

Qualitative Research: Views of Female Undergraduates or Graduates on Female Education and Women's Place in Society Today

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a significant role in both personal and national development. Education is one of the basic human rights and is the prerequisite for human development. However, the imbalance in female education still exists in basic education and higher education. Improving female education levels is the key to a harmonious society and China's people-oriented structure. Therefore, this study selected 30 female undergraduates or graduates to conduct interviews on female education issues and conducted open coding, spindle coding, and selective coding of the data. Through the coding of the 200,000-word interview draft, we obtained the views of female undergraduates or graduates on female education and women's place in society today. This paper also makes a comparative analysis of different regions, and different education levels (parents), and puts forward suggestions for promoting female education.

Keywords: *Female education, Gender inequality, Feminism, Women's place in society*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Backgrounds

Since the passage of the Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China, the cause of education in China has made rapid and significant development. According to the law, children who ever aged more than six should receive a regulated length of education, regardless of their gender, nation, or race. Under this system, the yoke of the feudal system which bound female education was broken. Thus, women gained the right of being educated. With the development and modernization of our country, basic education and higher education could now be received commonly. The education level of women, who have been taken as the crucial social role that can "hold up half the sky", has become an important indicator of the

nation's education cause and even the progress of social civilization [2].

Though female education developed constantly, there are still problems that existed. According to the chart below (Table 1), at the beginning of the 21st century, the number of women who received education was far less than men. Especially in higher education, the higher the academic degrees were, the less the number of women was. In 2007, women who earned doctorate degree only took a small part at 34.07%. According to the statistics in 2020 (Table 2), females took smaller portion in primary and secondary education than male, but took larger portion in undergraduate and master's education. Among them, female doctors accounted for 41.32%. From the above, we could tell that, female education, especially in basic and higher education, still has the problems like imbalance and inefficiency in development.

Table 1. The proportion of national female students in the total student population(%), 2003-2007

	Tote		Doctoral student		Postgraduate	
	Number (ten thousand)	%	Number (ten thousand)	%	Number (ten thousand)	%
2003	294.29	39.42	3.97	29.2	21.69	42.19
2004	357.92	45.7	5.19	31.4	28.89	44.2
2005	479.78	47.91	6.23	32.57	36.23	46.02
2006	485.78	46.097	7.05	33.87	41.77	46.36
2007	538.59	47.088	7.58	34.07	45.89	47.19

Table 2. The proportion of national female students in the total student population(%), 2020

Record of formal schooling	Primary education and secondary education				higher education			
	Primary school	Junior middle school	Secondary vocational	Senior middle school	Junior college education	Undergraduate	Master	Doctor
proportion	46.8%	46.42%	41.58%	47.11%	48.74%	53.9%	52.17%	41.32%

Table 1&2 are from: *China Education Statistic Almanac*, The People's Education Press

The imbalance in female education also brought out the inequality when they are looking for jobs. Problems like sex discrimination, low level of education, and the burden of family and giving birth to children lead to weaker competitiveness in the job market[5]. In recent years, with the enrollment expansion of higher education and the revolution in graduates' employment system, the female's hard-to-find-a-job problem crept into the field of higher education [2]. Companies tend to put the male in priority employ when facing the employee's graduated in the same major and have even comprehensive abilities since gender became one of the considerable factors. Some companies even announced "recruit male-only" to turn down female applicants. Thus, the unfairness women faced and their social status is discussed heatedly. improving female education is considered not only a method to help women raise their social status, but also a strategy to solve the inequality problem.

Nowadays, there are already many scholars studying the problems of female education and providing solutions to enhance female education. In 1996, scholars have explained that from the perspective of means to improve production efficiency, family income, and employment level, the improvement of female education can benefit the economy; from the perspective of the birth of population, human health, and growth of offspring, the improvement of female education can

benefits society. And as a large developing country, putting more effort into raising female education level, which was far left behind compared to male education level, can bring China higher social-economic rewards. And it is the most suitable option to prompt social progress [1]. Wu Xiaolan(2009), from the angle of feminism, discussed the inequality in education and provided corresponding methods and strategies for feminist education[3]. To accelerate feminist education, Jia Mengxi(2014) analyzed the problems and value them, which has profound significance. The principles used in Jia's analyses were to guarantee the materialization of female education rights, to improve female science cultural quality from a whole perspective, and to eliminate the sex discrimination and prejudice formed in history[4].

1.2. Summary of Studies and Problems Posing

Education is one of the basic human rights and is the prerequisite for human development. Giving females equal opportunity to get an education would also help the development and progress in society. The fundamental purpose of promoting female education is to accelerate the realization of education equalization. Lihuiying(2021) had specifically explicated theories and practices in equal-sex education. She claimed that, equal-sex education is not merely about keeping the balance of the enrollment of boys and girls, it is about

the realization of truly equal education, about carrying out the idea when teaching, and about turning the theories into practice[6].

