



Gender Difference in Higher Education in China and its Influencing Factors

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Abstract. Equity in education is the primary task of social development. But there is still a big difference in higher education, many families cannot afford the high tuition fees of higher education due to the backward economy. In particular, females have fewer opportunities to receive higher education than males. Due to the influence of family and “boys study science and girls study liberal arts”, there is a big gap in the proportion of male and female students. Meanwhile, in the current job market, males and females are faced with the problem of “equal pay for equal work”. Males earn more than females and are more likely to be promoted than females. It is also because of this that females choose to upgrade their personal education to achieve the same or higher salary level than males.

Keywords: Gender Differences · Stereotypes · Higher education

1 Introduction

The development of Higher education in China is increasingly pursuing educational equity. Education equality has always been a hot issue in both developed and developing countries. With the popularization of nine-year compulsory education, the gender gap in primary education is small, and the gender gap in higher education is gradually narrowing. However, there are still significant differences between males and females in higher education access and educational performance. As society develops, people have gradually abandoned the stereotype of “men are superior to women”, so the idea that “a woman without talent is virtuous” is no longer the main factor affecting gender differences in education. Some scholars have studied that the gender gap in higher education is gradually narrowing. The gap between the admission rate of women and that of men is gradually narrowing every year, but women are still at a disadvantage. This study aims to reveal the current status of gender differences in higher education. Therefore, this paper will briefly discuss access to higher education, gender differences in overall performance in higher education and their influencing factors.

2 Gender Differences in Access to Higher Education

2.1 Gender Differences in Access to Higher Education in Rural Areas

China's rural population accounts for 80% of the country's population, and rural education is the top priority of education. Only when rural education is strong can education be strong. A country's education level is not measured by the number of prestigious universities, but by rural education. Rural education means a good country's education. There can be no real modernization without rural modernization. Therefore, we must take the construction of socialist new countryside as an important strategic task to grasp. This is a major issue concerning the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Therefore, it is very important to do a good job in rural education.

According to the China Education Statistics Yearbook (2004), the enrollment rates of urban males and rural males in higher education are 1.43% and 1.34% respectively, while the enrollment rates of urban females and rural females are 0.85% and 0.64% respectively. It can be seen from the data that there is a big gap between male and female enrollment rates in both urban and rural areas. At the same time, the enrollment rate of urban females is 0.21% higher than that of rural females, which means that rural areas have little for female's education. It is because of this traditional thought that males and females have different school choices. For males and females with the same scores, males will choose a school based on their grades and interests, while the latter consider a range of factors such as tuition, travel, and distance from home.

Different from urban education, rural education is obviously backward in teaching resources such as teachers and teaching equipment. Even in some rural areas, it takes students hours to get to and from school. Urban teachers have easy access to get advanced teaching resources. Moreover, urban students have enough time and conditions to cultivate their personal interests and hobbies. The stronger their comprehensive ability is, the more competitive they will be in higher education. According to Chen [1], most of the top scorers in the gaokao come from key provincial middle schools and families of intellectuals.

2.2 Gender Differences in Access to Higher Education of Ethnic Minorities

China is a unity of 56 ethnic groups. Although the Han people account for the majority of the total population, the minority areas with a small population account for almost two-thirds of the entire land area. They are rich in natural resources and have a very important geographical location. Therefore, the harmonious development of society is inseparable from the participation of ethnic minorities. Higher education for ethnic minorities has also become an extremely important part of social development.

According to the investigation, the gender difference in the entrance opportunity of minority higher education cannot simply be represented and described by numbers. When entering colleges and universities to receive higher education, the differences between male and female students are not unified due to various factors such as the difference of origin, family differences and ethnic differences.

Ethnic minority males and females have different choice preferences in colleges and majors, which will lead to the difference in enrollment opportunities between male and female students. In reference to the data of Gansu Normal University for Nationalities, it can be seen that when female students choose higher education, they prefer to choose normal colleges, and in majors, they prefer to choose liberal arts majors. As a result, male and female students will face different competitiveness when they enter the university due to different colleges and majors, which will lead to different opportunities for higher education due to gender differences.

However, among different ethnic groups, the difference in enrollment opportunities for male and female minorities is also different. For example, in the investigation of Tibetan, Hui and Tu, it can be found that there is little difference between male and female enrollment opportunities among Tibetan students, and the proportion of both sexes receiving an education is relatively balanced. The proportion of Hui is slightly given to Tibetan students, while the difference between male and female enrollment opportunities in higher education is relatively large. This difference is not only due to ethnic differences in the treatment of male and female education issues but also related to the preference of different ethnic groups for university majors. In medical majors, the number of Tibetan is much higher than that of Hui and Tu, and the gender composition of Tibetan and Hui medical students is higher than that of males. Because Tibetan medicine has a long history of development and a complete set of majors, Tibetan people generally prefer to major in medicine when studying at university. Moreover, due to the disciplinary nature and employment nature of the medical specialty, it attracts a large number of Tibetan female students, and this tendency plays a huge role in balancing the gender difference in higher education.

