



What Next for Rural Primary Schools Under the Integration of Educational Resources? - A Case Study of Rural Primary Schools in Wanzhou District, Chongqing

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Abstract. With the implementation of the rural revitalization plan, rural education has risen to the top of China's education development priorities. Rural primary schools scattered in various towns and villages have either stopped operation or merged into other primary schools as a result of the consolidation of educational resources, with only a very few rural primary schools remaining as independent legal entities. At the same time, the problems of long commutes to school, an aging teacher structure, and a lack of family education in rural areas have also emerged. In the context of resource consolidation, what next for rural primary schools and how should rural education be planned?

Keywords: rural education · rural primary school · urban and rural planning

1 Introduction

On Monday morning in the village of Ciping, a girl crossed the street. She was going to the Gaoliang Primary School campus in Shunxi, which was around 2.8 km from her house. In fact that girl is one of 16 pupils now enrolled on the Shunxi campus. Every day, they travel for 40 to 60 min to get to school. However, such schools are very common in rural areas of Wanzhou District of Chongqing.

2 Current Situation of Rural Primary Schools in Wanzhou District, Chongqing

In general, there are 269 kindergartens in this region, including 131 in cities, 67 in towns and 71 in rural areas. There are 113 primary schools, including 35 in cities, 26 in towns and 52 in villages. There are 21 nine-year integrated schools, including 2 in cities, 10 in towns and 9 in villages. There are 27 middle schools, including 10 in cities, 11 in towns and 6 in villages. There are 17 ordinary high schools, including 12 in cities and 5 in towns.

At the same time, there are two examples worth mentioning, namely, the Gaoliang Primary School Shunxi Campus and Gaosheng Primary School.

The Gaoliang Primary School Shunxi Campus located in Cizhu village. The school was established in September, 2007, merging the original Shunxi and Sanyi primary schools and their rural primary schools. With the development of urbanization, the school has only 3 classes, 7 faculty members and 16 students.

Gaosheng Primary School is a typical rural primary school. The school is a nine-year integrated school, with 30 students in kindergarten section, 289 students in primary school section and 76 students in middle school sections. There are 395 students in total, of which 81.2% are “stay-at-home” children. Just like other rural schools, the aging of teacher structure of Gaosheng Primary School is very serious. The average age of teachers in this school is 48.9 years old, and the number of teachers under the age of 40 is 3 [2].

3 The Analysis of Policy Background

The consolidation of educational resources is one of the options under the policy background. In 2017, president Xi proposed that “The Rural Revitalization Strategy”. This strategy adheres to the priority of rural development, accelerates the process of rural agricultural modernization, and establishes and improves the institutional mechanism and policy system for the consolidated development of urban and rural areas. To this end, the Ministry of Education began to respond to this policy and took measures to plan rural areas. The development of rural education was one of the most important sections of these actions.

To reform rural education, several policies have been put forward. Firstly, the integration of educational resources. According to the actual situation, the local government and the education department closed some rural schools with less than 100 students, or merged some small rural schools. Secondly, the improvement of the quality of rural education [7]. Education quality is an important reference standard for schools, which determines the student resources of schools. If rural schools want sustainable development, the education quality cannot be ignored. Then, it is suggested to attract more and more young teachers and talented people to establish a rural education system.

Among the above policies, the integration of educational resources is the most important policy, which has the most far-reaching impact on rural schools.

4 The Impacts of Policies

After integrating educational resources, primary schools in the urban areas started group education. Through this way of education, schools will become an education system, in which a famous school and several schools form a school community (prestigious school group) according to administrative instructions and taking into account the common wishes of schools. With leading schools as the leader, school is unified in terms of educational philosophy, school management, educational research, information technology, educational evaluation, and school property management to achieve the sharing of high-quality educational resources such as management, teachers, equipment and so

on. At the same time, primary schools in rural areas have adopted completely different ways of running schools. After the merger, primary schools in rural areas will be divided into main campuses and sub campuses [3].

Obviously, since the implementation of the new policy, the number of registered incorporated primary schools in rural areas has decreased. Some primary schools were closed, while others became sub-campus of other large-scale primary schools. Therefore, the resources of teachers in rural areas are lost. Most teachers are assigned to the main campus or the urban primary schools. The departure of rural teachers will huge problems to rural schools, that is, the decline of education quality. The fewer teachers there are, the more unproven the quality of education. For example, in Gaoliang Primary School Shunxi Campus, after the merger, more and more young (under the age of 40) decided to work in the main campus or urban primary school, which means that they can get higher wages and more opportunities for promotion. However, due to the resignation of teachers, some subjects will be suspended, especially some professional subjects, such as mathematics and physicals. Then the students may not choose Shunxi Campus. The fewer students, the smaller the school will be. When the number of students is less than a certain figure which less than 25 students, the primary school will face closure.

