**Investigating Social Justice in Ghana's Higher Education System Using Sen’s Capabilities Framework**

Gana'nın Yükseköğretim Sisteminde Sosyal Adaletin Sen’in Yetkinlikler Çerçevesini Kullanarak İncelenmesi

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# ABSTRACT

Higher education has been one of the most critical public services in modern times. Its centrality to societal life is related to its power to ensure social mobility for the disadvantaged and allow vulnerable groups to attain a reasonably moderate standard of living. While, to some extent, these higher education institutions have contributed to this agenda, a dispassionate examination of the institutions under consideration reveals a lot of paradoxes inherent in the system in that they embodied in themselves the main factors that contribute to the widening gap in the societal strata. This study would explore manifold accounts of how government policies and higher education organizations seek to ensure social justice in the HE system.

Transformative Mixed-method research will explore how state-level policies and institutional practices influence equity in HE and how that shapes students’ experiences. The results of this study aim to be a policy reference manual and a comprehensive guide to understanding HE in Ghana, thereby contributing immensely to education attainment and development discourse in Ghana. It is also meant to be an excellent resource for international agencies like the World Bank, which invest heavily in education in their investment decisions.

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Introduction

Higher education (HE) has different connotations for different groups of people in the society. Universities, which have become synonymous with higher education (Cobban, 1975), refer to the context of the higher-order pursuit of knowledge and the dedication to inquiry (Boulton & Lucas, 2011). Consequentially, in HE institutions there are students and teachers fully immersed in exploring meaning, engaging in discourse, and exploring the lengths and depths of their minds, a collection of endless thinkers from all walks of life. Another broader conceptualization of HE encompasses post-secondary and research-oriented institutions (Baker & Wiseman, 2008). According to (Etymonline, n.d.), a university is an/a:

“c. 1300, "institution of higher learning," also "body of persons constituting a university," from Anglo-French université, Old French universite "universality; academic community" (13c.), from Medieval Latin universitatem (nominative universitas), "the whole, aggregate," in Late Latin "corporation, society," from universus "whole, entire" (see universe). In the academic sense, a shortening of universitas magistrorum et scholarium "community of masters and scholars;" superseded studium as the word for this. The Latin word also is the source of Spanish universidad, German universität, Russian universitet, etc.”

Indeed, what body constitutes a HE institution has been in perpetual evolution from its medieval heritage as organized guilds (Coban, 1975) of higher learning (Forest & Altbach, 2007). In the medieval era, HE institutions had independent statutes and administrative structures regulating them. Cobban (1975) has been instrumental in our understanding of the origins of the modern university. He posits that the contemporary university experience is reminiscent of the medieval era’s *studium generale* which were erected by the authority of an emperor or a pope-though not always the case. These institutions were general in attracting scholars and masters from worldwide. Unlike *universitas* many wrongly ascribed the origins of university referred to any guild of professionals in a particular craft (Rashdall, 2010 & Cobban, 1975). For example, a group of lawyers could be designated as a *universitas, referring to the whole of them,* despite its later usage to mean a collection of masters and students (Rashdall, 2010).

These primitive roots of the development of HE progress similarly in Africa and, for that matter, Ghana. The traditional HE system that produced the craftsman for society was structured around age groups, and each age group would explore various occupations in the apprentice (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). The traditional rites of passage in some communities signal the transition into adulthood. Similarly, apprentices with a master have graduated to start independent businesses. Institutions of higher-order learning have always existed in almost every society, though they might exhibit different levels of sophistication in structure, taking a different turn in the medieval era.

The medieval era’s *studium generale* emerged in civil and religious turbulence. A competition among power bases like the state, the church, and many other local players. This invariably influenced the roles that universities played then. Consequentially, medieval universities were vested in training students in law, primarily in the case of Bologna University, arts, and theology in the case of Paris, and Medicine in the case of Salerno (Rashdall, 2010).

Fast forward from the inception of the modern university, it has continuously evolved with time to its present state, and so are its functions. Boulton & Lucas (2011) underscored that universities are centers of advanced learning that command students from all walks of life to pursue manifold endeavors in knowledge acquisition. Similarly, a university should bring people together and make available the means to lifelong learning by ensuring access to both students and masters alike (“University Education: Its Recent History and Function.,” 1935).

Higher education achieved new roles as deemed fit by opinion leaders and advocates. In Germany, in the 1800s, a revolutionizing thought erupted in the pioneership of Wilhelm von Humboldt. A memorandum he published emphasized the unity of research and teaching, freedom of teaching, and academic self-governance. This understanding eventually culminated in the establishment of the University of Berlin Field (Forest & Altbach, 2007); Boulton & Lucas, 2011). Eventually it would grow to become a model for the western university. This understanding could be discerned 40 years later when John Henry Newman made similar proclamations about, HE (Newman, 1852). Newman espoused that a university commands interested parties worldwide to engage in intellectual discourse, pursue knowledge, and freely communicate their discoveries and thoughts. Rightly so, HE institutions have birthed great philosophical and ideological movements in history and continue to do so even currently.

Contemporarily, though, HE has deliberately evolved into an embodiment of a vehicle for national purposes. While prior interests in HE education were, to some extent, a matter of control for the church and the state, the interest now emanates out of need with much heavier entrustment of development responsibilities to HE institutions. Mention must be made that universities’ nationalization started during the Reformation, also called the protestant reformation. The strife between the empire and the papacy trickled down to a contest for the authority and dominance of the catholic church (Forest & Altbach, 2007). This development also coincided with the emergence of nation-states, resulting in universities' nationalization.

The modern conception of Higher education would soon be exported beyond the borders of Europe to other parts of the world through European conquest and colonization (Forest & Altbach, 2007). Universities had new roles during this colonial time. It must be underscored that the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century expanded the need for trained labor, thereby influencing the functions of the university (Miller, n.d.). The emerging industry needed engineers and management personnel to train people in those fields. Additionally, urbanization led to agricultural development, especially in the United States. While these developments were going on, Germany, which had already undergone a revolution in its HE system, as mentioned earlier, became a hub for American doctoral students who sought research skills (Miller, n.d.; Altbach, 2008). Research-intensive universities and institutions would grow to become conduits of countries’ diplomacy in the international knowledge community (Altbach, 2008; Salmi, 2009).

Through colonization, Ghana got to witness and experience the promises of HE. She got her first HE institution in the year 1947 when The University College of Gold Coast was established (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013). Since then, efforts have been made to accelerate its outreach to most constituents at different times in the historical development of HE.

* 1. **Access to Higher Education**

Higher education is the epitome of achievement in the pursuit of human development and the development of societies. Modernists hailed education as a panacea to all human problems like hunger and poverty and ensuring social mobility towards economic prosperity and social strata (Bloland, 1995). Rightly so, the human capital theory, as put forward by Schultz (1961), has bolstered the role of education in improving the skills and productivity of the human. Consequently, the labor would earn higher returns for its investments through personal development and education. For state governments, HE institutions are centers of innovation, agents of development, and powerhouses for economic progress (Boulton & Lucas, 2011).

The above understanding and other factors have played a role in national efforts to make HE accessible to many. These accessibility efforts became more conspicuous in the post-Second World War era. Generally known as massification in HE, growth in this era would move from about 40 million to 80 million within 20 years from 1975 (Altbach, 2008). From this era, efforts to increase access to HE Education became both an individual and national effort. Currently, the global enrolment numbers stood around 260 million students(De Wit & Altbach, 2021).

Despite the growing numbers, access to higher education is still underpinned by many inequities. Despite the unresolved debates surrounding whether higher education is a public or private good, its enormous private benefits have led to widespread demand for higher education and have become a severe bone of contention for social justice. While massification provided access and a variety of pathways for students, including vocationally oriented institutions (Altbach, 2008). With this emerged patterns of access among several groups of societies like gender, socio-economic status, and geographical location.

The problems associated with the massification of HE stemmed from the fact that many institutions are of lower quality and less equipped when compared to the already existing institutions. Additionally, dwindling public funding of HE has accounted for their ill shape and performance. Since the cost of education is shifted to the student, sometimes cost-sharing strategies are adopted. However, students from low socioeconomic status are continually on the unfortunate side of events.

Along with massification, existing inequalities created stratification in access to HE, thereby raising social justice concerns (Triventi, 2013). Stratification in HE is about how an individual’s socioeconomic background determines the type of higher education institution (HEI) they enroll in and the fields they choose to major in. In other words, prestigious intuitions and highly remuneratively rewarding subjects lend themselves to different students from society based on specific socio-economic factors (Martin, 2010; Wakeling & Savage, 2015).

* 1. **Massification and Equity in Higher Education in Ghana**

Social justice is a critical component of what modernization promises humanity—a world free of inequalities, freedom, and the pursuit of individual happiness and communal welfare (Bloland, 1995). As one of the key institutions to achieving these lofty aspirations, the formal educational system has been crucial to realizing this dream. Therefore, in examining or assessing the extent to which modernization has achieved its goals it is imperative to put the very institutions that serve as the vehicle for this change under consideration.

