



Research Paper

Theories of Justice and Their Applications in the Field of Educational Policy in Iran (Case Study: Student Admission Quotas)

Amin Ghanbari ¹, Gholamreza Taleghani ^{*2}

1. PhD student in Public Administration, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran
2. Corresponding Author: Professor, Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

Received: 2022-02-15

Accepted: 2022-06-12

Abstract

Aim: The student admission system of any country can lead to justice when its policies are fair. In this regard, the objective of this study is to analyze one of the most important student admission policies in Iran, namely the quota policy and creating quotas for some candidates from the perspective of justice. To this end, this descriptive-analytical study used library studies (study of documents and literature) for data collection. Therefore, among all the documents related to student admission quotas (research community), documents related to student admission quotas after the Islamic Revolution were selected as the research sample. Then, two important theories of justice, namely the theories of John Rawls and Sen, were used to analyze those documents. The trustworthiness of the research was confirmed through showing the details of how to derive the concepts and meanings from the two theories, mentioning the details of the data, and presenting many examples. Finally, the research results were compared with those of other studies. The results of the analysis generally show that since John Rawls, in addition to equality in process, considered equality in outcome, according to his theory, it is fair to create a quota based on conditions. Unlike Rawls, Sen places more emphasis on equality in process than equality in outcome. Therefore, according to Sen's theory, empowerment and capability building are recommended instead of quotas. Furthermore, the results of the analysis show that according to Rawls's Theory of Justice, it is fair to create a quota when discrimination is positive. Otherwise, it will cause injustice in the

society because it violates the principle of equal opportunity for the candidates to enter the universities. It is also possible to ensure that the quota is fair when the problem of conflict of interest is resolved in the student admissions decision-making and policy-making system.

Keywords: *Justice, Quota, Student admission, Educational policy making*

Introduction

A country's education system can reduce the grounds of injustice in different parts of society because the disadvantaged classes of society can access better jobs with a good education system and then have sufficient facilities in other areas (health, nutrition, salaries, etc.) (Walzer, 1984: 197). Education system is governed by the educational policies formulated by policymakers. Thus, an education system can lead to justice when its policies are fair.

One of the most important policies implemented in Iran after the Islamic Revolution was the policy of creating university entrance quotas for some volunteers. In general, one of the reasons for creating quotas in society is creating justice in society (Zarei and Mahmoudi, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to examine and analyze how fair these quotas are. As mentioned, this research discusses one of the important principles of creating quotas. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to review and analyze the policy of creating quotas in the student admission system in Iran from the perspective of justice.

There are different theories about justice, but we used only two theories of justice, namely John Rawls's theory of justice as fairness and Sen's Capability Approach to analyze the policy of creating quotas. Rawls's idea of justice as fairness embodies two principles:

Principle 1: Individuals have the right to equality in relation to fundamental freedoms;

Principle 2: Social and economic inequalities should occur only if:

A: Inequalities benefit everyone, in other words, they have the most benefit for the most disadvantaged people of the society;

B: These inequalities relate to positions and situations to which everyone has equal access (Rawls, 1999: 53).

According to Rawls, our choice about the principles of justice takes place in a situation called the veil of ignorance (Meyer and Sanklecha, 2016: 17).

Based on the capability approach, we should focus on functions and capabilities (Robeyns, 2018). In other words, our criterion for evaluating and judging should not be desirability—as utilitarians say, or basic goods—as Rawls suggests, but capabilities (Sen, 2015: 93). Capability approach

focuses on individuals' real opportunities that enable them to live in a style that have reason to be valuable (Visser & Haisma, 2021)

Methodology

This research is descriptive-analytical research in which data were collected through library studies. The documents (text of laws, theoretical literature, etc.) related to student admission quotas after the Islamic Revolution were studied. Then, based on the important concepts extracted from the two theories of justice by John Rawls and Sen, student admission quotas in Iran are analyzed.

Results

Three concepts were extracted from studying and analyzing Rawls's theory of justice that help analyze the issue of quotas and student admission facilities. These three concepts are equal opportunity, positive discrimination and conflict of interest. The concept of positive discrimination was extracted from Part A of the second principle. According to Rawls's theory of justice, the principles of justice are determined in a situation called the veil of ignorance, that is, people in this situation are not aware of their status and interests. Thus, the concept of conflict of interest in the decision-making and policy-making literature was extracted from the concept of the veil of ignorance.

The core concept of Sen's capability approach is capability. Accordingly, efforts should be made to empower people by providing them with resources and facilities as well as removing environmental barriers. In other words, their capabilities must be increased such that they independently achieve their ideal status based on their choices.

Discussion and conclusion

According to Rawls's theory of justice, it is fair to create a quota when discrimination is positive. Otherwise, it will cause injustice in the society because it violates the principle of equal opportunity for the candidates to enter the universities. Fairness of the quota can be ensured when the problem of conflict of interest is resolved in the student admissions decision-making and policy-making system. According to Sen's capability approach for student admission, efforts should be made to increase the capabilities and abilities of people with disabilities by providing educational facilities and

resources, so that they can be independent and enter the university based on their capabilities.

Reference

- Meyer, Lukas H. and Sanklecha, Pranay. (2016). *Philosophy of Justice: Extending Liberal Justice. in Space and Time*. In Clara Sabbagh and Manfred Schmitt. Handbook of Social Justice Theory and Research. New York: Springer .
- Rawls, John. (1999). *A Theory of Justice*. United States of America: Harvard University Press.
- Robeyns, Ingrid. (2018). *The Capability Approach*. In Serena Olsaretti. The Oxford Handbook of Distributive Justice. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Sen, Amartya. (2015). *Development as Freedom*. translated by Vahid Mahoudi. Tehran: University of Tehran. (Text in persian)
- Visser, Sanne Siete and Haisma, Hinke. (2021). Fulfilling food practices: Applying the capability approach to ethnographic research in the Northern Netherlands. *Social Science & Medicine*, (272), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.113701>
- Walzer, Michael. (1984). *Spheres Of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality*. New York: basic books.
- Zarei, M. and Mohammadi, H. (2013). Legitimate discrimination in Iranian higher education with emphasis on special quotas. *Parliament and Strategy*, 20 (76), 5-34. (Text in persian)



This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons AttributionNoncommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).