As a result, the primary schools in the rural areas will fall into a vicious circle.

5 The Pros and Cons of the Changes in Schooling Format

In order to complete the revitalization of rural education in the “Rural Revitalization Strategy”, some changes have taken place in schools in Wanzhou District. However, just as coins have different sides, everything has two different sides. The changes have brought advantages and disadvantages to the rural primary schools at the same time. Now, we will analyze three subjects influenced by changes in schooling format in the rural areas: primary schools, teachers, and students separately.

5.1 The Pros and Cons of Changes in Rural Primary Schools

On the one hand, for those schools that have turned into sub-campus could receive some helps from the main campus. Firstly, the main campus could provide some suggestions on school education. When the main campus adopts a new way of running a school, the sub-campus will be affected and take the same action. Then, since schools have joined some famous schools as sub-campus, some students may choose these schools for the reputation of main campus. As a result, the student resources of those sub-campus will be better. For those independent registered primary schools in rural areas, after the integration, they will have more staffs and students, which will help them continue to develop.

On the other hand, the reform also has some shortcomings. We still divided schools into two types. The first is schools like Gaoliang Primary School Shunxi Campus, and the other is schools that accept small-scale schools as sub-campus. For the first type, schools become sub-campus, and they will lose some independent rights. For example, when managers want to renovate school buildings, they must report to the main campus. In addition, when the sub-campus and the main campus have completely different

concepts of education, the sub-campus must obey and follow the main campus [1]. For the second type, receiving small-scale schools means that the main campus will face a lot of difficulties. In terms of managing, because the situation of the main campus is different from that of the sub-campus, the main campus must pay more attention to the sub-campus. They may have to establish a completely brand-new system for the sub-campus. In terms of economy, the sub-campus will spend additional resources and funds from its own campus. This may be a financial burden.

5.2 The Pros and Cons of Changes for Rural Teachers

For those teachers who work in rural areas, educational integration has both advantages and disadvantages. In terms of pros, teachers working in smaller-scale schools may be accepted by larger schools, and they will have more opportunities. After becoming a sub-campus of the bigger-scale or famous schools, teachers will become the faculty of the main campus, which means that they have the opportunity to work in the main campus. Therefore, they could move to the areas where the main campus is located, such as the urban area or some prosperous areas [5]. Also, integration could help teachers to have better development. The main campus or the larger schools will provide a broad space for teachers to show their talents and educational ideas. For teachers who work in independent registered schools, they will have more colleagues, which means they have the opportunity to oppose new ideas. This will help them to improve their teaching skills.

In terms of cons, when the government or education departments take actions or implement policies, teachers, whether working in small schools or large schools, might be affected negatively. Firstly, teachers working in the sub-campus face more pressures from the main campus. Due to the different education quality, teachers in the sub-campus need to work hard and pay more attention and energy to improving the quality, so as to catch up with the level of the main campus. This will inadvertently add to the pressure on teachers in the sub-campus. Furthermore, teachers working in the main campus are also facing challenges and negative effects. When the main campus absorbs those small-scale schools in their school, there are more and more staffs in the schools. Then, the competes in the schools will become fierce. For example, the number of places that can be promoted is limited [6]. The more competitors, the less opportunities for promotion. People may think this phenomenon is beneficial for the education quality, however, sometimes it will bring vicious competition, which is not conducive to development of schools.

5.3 The Pros and Cons of the Changes for Students in Rural Areas

The purpose of educational integration is to help rural students receive better education and complete the revitalization of rural education in the “Rural Revitalization Strategy”. After the change, students have the opportunity to study in famous primary schools, because their school has become the sub-campus of famous primary schools. For this reason, they will get acknowledges from some professional teachers. In addition, the main campus could provide some advanced equipment. For example, the Gaoliang Primary School has provided some computers for Shunxi Campus, so that Shunxi Campus

can count computer subjects. Afford some computers for the Shunxi campus so that the Shunxi campus could start the computer subjects. In this way, the quality of students in the rural areas will be improved.

However, this does not mean that this change has no negative impact on students. There is a unique fact, which is a special geographical reason. Chongqing is a mountainous city, which means most roads and buildings are built on mountains. When some schools stop teaching, students have to spend more time on traveling. Sometimes they have to get up very early so that they will not be late. If they don't have enough sleep time, their mental health and body will be affected. This is detrimental to the development of students in rural areas.