In developing countries such as Ghana, the idea of social justice might not have adequately found its way into policy documents (Otunga, 2009). However, the prevalent themes of discourse, such as equality and equity, which have been unequivocally expressed in policy discourses, form part of social justice. Indeed, social justice is by far and large inextricably bound to the issues of equality and equity, in the distribution of resources to and the treatment of individuals in a society. Also, it entails the practices of everyday life that diffuse through all factors that affect the quality of life of people. Therefore, social justice represents a commitment to combat inequality and ensure equity for all individuals, irrespective of sex, gender, race, etc., that differentiates them (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006).

The interest in higher education especially in its role in driving national development had already been established even within the quarters of the colonial government and the elites (the educated ones then) of the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana) (Apusigah, 2009). Before we investigate equity and quality in higher education, a discussion of the expansion of higher education in Ghana will be provided. In the colonial ages, HE was intentionally restricted by the British colonial government to a single university in West Africa (Apusigah, 2009). However, Similar to what happened in developed countries, the massification observed in the 1970s (Altbach, 2008; Hornsby & Osman, 2014) was also experienced in Ghana. Specifically, enrollments in HE rose by about 90 percent within 3 decades from the 1980s, from a total initial enrollment of 10,000 to approximately 110,000 (Effah, 2011). Available data shows that the number has since increased over fivefold.

Graph …Number of students enrolled in tertiary education in Ghana from 2005 to 2022

The enrollment growth became possible due to a proportionate increase in the number of HEIs available in the Ghana HE system within the 3 decades of the enormous boom. In the pre-independent Gold Coast (Ghana), some colleges were established, and a university was established; among them was the 1927 Achimota College affiliated with the University of London (Apusigah, 2009), the 1948 University College of the Gold Coast (UCGC) now University of Ghana (UG) also as an affiliate of the University of London, and then the 1952 Kumasi College of Technology (Ayelazuno & Aziabah, 2021, January 1). All these helped in absorbing the increasing demands for HE.

In post-independent Ghana, constant efforts were made to ensure the young, independent Ghana transitioned expeditiously to a modern state. The eminence of HE education to this agenda was equally underscored (Ayelazuno & Aziabah, 2021, January 1). The first president and founder of Ghana, DR Kwame Nkrumah, took a solemn mission to expand the country’s outreach in HE. Therefore, the University of Science and Technology was established in 1961 (Ayelazuno & Aziabah, 2021, January 1).

The massification efforts in education continued unabated by subsequent changes in government. Considering the varying needs of the young independent Ghana, massification, diversification, and innovation took center stage in the HE sector to allow for the training of the needed human resources. The HE system in Ghana comprises universities and polytechnic institutions (Used to offer Higher National Diploma (HND), now converted to degree-offering universities), among others, such as open education systems (Pimpong, 2006; Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013). These expansion efforts all made possible the increased enrollments in HE from the 1970s to 2008. These expansion efforts include attempts to include equality and equity principles. This is apparent in the 1992 establishment of the University for Development Studies in the northern region of Ghana (Apusigah, 2006). However, there are still equity issues in HE in Ghana influenced by various factors, including environmental, social, economic, and personal matters.

On a more technical analysis of massification, a HE system can be described as either elite, mass, or universal. An elite HE system absorbs about 15% of the graduating cohorts from High School, a mass HE system absorbs 50%, and above 50%, the HE system can be described as having achieved universal access (Trow, 1973). The Ghanaian HE system can be described as a Mass HE, as observed in the graph below. The GER ratio as of 2023 is a little above 20%, which clearly shows that Ghana exists in the elite phase of HE growth and development.

The graph below shows the GER over the years from the 1960s.

* 1. **Equity in Access to Higher Education**

Equity in access to HE will continue to be a contentious topic for countries. This is so because the issues that underpin the equity debate surpass matters of social justice to issues about economics and debates in philosophy as to whether HE is a public or private good. That notwithstanding, countries worldwide have social justice concerns to deal with. Their indigens comprise people from different backgrounds, and it behooves them to consider these backgrounds in any public discourse and policy. This dissertation examines SJ issues in HE and how the various forms of inequities manifest themselves in the HE arena.

Let’s start the discussion by examining the difference between equality, inequity, and equity in educational studies. Equality of educational opportunity gained prominence when Coleman (1966) and his associates published The US government sponsored research report into the state of education in the USA. In the report entitled ‘Equality of Educational Opportunity,’ Coleman drew attention to the fact that earlier definitions of equality strictly understood as the provision of equal opportunities without taking into consideration their socio-economic and historical backgrounds has not done so much justice to the issue of equality as regards social justice. He would eventually define equality of opportunity as the equality of educational outcomes. This definition was contentious as much as audacious about what educational attainment should mean for everyone.

Roemer (2002) would later espouse that Equality of Opportunity (EOP) refers to the provision of interventions that take into consideration the Socio-economic status (SES) of an individual and their characteristics. Romer talks about leveling the field for everyone before the game. This understanding proffers a meaning very similar to equity as it embodies a subjective consideration of the individual. Unlike Coleman (1966), Roemer’s approach acknowledged the inherent problems of the equality of outcomes approach by emphasizing individual ability's role in educational outcomes. Essentially, equality is inadequate in ensuring the level of social justice that is envisaged and deserved by those who are victims of systemic inequities.

Equity, conversely, is about eradicating systemic obstacles on the way to fair and equitable treatment of individuals (Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). By this definition, equity considers individuals' ability to convert equal opportunities into functioning (Sen, 2008). Equity also addresses Coleman’s (1966) concern that the conception of equality of educational opportunity ignores the extant inequities that characterize disadvantaged groups of people. Therefore, ignoring pre-existing inequality is equivalent to applying medication to an uncleaned wound.

Equity and SJ in higher education entail the issues relating to the involvement of people from underrepresented diverse groups in the society (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2023). HE access is not an opportunity for everyone. Access varies based on gender, race and religious affiliation, socioeconomic and family background (Nzinga-Johnson, 2020; Triventi, 2013; Wolbring & Nguyen, 2023). On gender, the data available shows that there is a tremendous improvement in female educational attainment in the entire world. According to Educational Attainment Worldwide by Gender and Level| Statista (2023), in the year 2020, there were slightly more women in tertiary education, 41%, than men, 36%. The difference in the pre-tertiary education was insignificant for secondary education at 66% for both boys and girls. Regarding primary education, there was about 3% difference between men, 91%, and women, 88%.

Another essential factor that determines participation in HE is race. In countries like America, race has always been an important policy issue, and therefore, in higher education, it is no surprise to see the race factor taking center stage. Even though participation in HE has seen tremendous appreciation, stratification among American universities has a direct effect on racial participation and potential mobility. According to Cantwell (2018), the HE institutions in America are, by convention, either elite multipurpose, research, or a community college. This distinction also reflects the financial capacity and resource endowments of those institutions. Community colleges are known to absorb most of the racially disadvantage groups in society, and as noted by Burton Clark (1960), going to a community college is instead a dream killer and so does not offer an equitable opportunity for social mobility. This similar view has been held by Angelo (2015) when he asked in his paper whether Historically Black Colleges and Universities were a step backward. In the UK, certain races are gaining access to some elite universities (Bhopal, 2017).

Moreover, socioeconomic background determines our educational aspirations to some extent. In HE, ample empirical evidence exists that a person’s parental Higher educational history somehow determines his/her participation in the HE (Wakeling & Savage, 2015). Theoretically, this phenomenon is closely related to Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction, where cultural capital, field, and habitus shape and mold individuals in society to grow up appreciating what they can and can’t be or do in life (Martin, 2010). The socioeconomic factor, as would be observed later, will be a significant policy foundation block in advancing social justice. In the Ghana higher education landscape, while there is a similarity in the factors that determine participation mentioned above, the characteristics peculiar to her include spatial or geographical factors.

* 1. **Sources of and the state of inequity in the Ghanaian Higher Education**

There has been tremendous advancement in educational access in Ghana. This is partly due to the diversification of the HE landscape, which includes other specialized institutions like polytechnics, teacher training colleges, distance education, and nursing training colleges, among others. Also, the infiltration of private universities into the HE sector cannot be underestimated, as they are the second largest providers (64,870) of HE and trailing behind only public universities (264,994) as of 2019 (National Accreditation Board, 2019). As these numbers are impressive, their components according to gender, geographical location, and type of program shall be analyzed on how they paint a picture of an equitable or an inequitable HE system.

Table … shows the numbers of HEIs and Enrolments for the year 2019

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of Institution | No. of institutions | Male | Female | Total |
| **Public Tertiary Education Institutions** |  |  |  |  |
| Public Universities | 9 | 156,289 | 108,705 | 264,994 |
| Specialised/ Professional TEIs | 8 | 5,134 | 4,691 | 9,825 |
| Technical Universities & Polytechnics | 10 | 30,831 | 19,555 | 50,386 |
| Colleges of Agriculture | 3 | 536 | 113 | 649 |
| Public Colleges of Education | 46 | 24,548 | 22,277 | 46,825 |
| Public NMTC | 67 | 6,673 | 20,604 | 27,277 |
| Sub-total | 143 | 224,011 | 175,945 | 399,956 |
| **Private Tertiary Education Institutions** |  |  |  |  |
| Private Universities and Colleges | 73 | 36,725 | 28,145 | 64,870 |
| Private Colleges of Education | 3 | 2,888 | 4,077 | 6,965 |
| Private NMTC | 3 | 135 | 397 | 532 |
| Sub-total | 79 | 39,748 | 32,619 | 72,367 |
| **Total** | **222** | **263,772** | **208,572** | **472,323** |

Debates on equity in the Ghanaian HE system generally hover around finance, the colonial academic tradition (Ayelazuno &; Aziabah, 2021, January; Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013; McCain, 1980), spatial (Senadza, 2012) and pre-tertiary education success (Ansong et al., 2015). To begin with finance and the academic tradition, the Ghanaian HE used to be financed by the Ghana government after independence due to the crucial nature of developing the country's human resource base. The need for urgent human resource development to meet the demands of self-rule was conspicuous and needed swift measures. Ghana's model of academic tradition inherited by her colonial master, Britain, also partly determined the access pattern (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013). The British university tradition was elite and residential, especially the Oxbridge (Oxford and Cambridge). This system provides grounds for socialization among students and in the elite culture (Anderson, 2016). This means admissions to the Ghanaian HE was only possible and contingent on the availability of residential and other school amenities (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013). This trend has limited HE expansion hence its outreach in the country, and created an elite class (Gruber & Kosack, 2014; McCain, 1980).

