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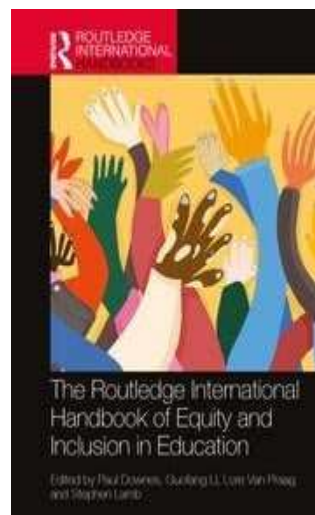
Downes, P., Li, G., Van Praag, L., & Lamb, S. (Eds.) (2024). *The Routledge international handbook of equity and inclusion in education*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003282921>

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**Reviewed by Bimbi Lastri Prima Asih**  
**Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia**  
**Indonesia**

Education equity and inclusion is the basis of a society where everyone can thrive, no matter who they are. Thus, inclusive education systems with a focus on equity are necessary to respond to systemic inequalities and advance social justice (Banks & Banks, 2020). UNESCO (2020) underlines the potential of educational inclusion to develop more just and unified societies. By prioritising equity and inclusion as core values, education institutions dismantle the barriers that sustain inequities and enable all students to flourish. The concept of equity and inclusion in education, the potential challenges to it, and pathways through which school communities can better serve students with disabilities, however, are less clear. As a master's student in early childhood, I also have concerns about how to integrate equity and inclusion in current education systems.



Addressing some of these concerns, *The International Handbook of Equity and Inclusion in Education* by Downes et al. offers valuable information about this topic. It serves as a practical guide for development inclusive practices and ensuring that no child is left behind in educational opportunities. Professor Paul Downes is Director of the Educational Disadvantage Centre for Dublin City University, and an affiliate professor at the University of Malta, with over 110 peer-reviewed publications across different fields. He has delivered keynote addresses and lectures internationally, served in an advisory capacity for the European Commission, and has been a Visiting Research Fellow at the University of British Columbia, Victoria University and the University of Cambridge. Other writers include Guofang Li, whose work focuses on bilingualism, biliteracy, teacher education, and language policy; Lore Van Praag, assistant professor of sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam; and Stephen Lamb, professor emeritus at Victoria University, whose research explores social inequalities, migration, and education. They are the perfect combination to talk about this topic due to their expertise.

By treating equity and inclusion as an ongoing process, the authors of the *Handbook* emphasize the need to dismantle systemic barriers and drive transformative reform. Achieving equity and inclusion globally requires

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collaboration from an interdisciplinary community dedicated to education research, policy, and practice. Downes et al. highlight collaboration as a key component in creating school cultures that foster student agency, empowerment and engagement. However, they argue that the challenges related to equity and inclusion in education are complex and require cross-disciplinary approaches and methodologies from educational research, psychology, sociology, economics, and other fields through a social justice lens.

The *Handbook* is highly relevant to several audiences. First, it aims to provide educators and educational researchers new practices and strategies to address educational inequities. Second, it offers educational policy makers and administrators fact-based recommendations for policies that make education systems more inclusive and fair. Graduate students and academics, particularly those specializing in literacy studies, critical pedagogy, and educational psychology, will also benefit from the insights from the handbook and the valuable references it gives for future research, critical pedagogy, and educational psychology. Lastly, this book would benefit practitioners in high-poverty communities serving students from low-income backgrounds, as it explains challenges while also offering solutions to educational access and equity.

This book has several notable strengths. First, the authors take a comprehensive approach to dealing with weaknesses while maintaining an asset-based focus. The significance of improving growth for entire systems as well as for individuals is emphasized in every section of the book. Second, the emphasis on collaboration across sectors is a key point, with the authors calling for interventions that include health professionals, teachers, social workers, and other critical players. It also offers practical advice for inclusive education and specific, actionable strategies for establishing respect-based school cultures that honor students from different socio-economic classes, genders, and ethnicities and with learning differences.

However, the volume has a few shortcomings, such as a narrow lens that leaves out the structural role of power concerning issues of equity and inclusion. The book overlooks challenges such as system blockage, inertia, and discrimination that affect educational systems and play a key role in understanding and addressing educational inequities. Moreover, another aspect lacking from this book is the development of critical discourse analysis. Specifically, little work has focused on the use of spatial theories in support of equitable and just educational institutions. While this book highlights some key points that make the disparity clear, the discussions often do not move beyond individual levels or models of analysis that are systemic in nature. An in-depth systemic approach is needed to understand how the different levels interact and impact the dynamics of education.

In sum, the main takeaway from the *Handbook* is the need for a multifaceted approach to tackle both systemic and individual drivers of educational disparities. Containing contributions from leading experts in the field of language and literacy education, the *Handbook* will be beneficial for readers seeking new strategies for a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, social-justice based approach to inclusion in education settings.

## References

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## About the Reviewer



Bimbi Lastris Prima Asih is a postgraduate student in the early childhood master's program at Universitas Pendidikan, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. She has extensive experience managing kindergarten and working with special needs students in an inclusive school environment. Bimbi is originally from Padang, Indonesia and graduated cum laude with her B.Ed from Universitas Negeri Padang in 2012. Currently, she is working on her second B.Ed in early childhood education at Universitas Terbuka, which she expects to finish in 2025. She received a scholarship from LPDP Indonesia to study at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia's early childhood master's degree program. Bimbi won first place in the China-Asian Story Telling Competition and was awarded best presenter at the International Conference of Early Childhood Education in Bandung (2024).



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