Through the analysis, we can find that although it is beneficial to change the form of schools in the "Rural Revitalization Strategy", there are also some shortcomings. Even some of them cannot be ignored.

6 How to Optimize Primary Schools' Format in the Rural Areas

To complete the "Revitalization Strategy", the revitalization of rural education needs continuous revolution. Now, there are some specific actions on different topics.

6.1 Suggestions for the Primary Schools in Rural Areas

As the main body of the revolution, primary schools need more useful policies to help them develop.

Management Systems of Different Campuses

Sub-campus means the rural school belonging to another urban school. When a school becomes a sub-campus of another school, it does not mean that the original school must give up its independent rights. The main campus needs to plan and prepare a new system for the sub-campus. If there are divergences between different campuses, the school needs to make a specific analysis according to the specific situation. For example, due to the different scale of the number of students, it cannot manage like the main campus of Gaoliang Primary School. Therefore, as the main campus, Gaoliang Primary School has to give Shunxi Campus some independent management rights, so that it can develop with the main campus.

Optimizing the Distribution of School Resources

To access better development, schools need to re-invest the resources on different campuses. Resources include financial resources and human resources. As we mentioned above, schools have some financial problems if there are some new schools received as the sub-campus. Therefore, the main campus can submit an application report to the

government and education departments to apply for appropriate funds to develop the whole school.

Changes in Rural Primary School Teachers

Actually, teachers play a critical role in the education. With the loss of more and more young teachers, the structure of teachers is getting older and older. Schools, government and education department have to emphasize this problems. First of all, they have to improve the treatment of teachers, such as raising wages, in order to attract more young teachers and teachers of different disciplines, especially some science teachers. In this way, the quality of education in the rural areas could be improved. At the same time, schools need to provide more chances to promote and advocate healthy competition among teachers.

The Transformation of Rural Primary School Education Concept

In the past, schools in rural areas may only focus on grades and promotion rates. However, for sustainable development, primary schools need to exchange the highlights of education. They should pay more attention to quality education. An example occurred in Yunnan Province. Schools there offer poetry classes so that students can appreciate poetry, and even teachers will teach them how to write a poem. When the principal was taking the interview, he said, “Although poetry will not tested in the examination, the poems will help the students to tell the truth and word from their deep hearts”. Students has a new way to express their emotions and release pressure, especially those “stay-at-home children” [8].

If rural schools can take advantage of the characteristics of villages and start education according to villages, the “Rural Revitalization Strategy” can be completed.

6.2 Suggestions for Government and Education Department

If only schools are changed, the “Rural Revitalization Strategy” will not succeed. The government and the education sector must also make some changes.

Financial Support from the Government and Education Department

Firstly, the government and education department should evaluate the rural schools, giving them financial support, in order to improve the environment of schools. At the same time, sufficient funding could support the school to carry out more activities, such as painting competitions or technical exhibitions.

Policies Supported by the Government and the Education Department

The government and education department could also take some practical measures to help revitalize rural education. According to specific regulations, it is suggested to decide which schools should be closed or join other schools as sub-campuses. They could also

give priority to rural primary schools to help them develop. At the same time, government and education department should encourage the internet education or tele-education in rural area so that students who live in far away places do not need to travel for a long time.

6.3 Changes of Parenting in Rural Areas

When people talk about rural education, they always ignore an important part, that is, parenting children. If parents cannot change and support the schools' work, the revolution in rural primary schools will not succeed.

Changing the Concept of Parenting

Some rural families do not attach importance to education. They may not understand that parents' behavior will have a great impact on their children. Some of them may blame or punish their children, smoke or drink in front of their children. Because children are too young to distinguish right from wrong, they may imitate the behavior of adults. In addition, parents in rural areas sometimes cannot provide a better study environment. Schools and relevant departments should play a leading role in this phenomenon. They should enhance the publicity and education so that the parenting awareness can be improved.

Don't Rely Too Much on Schooling

For most rural parents, they believe that it is the responsibility of the school to educate their children. They just send their children to school and do not care about their study. This kind of thinking will affect their children. To solve this problem, schools and teachers can assign homework to students and require students to complete it together with their parents, so that parents can understand the study situation of their children.

7 Conclusion

At present, there are still a lot of "stay-at-home children" in rural areas. In these families, the family structure is unstable, which means that the children in these families lack companion and education. To fill the missing parental roles, schools and teachers should conduct regular home visits. If children can move to a new city with their parents, the government and relevant departments should help solve the problem of school registration.

In fact, the education in rural areas is a persistent problem. However, the government and society should pay more attention to this issue, so that the rural education revitalization can be achieved as well as the Rural Revitalization Strategy.

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