Another source of inequality in the Ghanaian HE is geographically related. Spatial inequality refers to the disparity in living conditions among people and between geographical locations (Oduro et al., 2014). In Ghana, this inequality is manifested in the north-south divide (Adjasi & Osei, 2007; Al-Hassan & Diao, 2007). The north is marginalized regarding the availability of critical infrastructure. The north comprised of Northern, Savanna, Upper East, Upper West, and North-East regions, while the south consisted of Ahafo, Ashanti, Bono East, Brong Ahafo, Central, Eastern, Greater Accra, Western, Western North, and the Volta regions.

A Table of the Administrative Regions of Ghana

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Former Region | Capital | New Region | Capital |
| Ashanti | Kumasi | Ashanti | Kumasi |
| Brong-Ahafo | Sunyani | Bono | Sunyani |
| Bono East | Techiman |
|  |  | Ahafo | Goaso |
| Central | Cape Coast | Central | Cape Coast |
| Eastern | Koforidua | Eastern | Koforidua |
| Greater Accra | Accra | Greater Accra | Accra |
| Northern | Tamale | Northern | Tamale |
| Savannah | Damongo |
| North East | Nalerigu |
| Upper East | Bolgatanga | Upper East | Bolgatanga |
| Upper West | Wa | Upper West | Wa |
| Volta | Ho | Volta | Ho |
| Oti | Dambai |
| Western | Sekondi-Takoradi | Western | Takoradi |
| Western North | Wiawso |

To exemplify this disparity, while the premier university of Ghana, the University College of the Gold Coast, was established in 1948 in the south, it took over three decades for the University for Development Studies to be based (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013) in the north in 1992. This implies that access to HE for northerners was virtually non-existent within that period.

While the causes for these regional disparities would be examined much later, it is surprising that it was only in 2016 that several University for Development Studies campuses were reconstituted as independent universities in the northern belt of Ghana. Besides the *northern-southern* divide, the urban and rural divide is another form of spatial inequality (Senadza, 2012). Rural areas in the Ghanaian context meant deprived and poverty-stricken places (Ayelazuno & Aziabah, 2021). Consequentially, educational attainment in rural areas is very low compared with urban areas.

Gender is yet another area where inequality raises its ugly head in the HE arena. Despite improvements in female access to HE, there are still reasons for concern. Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, (2013) remarked that increments in gender parity are only marginal. Righty so, according to the National Accreditation Board (2019), female enrollment was 108,705, as opposed to 156,289, in favor of men in all public universities in Ghana. This discrepancy is sometimes compensated in other HE institutions, even if it doesn’t completely offset the imbalance due to prominent but non-proclaimed gender roles. For instance, in 2019, there were 60,604 female students compared to 6,673 male students in public Nursing and Midwifery Training Colleges (NMTC).

Last but not least, one of the sources of inequality in the HE system in Ghana is pre-tertiary education achievement. The whole HE system is built on the idea of merit. This means attaining good results from Senior High School (SHS), the last stage before tertiary education, would allow one to get admission into any university and program. As good and just as it sounds, the problem with this meritocratic criterion is that there has always been a lack of an equal playing field for all to compete. So, the outcomes from unequal grounds cannot be entirely fair as a criterion. The pre-tertiary education system in Ghana includes Primary and Junior Secondary schools (JSS)/Junior High Schools (JHS) and Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) or Senior High Schools (SHS). In the colonial era, these were primary, middle, and secondary schools, respectively (Stratmon, 1959).

Whatever happens to equity in HE, ask pre-tertiary education. The reasons for such a bold statement stem from the distribution of pre-tertiary educational institutions in the various parts of Ghana, especially the north, and some rural areas are half a century behind the south in this regard (Quist, 2003). Quist noted that the North got its first public secondary school in 1951. Considering that the transition to HE was after completing secondary school, that meant until 1951, there was little chance for northerners to transition to a university. More recently, though, that disparity has been sustained in different forms. For example, an empirical study by Anlimachie & Avoada (2020) revealed that the rural-urban gap in pre-tertiary educational attainment had reached 50% in human capital productivity. Also, while there is almost 90% availability of facilities for pre-primary, primary, and JHSs in urban areas, there are about 39%, 64%, and 40% availability in rural areas, respectively (Ghana Education Sector Report, 2023). Moreover, Myjoyonline (2022) reported that only110 SHSs out of 700 (720) SHSs provided the medical faculty of the University of Ghana (UG) and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology with candidates for 8 years. This is a testament to the deterministic role of pre-tertiary education in HE regarding access to prestigious programs and institutions.

At the heart of dealing with inequities in HE are the roles and practices of HEIs in this direction. While when tracing the historical development of HEIs little would be found of traces of social justice and equity concerns in its embodiment until the post second world war era (Tavares et al., 2022). At this time, the role of universities as development vehicles was well understood. States and individuals alike began investing resources into HE. In addition, HEIs became the number one certifying agency for work credentials (Sewell, 1971), making HE a must-have for employment. Here comes the twist: inability to access HE means, to some extent, an exclusion from higher-paying jobs and possible self-actualization. In the face of these inequalities that people might suffer due to either gender, race, or socio-economic background, among other factors, coupled with government efforts, how do institutions respond to increasing inequality in access to and experience in HE?

It is a fact that global HE access has increased over the years (Altbach, 2008; Forest & Altbach, 2007; Hornsby & Osman, 2014; Teferra & Altbach, 2004); however, beyond widening access, SJ has many more concerns that extend beyond participation to concern itself with patterns of access, especially among different segments of society of the social strata that might still exhibit symptoms of replicating preexisting inequalities. In this regard, it has been observed that the distinction between HEIs notably described as stratification (Cantwell, 2018; Wakeling & Savage, 2015), such as research vs general education HEIs (Altbach, 2011; Lepori, 2022), and elite universities (Zimmerman, 2016) among other national and regional classifications, have been instrumental in either mobility or the replication of inequalities.

With the above context in mind, many universities adopt SJ policies as part of their community service efforts and as vehicles of change to mitigate the inherent inequalities ubiquitous in HE. The well-known strategies employed in this endeavor entail some fundamental philosophical underpinnings, such as distributive justice by John Rawls (Sabbagh et al., 2016). Distributive justice has to do with how communal resources are shared in a way that ensures equal allocation to every constituent except in situations where unequal allocations benefit everyone. In other words, distributive justice acknowledges that pre-existing conditions of some constituents might require some positive discrimination of sorts to enable them to climb up the ladder of well-being.

In this regard, some institutions use quotas to widen access to disadvantaged groups like women and those from deprived communities and schools (Ayelazuno & Aziabah, 2021). This called for flexible approaches to prospective students from marginalized backgrounds resonates with the International Association of Universities (2008) suggestion to move away from strictly achieved pre-tertiary credentials to assessing the student's potential for admission purposes. Empirical evidence substantiates the overwhelming importance of pre-tertiary educational success in enrolling in the HE (Anyan, 2015; Quist, 2003; Tavares et al., 2022hence the eminence of equality in equity abound in pre-tertiary education.

In addition to utilizing criteria for admission, some HEIs are equally encouraged to employ flexible modes of educational delivery and institutional models that suit students’ needs (International Association of Universities, 2008). this proposition has found an expression that predates the International Association of Universities (IAU) proposition in the form of distance education facilities and remote learning, among other forms that continue to widen access. However, when analyzing expansion drivers, we need to understand the ideological inclinations (Gidley et al., 2010). For example, the infiltration of private tertiary education does not necessarily make HE accessible if the cost outweighs the access of deprived individuals or if the quality of education is nothing comparable to acceptable limits of minimum quality.

* 1. **Higher Education and the Reproduction of Inequality**

HE has become a deterministic factor in getting access to jobs and occupations, which is the signaling power of the certificate. HEIs have achieved that mandate conventionally to certify individuals looking to work in some sectors of the economy. The educated people, in turn, can enjoy higher income, prestige, and power (Sewell, 1971). Other authors have expressed this line of thinking. Tavares et al. (2022)For example, they have argued that HE is a positional good, which accords the consumer status upon accomplishment. Put differently, HE can ensure mobility and the distribution of societal prestige and status. The society also responds similarly and raises the aspirations and expectations of those who attained HE.

