

Equity and Quality in Education from a Student Perspective: Semantic Constructs in Chilean Undergrads¹

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the representations that undergraduate students at the University of Chile have with regards to the concepts: "equity" and "quality in education". These conceptual constructs were studied in a sample of 70 students enrolled in the majors of history, psychology and educational psychology using natural semantic networks. The main results suggest that for students from the sample, equity and quality in education are both a right and a need that promote equality, which (may) give them opportunities. Students perceive that equity and quality in education should offset inequality and could be made evident by sustainable development.

Key Words: equity, quality in education, rights, equality, opportunities.

1. Introduction

Recent public protests by Chilean students reflect a number of social changes taking place in the college community, the institution itself and higher education as a whole. The social claim to receive free high quality public higher education is presented as the top social aspiration in the Chilean population. It is a legitimate aspiration, considering that currently 60% of school age Chileans is excluded from college (OECD, 2007). Members of the upper classes has been favored by the privatization of education, high costs of educational enrollment and changes in the financing mechanisms in higher education among other policies.

In the present Chilean educational system there is a constant tension between equity and quality. State policies on education; have not been fully effective in achieving an integrated society. In this regard, the Chilean educational policy, and its controversial reforms have been contested regarding social cohesion within education. Since social cohesion is considered an instrument to establish social justice by facilitating access, equity and equal opportunity on education and, encouraging mobility and reducing poverty. The current democratic Chilean regime has not been able to provide full access and coverage for higher education. Students who are enrolled in college might drop out due to the high cost of tuition. Thus general consensus is that higher education is at the service of the capitalist market and has "becomes an instrument of reproduction of economic and ideological structures" (Vallejo, 2012), affecting the lower classes access to education. Moreover, the current policy of quality applied to higher education, focuses on monitoring of educational institutions through certifications through educational quality parameters established by the Ministry of Education of Chile (MINEDUC). Still, changes and national assessment mechanisms, fail to meet the social demand.

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The enactment of the new General Education Law (latest revision) of 17 September 2011 and the law establishing a national system of quality assurance in higher education [Law 20,129 promulgated on October 23, 2006], can generate expectations about real changes in education in Chile. The most immediate antecedents of this reform, failed to effectively impact the achievements in education, nor transform the structure of the education system, therefore the expected impacts for society not occurred. This manuscript explores what are the aspects that are important in top level education policy to reach a fair and quality in education, from the students' perspective. The research focuses on the analysis of two qualitative variables that are determining the course of the current education policy in Chile: equity and quality in education. In this regard, the purpose of this manuscript is to:

1. Develop semantic networks around the concept of equity.
2. Develop semantic networks around the concept of educational quality.
3. Identify specific concepts of definition and social representation of the relationship: Equity / quality in education received by students at the University of Chile.

Indeed, in subjective assessment, the definitions provided by students on equity and quality in educational services are shaped by the specific characteristics of their context. This subjective assessment will enable a better understanding of the problem, since the ways of perceiving and the intrinsic properties of education that each student has, is constructed of multiple definitions. The interest of this manuscript reflects the need to continue the debate on the role of higher education, represented by the university⁴, as an instrument of social exclusion or inclusion and quality of the services it offers. The need to address this issue, particularly in the Chilean case, corresponds to the social unrest caused by the society's concern with the change and the transformation of higher education.

2. The relationship equity- quality in education.

The starting point is the basic definition of *equity* and *quality in education* concepts, and the concepts that are associated with them. Thereafter, a discussion, reflection and analysis on the relationship between the concepts equity / quality in education and their background / social consequences.

2.1 About equity

Etymologically, the word derives from the Latin equity: *aequitas*, *-ātis*, a word that designates equality or mind attitude. According to the Royal Academy Spanish language dictionary, equity is defined as:

(a) Equality of mind. (b) Usual generous temperance. Prone to be guided or fall for the sense of duty or conscience rather than for the strict requirements of justice or law. (c) Natural justice, as opposed to the positive law letter. (d) Moderation in the price of things or contract conditions. (e) Mind attitude that moves to give everyone what they deserve (Real Academia Espanola, 2012).

The dictionary of Mexican Spanish defines equity as "quality of equal. Ability to apply the law according to justice principles and common sense: equity criterion" (Lara, 2011:724). For other researchers, the concept of equity is commonly associated and synonymy of the concept of social justice. However, as noted by Bracho: Talking about equity is still unclear and accurate. The main cause of this lack of clarity is that the concept of equity is based and interacts with three hugely important concepts: on one hand, equality; on the other, law and justice enforcement; and finally, inclusion (2009:2).

Understood as a concept provided by the legal and juridical field, its application implies value and moral judgments when executed, and considering the previous definitions, we may consider the concept includes at least six substantive components:

1. Value judgment from who applies it (or acts with equity),
2. Considerations regarding the rules and/or laws that leads to its application,
3. Equality and mind attitude from who applies it,
4. A trend to justice,
5. A trend to equality,
6. A trend to inclusion.

⁴ The terms college and university are used to refer to the abstract entity not to a specific university. They refer mostly to the spirit and nature of the social institution.

Applied to the education field, some approaches to the concept of equity present a set of articulated elements inclined towards development. The achievement of educational equity is regarded as a result of political action particularly that aimed at social policy. Indeed, the educated population with high social participation, who have the ability to organize themselves to request (sometimes claim) quality, free and universal educational services, counteract social arrears. In this context, development is part of a vision and a global objective linking institution-society that considers education as an effective tool to accomplish it (ECLAC-UNESCO, 1992).

Moreover, since the sixties, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development regarded education as a social mobility and prosperity instrument for society (OECD, 1991:22). In the eighties, several international agencies found a space to consolidate this paradigm in the main educational issues. Accordingly, it is easy to find major similarities between the approaches of UNESCO and ECLAC. The agencies converged in the recurring idea of viewing education as the engine for an economic and social development with equity (ECLAC-UNESCO, 1992). Within this developmental vision, one of the international organizations fundamental concerns is the main goal of counteracting inequalities and fighting poverty; it is considered that this may be achieved effectively by providing schooling to the population. The paper "Social Panorama of Latin America" presented by ECLAC (2010) highlighted the ways in which the reproduction of poverty is manifesting in the region's population. Children and young people who aspire a better future (using education for this), fail to meet their goals because the first filter within the social structure is the family and within it, poverty is only perpetuating across generations.

