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Education: Human Right or a Privilege?

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Abstract

Standards-based reform in the United States demonstrates a preoccupation with numbers and not the needs of students. Reform policies like No Child Left Behind in 2001 and Common Core Standards attempted uniformity without sufficient support. Thus, implementation of these standardization mechanisms are less than stellar. In this paper, I argue that education reform requires a recontextualization. A recontextualization of education considers teacher quality, various types of resources, and how rights are articulated in an educational context. Using social capital theory as my theoretical framework, the significance of social networks, developed relationships, and adaptive learning environments lay the groundwork for progressive education. Based on these findings, I argue that policy makers and curriculum developers provide extensive professional development and malleable standards that empower teacher autonomy by looking to suggestions from the United Nations. The findings in this exploratory design can help inform a recontextualization of educational policy to achieve more substantive education reform.

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Introduction

The problem of education in the United States is not a problem of standardization. The problem of education in the United States is negligence. The biggest indicator of this would be insufficient funding supplied by the federal government. The nation's GDP is 23.32 trillion yet the educational budget is less than 1% of the budget dedicated to education (US Spending Gov, 2021; World Bank, 2021). This contrasts starkly with the 8% dedicated to the Department of Defense (US Spending Gov, 2021). Further evidence of the country's noncommittal attitude towards education is the spending budget "flatlining" since the 1990s at approximately 0.07% (Chantril, 2023). The stagnant education funding contrasts greatly with the sweeping reforms that colored Congress's floors and state lines that prioritized "outcomes-based" education that emphasized the importance of test scores in the 1990s (Hurst, 2003). The expectation for education to improve without sufficient support represents a gap in understanding between policymakers and reform.

A substantial gap exists between the goals of education reform and the needs of students. This gap emerges from a preoccupation with numbers and not students. This preoccupation with numbers manifested through three instances: evidence-based funding, tracking students, and new funding allocations (McCardle, 2020; Slavin, 2002). All three coalesce to improve the pinnacle of education: standardized testing. Yet, the shift to prioritize numerical gains on test scores proved to have adverse effects on student achievement (McNiel, 2001). The solution further complicated the problem it aimed to fix.

For too long, the laissez-faire approach to education in the United States exacerbated gross inequities. These gross inequities are a direct result of social issues never addressed by the United States. These social issues are a result of generations of disenfranchisement, segregation,

and a violation of civil, political and human rights. However, advancement is possible for the United States by taking a new approach: a human rights-based approach. As a proponent to the International Bill of Rights, the United States can change American negligence to global conscientiousness.

Global conscientiousness begins with the United States considering international recommendations as remedies to the decaying state of American education. As a member of the Permanent 5 of the United Nations' Security Council (P5), the United States has a unique position in the international human rights area. By considering the system that the United States helped to build, American education would benefit from international recommendations. In particular, recommendations from both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and United Nations Education summit would supply the reform that education needs.

This paper aims to close the gap between education reform and educational implementation. Past education reform prioritized numbers over individuals. Educational implementation delegated tasks to states with starkly different approaches and worsened social equities. Social equities are often alleviated through legislation and policy, particularly done at the federal level with civil rights and at the international level with human rights. Considering this precedent between a body of authority and the individual impacting education accessibility and quality, this paper also highlighted civil and human rights as a uniform baseline for the diverse participants in this study. In order to do this, I investigated people's perceptions of their education experiences to inform educational improvement to answer two research questions:

1. What were indicators that people identified with a higher quality of education in comparison to lower education?

2. Were people with a higher educational attainment compared to people with a lower educational attainment more likely to perceive education as a basic human right rather than a privilege?

In this paper, I take a mixed-methods approach through 15 interviews and 56 survey respondents both within and outside the United States. Qualitative findings were deduced from semi-structured interviews with an interview guide. Quantitative findings were concluded from coded segments in both interviews and the Likert scale rankings from participants. The guiding framework was Social Capital Theory by Pierre Bourdieu detailing the significance of accumulation of human capital through relationships (Bourdieu, 1984; Grenfell, 2009). The first research question was informed largely by the qualitative interviews that posited the following findings: the overwhelming importance of contextualizing education, education is sufficiently lacking in both civil rights and human rights discourse, and the impact of teacher value. The second research question posited the finding that respondents with higher educational qualification were less likely to perceive education as a basic human right compared to their lower educational qualification counterparts.

This paper contributes to pre-existing literature by documenting educational experiences and chronicling disparities surrounding civil rights, human rights, and general education. These disparities resulted in policy implications suggesting a contextualization of educational settings, a need for greater resources. Further implications include the acknowledgement of discrepancies not only between the public and private dichotomy, but also through unregulated American education at large. Little research has been done to evaluate educational quality based on perception. This paper aims to provide a holistic view of education beyond the metrics based focus associated with test scores and resource quantity.

Background

A Brief History on Educational Inequity in the United States Based on Class

Education in the United States continues to lack despite the country's advancements. Despite the rise of gross domestic product (GDP), a more diverse population, and more knowledge available since its founding, American education still mirrors the same discrepancies that it had over three centuries ago.

Discrepancies in American education started with the colonial era when upper class families utilized private educators (Paterson, 2021; Lynch 2016). To contrast, lower-class children had to decide between supporting their family through labor or education. More often than not, they chose apprenticeships, factories, farming, or other forms of low-skilled work (Murray, 2009). This prioritization of labor reinstated class differences until it no longer proved viable. Problems of literacy and job execution complicated the relationship between child workers and their respective employers (Toffler, 1970). In order to standardize the expectations, the industrial model of education was introduced. The industrial model of education – also known as the factory model – shepherds children into classrooms with singular instructors as though mimicking an assembly line for the purpose of mirroring their future work (Toffler, 1970). Ultimately, employers – typically factory-owners – needed a certain kind of worker produced and education was the solution to this growing problem (Waters, 2015).

Yet, the solution was intermediary. The advent of the Industrial Revolution and the concerns about the labor mechanization led to some of the first education reforms. Other reforms were spearheaded by Horace Mann and religious leaders to teach moral, value, and basic skills to child workers (Encyclopedia, n.d.). Yet, the problem of high teacher turnover, lack of uniform

standards, and inconsistencies further propagated educational inequities. Remedies to account for this led to the professionalization of educators beginning with normal schools and later teaching colleges to improve teacher quality (Paterson, 2021; Ravitch, 2002). Yet, disproportionate resources available to upper and lower class children continued the inequities. Furthermore, reforms proved less than satisfactory.

A Precursor to Standards-Based Reform in the United States

This section will provide a brief summary of education reform in the United States. The earliest reform policies merely established accessibility. Commonly referred to as the Father of American Education, Horace Mann perceived a universal right to education. He advocated for common schools to teach basics like hygiene, morals, and religion before establishing the Massachusetts State Board of Education (Carleton, 2009). Soon after, Massachusetts would be the first state to establish compulsory laws. New York in 1853 would be the second to establish this accessibility and eventually all states in 1913 (Katz, 1976; Watson, 2008). Accessibility was principle over quality given the factory-model previously established.

Early education reform established baseline knowledge that children should know beginning with G. Stanley Hall. In *The Contents of Children's Minds,* he measured the variation of children's knowledge and recognized the different strengths of children (Stanley, 1883). It would not be until American Education philosopher, John Dewey, that further structural reform would advance education. Dewey argued for schools to be an extension of society and leverage individual student interests – a concept that arguably lends itself to educational electives. (Dewey, 1916). His successor, educational psychologist Charles H. Judd pivoted from the factory-based view of education to inform workers to education informing future citizens. Edward Thorndike emphasized the importance of data collection. In informing future citizens,

education required understanding where gaps of knowledge existed and conducting periodic surveys to assess quality of education, teacher quality, required skills, and facilities' conditions (Thorndike, 1906; Ayres, 1917). This symbolized a shift to data driving education reform.

Data proved momentous for education reform. One educational milestone would be Brown v. The Board of Education in 1954 that ruled separate did not mean inherently equal (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). Surveys of school conditions in predominantly African-American schools versus White schools illustrated how both resources and opportunities were disparate. While Brown v. Board outlawed separate but equal facilities, the lasting effects of disenfranchisement persisted. Institutions like The National Teachers Corps promoted social justice and increased teacher accessibility in the 1960s (Rogers, 2008). The 1963 Coleman Report was requested by the Department of Education following the popularity of surveys and documentation of educational quality. The report did not provide the desirable results. The Coleman report found that social, political, economic, and cultural factors do indeed impact education(Coleman, 1963). As a result, the federal government passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and other legislation to provide more accessibility to education (Kober, 2000). ESEA offered grants to both educational institutions, organizations, and community centers to create educational equity (United States, 1965). Shifts in funding became the new policy for educational reform.

The effects of 1960s educational reforms focused on desegregation and carrying out Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty (Paul, 2016). The provisions of the law included professional development and more investment in textbooks and other educational materials carried out by the Department of Education (United States, 1965). More specifically, ESEA's provision, Title I, served to close the gaps in math, reading, and writing between suburban and

urban schools (Paul, 2016; United States, 1965) The distribution of financial dollars would have to be reauthorized every five years and since 1965, the US government has continued to do so (Paul, 2016). Federal spending increased from the 1960s up until the 1980s (Chantril, 2023). Yet, a scathing report entitled 'A Nation at Risk' in 1983 issued the new approach beyond funding (Greer, 2018).

In the 1980s, there were calls for a nationalized American education system (University of Georgia, n.d). The result of these calls was a standards-based curriculum (Sadovnik, et al. 2001). Furthermore, the Department of Education was founded as a response in 1989 (McMeekin and Dede, 1980).This top-down approach became especially difficult to implement when local districts did not want to adhere to the standards being imposed on them. One instance includes Illinois state districts suing the Board of Education for trying to implement these measures (Murphy, 1989). The resistance to standards-based reform would persist even in the wake of No Child Left Behind and Common Core Standards, both extensions of the data-driven policy intended to placate standards based reform.

The Standard Based Policies that Complicated Educational Inequity: No Child Left Behind (2001) and Common Core (2010)

Given the opposition to top-down nationalistic approaches, the federal government pivoted to incentivizing states through the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In 2001, Congress passed No Child Left Behind to "improve the academic achievement of the disadvantaged" and expand upon the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA, 2011). No Child Left Behind pressed for "highly qualified teachers", "evidence-based practices", and encouraged parent participation (Simpson, Lacava, and Graner, 2004). In theory, federal intervention would

improve the problem of education after surveys and standards-based education outlined the distinctions (Simpson, Lacava, and Graner, 2004). Yet, improvement was not the result. Under the perception of more flexibility for states to delegate their own educational standards, achievement gaps did not decrease (Ladd and Loeb, 2013).

Research has demonstrated the limited effectiveness of No Child Left Behind. The efficacy of No Child Left Behind revealed to have little to no impact on the educational outcomes of American children, with 0.01 of a standard deviation (Reardon, 2013). What this means is that no statistical significance was found when comparing the progress of white students and people of color. Furthermore, the metrics of success proved futile. Differences in "proficiency" gaps – determinants of achievement – were broadly defined and easily allowed for under-resourced schools and students to be further penalized (Reardon, 2009; Ryan, 2004). Furthermore, the preoccupation with test scores instead of comparative growth disincentivizes under resourced schools and students does not reflect their full growth (Ryan, 2004).

More broadly, recent education reform's preoccupation with numbers harms students. The Common Core curriculum went further than No Child Left Behind to provide guidance of what standards should be taught to students, yet no resources were extended to help under-resourced students (Geer, 2018). Hasty implementation of Common Core State Standards outlined expectations for states required "fundamental changes" (Kober and Rentner, 2011). Teachers faced the brunt of Common Core by having to carry out these new standards with less than 10 hours of professional development (Greer, 2018). Furthermore, these standard-based reforms persist to ignore important factors that extend beyond the classroom. As long as standard-based reforms prioritize skills and test scores over the students, the achievement gap will persist in American education indefinitely.

The Achievement Gap As a Result of Socioeconomic Status

Educational inequity is commonly conceived as the achievement gap. The achievement gap commonly refers to the differences in academic performance between people of color and white people (Jeynes, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006). The achievement gap arose from disparate funding and racial disenfranchisement for people of color (Gardner, 2007). Both disparate funding and disenfranchisement can be distilled down to a common outcome: a decline of opportunity (Welner and Carter, 2013). In order to understand a decline of opportunity, it is necessary to understand how income impacts the achievement gap. The achievement gap is determined by income because it explains the amount of accessibility resources (Reardon, 2013).