Empirical data on the power of HE to propel intergenerational mobility has shown the role of institutions with relatively higher levels of faculty of color (Simpfenderfer, 2023) in government financial support (Prem et al., 2023; Ruff et al., 2023) SES, middle and the role of prestigious universities (Lee, 2022), and government policy (Halsall & Caldwell, 2020) on the mater. These studies employing both econometric and statistical data have shown improvement in marginalized groups. One problem with relying on this data, no matter how valid the deductions are, is that it is data on enrolled students in HE. How many are not engaged in HE is unknown; at what rate would the gap between the marginalized and the affluent be bridged at the prevailing rate, or is it just a cycle? To crown it all, the literature is replete with empirical data on how HE perpetuates pre-existing inequities and class structures.

Regarding the reproduction of social class norms and status, Pierre Bourdieu is one of the inescapable names that comes to mind. Bourdieu et al. (2000) espoused economic, cultural, and social forms of capital that have been held to influence an individual’s educational ambitions, leading to varied modes of unfavorable disparities in educational attainment (Amaral, 2022).

The attractiveness of Bourdieu’s reproduction theory partly lies in his empirical work that led to his conclusions about French society. Indeed, this theory has fueled a lot of research into his proposed forms of capital and the reproduction of inequality (Pence & Ulusoy, 2023; Pham Xuan, 2022; Polus et al., 2021; Stopforth & Gayle, 2022).

Without dwelling on Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction just yet, it is surprising to understand that there are two contrasting positions on what education and, more specifically, HE can do to bridge the gap between the haves and have-nots or widen it further. Despite its long history of being one of the oldest institutions of learning in society, there is a general lack of reconciliation on what HE can do regarding social mobility.

Questions worth asking: can HE execute its numerous mandates, including social mobility and enhancing equity and development, especially for the underprivileged sections of society? If yes, at what rate could it achieve that and still be able to carry out its other mandates? It is the position of this dissertation that HE has indeed enhanced mobility, however meager that might be compared to expanding the inequality gap. Again, it is appropriate to substantiate that things holding underprivileged people back span far beyond education to other critical social aspects like culture and history. Keeping this in mind; to what proportion of the persistence of inequality among people can be attributed to HE? These, among others, would be the focus of this dissertation.

Higher Education (HE) in Ghana is a prestigious institution with more meaning than just a university degree. Many are attracted to HE for the prestige of having a degree. The societal value of a degree has so much premium and has become a yardstick for passing value judgment in society. Hence, the appropriation of status as prestige is mediated by the level of HE attained (Morley, 2012)

In addition, HE qualification is the gate standing between employment and unemployment, even though that statement is no longer valid. Nonetheless, a degree signals eligibility for employment in skilled jobs. Also, as Human Capital Theorists advocate, education directly affects salary (Holden & Biddle, 2017)

He has been held as a deliverer of development in Ghana with the ability to alleviate poverty and bridge development gaps among the regions of Ghana. However, this belief has been shaken by so many ills in the HE space. Like many other colonial African countries, Ghana inherited an elitist HE system that served only a few in the colonial ages (Amuzu, 2019). The structure of the HE landscape in Ghana, among other challenges like inequalities among constituents, the fact that the growing massification has not addressed inequalities inherent in the HE system, the inability of policy initiatives, the proliferation of neoliberal policies in HE resulting in the marketization of tertiary education, geographic disparities, financial barriers and the lack of support systems (Ayelazuno & Aziabah, 2021).

On geographical disparities, HE education is negatively skewed in Ghana. Northern Ghana is 50 years behind the South regarding educational and development outreach (Ayelazuno & Aziabah, 2021; Senadza, 2012 & Thomas, 1974). For example, the first university was established in 1948 in Ghana, and Northern Ghana had its first university only in 1992, serving three regions and more. In addition to that, there are 74 private universities and university colleges with valid accreditation in the country (NCTE 2017b), of which almost 65 percent (48) are in Ghana’s capital, Accra, 10.8 percent (8) in Kumasi, and 5.4 percent (4) in Tema. The rest are spread thinly across mainly urban centers in the southern part of the country, with only three located in northern Ghana, specifically in the regional capitals of Tamale (Northern Region), Bolgatanga (Upper East Region), and Wa (Upper West Region).

On another front, there are geographical disparities in Ghana: nearly half (49.1%) of Ghana’s population lives in rural areas (GSS 2013); this highly uneven distribution of universities has negative implications regarding access by the rural poor. Proximity to a tertiary institution reduces costs in terms of transportation and housing.

Ghana implemented structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in 1983 (Ayelazuno 2014), decreasing government expenditure affecting HE. This development shifted the cost of HE to families and students, worsening the rights of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Also, the policy led to the abolition of favorable financial support schemes supporting students from underprivileged backgrounds. These developments took a toll on the structural mobility ensured by HE, and social justice issues became increasingly prominent in Ghana’s HE system. They argued that HE is partly responsible for reproducing inequalities in the Ghana Field (Ayelazuno & Aziabah, 2021) and even in the Africa (Lebeau & Oanda, 2020).

Furthermore, tertiary institutions policies have also been touted as sources of inequality in HE. (2021) & Lebeau & Oanda (2020) raised issues concerning HE institutions' role in exacerbating the social inequality problem. Some institutions’ admission criteria and their money-generating methods exclude certain groups of people from underprivileged backgrounds.

The growing infiltration of private HEIs has only worsened the plight and introduced new forms of exclusion. Indeed, there have been documented facts that massification efforts have only extended the dimensions of inequalities in the HE space, especially in the West African sub-region (Lebeau & Oanda, 2020). Private institutions are fee-based and are not well-vested in practical departments like the sciences. It attracts students who couldn’t get into mainstream HE institutions and are left to explore those private institutions. These disparities in access types have been brought up in the transition from HE to work.

Moreover, quality pre-tertiary education, a critical part of the transition from access to higher-quality institutions, has been touted as a significant determinant of access to elite universities and programs. For instance, in Ghana, there is Low pre-tertiary educational attainment in the north and the rural areas due to low investment. There is almost 90% availability of facilities for pre-primary, primary, and JHSs in urban areas; about 39%, 64%, and 40% availability in rural areas, respectively (Ghana Education Sector Report, 2023). Eventually, the transition to universities and to prestigious programmes will exhibit similar patterns as observed in a report by Myjoyonline (2022) that only 110 SHSs out of 700 (720) SHSs provided the medical faculty of the University of Ghana (UG) and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology with candidates for 8 years. This is what Sawyer had to say about this phenomenon.

“Sawyer (2004:22-23) stated that “With our present education system, over 70 percent of our future doctors, scientists, engineers, architects, pharmacists, agriculturists, future managers and other professionals in the humanities including lawyers, accountants, and administrators will emerge from just about 10 percent of our schools, with almost 50 percent of all these categories emerging from…only 18 out of 504 Senior Secondary Schools”.

The background provided a perfect case for a study on social justice in the Ghanaian context. As can be observed, the discrepancies in the access modalities to HEIs have been duly criticized for the growing inequalities in HE. Despite massification efforts and government policies, there seems to be an intractable tendency towards growing inequalities and injustices in the sector.

**Theoretical Framework (or merge with the section below.**

Understanding the sources of disparities and devising remedies to these disparities have been one of the core concerns of educational sociologists. [Continue with the theories that you present below. Summarize the theories and argue about their key premises about access to HE and inequity. Higher Education has experienced growth and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. This massification first addresses the issues of access to HE, the first stage of social justice. National policies generally claim to be social justice-oriented. However, this unexamined assumption narrows the meaning of SJ to the provision of HEIs without paying attention to the details of the policy and how it attempts to solve the access issue. Additionally, this understanding makes access and participation in HE synonymous with SJ when, in fact, it is only a step towards guaranteeing equity in HE attainment to all segments of society and all its constituents.

Another inherent assumption in this line of discourse that assumes that widening the available opportunities automatically means whoever qualifies can access ignores the underlying causes of qualification and the price tag associated with participation in higher education. This understanding relegates the discussion of the factors that determine participation beyond the availability of HEIs. No discussion of Social Justice (SJ) would be complete without addressing the root causes of societal inequalities that are determinant to some extent of all derivative inequalities. Within this context, Sens’s capability theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s Social capital theory, among others, would be employed in diagnosing the patterns of inequalities that undergird the prevalent disparities in society.

Pierre Bourdieu holds an understanding of education that contrasts the modernist claim that education allows for social mobility (Stratmon, 1959; Bloland, 1995; Atmaca & Aydın, 2020). Bourdieu argues that schools, at best, reproduce existing inequalities among social classes. His famous *Habitus* concept, a system of internalized behavioral patterns and dispositions that guide action, has been instrumental in arriving at this conclusion (Nash, 1990). By this understanding, students from a lower class of society would have such behavioral orientations of their class that would inevitably determine their aspirations and guide them to manage their expectations in life. The dispositions of a habitus constitute an encoded body of the past and present experiences passed on in the family (Mills, 2008).

Another concept that Bourdieu employs in his assertion that schooling reproduces inequalities is the cultural capital concept. He argues that the meritocratic doctrine taught in schools is an upper-class culture employed to masquerade the root causes of differential attainment in education due to personal ability and not the inherent social class differences in their cultural capital. Another useful concept to explain that providing avenues for access does not transmute to actual access, equality, or equity is Bourdieu’s terms of the field. These valuable concepts would be employed in analyzing how ensuring SJ through HE entails more than participation.

