

The Socioeconomic Status Impact on Rural Area Students' Education: An Interview Study

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ABSTRACT

As GDP per capital increases rapidly in contemporary China, the issue of educational equity is further highlighted. This study aimed to investigate how socioeconomic status impact education, specifically in rural areas with low socioeconomic status. Compared with developed areas such as many urban cities in China, the enrolment rate in rural areas is very low. As a result, solving the problem of education in rural areas could further solve the problem of educational equity. The level of economic development is the main factor which impedes the development of education in rural areas such as governmental funding, limited schools, limited school age children, and limited teacher forces. The data analysis found that socioeconomic status impacted their quality of education, their ways of thinking and behaving, their family education and thus overall impacting their academic trajectory in the long run.

Keywords: Poverty, Educational Inequality, SES, Rural Areas.

1. INTRODUCTION

As GDP per capital increases rapidly in contemporary China, the issue of educational equity is further highlighted. On average, 55% of junior high school graduates in Shandong China could enter ordinary senior high schools to further their study. However, for rural junior high school students, 55% enrolment rate was a luxury, while the actual enrolment rate was only about 25%. Compared with developed areas such as many urban cities in China, the enrolment rate in rural areas is very low. As a result, solving the problem of education in rural areas could further solve the problem of educational equity [1].

The level of economic development is the main factor which impedes the development of education in rural areas. There are several reasons behind it. The first one is the role of government in facilitating funding to rural areas. As the government, specifically government in rural area, is often lacking funding, the local government usually do not have enough financial support to invest in schools as well as some other advanced educational facilities such as projectors. Also, the numbers of schools in rural areas is usually very limited due to the limited number of school age children and limited funding, the local governments would also neglect the development of

other education sectors such as the security of schools, sanitation management and teaching management [2].

It is also very common that the number of teachers in rural areas is very limited as many qualified teachers are not willing to teach in rural areas. Specifically, most teachers with high level of teaching certificates are more willing to work in areas with good economic conditions to get better living standards. Family socioeconomic status is also an aspect that hinders the improvement of education in rural areas. In order to support the sources of household income, many parents would let their children go to work at their early age to make money instead of going to school to receive education, which would result a high drop-out rate at rural areas. Thus, this study aimed to investigate how socioeconomic status impact education, specifically in rural areas with low socioeconomic status [3][4].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Concept of Poverty

Most of the researchers would argue that there are relations between poverty and people's level of education. Poverty is multidimensional, not just the family source of finance. Poverty was also defined as a scarcity of

freedom which refers to people who are poor at their capability to operate effectively and efficiently in society, which is widely accepted by a large number of scholars in the educational equality field. In general, absolute and relative poverty could compose the concept of poverty to some extent [5][6].

2.2. Family Background Influence the Education Outcomes

The socioeconomic background of a family is related to education outcome. The level of income is the main considerations. Families experiencing poverty usually are not able to pay for tuitions and costs, especially families in those rural areas. Families experiencing poverty are also struggling with accessing better education in some metropolises. Their concerns about educational costs are usually from the two following perspectives: financial and non-financial costs in education. Financial costs in education usually include some upfront costs such as schooling, transportation, school uniforms and textbooks. Parents from families experiencing poverty usually cannot afford such costs [7].

On the other hand, the opportunity cost would be another important factor for those families to enroll successfully at schools. Those families usually do not have access to the greater education resources as compared to other families who are not struggle financially. Furthermore, many of those families usually do not consider it worthwhile to send their children to school, because they are not able to foresee the long-term gains from education which takes years to see the results. Parents in a rural area who are struggling financially usually would be more willing to see some instant benefits, such as agricultural works or domestic duties. In addition, those parents are more likely to spend less time in implementing proper family literacy practice on their children. Consequently, the achievement gap between

urban and rural areas caused by the socioeconomic factors are widening [8].