The same report estimates that the family depends on the labor market (ECLAC, 2010), which as a result of a neoliberal economy gives priority to productivity and competitiveness, rejecting in its ranks the youth who do not fulfill the required skill levels and paradoxically the low quality educational systems fail to provide them the equalifications. In the tension between labor market, social policy and education policy, it is necessary to remark that the labor market is not geared towards inclusion and equality. Therefore, it is inequitable by definition as social policies are not aimed to protect employment, redistribute income and universalize social protection. State policies have not been able to close the gaps between labor market, education investment, tuition, skills and educational achievements of the individual.

These consequences are marked in the youth population aged between 12 years to 29 years. The existing levels of child poverty in Latin America (poor children 0-15 years of age) confirm this situation. A comparative analysis conducted by ECLAC (2010), contrasting the differences between 1990 and 2009, found that Chile had reduced child monetary poverty by 74%, Argentina by 48%, Uruguay by 45%, Panama by 37 %, and Mexico by 16%. This situation is alarming considering that during childhood the social and family basis are established to later build a school and social life that can offer a place within the structure and dynamics of social mobility. The neoliberal market, society and State affect directly the family with their actions; an inclusive market creates jobs and protects the welfare state. The young and the child, as family members, face the dilemma of having opportunities and being able to live in a fair and equal society or in social exclusion. It is up to the higher education -represented by universities-to assume its responsibility as an institution that strengthens inclusion and promotes the values of equality, justice and equity.

2.2. About quality in education.

Etymologically, the word derives from the Latin: *qualitas-ātis*; a word that designates the quality, the way of being, circumstances, conditions and class or type. Some dictionaries define the concepts as: Way of being of a person or thing, condition or requirement that is put into a contract, importance or quality of a thing, a person's status, their nature, their age and other circumstances and conditions required for office or dignity (OCEANO, 1999). The International Standard Organization (ISO) defines quality as "the set of properties and characteristics of a product or service that bear its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs" (Heredia, 2001: 34). In the Mexican context, the quality in education movement started to develop several years ago within the ISO 9000 systems (Razo, 2003). Under this view of quality certifications: The school has to be considered as a complex center that offers educational services. Thus, with the full knowledge of the experiences and criteria of the national education horizon and taking advantage of methodological developments in the world of work and production, the education sector must establish systems for the management and quality assurance of school services. Quality in education must be ensured based on a set of principles, standards and requirements which relate to the management of the entire school process.

This is to ensure the quality of the whole process and not only to evaluate its success or failure (Razo, 2003: 28). Understanding the need to evaluate education systems, the agents involved and their achievements (student learning, performance of schools and teachers, etc.) have become a priority to increase the quality thereof (OECD 1991: 134; Brunner and Uribe, 2007). In this sense and retaking reference to Mexico, the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE, 2003) defines quality in education as follows:

Quality education includes the learning level that students reach, but also the extent to which a school or educational system get children and young people of school age to attend school and remain in it, at least until the end of the mandatory journey. Terminal coverage and efficiency are quality dimensions, like the learning level (p.28).

Derived from the above definitions, we can say that the quality concept refers to at least five substantive characteristics:

1. The properties of a process (which a product or service is derived);
2. The properties of a finished product;
3. The properties of a service offered;
4. The circumstances and conditions of the subject receiving the product or service; and
5. The way this product or service meets the needs of a user and remain in time and space.

Consequently, addressing the concept of quality suggests walking down a path of objective and subjective interpretations assessments. The way is considered the level or type of quality of a product or service leads to judgments of appreciation of what is or should be such product or service; means, establish evaluation criteria and indicators. However, as Brunner and Uribe (2007: 199) point out, being education an "experience good" (one in which the consumer cannot know in advance nor easily inspect their quality), generated in the market a problem of information and leads asymmetry results in a difficult environment for the consumer [student] to make a rational choice allowing the provider the ability to incur in a deceptive behavior. In the Latin America and Mexican literature on quality on education there are eight dimensions of analysis that indicate when an educational system satisfies the population under the quality criteria (Toranzos, 1996; Schmelkes, 1997; Muñoz Izquierdo, 1998; INEE, 2003; Rodriguez, 2003; Robles, 2009). These dimensions are:

1. Quality-relevance (appropriate curriculum to the needs of the society);
2. Quality-pertinence (appropriate curriculum to the circumstances of life);
3. Internal quality-effectiveness (that the results achieved match the expected results);
4. Quality-sufficiency (meet the needs of schools in terms of resources);
5. Quality- external efficiency (that educational results correspond to the satisfaction of social needs);
6. Quality-efficiency (use of human and material resources without waste);
7. Quality-impact (match between educational outcomes);
8. Quality-equity (distribution of resources and application of suitable processes, so that the results actually tend to reduce inequality).

And focusing exclusively on the Chilean case, at present, the Chilean educational reform has entered a deep questioning. The proposed reforms in the education policy of the regime established since 1990, focused on raising the quality of education through direct supply of resources to schools, achieve equity in each context and achieve learning outcomes recognized within the international standards (Donoso, 2005); particularly those recognized by the OECD. Since the nineties, educational policies focus on the opportunities the system offers and the social distribution of these opportunities. They are gradual and are cumulative. In the case of higher education⁵; according to the OECD (2007: 7), the policy approach that Chilean higher education has taken, can be understood from the following:

1. Trust in more and better academics, professionals and technicians;
2. Extend coverage;
3. Equitable access, correcting inequalities;

⁵ In Chile (OECD, 2011), universities are classified into two categories: (1) universities created by the private sector after 1980 known as "private universities" and (2) those that belong to the Council of Rectors of Chilean universities [CRUCH] and are known as "traditional universities".

4. Ensure and improve quality;
5. Make information more transparent;
6. Modernize science and technology policy; and
7. Innovation and flexibility in curriculum design.