Another critical issue related to social justice regarding HE participation is the assertion that raising participation via increasing the availability of HEIs means admittance to quality education and into gratifying programs. This assumption first ignores the underlying dissimilarities in the funding of all universities and their inherited academic culture and prestige. Second, it assumes that policies are streamlined for everyone to access all institutions and that institutional practices are well adjusted for every prospective HE student to participate regardless of their socio-economic background. Stratification among HEIs in a country always appeals to different categories of people from various social strata. Any discussion of SJ that ignores these inherent stratifications would be tantamount to self-deception.

Ensuring social justice in higher education demands more than injudicious expansion in HE through massification and diversification of the HE sector. SJ is more about empowering people to be able to utilize their capacities to their full potential. Within this regard, Sen's (2008) commodities and capabilities framework proves a viable diagnostic and prescriptive tool for analyzing inequalities in HE beyond widening avenues for participation.

The notion of capabilities entails functionings—the states a person can be or has attained (Sen, 2008). While functionings are within the capabilities of an individual, capabilities is a much broader concept (Nambiar, 2013), which entails the freedom to lead a life that one desires. The contrast here is that commodities, generally employed in welfare analysis, refer to the opportunities available to an individual. Sen (2008) argues that personal, social, and environmental factors mediate the ability to convert these commodities into functions. At this point, the framework captures the essence of our study. This concept would help explain how the expanding HE outreach does not qualify as a proper intervention for SJ. Expanding access without dealing with factors that inhibit the progression of disadvantaged groups in society to HEIs is equivalent to the reproduction of inequalities.

* 1. **The purpose of the study**

The study aims to examine the implication of HE policies on various disparities in Ghanaian higher education and the remedies to mitigate the negative consequences of these remedies at individual, institutional, and national levels. Entrenched regional disparities in HE access promote inequality and inequity and eventually maintain prevailing class structures. This would document how the conscious and/or unconscious policy decisions, or its lack of, have led to the prevalent systems of injustice.

A discussion about social justice is equally a discussion of injustices. Therefore, national educational policies establish social justice or have aided the reproduction of inequalities in Ghanaian society via HE. This study will be made up of three major parts. The first part will consider how policy decisions regarding the factors that foster inequities are being assessed and handled by national efforts.

In this regard, the second chapter will consider how geographical, gender, and socio-economic status have been determinants in access decisions. This first step would illuminate the terrain of the Ghana HE systems. Evaluating, among others, how historical events like colonization have impacted society and the cultural difference it has created within the Ghanaian culture, which has been prominent in complementing state efforts to ensure SJ in educational practices. Particular attention would be given to the distribution of HE institutions in the country and their relative qualities. Furthermore, pre-tertiary education as an essential determinant of participation would be considered due to the geographical disparities in accessing quality pre-tertiary education. To accomplish these, answers to the following questions will be sought.

1. What are the sources of disparity in Ghanaian HE?
2. How are these disparities are reproduced/deepened by HE policies? (Or what are the implications of HE policies on inequalities?)
3. How is social justice enacted at the national level via government policies?

The holistic picture of the Second chapter would provide a springboard for the third chapter. The third chapter is a meso-study that will first reveal how national SJ-related policies have translated into institutional charters and regulations. Additionally, the regional obligations of selected HEIs would be assessed for their commitment to the dictates of SJ.

Over the years, some critical universities in Ghana have developed methods to mitigate inequalities in access and education experience. Notable among them are The University of Ghana’s (UG) affirmative action admission policy for females, The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) Less Endowed Secondary School (LESS) admission program to address the exclusion of rural students from HE, and the 2017 Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy, a macro-level intervention at improving the inclusion and Higher Schools and invariably in HEIs.

Within this context, institutional SJ policies and regulations and how they are operationalized in the core operational activities of the institutions, like recruiting students and fee policies, will be examined. Like in many other developed or underdeveloped countries, stratification in HEIs and programs exists. This phenomenon is crucial in the reproduction of inequality since access patterns are crucial to what universities specific individuals of society attend and the programs they read. Answers to the following questions would help shed light on the institutional practices of SJ.

1. How is social Justice Enacted at the institutional level? (Multiple case design)
2. What institutional support systems have students experienced that support their personal, social, environmental, and economic constraints in the institution and program?

The fourth chapter would be a micro study that attests to the manifestation of national and institutional policies and practices. This would reveal how they experienced and perceived by students. To ascertain these, answers to the following questions will be sought.

1. What are some of the structural issues to access?
2. What are the experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, deprived and rural areas, in accessing High-quality HEIs and highly remunerative programs?
3. How do individuals equip themselves and build their capabilities? (interview)
4. What are students’ views on Developing a model of social justice?
   1. **The Theoretical Framework**

Understanding the sources of disparities and devising remedies to these disparities have been one of the core concerns of educational sociologists. [Continue with the theories that you present below. Summarize the theories and argue about their key premises regarding access to HE and inequity.

Access to education has been explained by many theories, and these theories inevitably inform policy interventions towards remedying these inequality.

Several perspectives deal with inequalities. However, Amartya Sen provided a perspective that enables the exploration of the sources of inequalities,

How it functions, how it explain the various

In conceptualizing social justice, many theories of justice have acted as the guidepost shaping our understanding and frame of reference. But to fully appreciate the convoluted nature of justice and, for that matter, social justice, a review of the thought process behind justice promises a good start. The idea of justice has both religious and philosophical roots (Sabbagh et al., 2016). The prevailing understanding is that the Western conception of justice emanates from a Judeo-Christian tradition (Cartwright, 1992). However, the philosophical strand of thought has been the most predominantly contentious of the two.

Sen (2010), in his ‘Idea of Justice’ book, emphasized the developments in the conception of justice in the Age of Enlightenment, which he observed as having developed into two primary strands of divergence: arrangement-focused and realization-focused. The former dedicated itself to discovering perfect institutional arrangements that emerged as institutions and rules of engagement, termed *transcendental institutionalism*. The latter, however, represents a comparative approach presenting a pragmatic approach to dealing with day-to-day injustices. Essentially, the theories of justice would exhibit characteristics of conflictual interest and holistic incompleteness depending on the subject a particular theory chooses to dwell on. In this regard, we shall present ~~a couple of~~ the theories ~~of justice~~ that are generally employed in education in dealing with issues of social Justice.

**1.11.1 Sen-Bourdieu Analytical Framework**

The framework developed by Hart (2012) extends the debate on well-being ~~as Sen (2010) advanced~~. Hart (2012) combines two compelling theories to explore their utility in understanding SJ in education. It is premised on the idea that existing assessments in education, limiting it to the availability of resources, could be inaccurate in capturing the true nature of educational inequalities experienced by students.

The Sen Bourdieu Analytical framework syntheses Amartya Sen’s Capabilities and the sociological inclinations of Bourdieu to explore the depths and lengths of social and psychological dispositions in enhancing the development of an individual and a community’s growth and the potential roles of educational systems in the development endeavor.

The adoption of Sen’s capabilities approach in social justice discourse in education is not a novelty, and the literature is replete with both empirical (Dejaeghere, 2020; Fertig, 2012; Gale & Molla, 2015; Hart, 2012b) and analytical (Dejaeghere, 2020; Hart, 2016; Nambiar, 2013; Sugden, 1993; Walker, 2003) applications. Similarly, Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction has been employed in both analytical (MacKenzie et al., 2022; Mills, 2008; Nash, 1990; Tzanakis, 2011) and empirical studies (Gale & Parker, 2015; Hart, 2012a; Martin, 2010). Bourdieu’s theory, for example, was derived from empirical research of HEIs in France, attesting to its original utility in an empirical endeavor. Despite the analytical and empirical progress made regarding the two theoretical propositions, arguments are still advancing toward the inoperability of Sen (Walby, 2012) and Bourdieu’s (Archer, 1993) theoretical frameworks. These arguments are philosophical and pragmatic (Walby, 2012), so they deserve some consideration. Before diving into the criticisms of the theories, let’s examine closely what Sen’s capabilities and Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction are.

**1.11.2 Sen’s Capabilities Approach**

Amartya Sen developed the concept of capabilities in the welfare-well-being literature partly to shift attention from the tendency to judge welfare/well-being by using pure economic indicators (Nambiar, 2013) to the factors that underlie the reality of inequality, poverty, and welfare by providing a framework to assess wellbeing that is more about an individual’s capacity to covert capabilities to functionings (Sen, 2008). Consequentially, it was invariably a criticism of preexisting welfare and social justice ideas.

Welfare/well-being refers to the availability of economic and well-being support systems that allow an individual to live a happy and fulfilled life (Greve, 2008). Arguments suggest that well-being and welfare connote different things (Reinsdorf, 2020). Accordingly, well-being is believed to include intangible life aspirations such as happiness, trust, and welfare (Greve, 2008; Reinsdorf, 2020). That argument settled; the measurement and quantification of well-being has been a contentious topic for economics and social justice advocates. In economics, the tendency to see welfare as the utility derived from the consumption of goods and services is the dominant understanding (Greve, 2008); hence, the measurement of welfare in economics or the System of National Accounts (SNA) is done using the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Household consumption among others. However, in the broader context of well-being, educational outcomes, health outcomes, and happiness are not reflected anywhere.