2.3. Quality Education Contributes to the Educational Inequality

Introducing high-quality education will contribute to narrowing the achievement gap in society. Improving the standard of people’s lives results in raising the average income of each family in long term run. In addition, the gradual increase in the employment rate across the country will result in more effective human resources. In terms of families struggling financially, they would be benefited by getting more and better career opportunities and getting more income to feed their family. The people who have changed their life via quality education would have higher awareness in education and their next generation’s education as they would not want their children to fall back into financial struggling. Additionally, raising people’s average income could also assist the female in those underdeveloped areas. If females who are from families struggling financially had a chance to be educated systematically, they are more likely to get out of poverty and be able to manage their own life [9][10].

3. METHODS

3.1. Context and Participants

This study aimed to recruit participants who have taught in rural areas in China for a variety of reasons such as charity work, taking part in school activities. We applied convenient sampling strategy to recruit targeted participants from our own personal network to participate in a semi-structure interview. The participant recruitment process ended up with 4 participants. Table 1 displays the detailed information of each participant.

Table 1 Participant Information

Participant	Age	Time Taught in Rural Area	Subject(s) taught	Areas Taught	Local SES level
Minnie	17	2020.7-8	English	Hainan China	Extreme poverty
Emma	17	2019.7-8	English, Chinese	Fujian China.	Below the average
Grace	17	2019.11-12	Spanish Art	Morocco	extreme poverty
Ivory	18	2021.7-8	English	GuiZhou China	Below the average

3.2. Data Collection

Participants were invited to participate in a semi-structure interview to discuss their teaching experiences and perceptions during the time they were teaching in the particular rural areas. The interview protocol is listed below:

1. Which rural area did you teach?
2. Describe the area economic status where you visited to supported teaching activities.
3. How is the education in those area? (how many students, school or teachers and how the environment/facilities be like?)
4. How did the students behave in class? How do their behaviors compare to those students in the urban areas? In your opinion, what makes them different? (are they active? Or not pay much attention when the teachers are speaking)
5. How well did the students understand the concepts/contents being taught? (Can they understand the class contents? How they perform in class tests?) How did their levels of understandings of the concepts/contents being taught differ from those students in the urban areas? In your opinions, what makes them different?
6. How much do their parents care about their children's academic performance and actively engage in their learning? How do the parents' levels of engagements compare to those parents in the urban areas? In your opinions, what makes them different? (Do their parents ask how their children behave in school?)
7. What do you think are some strengths and limitations of going to school in rural areas? Why? Please explain.
8. Do you think their academic trajectories may be different if they go to school in urban areas? Why? How? Please explain.

3.3. Data Analysis

The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed as soon as the interviews were completed. The full transcripts were then translated into English for further data analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted to examine the full transcripts to reveal the patterns across participants.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Q1. How did the students behave in class? How do their behaviors compare to those students in the urban areas? In your opinion, what makes them different? (are

they active? Or not pay much attention when the teachers are speaking)

Minnie: The students there are still full of enthusiasm for learning. The students there will still be relatively worse than those in other big cities, but they still have some basic and basic knowledge of English. But the equipment there, the environment will certainly be worse than the big city, and perhaps the teachers there will be the poorer quality of teaching. Nevertheless, students are active in class, answer questions positively, and interact with teachers. I think they can accept the class, each assignment is also able to complete. Whether it's the performance of the class or the completion of homework after class, it will be quite good. But compared to students in big cities, students here may have difficulty with some of the more thought-out topics.

Emma: They know some basic theoretical knowledge. However, there are still some deficiencies in quality education. The pronunciation of English is not very standard, this should be related to the teacher, because they told me that the teacher taught me to read this way. In terms of knowledge, such as some words, they know and understand more than we expected. These children are very easy to learn. Every time they come to class, they come earlier than us, including some interesting questions we asked, even if the answers are sometimes wrong. Moreover, their attention is easily distracted. These children often do not spend very long time attentively. They start to make trouble when they are in class, and I have to take a quite long time to deal with discipline issues. And students in urban areas tend to be more disciplined, including some basic etiquette in class. But the students in the city are even more reluctant to express their thinking process or even thinking about the results. They think that if they say something wrong, they will be embarrassed. In my opinion, it should be about family education, and some imperceptible reasons or some circumstances that have caused such a difference. In terms of the understanding of knowledge points, I think there is no problem with their understanding. On the contrary, they are more willing to think about questions and answer them. This allows me to understand their thinking process and correct their mistakes. Including in the aspect of memorizing words, they are fully able to complete the tasks we set out even when they are attentive. The only thing I think they are different from urban children is that their foundation is completely different. Children in cities are more advanced, and their ability to concentrate is not as good as children in cities can control themselves.