The income achievement gap acknowledges how income impacts educational performance. While the achievement gap primarily focuses on race and educational outcomes, the income achievement gap acknowledges the higher investments that higher income individuals make. Furthermore, greater resources are correlated with higher income (Reardon, 2013). Yet, income is only one factor of what impacts educational inequity. Income is but a piece of the puzzle to contextualize the significant driver of educational inequity: socioeconomic status.

Socioeconomic status can explain inequities that extend beyond income. Even prior to attending the classroom, prior research demonstrated that lower income children hear an average of 30 million less words by age 3 compared to their higher socioeconomic peers (Hart and Risley, 1995). While income would be perceived to be a primary determinant, the number of words spoken to a child are dictated by several factors beyond income. Various factors that impact socioeconomic status include income, occupation, education, race, and religious factors (American Psychological Association, n.d.) Socioeconomic status provides a more holistic

perspective on the achievement gap. Socioeconomic status consideration explains the gap beyond race and income, but also acknowledges the decline of opportunity and disparity of resources that often impact educational attainment. Furthermore, a global study from 2019 found the United States to be one of three countries with the highest increase of achievement gaps despite standards-based education (Chmielewski, 2019). The United States is well-resourced for education but continues to exacerbate educational inequity. Ultimately, educational inequity requires a deeper understanding of beyond material resources and consideration of the impact of relationships, social networks, and schools.

Theoretical Framework

Social Capital Theory: The Impact from Relationships, Social Networks, and Schools

The guiding theoretical framework is Social Capital Theory first introduced by Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman (Liou and Chang, 2008). Social Capital Theory describes the phenomenon of the accumulation of capital through social networks, individuals, and institutions (Bourdieu, 1980; Greenfell, 2009). Social capital theory was a response to human capital, advocated by University of Chicago economists, Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz. Human capital theory evaluates institutions, like schools, based on their propensity for future attainment (Robeyns, 2006). Critics like Ingrid Robeyn asserted that human capital theory to be "fragmentized" and not reflective of "capabilities" that students incur in these institutions. This paper finds that social capital theory as a framework accounts for this accounting for the influence incurred by built relationships and norms. Social capital theory's ability to account for these variable factors reflects the changing educational policy landscape.

Education policy must provide necessary structures for social institutions that are ever changing. Educational policy's prior usage of policy borrowing sets a precedent in educational reform (Steiner-Khamsi, 2013). Social capital theory considers the societal implications that impact an individual and considers what formative environments can aid. More explicitly, social capital theory informs education policy because of its ability to explain how relationships, resources, and individuals comprise leverageable capital (Liou and Chang, 2008). More concretely, social capital theory can be contextualized as the following: a student's first socialization outside of the household is done through school. At school, the student is enriched by the knowledge delivered to them by their teacher and socialized by their fellow students. The student is able to accrue knowledge by becoming a stakeholder within the classroom through participation. As a result, the more invested the student is, the larger their educational return will be given that there is a sufficient amount of resources.

Coleman's definition of Social Capital Theory hinges on its function (Coleman, 1988). He posits that the individual "actor" is shaped by their environment and in turn imposes a response. An inherent interconnectedness between "actor" and environment parallels that of a student within the classroom (Coleman, 1988). Social Capital Theory is particularly useful in educational policy when considering education reform. Given the social nature of education, it provides a holistic framework in evaluating the environment that a student is placed in. One instance of social capital theory being leveraged would be Education Action Zones in England (Gewritz et. al, 2005). The application of this theory facilitated educational policy by promoting interconnectedness between the individual and the community, particularly through relationship building. Social capital theory informs policy by accounting for the ambiguities that are unique to education.

Literature Review

Human Rights: A Catalyst to Social Capital Theory and Education Reform

In order to successfully partake in social capital theory, the recognition of one's resources is essential. Thus, human rights also has applicability to social capital theory. Social capital theory has many stakeholders: individuals, organizations, institutions (Coleman, 1986; Coleman 1988). These various stakeholders govern themselves in different ways. However, the way that they are governed is predetermined by the resources that they have. The resources that these institutions have are dictated by their "obligations and expectations, information channels, and their social norms" (Coleman, 1988). All three of these categories are informed by rights. Rights facilitate all three categories by setting a common dialogue. Thus, the rights of an individual impact their ability to interact with others and thus impacts their ability to attain capital (Danilenko, 2017; UNGA, 1948).

One human right is the right to education, granted by Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The right explicitly states in subclause 2 that, "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality… It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship…" (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). The full development of the human personality means the full development of the individual as a contributor to society. A contributor of society is an actor interacting with their network to accumulate more knowledge and human capital. Prior research regarding education as a human right leveraged schools as institutions that inform future citizens of their capabilities, their entitlements, and their rights (Newman, 2013). Contextualizing education as a reflection of one's background, accumulated

knowledge, and socialization requires understanding education's significance as a catalyst. In absence of contextualization, education is a magnifier of inequity and not an equalizer.

A Parallel Story of Education: Human Rights and its History

The same sources of inequity that procure the achievement gap are the same sources of inequity that necessitated human rights. Inequalities, discrimination, and injustice between nations and their citizens required a covenant of international security, just as was done through shifts to standards-based reform. While the original purpose of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was to prevent another world war and Holocaust, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights intended to close gaps that nations failed to address (OHCHR, 2018). The United States signed on to this aspirational document.

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights procured 30 articles, including the right to education (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). The right to education included the right to a basic, free, compulsory education. However, the article pressed forward to demand education scaffold the human personality and promote international cooperation (United Nations General Assembly, 1948), "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality." Contrary to the standards-based reform of the United States, the universal right to education contextualizes education. There is more to education than rigid standards and unilateral teaching. Embedded in the fine print, there is an understanding that education must be of sustainable quality to ensure the acquisition of all other rights. Yet, standards-based reforms have not bothered to contextualize education in the same facet as human rights has. Instead, the federal government delegated states to oversee their education, just as was done in colonial times (U.S. Constitution, 1791).

Another parallel between education and human rights is the increasing attempt of accountability. Similar to the standards-based reform in the 1980s, the United Nations ushered in the Decade of Education from 1995-2004 (OHCHR, n.d.). The provisions included a Plan of Action demanding "an eradication of literacy and direct education towards the full development of the human personality" (United Nations General Assembly, 1994). Furthermore, the plan of action explicitly stated it applied to all countries to evaluate needs, improve regional capacities, enhance national capacities, coordinate human rights education, and make human rights education more readily accessible (United Nations General Assembly, 1994: 2-6). The parallels between human rights education and general education are embedded in a shared trend: adherence to data.

This ushered in an age of evaluation and strengthening through data. In 2000, the United Nations issued an international evaluation of the progress that countries made following the initial 1994 declaration of the global decade (United Nations General Assembly, 2004). While principaling focusing on human rights education, greater evaluation metrics were called for. Furthermore, discrepancies existed between countries' implementation. The highest responsive rates to evaluation was Europe with 39.5%, followed by the Americas with 20%, Africa with 13% and Asia with 6% (United Nations General Assembly, 2004). This variation in responsive rate parallels different school districts' during standard-based reforms. Periodic evaluations to evaluate human rights education development continued until the end of the decade in 2004. In the evaluation, it called for an extension of the Decade of Education from 2005-2014 that included an emphasis on "comparative evaluation of experiences" with greater participation of member nations (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2004:9).

Trends Towards Evaluation and Contextualization: Education and Human Rights

A shift towards evaluation as a policy reform became a guiding mechanism for both education and human rights. The development of the United States Department of Education in 1979 just before standards-based reform in the 1980s signaled for greater accountability amongst states (McMeekin and Dede, 1980). Similarly, the United Nations expanded on its evaluation mechanism when the General Assembly created the Human Rights Council and Universal Periodic Review in 2006 (United Nations Human Rights Council, n.d.). The Universal Periodic Review contextualized human rights in each United Nations member country. Contextualizing human rights meant creating dialogue surrounding human rights. This included previous records of human rights adherences and violations as documented by the state, independent nongovernmental organizations, and individuals (United Nations Human Rights Council, n.d.).

This evaluation of independent researchers and government organizations guiding human rights evaluations parallels educational researchers in the United States. In the United Nations, special Procedures – also known as special rapporteurs – fall under the category of individuals, given that they are experts who make periodic visits to countries to conduct field research on human rights (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2022). The first instatement of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education began in 1998 but was recently renewed in 2020 (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2023.). The purpose of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education served to identify educational inequities and their causes in various countries. This process mimics education research in the United States. However, an applicability of human rights considerations to education as a contextualizer has yet to materialize.

Similar internationally-based education research focused on the achievement gap, a problem typically associated with the United States. The largest driver of achievement gap was socioeconomic status. In particular, the United States, South Korea, and Malaysia had the largest gap increase from 1964 to 2015 (Chimielewski, 2019). Educational inequities have only grown despite the United States' positionality as a developed country and standards-based education. The result of this educational evaluation focuses on numbers and not the context that students are in.

Educational evaluation often focused on measurement of resources, evaluations of school environment by outside actors, and test scores (Ladd and Loeb, 2013). Prior research has posited that test scores are extremely poor measures of school quality. (Reardon, 2019). This preoccupation of numbers has in turn made schools "refractors" of educational inequity given this focus on numerical evaluation (Downey and Condron, 2016). This is particularly concerning considering that education is the impetus for social mobility (Reardon, 2019; Downey and Condron, 2016).

Education as a driver of social mobility shares the same aspirations as human rights for equality. Both education and human rights as concepts intend to advance society. Further similarities exist between human rights education and general education in the United States. The United Nations' renewed interest in the education timeline coincides with the push towards standards-based education with evidenced-based practices, No Child Left Behind and Common Core standards. These parallel structures of educational and human rights evaluation are obvious: both structures aim to improve regulation in their respective fields. Yet, accountability often complicates this. For example, the United Nations uses progressive realization to evaluate countries. Progressive realization contextualizes a nation's human rights progress based on their

resources. Such resources include GDP, nongovernmental organizations, and global context (Blyberg and Hofbauer, 2014). This parallels how many educational surveys, such as the Illinois 5Essentials, leverage the same holistic approach to better assess educational environments (Illinois State Board of Education, 2018. Despite these shared characteristics, considerations of education and human rights have been grossly understudied.

The Gaps Between Rights and Privileges Within Education

Given the international nature of human rights, it is important to first consider rights at a national level. The United States does not have a federal right to education. Prior research has investigated the reasons: questions of state sovereignty, educational federalism, opposition met by Congress and the court system (Robinson, 2019). First, questions of state sovereignty result from the Constitution. The Constitution's Tenth Amendment explicitly states that powers not directly stated within the Constitution to the states (Constitution, 1791). To further complicate the lack of federal protections, educational federalism exacerbates state sovereignty. Educational federalism is the division of education into federal, state, and local levels (Robinson, 2020). While localization is important to contextualizing education, there are varying interpretations of it. Each state has a right to education, but states like Michigan acknowledge that it does not provide a "robust" quality to education (Bowman, 2019). Lastly, opposition by Congress and the justice system are preoccupied by an excess of federal dollars pooled into local governments are at the center of the debate (Pasachoff, 2019). This preoccupation with numbers rather than students breeds the inequities between students and their corresponding educational facilities.

It is undoubtedly certain that inequities emerging within educational systems is a result of inadequate contextualization of education. I hypothesize that the United States' inability to commit to a federal right to education has resulted in educational inequities. The reasoning for

this is because a lack of a federal right means federal regulation is not mandated. Furthermore, an absence of regulation means lost context regarding education. Thus, the data and methods of this study aimed to investigate the context surrounding education and perceptions of it as a privilege or a human right.

Data and Methods

Methodology of Data Collection

This paper took a mixed-methods approach to learning about the educational inequity, people's different educational environments, and how that impacts people's perceptions of their educational experiences. Ultimately, people's perceptions helped to formulate their articulate of education as a basic human right or as a privilege. This paper functioned as an exploratory design. An explanatory design is not intended to be generalizable and features a small sample size (USC, 2023). While prior research exists regarding educational inequity, education policy, and perceptions of educational environments, little research exists on the human rights' applicability on education. Therefore, this paper leveraged a mixed-methods approach to provide preliminary data on the subject.

Prior to data collection, this study was exempted by the University of Chicago's Institutional Review Board in December 2022 after minimal risk was determined. Data was collected from the beginning of January 2023 until the end of March 2023 for a total of three three months. Participants were recruited via convenience sampling. This process includes posting to social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, and LinkedIn. The original poster advertised the survey. Following that, the survey included the opportunity to be interviewed.

