

Exploring Compulsory Education Policy of Rural and Urban Area in China

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ABSTRACT

In the current socio-economic development trend, the phenomenon of social stratification gradually affects China's compulsory education and cannot reach the policy's objectives. This paper reviews mainly on compulsory education policy's development in the context of social stratification. This paper utilizes a literature review to explore different phenomena that arise from the object of compulsory education in urban and rural areas. Social stratification causes educational stratification; at the same time, compulsory education exacerbates social stratification, which is mainly caused by uneven levels of economic development. Alleviating stratification needs to satisfy educational resources and diverse educational performance. The rural to the urban enrollment "hukou" system and financial centralization needs to be updated in terms of the policy. While in humanistic care, scientific family education and the community of migrant children and left-behind children deserve wider recognition. Through these efforts to improve the urban-rural gap and maintain a virtuous cycle between cities, the original intent of China's compulsory education policy can be gradually realized. The ultimate goal is to produce a virtual education environment where every child can have relatively equal access. Also, every family can experience less unaffordable stress of compulsory education.

Keywords: *Compulsory Education, Educational Performance, Rural Area, Urban Area*

1. INTRODUCTION

The nine-years compulsory education policy has been implemented in China. This paper will explore rural and urban education policies under the context of current social stratification. It will explore the phenomena arising from different classes of compulsory education recipients and the problems they face. It will first demonstrate the background of the current situation and crisis in rural and urban China. Based on the experience of the nine-years compulsory education policy surrounding the status of China, there will be several sets of case studies to compare with rural and urban areas' phenomena arising from different classes of compulsory education recipients. Through these case studies, the difficulties and challenges of current compulsory education can be illustrated as below.

2. BACKGROUND OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Both rural and urban China have implemented nine-year compulsory education. In urban China, all fees for nine years of compulsory education were abolished in

2007 [1]. In rural China, tuition, books, and miscellaneous expenses are free for students as well. With the development of compulsory education policy in rural and urban, tons of students gain the opportunity of studying, and their families gain new hope at the same time. The penetration rate of receiving basic education has generally increased that both urban and rural are in the process of development. In the meantime, it constantly generates problems in different areas and social classes. In rural China, resources are unevenly distributed; thereby, the remote mountains area has a large gap with coastal rural areas. The education quality is also negatively affected by rural parents' limited knowledge, backward faculty, and teaching facilities. In urban China, students have more opportunities for schools, but education costs increase rapidly. It leads to education stratification and indirectly causes social stratification. The current development and its problems give rise to different phenomena of compulsory education in urban and rural areas. The interaction of social and educational stratification affects many aspects of compulsory education in China.

3. EDUCATION DEVELOPMENTS AND EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCES IN RURAL AND URBAN CHINA

3.1. The Financing Situation of Rural Education

Education Management, policymaking, resources are affected to varying degrees by their financing. In rural China, the financing model is fiscal centralization. Take western China Gansu province as an example; fiscal centralization formed the "to the county" model, which means most power concentrates on county leaders [2]. Fiscal centralization affects education policy management that county education bureau and township governments have the main power of decision-making [2]. These leaders are relatively far away from the rural education work sites. However, the school district superintendents and principals who have actual involvement in the work site are not allowed to interfere too much. They have the limited authority that the school-related decision-making and power concentrates at the county level. For example, the power to deploy school district superintendents, principle, and teachers is focused on the county education bureau and township government, leading to poor coordination of education administration [2]. The over-centralization also causes horizontal power competition among government agencies. The outcome of over-centralization also affects educational performance that it forms the co-management model of the township government and county school board.

3.2. Educational Performance in Rural China

The outcome of over-centralization is not conducive to education, which shows in decision-making, teachers' educational output, and students' performance. About students' academic performance, the test score is the single measurement of educational quality. The management of over-centralization and ambiguous power distribution indirectly impact students' academic performance. Students' academic performance depends on teachers' instruction and school guidance that both of them depends on the higher administration. The management of teachers' educational performance is relatively confusing and unfair that multiple indicators evaluate them. Years of teaching experiences and students' academic performance are the main indicators [2]. Therefore, Teachers' educational awareness and output are affected by these indicators. Also, students' academic performance, teachers' educational performance and dropout rates are an important indicator of universalizing rural compulsory education and its performance. The research indicates that the dropout rates has declined in rural primary and junior high school in recent years [3]. However, the regional disparity and gender disparity negatively affect dropout rate that

western rural area exist the extreme poverty families and the perceptions of gender inequality leads girls to drop out of school passively. Overall, rural education performance is affected by inadequate education funds, limited education quality and county government management system, and urban educational performances.