In social justice, the concept of welfare commands different theoretical orientations. According to Rawls (1999) justice embodies an intuitive understanding among people that they are equal, and their social system is designed to allow for fair cooperation among the inhabitants. Rawls, therefore, articulated that a society with such an intuition of justice has institutions or must establish institutions and principles that transmute their deep-held beliefs into a praxis of life (Meyer & Sanklecha, 2016). Meyer and Sanklecha! consequentially noted that this understanding emphasized the importance of institutions, the rights, and responsibilities of individuals in the system, and the ultimate distribution of the proceeds of the cooperation among constituents.

Rawls, to pragmatize his idea of equality and legitimize its premise for healthy cooperation, invented the idea of ‘the veil of ignorance’ behind which no knowledge is assumed of the other person or people, thereby alienating the influence of individual power differences in determining the rights and responsibilities of the constituents which will eventually allow individuals to appreciate ‘the golden rule’ that do not wish for others what you will not want for yourself. Eventually, the members of the society would arrive at what Rawls describes as the ‘common good’ by pitching in as sincerely as possible (Rawls, 1999). The evolving common good imbued both unifying and differentiating the interests of the people of the society through whose labor the benefits are accrued in terms of its distribution.

Rawls posits the need for principles to negotiate how “…the benefits and burdens of social cooperation…” (Rawls, 1999) is to be shared. Within this context, Rawls believed there would emerge a society whose principles of justice would be determined by the nature of its institutions since the structure of such institutions influences the nature of social and economic inequalities (Rawls & Kelly, 2001). These principles would be the principles of ‘social justice’ (Rawls, 1999). Essentially, in Rawls's imagination of a just society, the fair distribution mechanisms of a society would determine its commitments to the course of social justice. In this regard, Rawls' principles of justice are:

“(a) Each person has the same indefeasible claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme of liberties for all; and

Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity, and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (the difference principle)." (Rawls & Kelly, 2001, p. 40).

As would have been observed, the primary concern in Rawls' theory of justice.is to “…specify the basic rights and liberties and to regulate social and economic inequalities in citizens’ prospects of a complete life” (Rawls & Kelly, 2001). Equality in life prospects among indigenes of a given community is considered an ideal state of society in Rawls’ view, and inequality is a problem to be dealt with within the ambit of the principles of justice.

Another vital contribution to social justice as regards welfare emanates from the German minister of interior since 2021, Nancy Fraser. In her conference paper titled ‘Social Justice in the Knowledge Society: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation,’ she sought briefly to narrate the evolution of the social justice concept and the progression of its discourse vis a vis the phases of the industrial developments of the world economy (Fraser, 2001). Fraser sought to show an unhealthy transition from redistribution politics to the politics of recognition, which she termed the displacement of redistribution (Fraser, 2001). The gamut of her bifocal approach of considering justice along redistribution and recognition presents a powerful tool for analyzing social justice and well-being. To achieve this duality in the conception of justice, Nancy proposed the ‘parity of participation’ principle. This principle maintains that “justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers” (Fraser, 2001, p.6). This principle can be likened to Rawls's ‘veil of ignorance,’ which allowed for equal participation without recourse to any sense of obligation to any superior individual or group but motivated only by the quest for the ideals of justice.

Nancy’s theory recognizes the contemporary eminence of distributive justice and the emerging eminence of recognitional justice in the knowledge society. She does this by expanding the distribution concept to its injustice form, maldistribution, which “broadly encompasses not only income inequality but also exploitation, deprivation, and marginalization or exclusion from labor markets” (Fraser, 2001, p.5). On the other hand, she expanded recognition to its injustice counterpart, misrecognition, “which must also be broadly understood to encompass cultural domination, nonrecognition, and disrespect” (Fraser, 2001, p. 5).

From these three theories, we see correlations in their disposition towards distribution in eradicating inequalities and ensuring justice. While these propositions have formed the basis of many social justice policies and indeed have been a remedy to many injustices, there persist manifold accounts of injustices and a widening gap of well-being in societies, societal institutions, and constituents. In addition to that, redistribution does not lead to the eradication of inequalities or ensure equity. In the view of Bourdieu, possessing certain dispositions like the appropriate social and cultural capital is necessary to deploy certain state-provided facilities to proper use (Bourdieu et al., 2000b). A similar proposition to Bourdieu’s comes from Sen (2008) when she talks about the conversion factors necessary to transform certain commodities into proper achievements for well-being.

Having provided a brief background to the development of SJ theories, let's now dwell deeply into the capabilities approach proposed by Sen. After that, some of Bourdieu’s sociological concepts, which would be employed in our framework, shall be represented. Sen’s commodities and capabilities approach seeks to tackle social justice issues beyond providing goods and services (commodities) to what people can do (capabilities/functionings) with these goods and services. While access remains relevant in education, there is a growing tendency to assess resource usage in attaining well-being.

**1.11.2.1 Commodities**

According to Sen's perspective, the commodities or resources an individual has at their disposal do not guarantee a fulfilling life (Hart, 2019). Indeed, having a book is a necessary condition for reading. However, it is not a sufficient condition since possessing the ability and skill to read is equally important. Commodities might include schools, educational supplies, and suitable learning environments in academic settings.

**1.11.2.2 Capabilities**

Capabilities, as used by Sen, denote “…the power to do something…” (Sen, 2010). Commodities expand capabilities (well-being and freedom) and functionings (well-being achievement). So, an available educational facility is only a capability if an individual has the power to utilize it. Thus, capabilities entail an individual's opportunities to lead the life they desire (Saleeby, 2007). Another prominent contributor to the capability approach, Nussbaum prefers to call it ‘the human development approach’ (Nussbaum, 2009). She believes that the human capabilities necessary to lead a desired life are “…(1) life, (2) bodily health, (3) bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; (5) emotions; (6) practical reason; (7) affiliation; (8) other species; (9) play; and (10) political and material control over one’s environment..” (Frediani, 2008, p. 192). Unlike Nussbaum, Sen did not go into the business of enlisting all the capabilities that he thinks are fundamental to the pursuit of well-being. Essentially, capabilities present an individual with a choice of action.

**1.11.2.3 Functionings**

Functionings connote the actual achievement of well-being. Sen views well-being as synonymous with functioning, which is what a person has achieved with the available resources at his/her disposal (Sen, 2008).

**1.11.2.4 Conversion factors**

The conversion of commodities into capabilities and functions is mediated by choice, which is made possible by the conversion factors available to an individual (Sen, 1992). Sen noted that commodities or resources are demanded for their characteristics; these characteristics, while they remain somewhat constant for everybody, being able to utilize them depends on the qualities of the possessor of those resources. For example, a pencil has the characteristic of writing; however, being able to write will demand that a person have some idea about writing or have known and learned the act of writing (personal characteristics). In another instance, having and knowing how to write, but unfortunately, writing is outlawed (environmental), then the act of writing wouldn’t happen all the same.

The conversion factors can be expanded to include specific contextual implications. Considering that in Ghana, we have over 73 languages (Nyamekye & Baffour-Koduah, 2021), and in the first three years of primary education, instruction is done in the local language, a tribe whose language has not been included in the Ghanaian language education will face a terrible fate in converting educational opportunities into a meaningful experience. Rightly so, of all the languages in Ghana, only six(6) are officially considered for education. Consequentially, Fraser’s recognition dimension of social justice (Fraser, 2001) would be a conversion factor at this juncture.

The capabilities framework is so elaborate, and it has been duly employed in several levels of analysis in the policy decision-making (Robeyns, 2005; Sen, 2013) and development practice (Frediani, 2008). For institutional analysis, Sen (2013, p. 174) asserts, “Individuals live and operate in a world of institutions. Our opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function”. Modern societies are organized around institutions that handle quintessential aspects of societal affairs based on prevalent customs and traditions. Examples of such institutions include but are not limited to the Education System, the Justice system, and The marriage institution. These social institutions have their hierarchies, gender appropriations, and power structures (Nambiar, 2013) that either propel them or digress them on the path to decent well-being. Consequentially, these value orientations that institutions share affect the real opportunities available to indigenes and are conversion factors.

Figure1. Welch Saleeby Diagram of the Capability Approach

A diagram of a diagram of a company

Description automatically generated

The capabilities framework has been applied with considerable effort in the education sector, churning out excellent intellectual understanding for practical applications. Hart (2012a) employed this capabilities concept to analyze students' aspirations beyond High school vis-à-vis UK educational policies that are more focused on expanding access than expanding the real opportunities that students have. As mentioned earlier, the capabilities approach can be used as a diagnostic tool, and it has rightly so been employed in analyzing sources of inequality in education (Dejaeghere, 2020; Hart, 2019). Walker (2010) used the capability approach and critical pedagogies to unpack and address inequities and injustices in university education. These examples show the practical applications of the capability approach, which is among the reasons for its consideration in this study.

