

# **Education Policy & Social Inequality**

Volume 4

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John Jerrim · Don A. Klinger  
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# Socioeconomic Inequality and Student Outcomes

Cross-National Trends, Policies, and Practices

 Springer

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*This volume is dedicated to the millions of teachers and educators worldwide who devote tireless energy to improve the educational outcomes and life chances of disadvantaged students.*

# Foreword

For over 50 years, international comparisons of educational achievement have been part of the world research and evaluation enterprise. Starting with comparisons led by academics and funded haphazardly and periodically, the comparative enterprise has transformed into more regularly occurring, government-sanctioned, and methodologically sophisticated studies. This book, *Socioeconomic Inequality and Student Outcomes—Cross-National Trends, Policies, and Practices*, focuses attention on comparisons within and among countries relative to differences in student status and implicitly raises the question of the utility of international comparisons focused only on achievement at the margin. Countries obviously differ dramatically in their culture, economy, stability, diversity of population as well as educational systems. Simple bottom-line comparisons seem to relegate have and have-not nations to a pre-ordained rank order. Should the policy lesson from such data simply be to try harder?

Data from other fields, for instance, healthcare, show that wealthy countries do not predictably attain the optimal outcomes assumed by their “advanced” status and level of expenditures. In education, the situation is similar. Although the credibility of educational achievement measures is somewhat more suspect than hard data like mortality rates, contrasts of achievement among countries of different sub-groups, identified by socioeconomic and ethnic membership have much to recommend them from a policy and improvement viewpoint. Comparisons of achievement moderated by classification variables demonstrate whether and how much rhetorical claims about equity and opportunity can be trusted as well as the efficacy of policy interventions. Studies over time of the range and disparity of performance by gender, region, group, and individual differences can highlight the areas where policies have been effective. They can identify principal outcomes and unanticipated side effects of compensatory investments. But, at the heart of the matter is whether there is a sustainable commitment by authorities and by practitioners to raise the quality and level of performance of all of the nation’s students.

The extent and depth of commitment to improved learning by all is often justified within countries in competitive, economic terms rather than from a moral stance. Even so, the rise of “nationalism” has new implications for this line of

inquiry. Nationalism may explicitly or tacitly imply the deserved right of differential success. Nevertheless, an inhibitor to success may be the structural nature of opportunity in communities as well as schools. The latter is likely exacerbated by the increased and hardened political divisions emerging within countries across the world. On a larger scale, the emergence of nationalism as a reaction to refugee migration or to other perceived or manufactured threats to sovereignty could pre-empt a wider rejection of globalism. Such dismissals must be short-lived and self-defeating, given connected nature of economies, of international corporations, of systems of higher education, and of the ecology of the planet itself.

This book then anticipates a continued future of international studies that provide lenses on how various nations attempt to achieve quality and equity in their educational systems. Noteworthy is the approach taken by the editor and authors to demonstrate their own commitment to quality and equity. They do so by preparing provocative chapters using state of the art methods and analyses and teams of authors. The writers of these chapters are illustrious scholars whose collaboration produces unusual value for the reader. Value, then, is the watchword of this volume, in its focus, methods, authors, and message.

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# Acknowledgements

Understanding the relationships between socioeconomic inequality and student outcomes across a range of countries is particularly challenging. The editors of this volume would like to thank each of the contributors for their willingness to engage in this timely project and the resulting research and insights they have provided for the international community.

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