Grace: I taught them two subjects, Spanish and drawing. When I had Spanish class with them, only a few students listening to me. Some of them were sleeping, most of them just sleeping in class. But when I taught them drawing, they began to participate and get interest. During my experience teaching in Morocco, the students

did not pay much attention in their academic performance and just want to have some relaxing lesson such as art or music. Although the local teacher told me that they also had Spanish class before, I felt their Spanish level was like beginners. Some of them even did not how to use some basic sentence in Spanish.

Ivory: I taught them English during that time. Maybe they didn't have a good language environment, their ability to accept English is not as fast as the developed regions, sometimes I needed to repeat about three times for a new word so that they could follow me to read out this word. What impressed me most was that when I asked them to talk in English, they did not dare to speak out loud in English. They spoke in a very low voice and were not confident. They are only willing to speak to me loudly when I talk to them in Chinese.

Participants generally considered that students in rural areas have some behavior issues as compared to their peers in urban areas. However, they also attributed to the "different" behaviors to the lower quality education in rural areas. For example, Ivory mentioned that students in the area she taught were usually very shy in speaking out and when they spoke up their voices were usually very low. She considered that it was because children in rural areas usually do not have enough opportunities to practice oral English so when she asked them answer in English they usually do not have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to speak up. Grace contributed the different behaviors to the fact that the students in rural areas do not consider academic performance important to their life. Also, Emma contributed the different behaviors to the local family education. Overall, they thought that many of the students in rural areas are passionate about learning.

Q2. How well did the students understand the concepts/contents being taught? (Can they understand the class contents? How they perform in class tests?) How did their levels of understandings of the concepts/contents being taught differ from those students in the urban areas? In your opinions, what makes them different?

Minnie: Students are active in class, answer questions positively, and interact with teachers. I think they can accept the class, each assignment is also able to complete. Whether it's the performance of the class or the completion of homework after class, it will be quite good. But compared to students in big cities, students here may have difficulty with some of the more thought-out topics. This may be because students here are not exposed to some training and extracurricular courses as students in big cities, and parents in big cities are also focused on all aspects of raising their children from an early age.

Emma: These children are very easy to learn. Every time they come to class, they come earlier than us, including some interesting questions we asked, even if

the answers are sometimes wrong. Moreover, their attention is easily distracted. These children often do not spend very long time attentively. They start to make trouble when they are in class, and I have to take a quite long time to deal with discipline issues

Grace: When I taught them the word in Spanish, they were willing to read along with me, but when I tried to test whether they could remember the word, half of the students still had difficulty accepting the knowledge and needed to take a long time to memorize it.

Ivory: They are not as interested in learning English as students in developed areas, and they are a little timid in spoken English. Although they are able to pronounce some English words correctly, they did not quite understand the meaning of a sentence.

Overall, participants generally do not consider students in rural areas are lower intellectually. They generally considered that students in rural areas are able to understand the same knowledge and concepts as good as their students in urban area. Some participants mentioned that some students had difficulties understanding the concepts but they considered it because they were not exposed to the intensive extracurricular training as of those in the urban areas.

Q3. How much do their parents care about their children's academic performance and actively engage in their learning? How do the parents' levels of engagements compare to those parents in the urban areas? In your opinions, what makes them different?(Do their parents ask how their children behave in school?)

Minnie: But compared to students in big cities, students here may have difficulty with some of the more thought-out topics. This may be because students here are not exposed to some training and extracurricular courses as students in big cities, and parents in big cities are also focused on all aspects of raising their children from an early age. Parents will still actively cooperate with teachers, they will also be very concerned about the students' learning situation and can give timely feedback to teachers. However, I suspect that parents there will still communicate with their children, but parents in big cities may be busy with work, more time with children will be replaced by grandparents. It may have been such a problem before, but with the development of China, in fact, like many rural places, still can let children learn knowledge and go to school. But the quality of education in the countryside is certainly not as good as that of education in big cities.

