoram. These findings strongly align with Article 29(2) of the Constitution of India," No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them" (Government of India, 1950).

In contrast, the stream of studies in college and the medium of instruction in schools have influenced college students' perceptions of access and equity in higher education in Mizoram. Since English is the medium of instruction in college, students with limited English language proficiency may face problems in their education. Moreover, colleges in Mizoram primarily offer mainstream subjects with a lack of vocational courses and an overall rigid curriculum. Consequently, some students may select a course not based on their interest but rather for the sake of the prevailing social trend, since, availability of colleges does not imply accessibility and equity.

The implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020, Ministry of Education, 2020) aims to address this issue by reducing course segregation and adopting a multidisciplinary approach to education, providing students with more diverse courses that align with their aptitude. This policy has the potential to bring a paradigm shift to the higher education landscape of Mizoram, making it more diversified and democratic, addressing challenges related to access and equity.

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