Data Sources

Participants included all English-speaking individuals over the age of 18. This was purposeful given the paper's function as an exploratory design. The age demographic of survey participants ranged from 18 to 75 years of age and the demographic for interviewed participants was 18 to 64 years of age. Although secondary education institutions were initially categorized as being either public, private, or vocational schools, greater diversity existed. Participants secondary education programming ranged from neighborhood high schools, International Baccalaureate, private schools with admissions tests, and more. The various different kinds of secondary programming was an indicator for the variation in educational levels as well.

Variation also existed in educational levels. Education levels also ranged from high school diploma (or G.E.D. equivalent) to a Juris Doctorate. A majority of participants had completed some college or lower. Due to this, participants were grouped into two categories: low educational attainment and high educational attainment. Low educational attainment was defined as completing some college or lower. Higher educational attainment was defined as completing a Bachelor's Degree or higher. These definitions were adapted from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development's Factbook (OECD, 2015). These definitions reflected a global perspective of education and thus remain relevant to the analysis of this paper.

This study also was not limited to geographical location. Given the study's ability to be done remotely using a computer, a global perspective informed the data. Participants were from 16 different states, spanned 8 countries, and represented 3 continents. Those countries included the United States of America, Switzerland, Spain, the Philippines, Indonesia, China, Taiwan, and England. The mixed-methods approach was divided into two parts: surveys (for quantitative measures) and interviews (for qualitative measures).

Quantitative Methods: Survey Data

The surveys are a particular formative practice given their cost-efficiency and timeliness when a common, accessible language is provided (Couper, 2005). The surveys included six biographical questions and sixteen questions with a Likert scale. The Likert Scale in this paper used the five-point system ranging from strongly disagree, slightly disagree, neutral, slightly agree, and strongly agree. The Likert scale is commonly used in both educational and social sciences research given its easy implementation (Joshi, et al, 2015). The questions for the survey ranged greatly to provide a baseline understanding of people's perceptions about their education. Given the exploratory design of this paper, the survey is a replicable tool for future research to be conducted regarding educational experiences, perceptions of education as a right or a privilege, and a contextualized approach to education quality evaluation.

The purpose of these questions sought to understand how enjoyable participants' educational experiences were, the fairness of their educational experiences being defined by and whether or not they perceived education as a right or a privilege. An additional question was open-ended for participants to add any additional context, comments, or concerns about the survey. The questions can be found in the appendix at the end of this paper. Finally, the question offered an invitation for a follow-up interview by providing the option to leave their email address.

Qualitative Methods: Interview Data

The second component of this study included interviews. All interview participants were sent an invitation to their email after consenting to a follow-up. Out of the 56 respondents, 30 of them consented to a follow-up interview. Not all those who consented to the follow-up

completed the interview. Only 15 respondents participated in the follow-up interview which is an attribute of attrition. Attrition is when there is a loss of observed units (in this case, research participants) in a study (US Department of Education, n.d). However, participants who did complete the follow-up interview provided rich insight to their responses.

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured setting over Zoom. All participants consented to the interview recorded, transcribed, and coded for this paper. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity and their corresponding educational institution. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to over an hour. The purpose of interviews granted interested survey participants the opportunity to further explain their responses. Additionally, some participants wanted to clarify their responses and opted to interview. Ultimately, interviews are able to capture what numerical values can not (Berg, 2009; Hipp, 2012).

Transcription Process and Coding Revision

The interviews were first transcribed using Otter.ai. Otter.ai is an artificial intelligence transcription software that allows audio files to be imported. While the software does save time in the transcription process, it does not always capture language as it is originally heard. Therefore, further review of transcriptions is required. After the initial transcription process was completed, I reviewed the transcriptions and corrected any mistakes such as the usage of slang, accents, or unaccounted for language. This practice of revising transcriptions intended to capture the complete and full language of participants.

Once the edited transcriptions were complete, I imported them to MAXQDA. MAXQDA is a transcription and coding software. This software allowed me to code segments of the interviews. The coding process was informed by Johnny Saldana's *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Research Methods.* The coding was first informed by two cycles: the First Cycle and

the Second Cycle (Saldana, 2009: 3). The First Cycle of coding included descriptive coding where a string of words for preliminary coding. The Second Cycle included a refinement of codes and occurred after the First Cycle was done (Saldana, 2009: 4). These two cycles are indicative of "precoding"(Saldana, 2009: 16-17). However, an additional cycle was required for my coding. The additional cycle helped condense the codes from the original 138 codes including 577 coded segments. This process is described as "codifying and categorizing" (Saldana, 2009: 8-9).

Codifying and categorizing creates a hierarchy of codes where the most expansive code is the main category and then the subcategories comprise the codes. The process of coding and categorizing is then refined by repeating the process for clarity. This process condensed the original 138 codes down to 11 broader categories. The eleven broader categories were then further distilled into three categories that shape the findings of this paper: contextualizing education is necessary to improving educational quality, the importance of teacher value, and the dichotomy between human rights and civil rights.

Positionality

As a student who attended a Selective Enrollment in Chicago Public Schools, I acknowledged that I benefited from a higher quality of education than others within the school district. For individuals who also were in Chicago Public Schools, discussing their educational experiences may have been hard to articulate. Furthermore, my position as a public school student made those who attended public schools feel more comfortable explaining their experiences. To contrast, those who attended private or specialized schools often expanded on their schooling too. Given the various geographical locations of participants, they often provided context when discussing their educational experience. My position as an urban student attending a public

school is different from rural and or small town attendees. Furthermore, some international students were more careful when describing marginalized persons in their country.

Findings and Analysis

The two research questions aimed to find a more equitable way of assessing educational quality into a formal language that is easily understood: whether or not education is a human right or a privilege and what indicators are associated. After completing 15 semi-structured interviews and reviewing 57 survey responses, a noticeable trend emerged. The noticeable trend demonstrated that a privileged education required a qualifier. From there, three main categories emerged from the data: the significance of teacher value adding to educational quality, the importance of education being contextualized, and the consideration of rights.

Quantitative Findings

Surveying: A Comparison Between Lower and Higher Education Attainment Perceptions

Perceptions about educational experience indicated one trend: those with higher educational attainment had more positive perceptions of their elementary and high school experiences. Elementary and high school experiences were explicitly labeled in the survey given the Universal Declaration of Human Rights's Article 26 articulating that "education shall be free in the elementary and fundamental stages" (United Nations, 1948). The averaged higher educational attainment's positive elementary experience was 4.23 (slightly agree on Likert scale) compared to 3.62 (neutral). A similar trend was found in high school experiences: higher educational attainment averaged 4.23 compared to 4.00 for lower educational attainment. It is important to note that this is not a casual statistic, but a slight trend exists where those with more

positive experiences achieved higher educational attainment. Therefore, it is important to cultivate positive learning environments.

When cultivating learning environments, it is important to plan for more than resources. On average, participants indicated that they slightly agreed (a 4 on the Likert scale) that their education should be evaluated in terms of resources. However, this paper also found that participants strongly agreed (a 5 on the Likert scale) that more than resources was required to improve education quality. The slight preference for more than resources indicates that a shift is required within educational reform. Rather than evaluating principally through material resources, funding, and property quality, this study reaffirms prior study that a more holistic approach is necessary in educational evaluation (Ladd and Loeb, 2013; Reardon, 2019). Furthermore, when using the UChicago Impact Survey's 5Essentials' definition of resources including supportive teachers and integrated school community, participants also demonstrated a strong preference of resources as important to assessing educational quality (Illinois State Board of Education, 2023). More expansive definitions of resources are necessary to evaluate education.

One attempt to measure education more historically is evaluating attitudes towards education. In particular, this paper aimed to be informed by the holistic approach of social capital theory and human rights as a qualifier of quality education. This paper also found that those with higher educational attainment were more likely to perceive education as a privilege rather than a basic human right. Higher educational attainment was the receipt of a Bachelor's Degree or higher (OECD, 2015). Using the Likert scale's 5-point metric from strongly disagree to strongly agree, people with higher educational attainment averaged a 3.9 (slightly agree) in agreement with the statement "Education is a privilege." To contrast, people with lower educational

attainment averaged 3.31 (neutral) in agreement. Another finding to reaffirm this statistic would be that people with lower education attainment strongly agreed that education was a basic human right with an average of 4.82 (tending towards strongly agree). People with higher education attainment indicated a slightly agreed preference of education as a basic human right. This finding was not what I initially hypothesized. I assumed that given higher education attainment, people would be more likely to see it was a right. Yet, it appeared that those with higher educational attainment acknowledged the privilege of their education. Similar traits emerged in the coding interview segments as well.

It is also critical to consider the data in general. All participants surveyed tended to strongly agree (80.4%) that education was a human right. To contrast, only 44.6% of participants perceived education to be a privilege. Compared to the two subset populations, participants typically viewed education as a basic human right as opposed to a privilege.

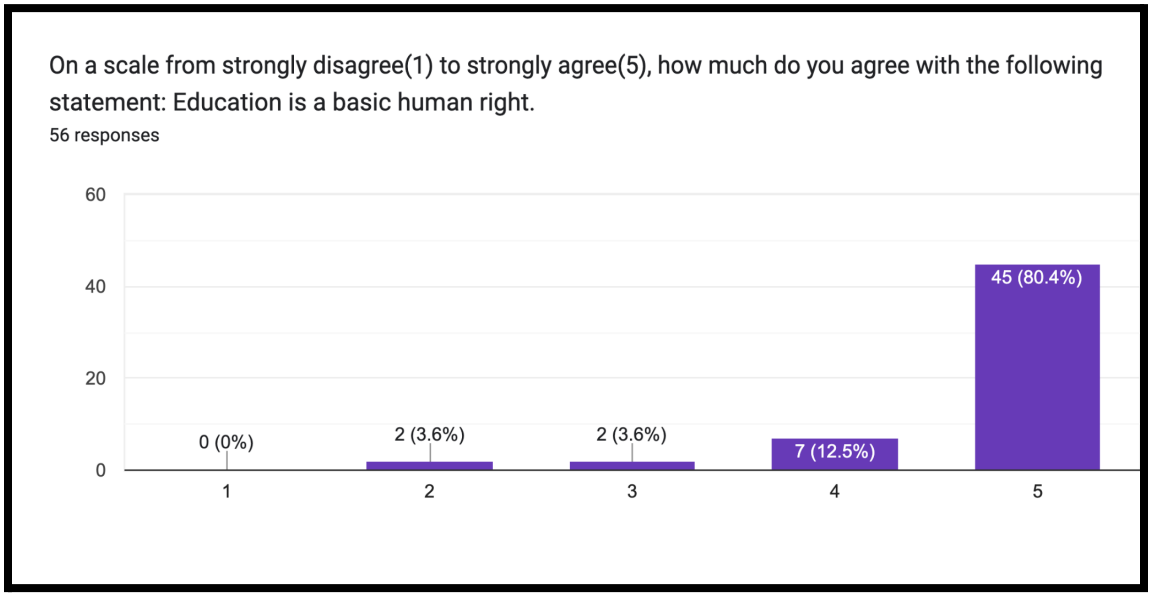

Figure 1.1 Bar Graph of All Participants' Response to Education Framed as a Human Right

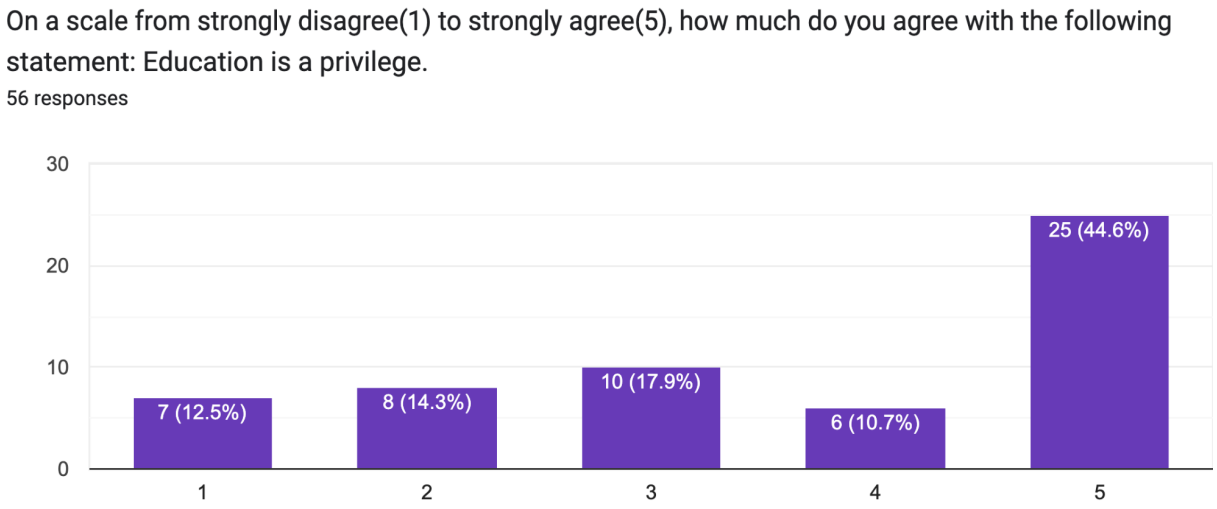

Figure 1.2 Bar Graph of All Participants's Response to Education Framed as a Privilege

Mixed Methods Findings

Interviewing: The Frequency of Coded Segments

The quantitative aspect of interviewing analyzed the frequency of coded segments. The frequency of coded segments was counted using MAXQDA's code system. The higher the number of coded segments, that meant more participants referenced a particular category's characteristics. Given the initial precoding and refining stage, the broader categories shape the subheadings of this section. The five most frequently coded categories were: teacher value, resource significance, education in its current state is presently lacking, the importance of contextualizing education, teacher value, and the consideration of rights.