The capability approach has been preferred as this study's umbrella theory for specific reasons. First of all, according to Frediani (2008), “It establishes a direct link between resource uses and dimensions of well-being; It elaborates on what things do, rather than merely what they are.” Additionally, it considers both ındivdiaul and communal endowments needed to pursue opportunities to achieve the things people value (Frediani, 2008). Moreover, Sen’s framework allows for diagnostic and prescriptive analysis, considering that to make a case for social justice, we first need to paint a picture of injustice, and this is achieved by considering the restraining factors that inhibit the growth of an individual and interventions would be complex to make if the constraints are not adequately delineated and targetted for improvement of capabilities (Nambiar, 2013).

However, Sen’s theory has a particular ambivalent characteristic, which serves as its strength and weakness at the same time. For instance, the critics of the theory maintain that it is nearly impossible to operationalize, considering that Sen did not provide an exhaustive list of capabilities (Saigaran et al., 2015). In contrast to this, Nassbaun provided a list. On the other hand, that same feature allows for its broader application to many situations (Robeyns, 2005); perhaps that is why it has appealed to many: its adaptability. Another noteworthy deficiency is the openness of the nature of conversion factors. Sen chose here to provide generic factors such as personal and environmental factors (Sen, 1992) and left it at that except in detailing some examples. This allows for elaborate interpretation and incorporation of other theoretical frameworks or concepts to enhance the understanding of conversion factors. Among these theories would be some of Bourdieu’s sociological concepts.

**1.11.3. Bourdieu and Reproduction in Eductaion**

Some key issues deserve a consensus in the journey towards ensuring SJ in education. SJ entails, as deduced from the theories of justice discussed earlier, issues of equality/inequality and equity (Fraser, 2001; Rawls, 1999; Sen, 1992), recognition (Fraser, 2001), human development and capability (Nussbaum, 2009; Sen, 1992, 2008), well-being (Nussbaum, 2009; Rawls, 1999; Rawls & Kelly, 2001; Sen, 2008). While I do not share an elusive belief that a comprehensive theory of justice can ever be enacted, I do believe in a thorough conceptualization of SJ that digs into the available pool of thinking accumulated in the pursuit of SJ. This is achieved by employing almost every known significant theory dealing with the archetypal themes above.

When dealing with issues of justice or injustice, the desire is to mitigate existing ones and/or prevent further occurrence of injustices (Sen, 2010). This pursuit is somewhat captured in Bourdieu’s conceptualization of the reproduction of Inequalities in education. In this respect, the gamut of sociological concepts contributed by Bourdieu has been discussed under conversion factors (Hart, 2019). While capital has always been a central issue in the analysis of class relations, Bourdieu takes this further by providing a range of capital accumulation that mediate the conversion of commodities into real opportunities and, in turn, functioning. Essentially, Bourdieu enriches Sen’s conceptualization of commodities by including forms of capital, habitus, and field into conversion factors (Hart, 2019). Most significantly, Bourdieu offered a cogent sociological explanation of the forms of capital in diagnosing inequalities and how they are reproduced in society (MacKenzie et al., 2022).

Bourdieu’s theory of cultural and social reproduction simply suggests that educational institutions are complicit in the recurrence of intergenerational socioeconomic inequalities in society (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). This assertion is foregrounded by but not limited to Bourdieu’s Cultural capital, Habitus, Field, and practice concepts.

**1.11.3.1 Bourdieu’s Forms of Capital and Sen’s Commodities**

According to Pierre Bourdieu, capital is “accumulated labor …” that can bring into being other forms of capital, reproduce itself, and even expand (Bourdieu, 2011). Bourdieu is against the pure economic conception of capital and argues for a broader understanding that brings all forms of capital into the spotlight and analyzes how they transform from one form of capital to another. In seeing capital as the capacity to exert power and influence or as having a ‘mercantile’ relationship, capital can be viewed in forms other than its pure economic conception, in that the different forms of capital can be transformed into monetary value, just like financial capital.

On a more critical note, Bourdieu’s interest in capital forms extends beyond bringing notice to the other forms of capital to developing a theory around the influential role of capital in the organization and practice of economics and the appropriation of capacity.

A general science of the economy of practices, capable of reappropriating the totality of the practices which, although objectively economic, are not and cannot be socially recognized as economic, and which can be performed only at the cost of a whole labor of dissimulation or, more precisely, euphemization, must endeavor to grasp capital and profit in all their forms and to establish the laws whereby the different types of capital (or power, which amounts to the same thing) change into one another. (Bourdieu, 2011, p. 281)

As observed, Bourdieu aims to develop a comprehensive theory of the economy of practice that encapsulates the very subtle ways that capital is acquired and appropriated but, for some reason, are not adequately captured under the current economic capital model that concentrates solely on monetary capital to the exclusion of more effective ways that capital is generated and maintained and transformed.

In this regard, Bourdieu envisaged three forms of capital: economic capital, which finds form in property rights; cultural capital, which finds form in the acquired educational training; and then social capital, which is expressed in the wealth of social networks and titles possessed by an individual (Bourdieu, 2011). In responding to human capital theorists, Bourdieu criticized that they ignore the other forms of investment in quantifying educational investment and scholastic returns on education. These capital forms are commodities enabling the possessor access to various capabilities and the freedom to choose. Activating these capital forms enables personal well-being pursuit in a way one deems fit and value.

Cultural capital can manifest itself in an embodied form, forming the core of a person's behavioral and mental apparatus. Also, cultural capital can be viewed in an objectified state, expressed in possession of artifacts of value and books, among other accouterments. Finally, the institutionalized state of cultural capital is objectified in certifications guaranteeing the bearer legibility to economically or otherwise specific claims (Bourdieu, 2011). In education, students from different backgrounds inherit different levels of cultural capital (with a positive or negative value). A student from a high-class family might be lucky to have inherited the discipline of his parents through the family's actions ((Bourdieu et al., 2000b)), giving them a positive cultural capital. On the other hand, an unfortunate student with no academic mentors in society or the family might start with a negative value of cultural capital.

Social capital, another essential component of Bourdieu’s capital formulations, points to

“… the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group– which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.”(Bourdieu, 2011, p. 286)

A simple explanation of this might reflect professional guilds, which protect their territory by instituting measures of accession and exit. Consequentially, such systems hope to maintain and develop reproducing mechanisms through inbreeding. Like Cultural capital, the development of social capital takes time to accumulate. It is maintained by societal rites and institutional practices that permit only certain individuals from specific social backgrounds to benefit from the social capital enterprise. Another marked feature of social capital is reciprocity; members of a social union are hard-wired to their obligations when a societal member calls on them.

The distribution of the various capital forms among students in all their formative environments significantly impacts students’ educational outcomes (Bartee & Brown, 2007). Even though ample evidence exists to the contrary (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Tzanakis, 2011), the empirical validity is continuously reiterated in other studies (Hart, 2019; Mills, 2008), sometimes combined with different concepts like habitus, field and practice (Hart, 2019; MacKenzie et al., 2022; Mills, 2008; Pence & Ulusoy, 2023).

**1.11.3.2 Field**

The field refers to a socially competitive environment (Hart, 2019) where individuals operate within a particular paradigm to establish practices between people and institutions. Fields can be any activity space, including schools, churches, mosques, some marketplaces, etc. How individuals interact with these societal systems can affect their life goals and their idea of who they are, which determines their level of freedom in the form of capabilities (Hart, 2019). Just like a profession, fields command specific credentials and mannerisms from those who wish to practice it; therefore, an individual needs particular dispositions (habitus), including cultural capital (Bourdieu & Bourdieu, 2002), to function effectively in a field like education.

Fields are, however, not static but dynamic, and sometimes, they change when there is a new actor in a position of power in the system, as argued by Bourdieu in his ‘Langauge and Symbolic Power book (Bourdieu et al., 2009). This hope for change lays the foundation for what policy can do in shaping the realization of SJ in society and in education in particular.

**1.11.3.3 Habitus**

In delineating his theory of practice, Bourdieu envisaged that practice is the product of habitus and capital plus field (Bourdieu & Bourdieu, 2002). This understanding permeates into the modern-day understanding of subjective institutions that emphasize the roles of agents in determining an institution’s structure and practices (Swartz, 1998). While this suggests that institutions are permeable by almost every individual, it is still worth noting that gaining access to specific fields of power and influence demands the possession of the disciplines of that field. These dispositions are hardwired into us after birth through the family pedagogic action and social environment, among other factors. A child from a low SES family lives their life with the understanding that they need a job in life or a patron to work for, hence their expectations in life.

Habitus is so ingrained in our subconscious (Hart, 2019) so well such that inequalities emanating from it are almost undiscernable. In other words, it legitimizes our decisions even if those decisions do not reflect higher-order aspirations and judges as an individual ability. This very imperceptible phenomenon of the factors underpinning inequality is what Bourdieu intends to uncover in his social action of praxis.

While habitus can be transposed and transformed, it is a structure that is not immutable to change. On the contrary, the very nature of Habitus is the product of what Bourdieu called the Pedagogic Action (PA) (Bourdieu et al., 2000b). This education mobilization starts in the family and is shaped through life. A continuous production and reproduction of the system.

In education, the role of habitus is clouded by standardized exams that seem to misappropriate success to intelligence, looking at the phenotype and ignoring the genotype.

Now, let's turn attention to the three prominent areas of education: educational access, experience, and outcomes concerning the conversion of educational resources to actual capabilities, and perhaps discuss the rationale for combining Sen and Bourdieu.