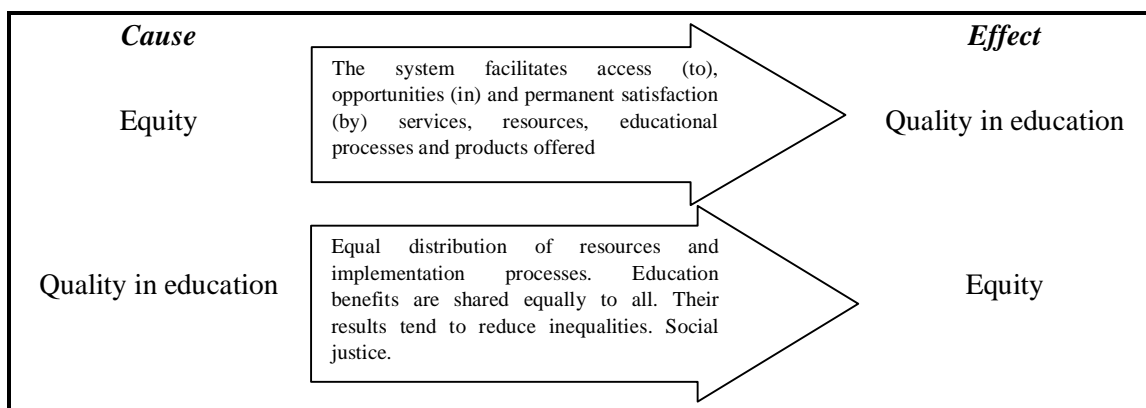
It is important to note that by itself, the Chilean education system is not assumed to be fully successful (OECD, 2007: 8), recognizing that among its most important needs are to:

1. Overcome tensions, including those between quality and equity;
2. Combat marginalization, since about 60% of Chilean college students do not have access to the financial aid system;
3. Generate a new student financing scheme;
4. The growing demand for workers with more skills to find a better job.

According to the Ministry of Education of Chile, the Program for the Improvement of Quality and Equity in Higher Education ⁶(MECESUP 2): It is part of the efforts of the Government of Chile to support the transition of its economy to one based on knowledge, *increasing equity* [emphasis added] and the effectiveness of its system of higher education. The program objectives are directed to the center of Chile's efforts to provide the necessary skills that increase global competitiveness, sustain economic and social development, and ensure that no talent is lost by differences in learning opportunities (MINEDUC, 2012).

In the Chilean case⁷, quality in education policy aims to establish itself as a firm state policy (at least in the discourse and the legal framework). The ultimate goal of the education system is that the basic level reaches the achievement levels established by the OECD worldwide, while at the higher level, the aim is to provide quality higher education and to make the graduates more competitive so that they can be inserted into the labor market. It is considered appropriate to end this discussion of the tension and the relationships between equity / quality in education; with two analytical reflections (Scheme 1):

Scheme 1: Cause-effect relationship between equity and quality in education concepts.



Source: compiled from: Toranzos, 1996; Schmelkes, 1997; Muñoz Izquierdo, 1998; INEE, 2003; Rodriguez, 2003; Robles, 2009.

1. Equity, understood as an act of social justice implemented by the state by way of social policy should aim to quality. That is, the education system must be able to provide access, grant opportunities, permanently satisfy users with services, resources, educational processes and products. This supply must be available for the entire population to educate.
2. Consequently, a quality education system is evidenced by equity, that is to say, the distribution of resources and the application of suitable processes, so that the results actually tend to reduce inequality.

⁶ This program is part of the Department of Institutional Financing of the Higher Education Division of the Ministry of Education.

⁷ Law 20,129 establishes a national system of quality assurance in higher education.

3. Methodology

The study is a qualitative research; it is a descriptive/interpretive research.

3.1. Design of the Research

Descriptive research allows obtaining information and descriptive data derived from the subjects of research spoken words (written); it is conducted in the context where the subjects construct their daily life. The descriptions make the social dimensions interact with the individual ones, the micro-social with the macro-social dimensions, moving them at the level of the practices that occur within the meso-system (Deslauriers, 1991).

Furthermore, it is *interpretive* because it suggests an approach to social practices and to the perceptions of the subjects from a theoretical and conceptual framework. This type of research allowed access to the conceptual universe of the subjects and to the interpretations in the network of meanings that the University of Chile students have on two concepts: “neoliberalism” and “equity”. The *natural semantic networks* technique was used. A concept’s semantic networks refer to the set of items selected by the memory through a reconstructive process. This network is given by associative links and the memory processes nature, which chooses the elements that comprise it. This selection is based not on the association’s strength, but on the elements within the network kind of properties (Figuroa, et al., 1981).

The research *sample* was an intentional non-probabilistic type, also known as purposive sample (Hernández et al., 1991: 231) and included a total of 70 students ($n = 70$), who were assigned to the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities and the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Chile. The sample distribution was: 16 graduate students in Educational Psychology, 9 doctoral students in Psychology, 21 undergraduate students in Psychology, and 24 undergraduate students in History, including 27 male individuals (38.5%) and 43 females (61.5%).

3.2. Procedures

The fieldwork was conducted in April of 2012 at the University of Chile. All students were invited to participate voluntarily and to ensure the respondent’s anonymity the field instrument did not require a name. The natural semantic networks technique was applied to the subjects (Figuroa et al., 1981; Valdez Medina et al., 1998). First, they were asked to address the stimulus words “equity” and “neoliberalism” and to express a definition for each concept with a minimum of five and a maximum of ten words. They were informed they could use verbs, adverbs, nouns, adjectives and pronouns, but asked to avoid using any grammatical particle (articles or prepositions). Secondly, they were asked to prioritize each word used as definition by assigning the number 1 for the one considered most important, related, close or that best defined the stimulus word, the number 2 to the next most important, the number 3 to the next and so on, until they had included all the words used as definitions; the number ten was assigned to the word that was furthest from the concept.