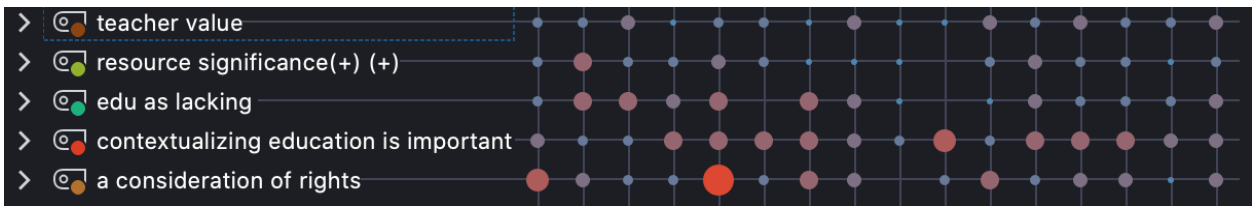

Figure 1.1 - Coding Matrix of Top 3 Categories: Teacher Value, Contextualizing Education is Important and a Consideration of Rights

The matrix demonstrates the larger the circle, the more frequently the code was utilized during the fifteen interviews. Teacher value had the smallest number of subcategories and thus was evoked the least out of the three major codes. A consideration of rights was the second most used code given the similarities that participants drew between education and human rights as an incremental unit. To contrast, contextualizing education was a broader category and thus was a code more widely used.

Contextualizing Education

In order from highest to lowest, the largest coded segment was the importance of contextualizing education with approximately 323 segments. The largest subcategory defined ' education as lacking'. Education as lacking demonstrated where school curriculums were accommodating and rigidly taught to the test. Furthermore, the privatization of schooling and education as a commodity also demonstrated the dichotomy of public vs private education. Education as lacking totaled 88 coded segments.

The second largest subsection included 'issues outside the classroom impacting the classroom'. 71 coded segments emerged from interview data including complications arising from racial and cultural disconnect, socioeconomic status, and attendance zoning. Large scale educational evaluation primarily focuses on resources and test scores rather than individual characteristics of students and their school environments.

The impact of resources regarding educational quality could not be ignored in this study. The frequency of 'resources' spanned 60 coded segments for 'resources' being a significant

indicator of educational quality. It is important to note that while it is an indicator of educational quality, it is by no means the determinant factor of quality.

The Consideration of Rights: Where Does Education Lie?

Rights discourse in reference to both educational evaluation and learned subject matter led to a total of 138 coded segments. Within both the surveys and interviews, participants were asked to evaluate how thoroughly they learned about a familiar and unfamiliar concept of rights. The familiar concept of rights is 'civil' rights which participants often associate with nation-based (23 coded segments), legal obligations (6 coded segments), or social and political movements(3 coded segments). To contrast, the anticipated concept that would be unfamiliar was human rights. Participants cited human rights were perceived to be fundamental rights (12 coded segments), more universal (4), or as a social contract (1 coded segment). This comparison provided rich insight to more nuanced but applicable 'real life' knowledge that is often advocated for in the schooling system. While participants drew distinctions between civil rights and human rights, human rights were overwhelmingly perceived to be limited with 66 coded segments. This is particularly alarming considering human rights equated the same 'basic' status that education was attributed (31 coded segments). Furthermore, human rights shared similar characteristics of protection against discrimination and the ability to be a driver of social mobility like education (6 coded segments). Education as a mechanism for social mobility included 4 coded segments. Education and human rights shared similar numbers of coding segments and associations as reducers of social inequity.

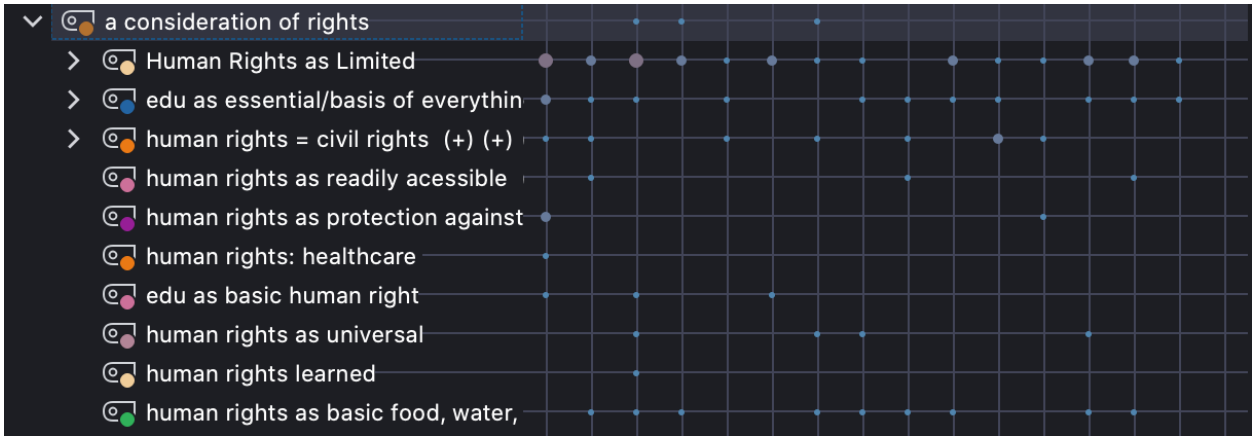

Figure 1.2 - Coding Matrix of A Consideration of Rights and its Subcategory

Teacher Value

Teacher value had the third highest frequency of coding segments. These coding segments emphasized the importance of high quality teachers (45 coded segments). High quality teachers were associated with building teacher-student relations. Common characteristics included high teacher responsiveness (5 coded segments), adaptability of teachers and professors (4 coded segments), and attentiveness (2 coded segments). Current teacher evaluations rarely offer this level of breakdown when evaluating 'supportive teachers' (Illinois State Board of Education, 2023).

The other subcategory that comprised the teacher value segment included negative implications. The negative implications depicted how teachers negatively impacted a student's educational perception (15 coded segments). Teachers negatively impacted a student's perception when they displayed discouraging behavior, such as comparing the student to siblings or discouraging them from applying to college. Education quality rarely investigates how teacher behavior impacts student's evaluation of their own individual abilities nor how it impacts their educational outcomes.

The third subcategory in teacher value emphasized the importance of changing how teachers are evaluated (10 coded segments). Considering both the positive and negative behaviors outlined in this section above, observation of teacher-student interaction over time is necessary to understand the greater impact of teacher quality on student's educational attainment. Suggestions from participants included higher certifications for teachers and corresponding incentives for those who meet such requirements.

The process of interviewing greatly informed both the quantitative and mixed-methods approach. The additional information surrounding people's perceptions of their education experiences added further context that could not be captured in numerical data alone.

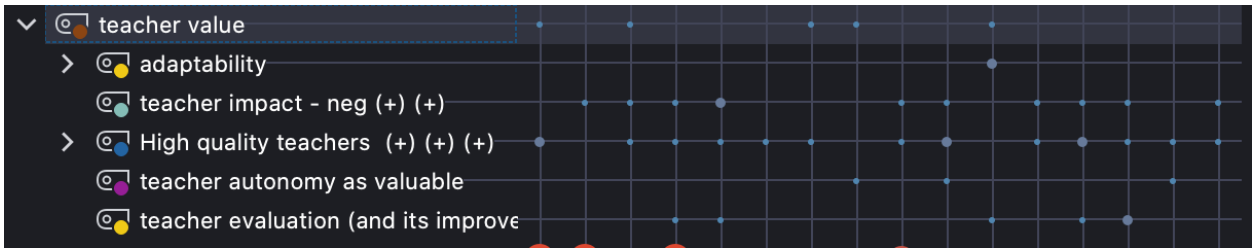

Figure 1.2 - Coding Matrix of A Consideration of Rights and its Subcategory

Qualitative Findings

Perceptions surrounding educational experiences are important qualifiers but go largely understudied for policy research. Approximately 75% of interview participants were considered 'low educational attainment' (OECD, 2016). However, differences in what quality education looked like did not vary largely. As a result, the following findings section includes both groups' perceptions. Participants' perceptions were largely shaped by issues outside the classroom that are not reflected in school evaluations. In order to successfully improve education quality, a deeper contextual understanding is necessary. In particular, this paper finds that participants

emphasized the importance of teacher value, education as lacking, the necessity of a conducive learning environment, and a consideration of its means for education to be a right or a privilege.

Teacher Value

Teachers play a pivotal role in education. Efforts to consider their role more holistically includes Value-Added-Models, but these evaluation methods are not used everywhere. Many current evaluative measures for teachers are restricted to classroom observations (Darling-Hammond et. al, 2012). When evaluating education quality, participants repeatedly referenced how teachers impacted their educational experience.

The Importance of Teacher Value: Observed through Teaching Style

Participants highlighted how teaching style is crucial to one's knowledge acquisition. Teaching style is the behavior and actions that teachers utilize in an educational setting (Brown, 2003). One participant named Ruby was from Taiwan and attended an international school. She explained how her school was well-resourced, but felt that some discrepancies exist within teacher quality. When describing her teachers, she explained how it is to separate good teachers from bad ones. Good teachers are able to "... to motivate students to be interested in the material. And two is if they can just motivate students to like learning in general." This became a common theme throughout other interviews as well.

One participant, Sofía, from Spain, articulated how she never really liked math but "I didn't really like [math], but I really liked my teacher. So he made me enjoy the lessons." Sofía went on to explain how she began to actively go from "dreading the material, the content, I was actually looking forward to it. And I found myself doing the homework, I found myself like, you know, actively listening to him." The teacher's ability to completely change Sofía's attitude

towards a subject that she hated is an exceptional feat that can not be quantified by one evaluative report.

However, not all teachers are taught equally. The opposite end of the spectrum included Ruby. Ruby initially wanted to major in psychology, but her AP Psychology teacher's inability to make content interesting made her change her mind. "It's just—there was no way–to actually engage in the material and then sort of apply it to [something]. The way she delivered. It was just not really interesting." Participants also expressed dissatisfaction when teachers were not invested. Negative attitudes towards students' backgrounds can be detrimental to a student's self-perception. Sofía, who is now an English teacher in Japan, articulated that, "[her] previous experiences have also taught me what kind of teacher I want to be and what kind of teacher I don't want to be." Teaching styles impact more than grades, they also impact people's careers. Thus, it is integral to understand what qualities make a valuable teacher.

The Broader Implications of Teacher Value: Autonomy, Adaptability, and Responsiveness

Participants articulated their understanding of how curriculum impacts a teacher's style, but their adaptability, responsiveness to students, and autonomy in creating a cultivated learning environment were essential to higher quality instruction. Participants often articulated autonomy, adaptability, and responsiveness as coupled characteristics when asked about what their ideal learning environment was. Marisol attended public school in California articulating that "I do think the teacher taking the lead to some degree is generally good, unless you already have a group of students who are very interested with a lot of opinions." The teacher guiding the discussion but knowing how to account for the student's interests nods to the adaptability desired from students. Moreover, it nods to an adaptive teaching style.

Similar sentiments were shared by Lina, an attendee of California private schools. Lina asserted the connection between autonomy and responsiveness where " giving teachers–some kind of free rein to do [what they want] so I think it's really important to kind of cater to the students' needs." The malleability of teaching style is integral to meeting student needs. Margaret, a current undergraduate student, attended both public and private institutions for elementary and high school. She was on the gifted track in her public school system. She received a personalized plan that met curriculum requirements and investigated her own interests. Contrary to preconceptions of public school, she considered her public school experience more positively given that "the institution's willingness to adapt, and to form more personalized educational experiences and opportunities definitely kind of made an impact on me." She attributed that "adaptability" made her educational experience more formative.