3.3. Resources in Urban China

Compared with fiscal centralization in rural China, urban education expenditure tends to decrease from western to eastern areas because of the local urban development level. Fiscal revenues are affected by local urban development, which determines the city's education budgets. The first-tier cities located in the eastern area can reach the latest resources on education because of their development level [4]. Geographically, coastal cities in the east of the area also have a clear advantage on educational output rather than inner regions. For example, the Yangtze River Delta and Pearl River Delta Region have uneven education development compared with central cities and cities in the west. While having the latest resources, first-tier cities are also under the pressure of basic education resources [4]. The rural population begins to shift to the non-ruralized population so that the level of urbanization is overgrowing. The rural population mostly chooses first-tier cities so that the first-tier cities grow in size, and the pressure of basic resources is also growing.

3.4. Educational Performance in Urban China

The urban educational performance can be expressed by educational competitiveness that is the gain of educational value. The urban education competitiveness forms various aspects such as the scale, quality, structure, and effectiveness of education. Compared with a single measurement of educational performance, China's Urban education competitiveness index is generally increasing, and its educational performance is diversified [5]. The urban education competitiveness has disparities between cities due to the level of urban development. Beijing, Shanghai, and other first-tier cities in China have the top education competitive index that they are also the government's main focus. Geographically, the education resources affect its competitiveness. The competitiveness of education in coastal cities is more significant than that in western cities and central cities. The student-teacher ratio is an important part of education resources that high student-teacher ratio is an essential indicator of education competitiveness in compulsory education [5]. It affects the quality of teaching and learning that high student-teacher ratio is the basement of proving students learning quality and effectiveness. In urban China, the gap between the student-teacher ratios is relatively large between cities that cities in the west area have a shortage

of teachers. Still, teachers in coastal cities and cities with higher development levels have a relative surplus.

4. THE COMMUNITY OF LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN AND MIGRANT CHILDREN IN RURAL AND URBAN CHINA

4.1. Left-Behind Children

Many families still need to alleviate poverty in rural China, leaving their children in rural homes because of economic pressure and structural constraints [6]. The government provides subsidized living expenses for boarders with family financial difficulties and special post plans for teachers to support rural areas [7]. The government issued policy interventions in 2004 to promote basic education through large-scale teacher training [7]. However, The teaching of left-behind children exists problems that schools have lack of funds and low salaries teachers. Left-behind children cannot receive quality education because of the weak materials foundation and teacher's weakness. In rural areas, left-behind children are also a typical community that receives less attention than in rural areas. Urban left-behind children mostly have better living conditions than in rural, and their parents go to other cities to find better career development [8]. But they lack family education and cannot benefit equally from the compulsory policy if they have a registered permanent residence in the rural areas [8].

4.2. Migrant Children

Migrant children from rural to urban areas are a big community that emigrates to urban areas because of their parents' emigration. First-tier cities have greater demand for migrant workers so that they are more willing to choose first-tier cities. The case researched the migrant community in Beijing and children's barriers to enrolling and being involved in public schools [9]. There are mainly three barriers: administrative, economic, and discrimination [9]. The public school request many official certificates and local household registration for migrant children. However, migrant workers cannot satisfy these requirements, and their salary is too low to pay high additional fees, which is uncapped in addition to the two sets of state-imposed fees. Students without local residency reinforce the discrimination on migrant children that they do not have an equal chance to integrate into the school. Almost no children migrate from urban to rural areas because the social and education stratification leads families to choose urban areas to seek a better livelihood.

5. DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN RURAL AND URBAN CHINA

According to the above case study researches and current development of compulsory education in rural and urban China, updating policies to promote the situation has its difficulty and challenge. Economically, education spending in each area depends on its level of development that governments' investment also is different and first-tier cities have priority. Children left behind in rural areas do not have access to better education because of regional poverty. Children left behind in urban areas are affected by migrant workers' limited salaries. Educational competitiveness and performances are also highly connected with economic development and policies to support finance. The above mentioned the impact of financial concentration on rural educational backwardness, but it is difficult for the government to de-centralize and redirect the limited economic resources. The current economic resources are challenging to change any policies to promote the situation. In China's development's current situation and context, policy improvement should seek the harmony of rights and obligations in compulsory education and achieve the nine-years compulsory education policy's original purpose [10]. Regarding biases on policymaking, it has already been issued that some guidelines cannot satisfy all the numbers in different communities. However, biases always exist and cannot cover all needs. Meeting the needs of neglected groups while adapting to new policy changes for those who are themselves being met is a difficult task to accomplish. Due to the vast population base in China, relatively niche groups also occupy a large population. Their individual needs and the impact of the group are also in great demand and involve many aspects. Any policies need to be accepted by the majority of the population in rural areas and urban areas.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF EDUCATION