While the tendency to combine theoretical phenomena is uncommon, it has gained prominence in an age when the main focus of especially research extends beyond a purely academic exercise but includes a motive to drive home policy-worthy outputs that can shape future educational experiences in the best possible way. The Sen Bourdieu Framework has been pioneered by many researchers in Social justice research. Notable among them is Hart (2019), when she applied the framework to investigate ‘education, inequality, and social justice’ at the same time, she demonstrated its empirical efficacy in ‘Aspirations, education, and social justice’ (Hart, 2012a).

The challenges faced, especially concerning operationalizing Sen’s framework, have been duly acknowledged in many studies (Chiappero-Martinetti & Roche, 2009; Grasso, 2002; Hart, 2012b; Saith, 2001). First, as highlighted earlier, it has to do with the difficulty of getting a comprehensive list of capabilities essential to an overall metric of individual comparisons. Sen has eschewed providing a list. The position of this paper is clear; we are looking at how SJ is enacted within the Ghanaian context. Those calling for an overall list are falling into a pitfall of transcendental institutionalism (Sen, 2010) when dealing with issues of justice or injustice. Societies progress at different stages and are imbued with various cultural and social values, making a universal list of capabilities unrealistic. Additionally, some societies might have advanced beyond specific developmental concerns that are of significant concern to some societies. Consequentially, our capabilities to inquire and compare factors will be determined by the peculiar circumstances of the Ghanaian milieu.

Another concern with operationalization generally stems from the fact that there is a tendency to equate operationalization with quantitative metrics (Chiappero-Martinetti & Roche, 2009). This preference for quantitative measures relies on the positivist paradigm in research practice. In this study, we prefer interpretative operationalization over quantification. Indeed, research should aim to generate thought outputs guided by a particular coherent reading of a theory. This should not be misconstrued as a dismissal of the pertinence of numerical data in research.

*Distribution and Recognition*: The Sen-Bourdieu Framework shall be applied to the various stages of our research. The national or Macro stage of the study will be concerned with how social justice is enacted regarding distribution and recognition. In education, when talking about SJ, we generally refer to the state's role in ensuring that every citizen has the right to access opportunities they need to realize their aspirations. This very social contract between communities and their constituents validates the pursuit of social justice at the national level.

Education cannot occur without necessary facilities like kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, high schools, and tertiary academic institutions and structures (Hart, 2019). The availability alone has an impact on the aspirations of children. imagine growing up in a village or neighborhood where no school or access to education is impeded by bad roads, financial obstacles, and the absence of cultural capital, among others; you couldn’t imagine life beyond your vicinity.

Another essential element is recognition; as in Ghana and in most other multiethnic societies, the primary language continuously varies from the language of school instruction. Ghanaians' primary language differs from English, the language of instruction (Nyamekye & Baffour-Koduah, 2021). This alone has created a necessary foundation for inequality; while elite families train their children in English, they grow up with an upper hand compared to children who only get introduced to the English English language at the age of six(6). To make matters worse, while Ghana has close to 75 languages, only a handful of them are recognized for use as the main medium of instruction in lower primary (grades 1 through 3) (Erling et al., 2016; Nyamekye & Baffour-Koduah, 2021). This dimension of the study is critical since it deals with nationwide policies and directly affects equality in access and experience of education.

A black background with white rectangles

Description automatically generatedFigure 2. A Diagram Depicting the Stages of SJ Enactment Applying Sen and Bourdieu

*Access and experience of education*: unlike Hart (2019), who treated access and the experience of schooling separately, our inclination to treat the two concepts under the same level of analysis stems from the fact that the desire to access educational facilities and the factors that affect the experience of education seem closer than access is it to distribution and availability of resources. Another important point worth noting is that treating access and the experience at the institutional level does not preclude it from the role of national policies in access to education. Contrary to that, it emphasizes the concentration of any policy decision to alleviate injustices and ensure SJ.

Institutions define the modus operandi in our social environments by prescribing the opportunities and responsibilities of community members (Rawls & Kelly, 2001). Sen succinctly captures the role of institutions in availing opportunities,

“Individuals live and operate in a world of institutions. Our opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function.” (Sen, 2000; p.142)

Against this backdrop, the aspiration to access and pursue education at high levels, such as tertiary education, has been proven to be somewhat dependent on family pedagogic action and cultural capital (Hart, 2012a; Tzanakis, 2011). The access and utilization of educational resources and their conversion to capabilities are mediated by factors including an individual's inherent dispositions that position them to want a particular commodity. Habitus, developed from an early age, puts some individuals in an advantageous position to benefit more from educational resources. With this knowledge, academic institutions, in our case HEIs, where government policy is manifested, need to position themselves to translate policies to cater to disadvantaged groups that might not have the required capital and habitus to function in the HE field.

*Outcomes of education*: central to Bourdieu and Sen’s framework is converting resources into capabilities and functionings. Also, as might have been stated earlier, resources are sought for their characteristics and not just for their own sake. Like education, the pursuit of education, in our sense, offers the opportunity for constituents to live the life they deem fit value, that is, well-being achievement and well-being freedom.

As pointed out by Bourdieu, it is also a reality that capital forms can be transformed from one form to another (Bourdieu, 2011). Particularly stressed is the role of social capital in reproducing expected behviaours from among the players in a particular field. Dejaeghere (2020) has noted the ubiquity of social networks among the factors that enhanced educational capabilities within the capabilities framework.

Against the above backdrop, it is not hard to discern that, as much as capital forms affect educational attainment, they determine as much the opportunities of every individual completing the same degree from the same institution.

*The conversion process*: the conversion process and factors for any field and society will present some unique characteristics. That notwithstanding, Sen (2008) proposed personal and environmental factors as contingent for converting commodities and capital forms. Nambiar (2013) added economic factors. In addition, some of the peculiar restraining factors are cultural and colonial in Ghana. Israel & Frenkel (2018) comprehensively list conversion factors, including habitus, political milieu, social, economic, and cultural factors.

If I tried to explain with an analogy, Habitus represents the mortar that keeps breaking together in a building. The mortar or concrete is a mixture of water and cement, among other ingredients, that has the property to come together and even produce a more significant effect of keeping it strong and making it safe for habitation. Therefore, along all levels of our analyses, some concepts will appear concurrently to show how infectious and potentious they are.

Figure 3 The diagram below is a conceptual representation of the conversion factors.

A diagram of a company

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**2.1 General Methodology**

In this dissertation, different but connected studies will be embarked on. These studies involve different analysis levels and would invariably result in somewhat different methodological approaches.

That notwithstanding, the study's common denominator is that it is SJ-oriented; therefore, only appropriate deep analysis is preferred to diligently and elaborately unearth the deep structures that shape the concepts being dealt with in this study. In the field of SJ research, the emerging methodology that has been employed extensively is the Transformative mixed method ((Bourdieu et al., 2000b). This method has been so appealing because it provides a cogent philosophical and pragmatic framework that lends it its suitability to deal with social injustices and SJ matters (Mertens, 2007).

This dissertation, borne out of a commitment to SJ, aims not only to paint an image of inequities in the Ghanaian HE space but to engage in a course to bring awareness to the plight of the people and what measures of advocation can be used to improve their conditions. Against this backdrop, the Transformative Mix Method is a good model. This method is suitable for its philosophy of putting at the center, exploring the experiences of deprived communities and societies(Jackson et al., 2018). Additionally, this method allows for the adoption of both quantitative and qualitative approaches and is adaptable to different studies in a single work (Flynn & Waterhouse, 2021).

The current dissertation involves three studies, constituting a rationale for employing a transformative design. Furthermore, it is the argument of this current study that marginalized students end up being marginalized in the HE systems. Consequently, the study explores how national policies have been instrumental and how university structures, even those committed to the course SJ, reflect the inequalities in contemporary policy decisions. Finally, this study would ascertain students' experiences from relatively neglected areas and rural communities about their experiences of SJ support systems at the national and institutional levels. Therefore, the transformative method, an oriented method, is well suited for these purposes.

In chapter 2 of this dissertation, document analysis will examine policy decisions on enhancing equality and equity in the Ghanaian HE landscape. More specifically, special attention would be paid to how they have improved or disenfranchised people from the marginalized strata of Ghanaian society. The notion of government policy influence on HE reform is not a novel issue (Lane, 1983). Also, interviews of key government institutions in charge of policy enactment for HE and the key stakeholders would be conducted. Some of the institutions include but are not limited to the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), the National Teaching Council (NTC), the National Commission on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET), the National Inspectorate Authority (NIA), the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). In addition to that, there are the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ghana Education Service (GES).

Chapter 3 would employ interview sessions with opinion leaders, university faculty, board of directors and other opinion leaders. HEIs in Ghana have a unique composition besides the official opinion leaders; the chiefs of the communities under which they serve equally are considered de facto opinion leaders of the university. Additionally, institutions' statutes would be examined for their institutional philosophy, vision, and mission to reflect the principles of equity and equality and how that has manifested in reducing inequality and/or promoting it. Moreover, institutional inventory for social justice will also be used.

Chapter 4 would use focus groups to interview students. According to Atkinson, (2017) focus groups can be very used to study group or organizational dynamics. Since the aim is to understand how institutional SJ policies are translated into action for the targeted audience, it is only appropriate their lived experiences are taken into consideration. Focus groups are also more convenient than one-on-one interviews since some students from different universities would be involved.