Teaching style adaptability is only possible when teachers are granted autonomy. If teachers are unable to adjust learning plans to meet students where they are, they can not create engaging learning environments. Participants emphasized how engaging learning environments positively impacted their learning experiences, yet this was often facilitated when teachers' had greater leeway. Thus, teachers require greater degrees of autonomy in their classroom in order to cultivate learning environments. In order to promote autonomy, professional development workshops are necessary to promote alternative teaching styles and allow for teachers to consider what works best for their classroom.

Education as Lacking

Lack of curriculum diversification, inaccessibility to quality education, and education being treated as a commodity were all instances emphasized by participants as drawbacks of education. A lack of curriculum diversification translated to rigid structures. These rigid

structures often disregarded student agency and made participants feel disconnected from their learning environment. Inaccessibility to quality education acknowledged barriers to entry when securing education. These barriers included attendance zoning and educational screening where a set threshold created an opportunity gap. Lastly, a binary between public and private school education emphasized the commodification of education. The commodification of education meant participants considering – or had attended – private schools given concerns about deindividualization in the education system.

Lack of Curriculum Diversification

Limited curriculums diminished student interests and encouraged disconnection from the learning environment. Ruby expressed how she felt dissatisfied with the limited curriculum offerings considering how well-resourced the school was. Her school was run by a corporation that produces educational materials with a board of directors that determined the curriculum. Yet, the course offering the educational materials did not make it to her own classrooms. When asked about a time she felt unsatisfied in her educational experience, she stated that "complaints come from the quality of, like classes offered and the content, how well it was taught, how much resources we were actually given." Dissatisfaction arose regarding the content offered because it limited available avenues of self-initiated learning. When students are unable to engage with the content they are given, there are negative implications.

One extreme example included Genvieve's attendance of a reduced curriculum school. Genvieve attended a private school for diverse learners for a majority of her educational experience and did not perceive her educational experience positively. She explained in one instance where she completed the math department's course offerings and had to retake the highest level because she'd have to "move out [...] tracks that [they] have available". She

expressed discontent, “And I'd say that kind of exemplified some of the ways that they thought about students.” Genieve cited this experience as being indicative of low quality education because of the school’s inability to diversify their curriculum. Furthermore, they rejected her attempt to advocate for a more diverse course offering. She went further to articulate how the ableist view of education negatively took rudimentary learning to new heights. She explained how the school’s rigid structure led to

> “In my senior year, in one of our classes, we had like an entire lesson on how to address an envelope, or like, or things like that. And I would say that that attitude significantly impacted my education in multiple ways.”

Throughout her interview, Genevieve expressed discontent in the current state of education. She articulated that the “one-size fits all” approach did not adequately serve those who did not fit the ascribed mold of what a student is. Thus, it is important for different institutions to have diverse curriculums regardless of predetermined education institutions.

Inaccessibility to Quality Education

Accessibility to basic education historically has been a priority. However, participants cited that inaccessibility to quality education is harmful considering education’s unique role in scaffolding society. One participant who moved to the United States, Joan, during her high school years stated, “I think more needs to be done to make quality education more accessible, not [focusing on] accessible [education].” This distinction between accessible education and quality education was especially pivotal. It underscored how accessible education is not the main problem plaguing education: the lack of quality is.

Ultimately, a higher consideration for making quality education more accessible was a recurring theme for all participants. However, the various barriers to entry varied depending on the type of educational institution. Lina, who attended private school on financial aid, expressed

how barriers to entry included financial obstacles, limited information channels, or discouraging process through screening.

Barriers to entry also included those beyond the classroom. Serena, an undergraduate who received financial aid to attend her well-resourced private school, cited that she had to travel for over an hour to attend school. Lina explained that transportation (similar to Serena's concern) prevented accessibility to quality education. Others, a parent of a Chicago Public Schools alumni, explained how she refused to let commuting for two hours each day stand in the way of her children's education. However, she did express how the long duration of travel should not have been required to receive access to quality education.

Lina also cited how familial responsibilities would complicate taking more rigorous academic work to support the family. This nodded to early education concerns in America from colonial times despite four centuries of time difference. Access to education should not be the only focus of education. Equitable access to quality education reflects the new problem of education.

Attendance zoning was also briefly discussed as a barrier to entry. Attendance zoning composes a majority of public school attendance and further perpetuates educational inequities (DeRoche, 2020). Regardless of educational background, several participants articulated how one's address determined their accessibility to quality education. Joan's experience in an urban public school complicated her relationship with education because "quality education is so tight in neighborhoods in a way that like where you live determines your life." Attendance zoning ultimately does decide where one is able to go to school based on their address because educational funding is so tied to property taxes. Chelsea, a first-year college student who previously attended high school in the American South, stated,

> "It should not be dependent on where I don't want to say dependent on where you live. Because I don't know how else you're supposed to do it. But when it gets to the point where people are moving into certain neighborhoods for the whole point of going to a school because it gets better funding, as opposed to another school, I think that's an issue."

What Chelsea was alluding to is the inequitable funding between districts because of how tied they are to property taxes. Several respondents expressed how the wealth of a school's surrounding area often determined the resources accessible to them. Amelia, a college preparatory alumni, expressed that " if you happen to be living in a school district that does not get as much funding, [quality education] is not going to be as accessible to you." This notion of financial dollars driving educational quality largely nodded to the growing commodification of education.

The Commodification of Education

The growing dichotomy between public and private education has resulted in tremendous changes in educational policy. The growing presence of public schools being turned into charter schools reflects a preference for more specialized education while redefining public and private education (Lubienski, 2001). Ultimately, participants who attended private schools had preconceived notions about public school's inability to address the full needs of the student. Public school attendees reaffirmed this, especially when it came to attaining higher levels of education.

This negative stigma against public schools discouraged some participants from public schools despite their "good reputation". Sofïa stated strongly that she felt disheartened about having to pay for a quality education, but did not see an alternative. When discussing what educational institution she would consider taking her children to in the future, she expressed supreme disdain regarding the routinized approach of schooling public schools:

> "The reason why perhaps I would not take them to a public school, even though I hope it's, they could be really good schools, is because I know they're just going to be a cog in the machine– they're not going to be treated special, they're just not going to be— they're just not going to feel like they can stand out. They might not be able to showcase their talents, either."

Sofía communicated the underlying notion of public schools: the full development of the student is not accounted for. Private schools encourage self-interest and initiative in learning while public schools are barely able to scrape by. Throughout the interview, Sofía perceived public schools' teaching methods to be under-resourced, overpopulated with students, and less individualized attention towards students. To some extent, her concerns could be validated by Joan's experiences in urban public school who stated, "I didn't feel like I had enough support." Joan also explained how the college counselor had more students to advise than they could handle. She expressed this made it understandable but she still wished that she had more support.

The commodification of education represents a shift in privatized education that ultimately creates an opportunity gap. Until equitable support is given to schools in need, educational inequities will continue to persist. Furthermore, students like Joan and the other millions of public high school attendees will simply be another cog in the machine that privatized education warns about. Rather than turning public institutions into charter schools with barriers to entry, educational funding should be directed to public schools with high-poverty populations to improve educational quality and provide the additional resources needed.

The Necessity of a Conducive Learning Environment

Participants overwhelmingly associated a conducive learning environment with an emphasis on student agency, equitable resourcing and integration into the school community. The emphasis on student agency underscores that students want to be granted autonomy over their education. Equitable resourcing extends beyond financial dollars and textbooks. Equitable

translates to having additional support services such as mental health care professionals, more guidance counselors, and tutors when needed. Lastly, integration into the school community meant dialogue between various stakeholders, presence of extracurriculars, and social investment.

Emphasis on Student Agency

Participants ranked their educational experiences most positively when their student interests were leveraged in the classrooms. Participants expressed that autonomy was crucial to finding their intellectual interests. Project-based learning and independent study were iterations of this student agency. In particular, both of these tools allowed students to incur a deeper understanding of a topic that was briefly glossed over in class. For example, Lina articulated how her teacher helped facilitate this interest by giving her the opportunity to complete her own independent research,

> "She helped me design a curriculum that I could follow along. And, and then every single week, I would check back on her readings. I've done everything, and I was able to present it at the other symposium to light at the end of it all and show that I really, you know, grasp this knowledge. And so I think that was pretty satisfactory to be able to design my own curriculum, and also to be able to gain a lot from it."

This was especially telling considering that Lina remains interested in cancer and ultimately majored in biology despite the independent study occurring over four years ago. Serena who also attended a private school shared a similar experience; she completed independent study to focus on social justice. When student agency is leveraged, it relays a lasting impact on the student that can not be quantified.

Project-based learning also positively impacted students' experiential learning. Margaret explained that project-based learning was the one reason she perceived her education at public school being superior to her private school education. Her private school education was more

rigid in structure. She felt this made her feel more disconnected from the school's learning environment. Marisol articulated how project-based learning expanded her integration to her local community by making her an active stakeholder, rather than a passive recipient of information. Making students accountable for their own education only emboldens them to take initiative. However, this is only possible in environments where there is sufficient support and resources are available.

Equitable Resourcing

Resources were both the most familiar and most complicated indicator of educational quality. Resources included both traditional and nontraditional considerations of resources. Traditional considerations of resources included money, textbooks, and building facilities. Overwhelmingly, participants associated money with resources and having a significant impact on education quality. Nontraditional considerations of resources considered equity and people as resources, such as mental health and support professionals.

Similar to how education policy research reframes funding as a guiding mechanism of education reform, participants understood the significance of funding (McCardle, 2020; Slavin, 2002). Participants continually referred to money as a point of reference. Marcus, a graduate school student, stated, "When I think of resources, I think of just funding." Chelsea went further to explain money's position to "When I hear resources, immediately, money comes to mind because money is able to provide everything else." It is impossible to separate money from education given its status as a funding mechanism. However, the way that funding occurs can be changed. One participant, Christopher, who attended an elite preparatory high school in New England articulated how education's resources should be proportional to funding,

"If you say, 'how does America's education compared to the world, relative to America's financial situation and the country that we actually are in everything else ?' No–we have a terrible education system."

Christopher emphasized that the current education system is lacking given its lack of financial support. Inadequate funding often translated to incorrect textbooks, outdated curriculums, and decaying school buildings. In particular, Lauren articulated how she still used textbooks denouncing evolution even though it is a widely accepted scientific theory. Ultimately, the gap in resources signifies a gap in funding. The relationship between funding and material resources can not be ignored. Prior research supports this notion of more money being crucial to improving educational attainment, not because of the existence of dollars themselves but because of the nontraditional resources that create a more holistic approach to education.

Nontraditional education resources included support beyond academic means. Participants both in public and private school settings called for mental health resources and gender sexuality resources. These resources often are not accounted for when completing school evaluations despite being integral to students' lives. This notion of nontraditional resources articulated education as a constructive framework. By considering connections and people, education can be articulated through social capital theory's emphasis on relations, social networks, and resources to better understand these needs.

Chelsea implied that having gender sexuality resources for younger kids would be advantageous because a large portion of formative years are spent in the classrooms. Chelsea went further to explain that schools often welcome a diverse range of students with very different backgrounds because "poorly funded schools are trying to just do the bare minimum. And then that bare minimum is often a skeleton of what it could be." Poorly funded schools are not inherently bad because they lack financial dollars. They struggle to account for the differences in the students that they serve. Having a consideration of traditional and nontraditional resources

would positively inform education as a formative experience. Yet, this is only possible when a holistic review is conducted.

Integration into the School Community

The final pillar in cultivating a conducive learning environment includes integration into the school community. Participants expressed positively perceived their educational experiences when they felt a part of their school community. Sofía stated that her school felt like a second home because "Everybody knew each other. So I didn't feel like I was just a number or I was just a person there." She expressed how being recognized as an individual made her excited to attend school, rather than dread it. Furthermore, Marisol, who attended a public school, emphasized that quality education was indicative of "basing it off the demands of the students and the demands of the family and teachers and just kind of looking at what already exists." In considering what the educational climate is, there is a consideration of how educational quality can be integrated into the school community.

In particular, teachers can become major vehicles of integration. Teachers are in direct contact with students and familiarize themselves with students. Thus, it would be feasible for teachers to be the first step of integration. Sofía, who is now a teacher, explained how she tried to take note of her students' interests in order to get them excited about learning. In doing so, she was able to help organize study groups among students and change lesson plans to make their learning more digestible. Ultimately, these steps integrated students into the school community by finding commonalities and expanding upon them. Promoting attentiveness among teachers during professional development workshops would be cost-effective approaches to making school integration a reality.