Marx had a famous thesis that one could tell the human's educational level from the way how men treat women. Nowadays, we have realized that a female's social status could reflect national and social development. Thus, taking female education seriously is of great significance in realizing sex equality, enhancing society's educational level and accelerating the progress of civilization. By interviewing campus female students' (graduates and undergraduates) ideas about China's female education and social status of women and analyzing the ideas based on it, we hope this study could help to promote female education, give suggestions and show our anticipation.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research Objects

By using the purpose sampling method, we interviewed 30 female undergraduates or graduates aged 18 – 25 years old in China who are studying or have graduated .

Inclusion criteria : ① Age 18-25 years old. ② Chinese nationality. ③ People who are studying or have graduated. ④ Female. ⑤ They gave informed consent to participate in this study.

2.2. The Introduction of the Research Method

In this qualitative research, semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect data. Each interview lasted about 60–80 minutes, which was all agreed upon by the interviewees and followed the principle of confidentiality. The data analysis was completed by OSR Nvivo 12.0, and the encoding process followed the grounded theory method.

2.3. The Introduction of Sample Sizes

Table 3. Interviewees' Information

Subjects number	age	Growth area	Father'scultural level	Mother's cultural level	brothers and sisters
P1	20	Shanxi Shuozhou	senior middle school	junior middle school	2 Brother
P2	19	Xiangyang, Hubei	senior middle school	undergraduate	not have
P3	21	Putian, Fujian	unknown	unknown	1 brother 1 younger brother
P4	21	Beijing + Jilin Nong'an	primary school	undergraduate	not have
P5	21	Pingdingshan, Henan Province	unknown	self-examination undergraduate course	half-mother, 1 younger brother and 1 younger sister
P6	20	Nanjing, Jiangsu	primary school	primary school	not have
P7	19	Beijing haidian	unknown	unknown	not have
P8	24	Hengshui, Hebei	junior middle school	primary school	1 Brother
P9	20	Northern Shaanxi Province + Xi'an Province, Shaanxi Province	master	undergraduate	not have
P10	21	Sichuan	middle school	middle school	not have
P11	19	the Heilongjiang River	junior college	junior college	not have
P12	19	Beijing Haidian District + Changping	undergraduate	undergraduate	not have
P13	18	Shandong	senior middle school	senior middle school	1 brother
P14	20	Dandong, Liaoning	undergraduate	master	not have
P15	22	Xiamen, Fujian	senior middle school	senior middle school	1 sister
P16	21	Beijing	undergraduate	undergraduate	not have
P17	20	Zhoushan, Zhejiang	undergraduate	special school	not have

P18	21	Huaihua, Hunan	primary school	junior middle school	1 brother
P19	21	Shaoxing, Zhejiang	unknown	unknown	1 sister
P20	21	Tongliao, Inner Mongolia	junior middle school	undergraduate	not have
P21	21	Shandong Jinan + Tianjin	primary school	primary school	unknown
P22	24	Wuhan	special school	special school	not have
P23	20	Jurong, Jiangsu province (hometown) + Beijing (growth)	undergraduate	undergraduate	not have
P24	22	Shanxi Jinzhong	self-examination undergraduate course	self-examination undergraduate course	not have
P25	21	Xiamen, Fujian	special school	junior middle school	1 brother
P26	20	Heilongjiang Hegang	junior middle school	primary school	1 brother
P27	25	Hebei	junior college	undergraduate	1 sister
P28	21	Beijing	master	doctor	not have
P29	21	Tianjin	undergraduate	undergraduate	1 sister
P30	29	Guangxi	unknown	unknown	unknown

3. RESULT

3.1. Data Analysis

The data analysis was completed by OSR Nvivo 12.0, and the encoding process followed the grounded theory method (Anselm 1998). The first step of open coding takes "female education" and "women's place in society today" as the core to identify, emphasize, and list meaningful units, and give the concept a name until the theory is saturated. The analysis process was completed by one coder, with approximately 20,000 original words in transcripts, 426 and 166 reference points, and 13 and 10 topic-related concepts, respectively. In the second principal axis coding, the internal relations among these categories are clarified

and sorted out. Through continuous comparison, the significance contained in the related concepts of these themes is further extracted, and 4 and 4 related themes are obtained. The third step is selective coding, aimed at establishing a theoretical system with internal consistency. On the basis of existing concepts, a core category that can cover all categories and phenomena most often is selected or refined as the research ideas and clues, forming a global theory and explanation. Finally, the coder checked the coding process and the code name to ensure that the concept and the original data can be closely correlated, and that there is a systematic link between concepts to ensure that the theory reaches the saturation point of the concept.