3.3. Data Analysis

To analyze the natural semantic networks findings⁸ it was pertinent to consider the following indicators used by Figuroa (1981) Moreno (1999); Valdez Medina, et al. (2004); Cabalín, et al. (2010):

1. J value. Indicates network size. The total of defining words used for the stimulus word. Displays the network’s semantic richness.
2. M value. Indicates semantic weight. The value obtained through multiplying the frequency of occurrence and the hierarchy obtained by this concept ($M = \text{frequency} \times \text{hierarchy}$).
3. SAM set. The group of words that get the highest values M.

⁸Some authors choose to analyze the network’s weight from a set of 15 SAM defining words (Valdez Medina, et al., 2004); other authors conduct this analysis from 12 defining words (Cabalín, et al.2010). For this research, both the concept of “equity” and the concept of “quality in education” were analyzed according to the semantic weight with 12 values, because there was a marked proximity between the concept numbers 10- distribution-and the concept 12-solidarity-(table 1). The importance of the analysis is not to alter the G values (G value total/individual G values), since the equation to obtain these values must adhere strictly to the analysis of the first ten M values. Therefore, the last two G values (Table 1. Society, solidarity and table 2. Bad, opportunities) are not reported.

4. FMG value. Indicates semantic distance. The defining words in the set SAM, in terms of percentages and semantic distance between words taking the word with more semantic weight as a 100% reference.
5. G value. Indicates semantic density. The difference between the highest and the lowest M values in the SAM set, which is divided by ten. Indicates the proximity among the ten M values that compose the SAM set, where the low G values reflect a high semantic density and the high G values reflect a low density; it is understood that there is distance between the concepts that constitute the network.

4. Findings

Equity Definitions

From the seventy [70] students who participated in the study, a total of 186 words were obtained to define the concept of "equity", this is the value $J=186$ (Table 1). The result for the SAM set for the twelve words with the higher semantic weight (M value) are shown in Table 1. Associated with this table, graphic 1 presents how the network is built and towards where the semantic weight leans. Between the concept "rights" ($M=104$), representing 27.5% and the concept "solidarity" ($M=50$) representing 13.2%, there is a minimum percentage difference (14.3%), meaning that from the fourth definition, low G values and FMG values will be noticed, which is understood as proximity and density.

The graphic 2 shows semantic cores representations (drawn from the FMG values, Table 1). The first core words identified are related to "definitions around the political/philosophical dimension". The word equality (100%) is related to the outcome of equity: equity is a political act (whether social policy, public policy, or State policy) and consequently there is equality (gender, access, etc.).

Percentages greater than fifty percent ($> 50\%$) are associated with this concept and are linked to effects from equity, i.e. as opportunities (56.2%), and from what society should "get" from political action, i.e. justice (51.9%). Only these three words encompass over 50% of the students' Views and represent their main areas of interest (Table 1). The second core of words is related to the dyad rights/education and associated with the subject's "education", defined as a right to which one must have access.

It is important to note that between the word justice (FMG = 51.9%) and the word rights (FMG = 27.5%) there is a considerable distance (24.4%). In this regard, between the concept of "rights" and "education" there is only a distance of 5.5 percentage points. Then, from the concept of "rights", there are nine concepts under 50% of the definitions. Continuing with the graphic 3 descriptions, there is a third group of words with a lower FMG value that can be considered "definitions around the dimension of social justice". For students, equity is defined as an instrument of social justice. The definitions are associated with the "expectations" that generate equity. That is, the possibilities and opportunities for a more just society: development (17.5%), democracy (17.2%), need (14.5%), distribution (14.3%), society (13.2%) and solidarity (13.2%). It is important to note that the antonym concept inequality (16.1%) appeared in the definitions.

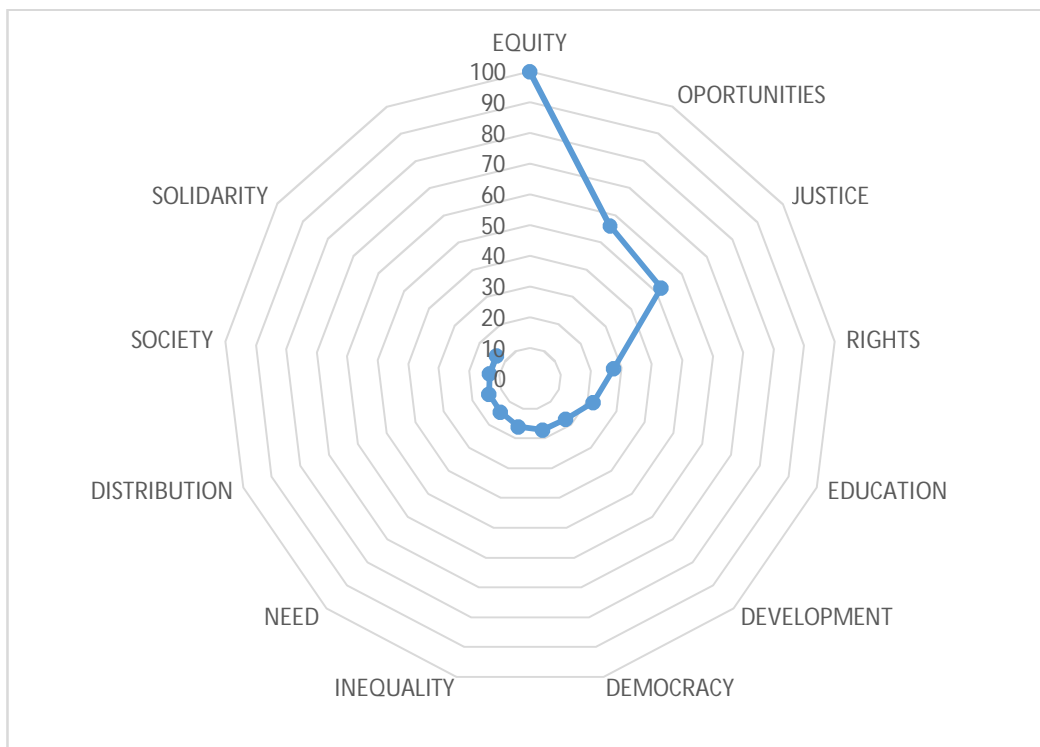
The G value obtained is a high value, $G=32.3$ (Table 1), which means there is a low semantic density in all definitions associated with the equity concept. Also between the concept "equality" and the concept "distribution" there is a low density. In the specific analysis of each of the G values, the graphic 3 shows clearly that between concept "education" (value $G = 2.1$) and the concept "distribution" (value $G = 0.1$) there are concepts associated with a high semantic density (low G value). These values are densely concentrated with a value fluctuation between 0.1 and 2.1, contrasting with the first four definitions (equality, opportunity, justice, rights) which have a low-density, but high M values; these concepts are distant from each other. The single G value showing density between these four concepts is that between opportunity and justice (1.6), which reflects a strong link between these concepts.