Furthermore, students are integral to making community given they compose the largest demographic within schools. Participants explained how healthy dialogue between organizations – like student government – made them feel like their voices were heard and positively impacted learning environments. Amelia expressed how the student governments promoted cultural awareness when administration struggled to do so by organizing assemblies and speaking directly to administrators. In the absence of this dialogue, negative perceptions of educational environments may occur. Ruby explained how her international school's board of directors negatively impacted the learning environment by disregarding student voices. A new education program was offered but the administration only screened high performing students. Ruby explained how "in the early years of trying to get a program up, you need to have good results. So they wanted the kids with good grades to give them good results, so they could expand the program." However, people interested in the program for its substance but lacked the GPA were denied access. Furthermore, Ruby cited how one-third of the students left the program because of its disconnect from the rest of the school community and curriculum. When disconnect occurs between the student and the school environment, this can have negative effects on their education. As a result, it is necessary to consider the environment as an extension of contextualizing education and what the aims of a particular program are.

Consideration of Rights: Education as A Right or A Privilege

In order to contextualize education, it is essential to evaluate its role in society. Participants articulated education's transformative impact on people's lives, but being able to discern its presence as a right or a privilege proved more difficult. Throughout the semi-structured interviews, participants evaluated their own educational experiences themselves without a given metric. An additional evaluation was added: the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights Article 26. This was used to provide an international standard that all participants could contextualize their education in response to. Once this additional evaluation was added, human rights was codified in the same way as education. Both education and human rights were limited in scope and considered "basic and essential" for a majority of participants.

Like human rights, education's status as basic and essential extended to basic necessities. Similarities in human rights and education included both as precursors to attaining higher needs. Serena articulated how education can not be a privilege because of its fundamental status.

> "[Education] is a right. It's making a living. It means getting food and water and making a living needs education. And education is needed for food and water, aka education should be a right.. It shouldn't be something that's given to people that deserve it. Like you deserve it automatically. It's like, like food isn't a privilege. Like everyone should have food, water isn't like a privilege. Everyone should have water. That's how I feel about education."

Contextualizing education on equivalent status with water and food embodied education's facilitative qualities. Furthermore, rights exist to both water and food (United Nations Human Rights OHCHR, n.d. United Nations General Assembly, 1948). This parallel of education to basic essentials emphasized the need for higher considerations for it as a basic human right instead of as a privilege.

Similar to human rights, participants wished for less ambiguity within the education sector. This paper's research question posited whether education is a basic human right or privilege, but a qualifier was necessary to make the distinction. Education is a basic human right but quality education is a privilege. This was especially prevalent when all participants expressed concern about the contradictory language of human rights. The right to education explicitly states general availability to all, but then counters with higher education becoming accessible "on the basis of merit" (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). Further similarities between education and human rights included their limited qualities and accessibility. Despite participants

expressing that human rights was not thoroughly taught in schools, they described it as "international", "universal", and as a "social contract" that protected their livelihoods. Education similarly was contextualized as a safeguard against stagnation.

Findings Conclusion

Ultimately, these findings posit that a contextualization of education is necessary to improve educational quality assessment. In order to contextualize education, it is important to consider teacher value, the importance of a conducive learning environment, and a consideration of education as a right or a privilege. This study's findings call for new measures of evaluation to reflect a more holistic consideration of education evaluation that considers the findings outlined above. It is possible to look to human rights evaluation mechanisms to consider more holistically how education quality can be assessed and improved.

Policy Implications

New Measures for Evaluation are Necessary

Evaluative measures do not adequately reflect a key stakeholder within the educational environment. Surveys like Illinois 5Essentials strongly encourage students to evaluate their school environment, teachers, safety, and surrounding community. Surveys like this should be replicated and adjusted for considering localized contexts. This paper calls for more thorough evaluative standards of education that accounts for student perceptions.

Evaluative Measures Should Look to Human Rights Mechanisms Guidance

The process of progressive realization should be applied to the United States's evaluation of education. Progressive realization contextualizes a country's human rights records through

multiple stakeholders such as nongovernmental organizations, individual complaints, and government officials beyond Special Rapporteurs. A Special Rapporteur for Education was recently renewed for the purpose of promoting accessibility, but quality education's accessibility should also be accounted for (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023).

The United States' unique emphasis on state sovereignty requires a Special Rapporteur to consider its accessibility to quality education. Participants articulate how quality education was widely inaccessible and required greater inspection. Given the nation's resources, both participants and prior research affirm that more is necessary. In particular, funding schools should not be granted from evidence-based practices. Evidence-based practices often rely on test scores as opposed to considering the growth over time that students experience while in a particular school. Focusing on the growth of student achievement would reward schools with higher concentrations of socioeconomic startups and supplement them with further resources.

More Professional Development is Needed for Teachers and Counselors

Professional development is necessary for teachers, counselors, and administration. High quality teachers positively impacted educational experiences. To contrast, low quality teachers lacked adaptability, negatively impacted self-perceptions, and made disparaging comparisons among students. In order to combat this, it is necessary for professional developments to be implanted in both private and private schools. Furthermore, professional development workshops should also include college counselors. College counselors often discouraged students from taking on more academically rigorous endeavors, including college and more advanced classes. Some students even articulated having to take self-initiative considering their counselor's

unwillingness to cooperate. Thus, college counselors should also be required to attend professional development to promote a growth mindset amongst student populations.

Conclusion

This project included a mixed-methods approach to evaluating a more holistic assessment of education quality. This exploratory design incorporated quantitative and qualitative methods using surveys and semi-structured interviews. Comparisons between low educational attainment and high educational attainment indicated that people with higher educational attainment were more likely to consider education a privilege. People with lower educational attainment considered education to be a human right. This contextualization of education as a right versus a privilege considers the multifaceted dimensions of education. Little research exists evaluating the similarities between education and human rights.

The contextualization of education aligns with prior research confirming the need to evaluate socioeconomic status, student perceptions, and human rights-based approaches. This paper's implications identify a need for new evaluative measures, which reaffirms prior research. Furthermore, evaluative measures should look to human rights mechanisms given its holistic approach to understanding limitations. Finally, more professional development is necessary for both teachers and counselors. Participants repeatedly referenced these two stakeholders as individuals who both supported and inhibited their educational experience. Providing extensive and high quality professional development is essential.

Given the small sample size of this study, the findings of this study can not be generalized. 56 survey participants and 15 interview participants contributed to this study. It is important to note that several participants often changed their initial answers while in interviews. Respondents articulated that the semi-structured interviews allowed them to think more in detail

about their responses compared to the survey. Further research should investigate how human rights-based approaches can become a guiding framework for education reform. This study functions as an exploratory design and thus is limited in nature. This paper included respondents from several different areas in the world despite its large focus on the United States. Thus, research focusing more explicitly on the connections between education evaluation and human rights evaluation in a U.S. centric focus would add on to this existing literature.

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Appendix

I. Survey Questionnaire

What is your name?

What is the highest level of education?

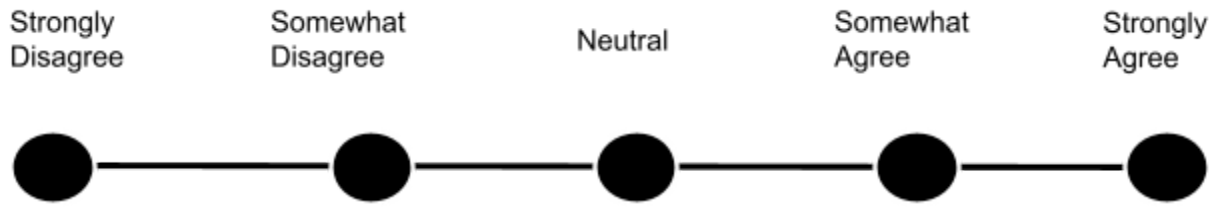
Did you attend a public or private school?

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private

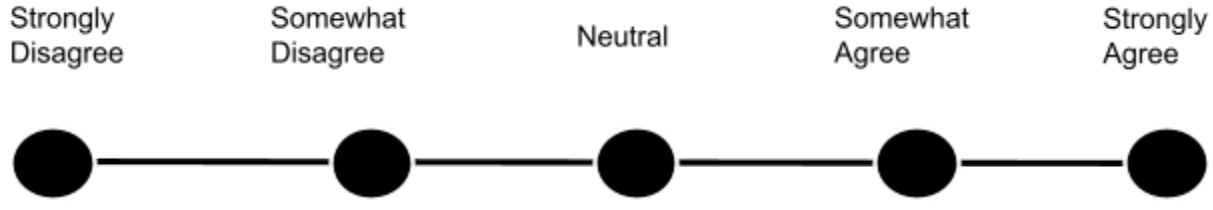
What type of high school did you attend (neighborhood, magnet, selective enrollment, math and science academy, etc?)

- ☐ Neighborhood (Enrolled in a school near your home without special admissions process)
- ☐ Magnet (Offers special instructional program)
- ☐ Selective Enrollment (Chicago Public Schools-specific, requires admissions process with testing)
- ☐ Other (:_____)

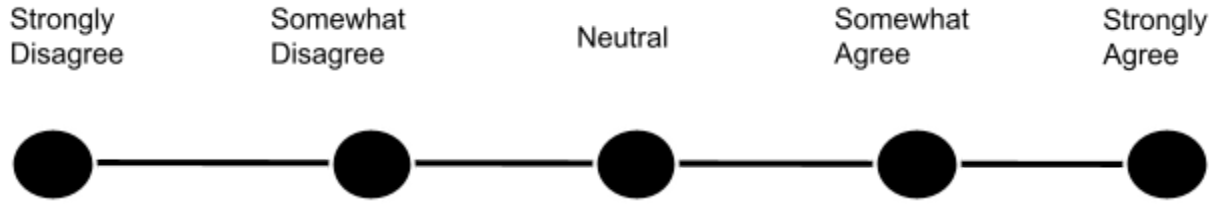
On a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), how would you rate your elementary school as a positive educational experience?



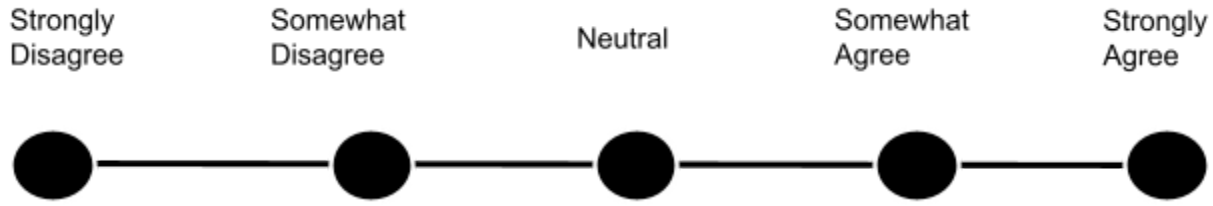
On a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), how would you rate your high school as a positive educational experience?



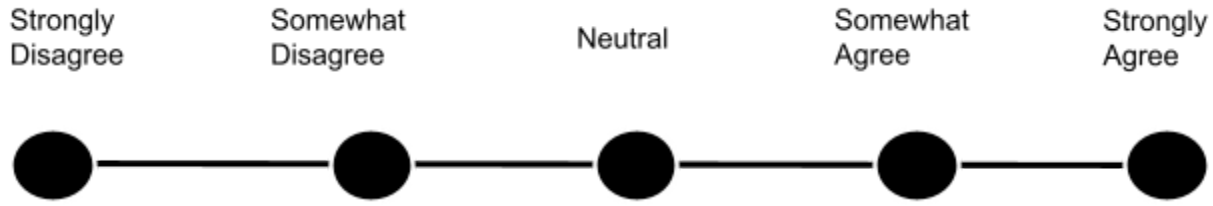
On a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), how much do you agree with the following statement: It is fair to rate my educational experiences in terms of resources (supportive teachers, sufficient educational quality, integrated school community)?



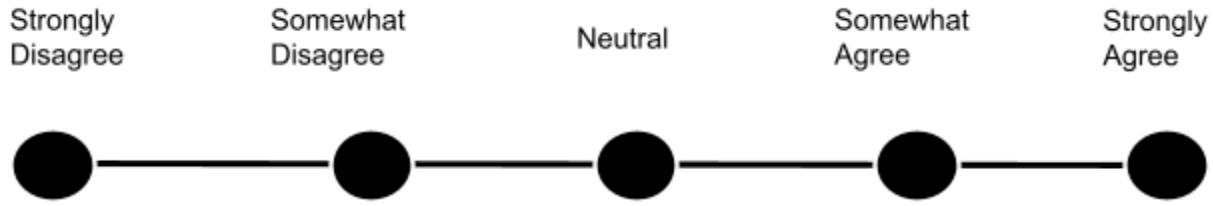
On a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), how much do you agree with the following statement: Education requires more than resources to be improved.