3.2. Coding Results

Table 4. Coding Results

core category	selective encoding	spindle coding	open coding	reference point
female education	family's attitude towards daughter's education investment and development	parents do not support and do not respect	no enough money; It's worthless to educate girls	36
		parents support and respect	all-round development; all-round support	82
	whether gender equality been achieved or not in family	do not favor boys over girls	no obvious difference; the investments to girls are rather more	42
		favor boys over girls	boys are family members; girls are to be married, aren't family members	54

	female education goal	financially independent	financial independence is the most important thing to education	24
		independent thinking	first need independent thoughts	18
		marry a good family	girls would married finally; a girl must married a good family	38
		support sons in the family	he always wants to get something from me	13
		avoid involuntary early marriage and early childbearing	girls get married early when finished jounior high school	5
		education is the basis of women's awareness to equality	education is the most foundation of equaling rights; boys and girls should respect each other	25
		to earn a better life)	the main point is that the girls live better lives for themselves	15
	whether school favors boys over girls	do not favor boys over girls	no obvious difference; show more consideration for girls	7
		favor boys over girls	boys can comprehend science better; low behavior standards for boys	66
	women's place in society today	influence of national policy	one-child policy has positive influence	one-child policy protects women's rights and interests to a certain extent
three-child policy has negative influence			parents could keep giving birth until they have a son	9
unfair job market policy			equal pay for equal work; male maternity leave	12
whether gender equality been achieved or not		no, gender equality hasn't been achieved yet	tend to gender equality; deep-rooted thoughts	56
		yes, gender equality has already achieved	gender equality is generally achieved	1
women's perspective about feminism		support	there is no need of propaganda	39

		non-support	it is too radical, there is no need of that	7
	men's perspective about feminism	support	understand and respect female	6
		non-support	radical feminism; there is no inequality in our life	31

4. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results of Female Education

Through the comparison and analysis of the materials, it can be learned that the core category of female education is constructed mainly from the four aspects of family investment in daughters' personal education and development attitudes, whether gender equality in the family, female education goals, and whether there is a preference for men or women in schools. ① Most parents support their daughters and respect their daughters' choices in education and personal development. In the unsupported section, the majority of interviewees chose to oppose their parents. ② Most of the interviewees or people close to them have felt patriarchal in the family. ③ interviewees believe that, in the eyes of themselves, their elders, or people around them, the highest ranking of women's educational goals is to "marry a good family", followed by "education is the foundation of women's awakening to equality" and "economic independence." ④ Most interviewees believed that in the course of education, they felt too much emphasis on men than on women.

It can also be seen that parents in developed regions, especially Beijing, and more educated parents support their daughters' personal development more with less emphasis on men than women in families, while there is no obvious difference between the northern and southern areas of China.

4.2. Results of Women's Place in Today's Society

Through the comparison and analysis of the materials, it can be learned that the core category of "women's place in today's society" is constructed mainly from four aspects: the influence of national policy; whether the society has reached gender equality; the female view of feminism; and the male view of

feminism. ① In terms of the impact of national policies, interviewees believe that the national employment-related policies are unfair to women; the interviewees believed that the one-child policy had a positive impact on women and the multi-child policy had a negative impact on women. ② Almost all interviewees believe that society has not yet achieved gender equality. ③ interviewees believe that the vast majority of women support feminism, and the vast majority of men do not support feminism.

It can also be seen that interviewees in developed regions are more supportive towards feminism and hold more views on the advancement of female education and women's place in society. The interviewees' suggestions will be illustrated in the following part.

4.3. Further Possible Program and Study

The opinions and suggestions about the follow-up program and study of female education could be divided into three aspects: society, school, and individual.

From the perspective of society, first, the subjects mentioned with the good use of the online platform, television and advertisement, female education could have a wide audience. Those could be interactions between females and society, encompass to disseminate basic idea of female education, to voice female and feminists, to broaden the horizon of girls who live in remote areas, and to spark public discussion and to inspire public opinion. Secondly, by utilizing deep interviews, questionnaires and field surveys we could publish research results and news to attract more people to female education. Some people also mention we could offer economic support to women who live in undeveloped areas through donating money, and products they need, as well as offering online voluntary teaching. Besides, mutual promotion among women, such as successful women returning to help new young women, is also a good way. Last but not least, some people propose that the works of art are also a way to reflect female rights and speak up for women. For

example, giving actresses more challenging roles in movies and TV series, and the works related to lesbians are another kind of voice.

Education is one of the keywords that almost every subject mentioned. As for schools, providing boys and girls equal teaching resources, building up a well-developed to evaluate professional ethic among teachers, and making education a public-interest cause are three suggestions given by subjects. Firstly, the equality in education is not merely that girls can go school and to study STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), but also that boys should participate in female education with girls at the same time to cultivate understanding and respect. Secondly, sex education is a prerequisite for women to protect and speak for themselves. Moreover, many subjects also mentioned that education is about not only gaining knowledge but also getting guidance with regard to morality and thoughts and letting them know their possibilities.

As for the individual, subjects thought it is good if women could develop their personalities as confident with self-esteem, independent and brave, respectful, kind, and dare to speak up.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank all the interviewees who provided interview materials for this study, members of the research group for their contributions and encouragement, and our friends for their support and companionship during the course of this study. We will work harder to conduct more meaningful research on female education going forward.

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