Emma: The only thing I think they are different from urban children is that their foundation is completely different. Children in cities are more advanced, and their ability to concentrate is not as good as children in cities can control themselves. The children I don't have in the place I go to are their grandparents living with them, and I haven't been in contact with their parents. The

disadvantage is that many children cannot receive a very complete basic education, which leads to a lack of solid foundation, which will be more difficult later, including the rural education environment is not particularly good. Subtle children and parents will not pay much attention to this aspect, especially in elementary schools.

Grace: I did not meet their parents so I did not know their parents' opinions to their children. However, The students rarely talked to me about their parents, and they had been living in the disabled center for a long time and few parents visited them.

Ivory: I heard that some of them had to walk about an hour on the mountain road to school and cook food for their younger brothers and sisters after school. Many students only have grandparents and younger brothers and sisters in their families. Their parents have gone to other areas to work and earn money, and they rarely return home. They are mature and always took the initiative to help me with things, but they were not very serious about their study. Many students also expressed their intention to go out early to help their parents earn money to support their family.

Overall, participants generally expressed concerns about family education of those students in the rural areas. Many of them mentioned that those students are living with grandparents and they had to walk long distance to commute between home and school. Some of them even had to take care of their elder grandparents and younger siblings. One participant mentioned that some of her students lived in a disability center and they barely see their parents who are working in the urban city. Thus, they were all worried about if their parents care about their children's education since they were busy in other distanced places working.

Q4. What do you think are some strengths and limitations of going to school in rural areas? Why? Please explain.

Minnie: They are less likely to learn some extracurricular knowledge and competition to increase their knowledge reserves.

Emma: There is also the problem of scarcity of teachers.

Grace: Some of the teaching quality in schools in economically backward areas is very low and the number of teachers was very limited which would lead to the decline in the quality of the knowledge students acquire.

Ivory: These children who go to school in rural areas are better at taking care of themselves, because their parents will come back home less time to take care of them, and they are more independent than students in developed areas. However, due to the slow economic development in rural areas, some digital media teaching is difficult to implement in rural areas.

Overall, participants worried that the quality of education in rural area is lower than those in urban area. Some worried that students in rural areas are not able to get the amount of extracurricular training and courses for them to be as competitive as those in the urban areas. One participants mentioned specifically that the local infrastructure in rural areas are not able to support some digital learning tools to function in those areas, which is a huge limitation on the quality of education in rural area.

Q5. Do you think their academic trajectories may be different if they go to school in urban areas? Why? How? Please explain.

Minnie: Probably, their basic knowledge points in the city will be similar, but because the students there are very competitive, they are likely to learn some extracurricular knowledge and competition to increase their knowledge reserves. Meanwhile, students in big cities need not only good grades but also skills and thinking to get into top universities in China, which will lead them to learn more extracurricular knowledge. If they go to the school in city, they may have a chance to have a n access to higher education and get rid of the poverty.

Emma: yes, and it is quite unpredictable for those students from rural area, because their foundation may be poor and they would feel a huge amount of peer pressure, which could be an motivation, as well as a kind of depression. In addition, I don't know the premise under which such an assumption is made, but what I want to say is that the IQ of rural children is not lower than that of urban children. If they are on the same starting line from the beginning winning or losing is uncertain.

Grace: maybe yes, In urban areas, they can gain better educational resources, such as teachers with teacher certificates and multimedia technology for teaching, which can effectively improve their learning efficiency.

Ivory: It is hard to say, although they could gain those external improvements, some of them still did not have confidence for themselves in learning those foreign languages, so they still have barriers in learning new things.

Overall, participants agreed that students in the rural areas' academic trajectories may be different if they are in the urban areas since they have the similar basic knowledge as of those in the urban areas. However, they also mentioned that they would have to take more extracurricular training or courses in order for them to be as competitive academically as their peers who are in the urban area.

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate how socioeconomic status impact education, specifically in rural areas with low socioeconomic status. The data analysis found that socioeconomic status impacted their quality of education,

their ways of thinking and behaving, their family education and thus overall impacting their academic trajectory in the long run.

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