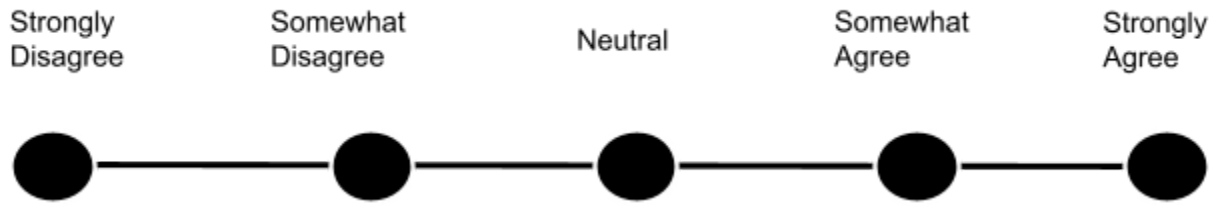
On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree (5), how much do you agree with the following statement: Resources (like supportive teachers, sufficient educational quality, integrated school community) are important when assessing education quality.



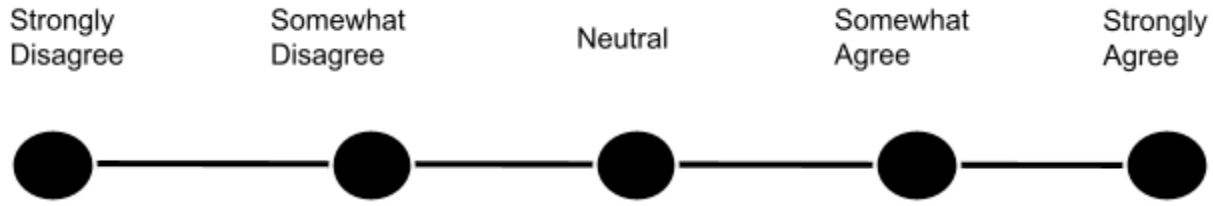
On a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), how much do you agree with the following statement: I value education highly in my life.



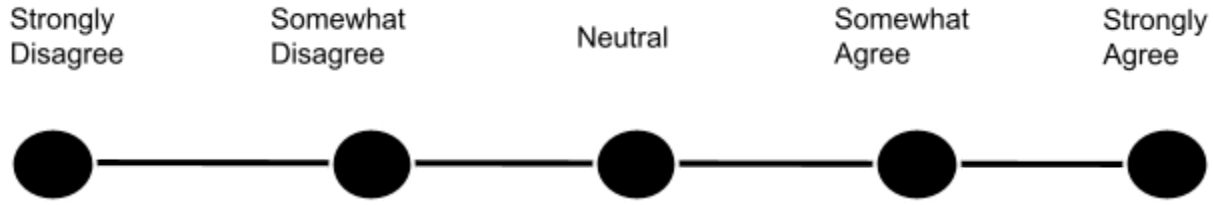
On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5), how much do you agree with the following statement: The number of resources a school can provide is indicative of a quality education.



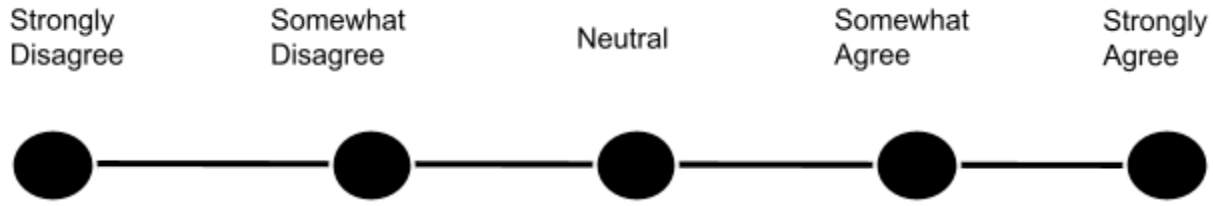
On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5), how much do you agree with the following statement: Education opens doors to opportunities.



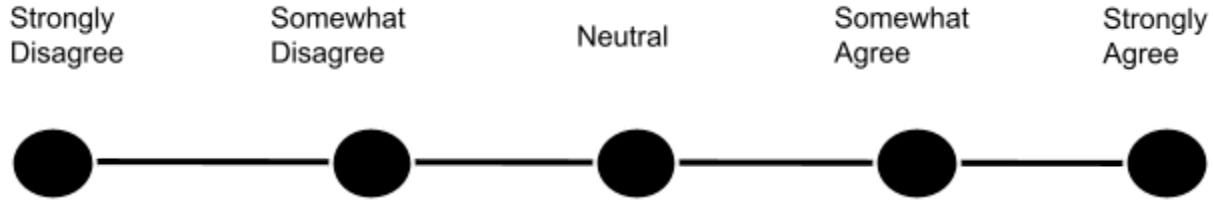
On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5), how much do you agree with the following statement: The number of resources is indicative of quality education.



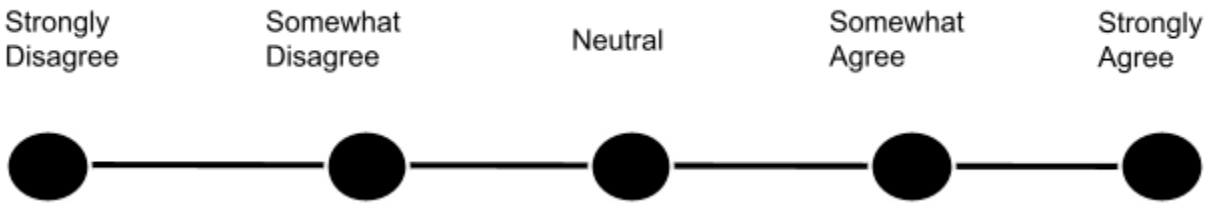
On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5), how much do you agree with the following statement: I had access to a quality education.



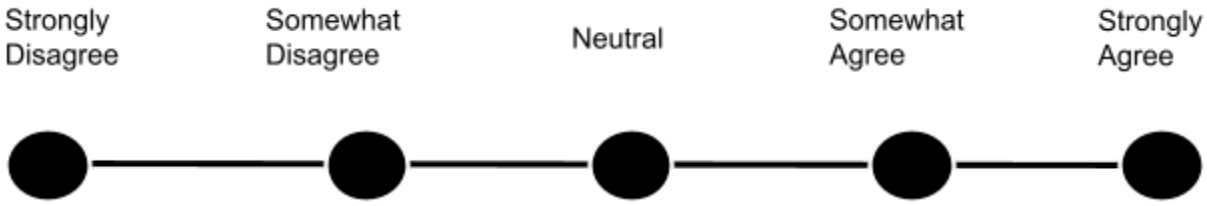
On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5), how much do you agree with the following statement: My educational experiences enriched my life.



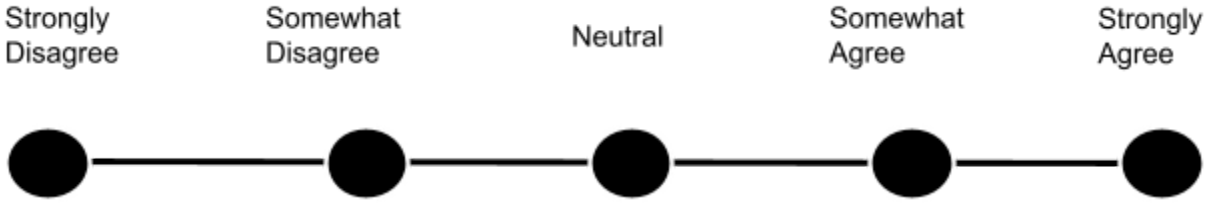
On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5), how much do you agree with the following statement: I learned about my civil rights in school.



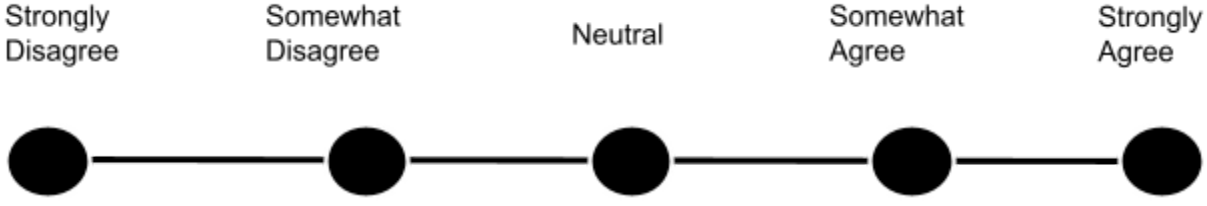
On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5), how much do you agree with the following statement: I learned about my human rights in school.



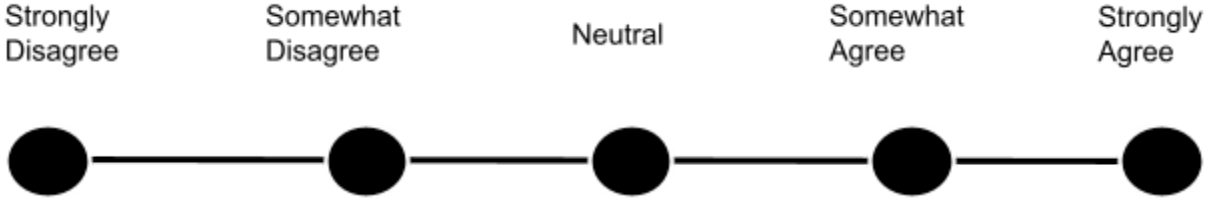
On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5), how much do you agree with the following statement: Civil rights are taught thoroughly in schools.



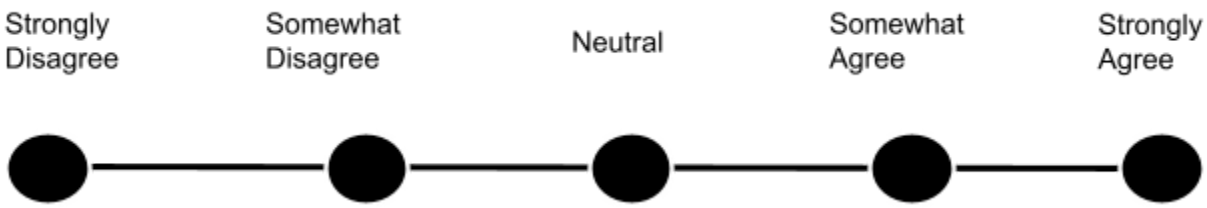
On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5), how much do you agree with the following statement: Human rights are taught thoroughly in schools.



On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5), how much do you agree with the following statement: Education is a basic human right.



On a scale from strongly disagree(1) to strongly agree(5), how much do you agree with the following statement: Education is a privilege.



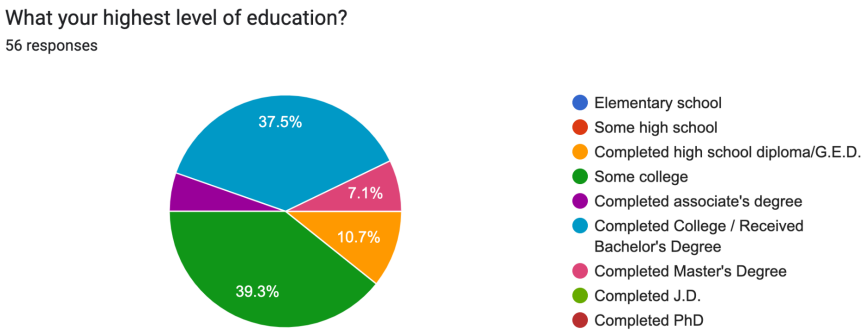
Do you have any questions, comments, or concerns?

Are you interested in a short follow-up interview for 20 minutes to talk more about your educational experiences?

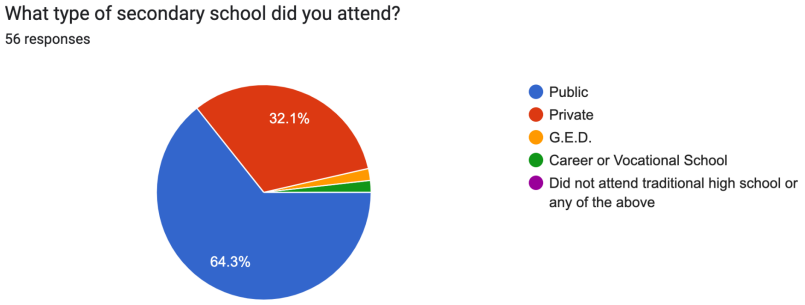
If answered yes above, please leave your e-mail address below.