The disparities between urban and rural areas and between different cities influence compulsory education in multiple aspects. About the social stratifications, the current situation forms a virtuous circle of priority resources and teaching competitiveness in first-tier cities and a vicious circle of limited educational resources and economic backwardness in rural areas. For the social-economic developments, the economy of urban China is obviously more developed than the rural economy that the rural-urban gap is the barrier to improving the compulsory system. Economically, rural poverty is widespread, so that the financial is not enough to invest compulsory education towards a complete level of development. In urban China, the higher share of education expenditure in household expenditure leads to higher financial pressure. Facing to the priority of

educational resources and competitiveness, education spending and economic development need to be balanced. Policies need to break the cycle and alleviate the effects of social stratification, which need to be well thought out and long time-consuming.

6.1. Family Education

Family education is an important component of compulsory education, which is closely influenced by social stratification, socio-economic development and also interacts with each other in educational development. In economic investment, the rise of off-campus tutoring brings up the family's children's individualized and diversified education needs to pursue better educational performance [11]. In non-economic investment, urban families devote more time and energy to tutoring their children than rural families [11]. The investment in urban education widens the gap between urban and rural family education and weakens the educational output. Based on current trends, off-campus tutoring will cause unnecessary competition that reasonable guidance can reduce the blind investment of parents. Schools should put efforts into actively guiding parents' understanding of off-campus tutoring objectively and decrease unnecessary competition. In the meantime, the curriculum of the school can be enriched to satisfy the family's diversified needs. In rural areas, families need more strongly education policy guarantee and financial support that can decrease the pressure of education spending [12]. In non-economic investment, increasing parental involvement in their children's education is an effective investment. School and government should guide parents to transfer their minds from a positive attitude to the scientific method. In rural families, most parents are lack self-knowledge that schools and communities need to provide more humanistic care. For the common phenomenon of families with left-behind children, schools and communities should pay more attention to cooperation and increasing involvement that can provide individualized assistance on children's basic education.

6.2. The Hukou System

Family is the smallest unit in society, and thousands of families basically form a society with different conditions. The "hukou" system is defined as the registration household that China implemented in the 1950s and has been with the development of society until now, which plays the essential role that positively guides population mobility, and each registration household obtains social services [13]. With the socio-economic development of China, cities generally rely on immigration labor, but the "hukou" system has become the administrative barrier of living in cities [13]. As mentioned above, rapid urbanization generally increases the number of migrant children, and their main barrier to

being educated equally is the registration household. Children of migrant workers living in cities should be included in public schools that can alleviate the stratified relationship of migrant workers with residents. Alleviating the stratified relationship can reasonably shorten the rural-urban gap and promote internal social stability. More connection is needed between central government policies and local government practices. Local government improves education regulations to make the State Council's goal of migrant children accessing public schools more practicable. More support for policy improvement can fundamentally prove the interests of the mobile labor force that can change the local resident discrimination against rural migrant workers. The children from migration families can obtain equal educational rights as local children that the virtuous circle of migrant children's education can ameliorate the education stratification.

7. CONCLUSION

Compulsory education and related policies have advanced and also affected the development of urban and rural China. Social stratification is the social phenomenon that unavoidably causes the urban-rural gap and uneven development in both rural and urban areas themselves. Local economic development directly affects its education development that fiscal centralization in rural China restricts education progress to some extent. The development level of urban education with different tier cities is directly proportional to the economic level. Educational performance is the outcome of educational development that the over-centralization and inadequate education funding in the rural area cause the single measurement on its performance and limited quality. Equally, uneven educational performance forms differential educational competitiveness that cities without occupying the geographical and economic level advantages, cities in coastal areas and higher tier level. Through reading this paper, families behind the left-behind children and migrant children deserve more policies support as well as humanistic care. The awareness of family education and enrollment mechanism under the hukou system is worth being reformed and renewed to benefit the big community. Compulsory education deals with the basic education need of all children and the impact on the whole family behind it. Maximizing refinement of the right to basic education for every community can bridge the gap to alleviate social stratification. The virtuous cycle of compulsory education requires joint cooperation with the government, schools, and families.

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