Table 1: SAM set. Stimulus word: Equity

	Value M	Value FMG (%)	Value G
1. EQUITY	377	100	0
2. OPORTUNITIES	212	56.2	16.5
3. JUSTICE	196	51.9	1.6
4. RIGHTS	104	27.5	9.2
5. EDUCATION	83	22	2.1
6. DEVELOPMENT	66	17.5	1.7
7. DEMOCRACY	65	17.2	0.1
8. INEQUALITY	61	16.1	0.4
9. NEED	55	14.5	0.6
10. DISTRIBUTION	54	14.3	0.1
11. SOCIETY	50	13.2	-
12. SOLIDARITY	50	13.2	-
Value J= 186			
Value G= 32.3			

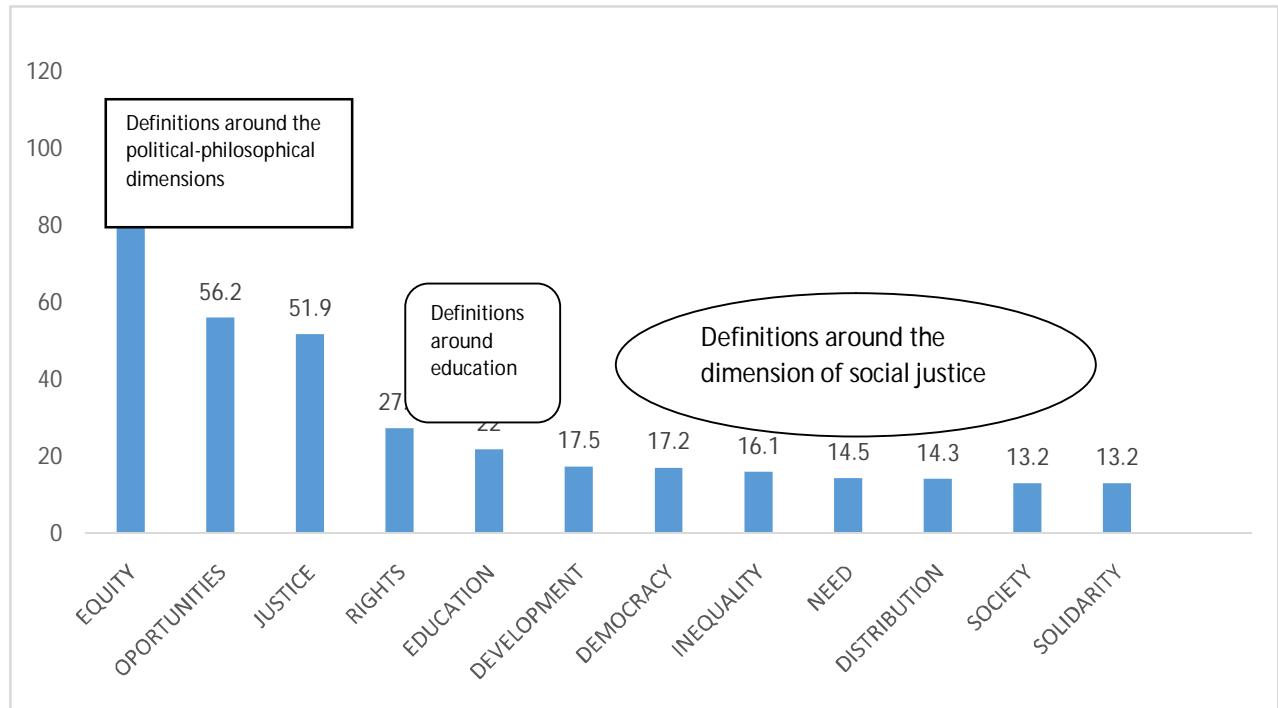
Source: Self elaboration.

Graphic 1: Value M (semantic weight). Stimulus word: Equity



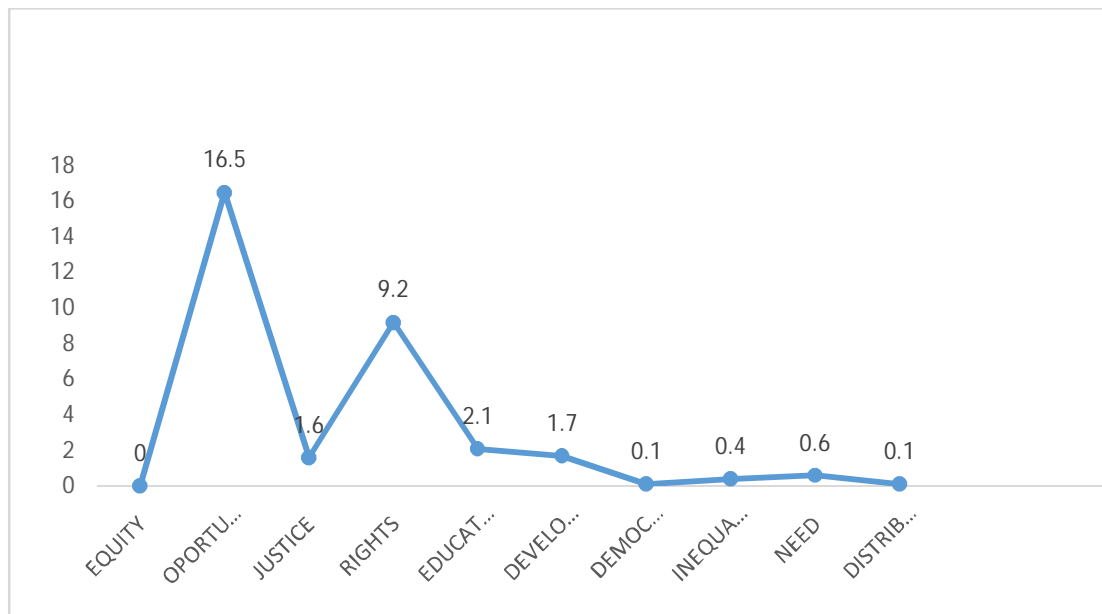
Source: Self elaboration.