II. Survey Results

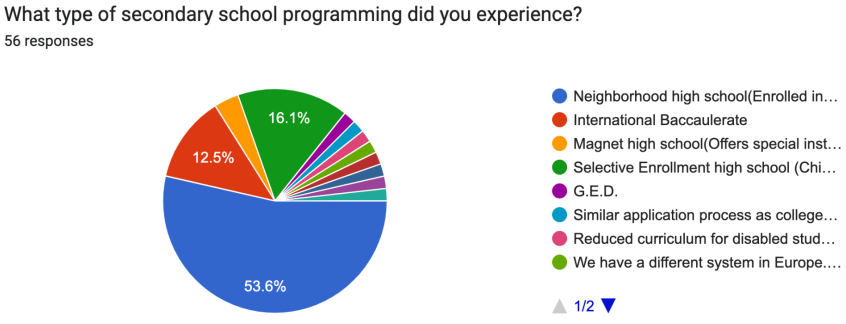
1. Graph 1.1: Demographics of the highest level of education



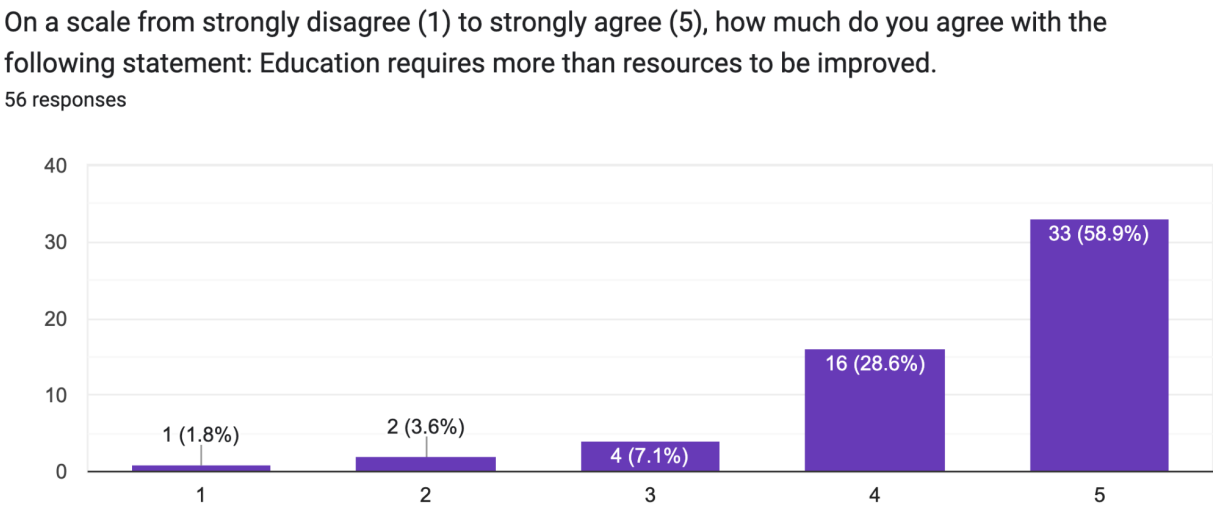
2. Graph 1.2: Demographics of secondary school attended



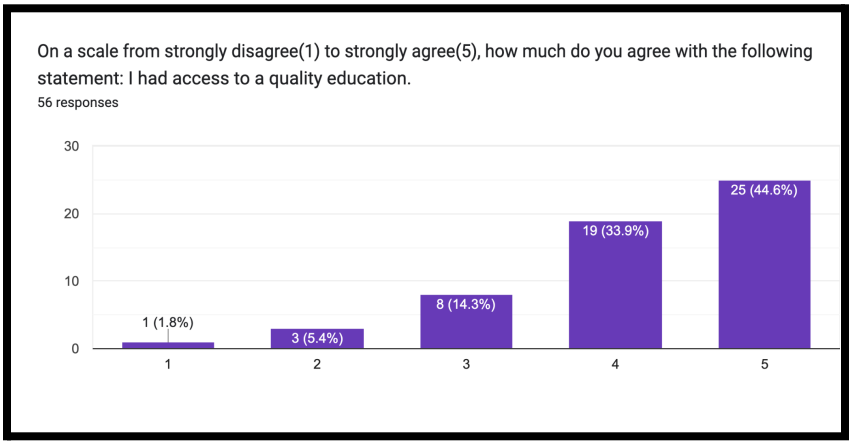
3. Graph 1.3: Demographics of secondary school programming participants



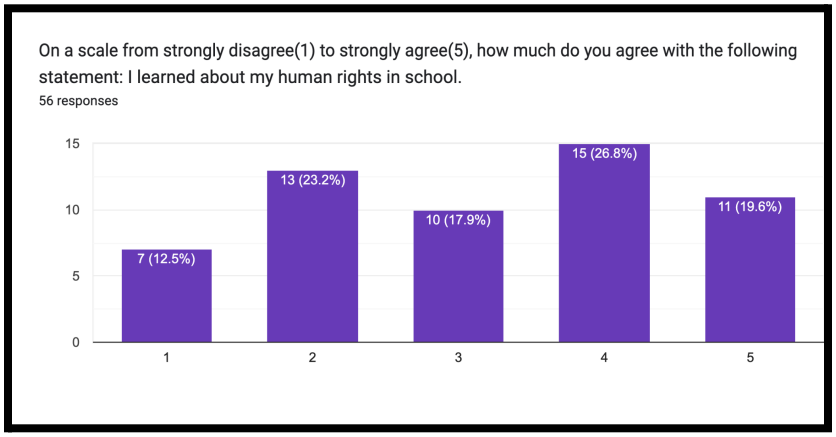
4. Graph 1.4: Bar Graph of Respondent Data for “Education requires more than resources to be improved.”



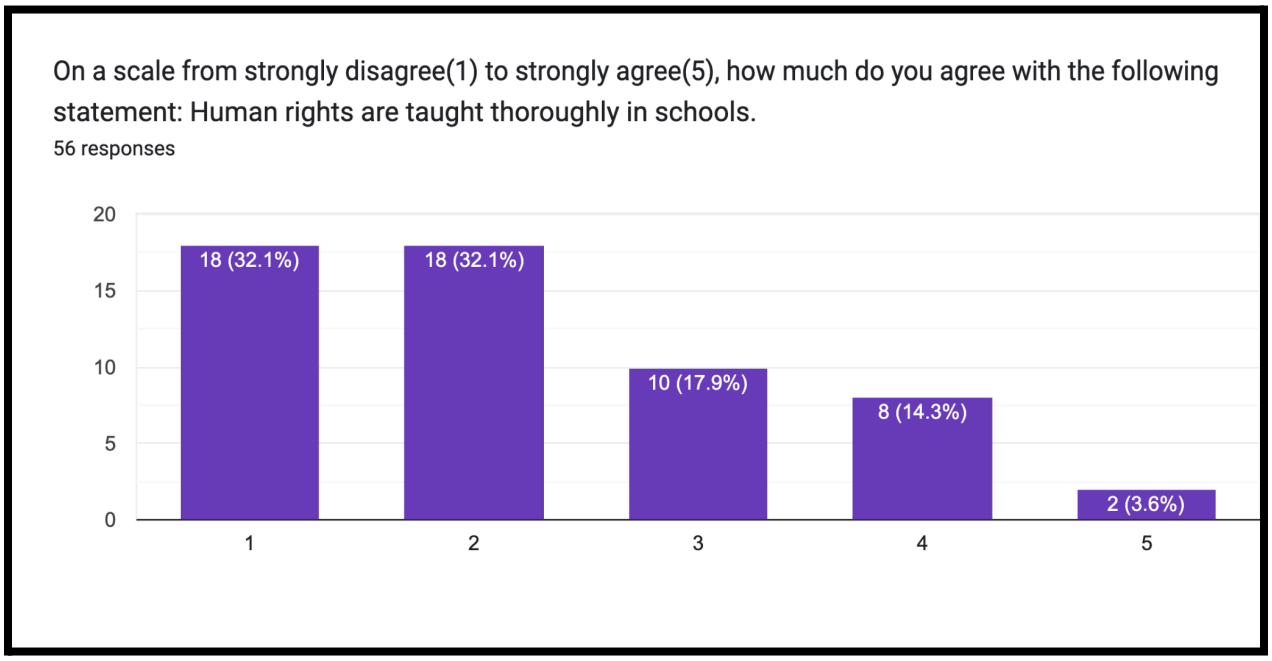
Graph 1.5: Bar Graph of Respondent for "I had access to a quality education."



Graph 1.6: Bar Graph of Respondent for "I learned about human rights in my school."



Graph 1.7 Bar Graph for Respondent Data: "Human rights are taught thoroughly in schools."



1. 1. Table of Demographics: Survey Data (Represented Countries with Participant Number in Parentheses)

United States (47)	Spain (1)
Taiwan (1)	Indonesia (1)
England (1)	Switzerland (1)

China (1)	Philippines (3)

III. Interview Guide

Interview Guide

1. What is your name?
2. What is the highest level of education?
3. Did you attend a public or private school?
4. What type of high school did you attend (neighborhood, magnet, selective enrollment, math and science academy, etc?)
5. How would you describe your elementary school experience?
    a. Probe:
        i. How would you describe your teachers?
        ii. How would you describe your principals?
6. How would you describe your high school experience (if applicable)?
    a. Probe:
        i. How would you describe your teachers?
        ii. How would you describe your principals?
7. On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate your educational experience?
    a. Probe:
        i. Why would you consider it ___? What would you say impacted your rating?
8. Tell me about a time that you felt satisfactory in your educational experience. (This can include elementary, high school, university, etc).
    a. Probe:
        i. What specifically made this satisfactory in your educational experience?
        ii. Were there any specific markers such as teachers, classmates, school subject, content that made this especially so?
9. Tell me about a time that you felt unsatisfactory in your educational experience. (This can include elementary, high school, university, etc).
    a. Probe:
        i. What specifically made this satisfactory in your educational experience?
        ii. Were there any specific markers such as teachers, classmates, school subject, content that made this especially so?
10. What do you believe quality education should look like?
    a. Probe: Can you give me an example of a positive instance that you had in school? What constitutes this quality education? Who helps ensure this happens? Did you feel that your school had adequate resources (such as supportive teachers, a safe environment, community engagement within school?)
11. What do you believe a poor quality education looks like?

   a. Probe: Can you give me an example of a negative instance that you had in school that should have been addressed sooner? What constitutes this poor quality of education? Who helps this happen? Did you feel that your school had adequate resources (such as unsupportive teachers, an unsafe environment, a lack of community engagement within school?)
12. What do you know about human rights?
   a. Probe: What do you know about human rights relating to education?
13. To you, what is the difference between civil rights and human rights?
14. How do you feel about the accessibility of quality education?
15. If you were an educator or administrator, what would the ideal learning environment look like?
16. Do you view education as a right or a privilege?
17. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know about your educational experience?

IV. Table of Pseudonyms and their Educational Backgrounds (With Permission)

Sofía	"High Educational Attainment"	Private School Attendee	Spain
Amelia	"Low Educational Attainment"	Private School Attendee	United States - Midwest
Christopher	"Low Educational Attainment"	Preparatory School Attendee	United States - New England
Chelsea	"Low Educational Attainment"	Neighborhood High School	United States - South
Margaret	"Low Educational Attainment"	Public and Private School Attendee	United States - South
Marcus	"High Educational Attainment"	Private School Attendee	United States - South
Marisol	"Low Educational Attainment"	Public School Attendee	United States - West
Lina	"Low Educational Attainment"	Private School Attendee	United States - West
Serena	"Low Educational Attainment"	Private School Attendee	United States - South

Joan	“Low Educational Attainment”	Public School Attendee	United States - South
Elizabeth	“Low educational attainment”	Public School Attendee	United States - Midwest
Lauren	“Low Educational Attainment”	Public School Attendee	United States - West
Ruby	“Low Educational Attainment”	Private School Attendee	Taiwan
Gina	“High Educational attainment”	Public school attendee	United States - West
Genevieve	“Low educational attainment”	Private school: reduced curriculum	United States - West

V. Coded Segments

1. Example of Precoding Stage: First and Second Cycle of Coding

2. Example of Refined Codes