Graphic 2: Value FMG (semantic distance). Stimulus word: Equity.



Source: Self elaboration.

Graphic 3: Value G (semantic density). Stimulus word: Equity



Source: Self elaboration.

Quality in education concepts

A total of 205 words defining the concept of "quality education", i.e., the value $J = 205$ (Table 2) was obtained. The overall result for the twelve SAM words more semantic weight (M value) are shown in Table 2; Likewise, in Graphic 4, the way that weaves the semantic network and where the weight is loaded semantic shown. In Graphic 4 can be seen that between the concept equity ($M = 101$), representing 79.5% and inclusion concept ($M = 94$) and accounting for 74%; there is a minimum percentage difference (5.5%). This means that within these four concepts / definition FMG and small G values, these values are understood as closeness and density are observed.

Graph 5 shows the representation of semantic nuclei (arising from the FMG values. -Table 2). In this context it identified the first nucleus of words having to do with "educational agent." The teachers / teachers word (100%), has to do with the subject with which the student interacts within the educational process. Associated with this concept, the highest percentages fifty percent (> 50%) have to do with two semantic nuclei: definitions around the "philosophical / political scene" and definitions about the "philosophical / educational scenario." In the first core equity (79.5%); equality (77.9%); the right (74.8%) and inclusion (74%), significant percentages grouped to define educational quality. These definitions are associated with the effects and features that in terms of educational policy quality in education "should be" or "must have". The second semantic core is of great weight. In this regard, three additional definitions are grouped into words more weight are: learning (66.9%), integral development (58.2%) and necessity (55.1%). These definitions are linked to the aspect of human need for, and what you can take advantage from quality in education. There are a total of eight words that group (> 50%) over 50% of the opinions of students, i.e., those of greater significance for them (Table 2).

The last semantic core is defined by concepts related to "political / social scenario." In this core, there are four definitions that can be considered the weakest, as they are removed from the eight concepts that hold the greatest semantic weight. It is noted that educational quality is defined as access / no access (45.6%); inequality (41.6%); bad (40.9%) and opportunities (40.1%). The G (the closeness we present the top ten M values with which the set is composed SAM) value is a low value: $G = 7.4$ (Table 2). That means there is high density semantics in all definitions associated with the concept quality of education. Among the teachers' / professors concept and the concept inequality.

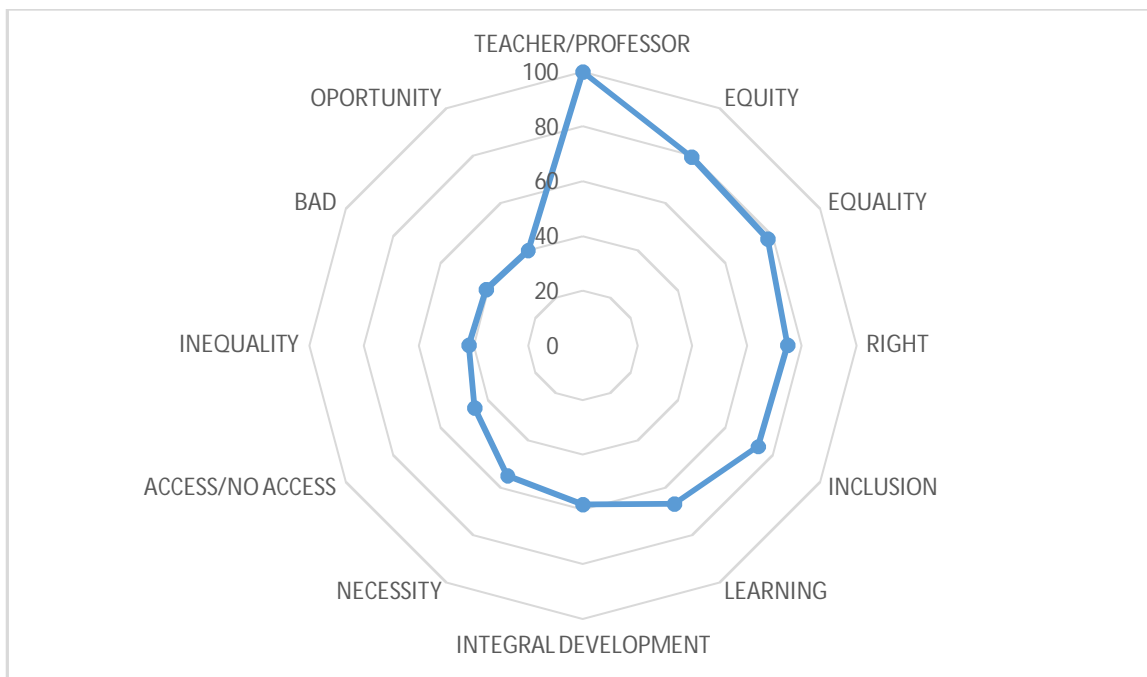
In the particular analysis of each of the G values, graph 6 shows clearly that the fairness concept between ($G = 2.6$) and the inequality concept ($G = 0.5$) there semantic concepts associated with high density (small G value). It is possible to observe how all values are densely concentrated. In this same figure shows the definition more weight: teachers / teachers ($M = 127$); It is completely removed, i.e. in low density with other concepts.

Table 2: SAM set. Word Stimulus: Quality in Education

	Value M	Value FMG (%)	Value G
1. TEACHER/PROFESSOR	127	100	0
2. EQUITY	101	79.5	2.6
3. EQUALITY	99	77.9	0.2
4. RIGHT	95	74.8	0.4
5. INCLUSION	94	74	0.1
6. LEARNING	85	66.9	0.9
7. INTEGRAL DEVELOPMENT	74	58.2	1.1
8. NECESSITY	70	55.1	0.4
9. ACCESS/NO ACCESS	58	45.6	1.2
10. INEQUALITY	53	41.7	0.5
11. BAD	52	40.9	-
12. OPORTUNITY	51	40.1	-
Value J= 205			
Value G= 7.4			

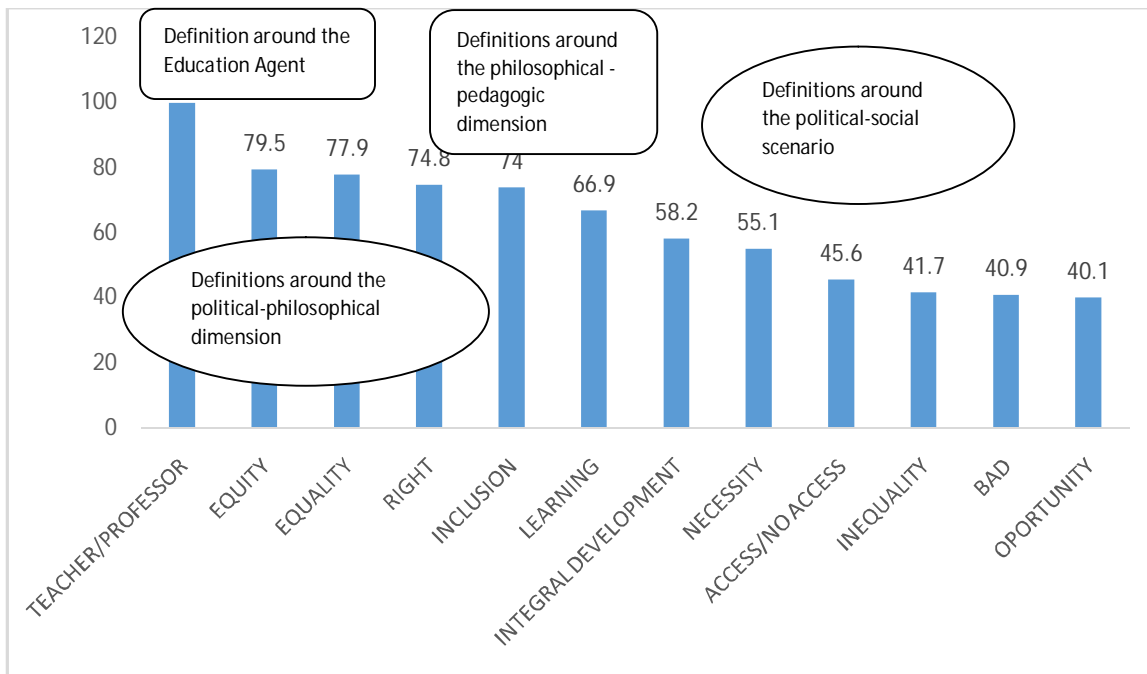
Source: Self elaboration.

Graphic 4: M value (semantic weight). Stimulus word: Quality in education.



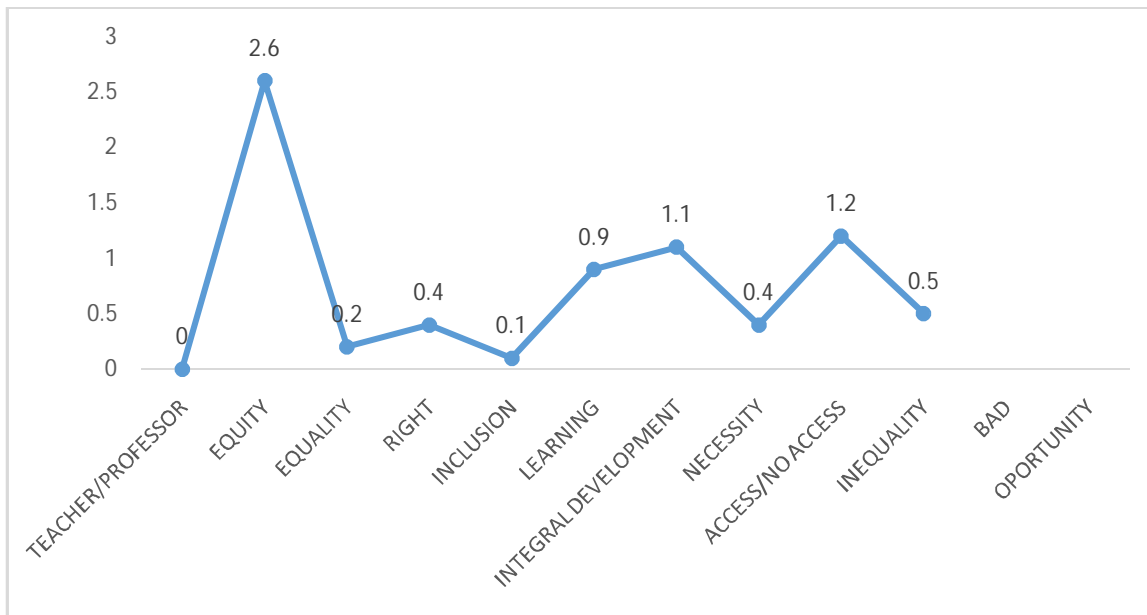
Source: Self elaboration.

Graphic 5: FMG value (semantic distance). Stimulus word: Quality in education.



Source: Self elaboration.

Graphic 6: Value G (semantic density) Word stimulus: Quality in Education



Source: Self elaboration.

5. Discussion.

The research results support the conclusion that for the University of Chile students, equity and quality in education are both a right and a need that must be characterized by equality, justice and opportunities and that should allow benefiting from a service to meet a need while ensuring the equitable distribution of that service (mainly education).

Table 3: Semantic Network for stimulus concepts: Equity and Quality in Education.

Equity	Rights	[it is a]	Rights	Quality in education
	Needs	[and a]	Needs	
	Equality	[that favors]	Equality	
	Opportunities	[grants]	Opportunities	
	Inequality	[counteracts]	Inequality	
	Development	[It is evident with the]	Integral Development	

Source: Self elaboration from table 1 and 2.

Right and necessity: Research results show that Chilean college students consider that quality in education and equity are both a right and a necessity. Public protests led by students reflect the tensions between the population and the state who has failed to guarantee public access to university to the masses. Historically, public instruction had its origins in the French Revolution. Present day modern states have implemented public instruction as a mean to social justice. In most United Nations (UN) member states education has become a "natural" right. Since, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the right to education has become an aspiration of nation states seeking to establish social justice among individuals. The highest aspiration underlying that statement is to offer quality education and universal coverage. While it is true that such a declaration appeals to the right to receive basic and secondary education; higher education should be considered within this framework of state endowments as equal access to quality education is an instrumental measure to establish equality between subjects. Legally [Law 20,129] and politically (MOE, 2012) Chilean education adheres to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, however, the Chilean government's responsibility to provide free education is limited to basic and post-secondary, omitting higher education.

Equity and need are concepts that are closely linked. The equity concept involves an act with moral and ethical value for a good or service offered by the state that is distributed equally for the benefit of the entire population on equal terms.

Indeed, Chilean students believe that to receive a quality education is an act of fairness and justice, which is supported by the law. Chilean student's claim is that the government has an obligation to establish higher education institutions providing the service for everyone⁹, because it is a necessity and a right and that such offer should be free, of quality and sufficient to meet demand¹⁰. Student's aspirations focus on the need to establish equitable mechanisms to ensure that the need is being supplied effectively and progressively. In this regard, the criterion of equity is associated with equal opportunities of access, retention and completion within an educational system. It is related to the availability of an educational service with which individuals should have to see fulfilled their right to education and that education, is of quality. Also, it relates to the need / accessibility to education regardless of social status, race, religion, and ethnicity.

Equality and opportunity: Chile's current higher education offer does not promote equal opportunities. Instruction is, among many others, an instrument of public policy by which modern states guarantee the right to equality, which the society is the legitimate holder of. Chilean students directly associate equity and opportunity, yet 60% of college-age Chileans are not attending school. Thus, there are no equal opportunities for all. According to Drislane and Parkinson's, equality (of opportunity) must be understood as follows:

Where differences in individual wealth, status and power are not so great to create advantages and disadvantages in the pursuit of personal achievement. The liberal ideology and consensus theory claim that ample equality of opportunity exists in modern societies (2010, ¶). The same authors define equality (status) as: "Where there is little difference in the possession of individuals of wealth, status and power. It does not exist in any complex society" (¶ Drislane and Parkinson 2010). Rawls' liberal *A theory of justice* (Aguilar, 2003); considers that equity as justice is based on three basic questions: What is it distributed? How is it distributed? And among who is it distributed; such principles are normative and correspond to liberalism: universalism, ethical individualism and neutrality. Rawls' theory focuses on explaining the how of distribution, for him the criteria are fair if the procedure is right, regardless of the results:

The primary social goods, [freedom, equal opportunities, income, wealth and the basis of mutual respect] ought to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of all these goods was advantageous for the least advantaged¹¹ (Rawls, 1978: 341, cited by Aguilar, 2003). In the Chilean education system, it is clearly observable how distributive justice is applied and the way in which the institutions distribute the burdens, benefits, rights and duties. The benefits of higher education are not being distributed equitably since private universities have a large share of the market, thus, the distribution of educational goods in Chile is not based on justice but in utilitarian distribution. So, higher education becomes more attached to the utility (profit) that it generates for the system that in turn is responsible for managing the resource (education). As a consequence, higher education is not attached to the benefit of those receiving the service. Unlike modern democratic states that are based on welfare, Chilean education is not based on a social contract, nor principles of political ethics. Finally, Rawls believes that two principles of distribution would lead to a valid concept of justice as fairness: one for freedom and another for equality (social primary goods). According to Rawls (1978: 341, cited by Aguilar, 2003):

1. Every person should be equally entitled to the broader overall system of basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

⁹ In Chile (OECD, 2011), universities are classified into two categories: (1) universities created by the private sector after 1980 known as "private universities" and (2) those that belong to the Council of Rectors of Chilean universities [CRUCH] known as "traditional universities". CRUCH universities are composed by 16 state, 6 Catholic and 3 private secular universities. In these universities students have access to various forms of subsidized financing; instead, students of non CRUCH higher education institutions have fewer (largely unsubsidized) options. CRUCH universities receive direct grants from the State (Fiscal Direct Contribution, AFD) and indirect donations (Indirect Tax Contribution, AFI) assigned to institutions that attract 27,000 students with the best scores in the PSU. Private universities, however, are financed by tuition and AFI (OECD, 2011).

¹⁰ Educational quality within an education system that according to Brunner (2012) "is offered under various qualities".

¹¹ Difference principle. Society must support only unequal distributions of social primary goods as when it maximizes the benefits to the most disadvantaged.

2. Economic and social inequalities must be structured so that they are for: (a) greatest benefit of the least advantaged, according to a principle of fair savings; (B) the offices and positions are open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

In short, the dialectical relationship between distribution / need will remain. , since the definition of equality means equal distribution of power, status, economic well-being, not to create disadvantages among members of a society, on the other hand Chilean student's "egalitarian" aspiration appeals more to the application of criteria for distribution of educational resources to establish an equal distributions in terms of opportunity (access, retention, graduation, derived benefits), rather than to aspire to power. Social equality as a state's instrument of political action should establish links of responsibility / right between society and law. The exercise of justice is itself an exercise in law enforcement. While there is a law that guarantees quality in higher education in Chile [Law 20,129], its effects have not been reflected on equity yet, which is the indicator of quality in education (; Schmelkes, 1997; Muñoz Izquierdo, 1998, INEE, 2003; Rodriguez, 2003; OECD, 2007; Robles, 2009 Toranzos, 1996).

It is worth inquiring if at any time the desire to receive, "according to need" which is the Chilean student's position; will reconcile with the state's official position of giving everyone "according to their work and merit." Our findings, that equity which appeals to fairness and the principle of justice, has not been considered by the Chilean educational policy for higher education, should shed light to this inquiry.

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