2.3 Gender Differences in Access to Different Types of Higher Education

With the development of the economy, the country's investment in education has gradually increased, which has increased the educational opportunities for both males and females in China and also improved the educational level of both males and females. People's thinking has changed a lot. It is no longer accepted that "a woman without talent is virtuous". Instead, people now believe that "a woman with talent is virtuous". However, there are still significant differences in access opportunities, especially in the enrollment rate of different types of colleges and universities.

According to Yang, the enrollment rate of females in higher vocational colleges is higher than that of males, but the enrollment rate in elite universities is far lower than that of men [2]. Zhou stated that males are more likely than females to enter universities such as C9 and Project 985 [3]. The reason is the difference in thinking between male and female students. Shen, Liu, Shi and Yuan point out that males are better at picking up on changes in their environment and are more agile, while females show a talent for language, according to the survey [4]. This also gives men a greater advantage in the gaokao and a greater chance of entering higher education than women.

With the development of the economy, the country has put education equity in the first place and tried its best to help more women to receive higher education. The gap between males and females in receiving higher education is gradually narrowing, but there are

still significant differences in key higher education. Females are still underrepresented in higher education.

3 Gender Differences in the Process of Higher Education

3.1 Gender Differences in Major Selection

In recent years, China's higher education enrollment quota expansion means the rapid development of higher education, it also promotes the development of education equality. As more and more women participate in higher education, the division of disciplines is becoming more and more obvious. The gender division of majors makes liberal arts classes mostly female and science classes mostly male.

It is a common phenomenon in Chinese higher education that there are only one or two girls in science classes and only one or two boys in liberal arts classes. According to Gan, Liu and Yu, female students are disproportionately represented in humanities majors such as literature, foreign language and education, while male students are disproportionately represented in science and technology, such as mathematics, physics and chemistry. Over time, the stereotype that "boys should study science and girls should study liberal arts" has gradually formed in the eyes of most Chinese parents [5–7].

There are many factors that affect the choice of majors, such as personal interests, abilities and family factors. Most female students will choose their majors according to their interests, which will also help them in their college life. But males will take both their interests and their practicalities into account, that is, their future careers. As Shen, Liu, Shi and Yuan state, males are more agile, while females are better at language. Therefore, it also helps males to learn more easily in science fields and females to learn more easily in arts fields. At the same time, girls are more likely to consider their families' educational expectations. Most families expect female students to get a secure job in the future, which also leads to female students paying more attention to humanities when choosing majors. However, families expect boys to become strong in education, and most parents will choose to let their children work hard, so they will not give their children too much interference in choosing majors.

3.2 Gender Differences in Academic Achievement

As high-quality talents, college students' academic achievement is very important for social development. Therefore, it has become a worldwide trend to pay attention to college students' academic achievements.

In Yao and Tao's research, it can be seen that in the two schools selected for the investigation, the number of activities performance awarded to female students is more than that of male students, but the difference is not significant [7]. However, in terms of scholarship selection, the proportion of female students is significantly higher than that of male students, which indicates that female students' academic performance is better than that of male students.

Generally speaking, females' minds are more delicate than males', and their perceptive ability is more acute. Achievement motivation refers to an individual's desire

to pursue what he or she considers important or valuable. The reason why females get higher grades than males is that women value family responsibilities more. And winning a scholarship can help ease family burdens or please others, while men may value intrinsic achievement motivation more because they mature later.

3.3 Gender Differences in Educational Returns

With the rapid development of China's economy, higher education has moved from elite education to popular education. With the expansion of the scale of higher education, higher education plays a huge role in improving the income gap between workers. However, with the increase in the number of college graduates, the employment pressure on graduates is gradually increasing, and females have become the vulnerable group.

The rate of return on education refers to the growth rate of income earned by an employee for each additional year of education after adjusting for gender, work experience, region, ownership and other factors. According to Song, on average, males and females receive the same amount of education, and the return on education for males is higher than that for females [8]. The return on education has risen as degrees have risen, mainly among females. Peng states that the return on education for females is higher than that for men, but the return on higher education for females tends to decline as the barriers to entry in the industry increase [7].

It is generally believed that gender discrimination is the cause of gender wage differences among higher education groups. Females are paid less than males under the same conditions, unequal pay for equal work. Second, females have fewer opportunities for promotion than males in the same position. One more important factor is a family responsibility, which females attach more importance to, followed by work, while males do the opposite. In the eyes of most Chinese people, the belief that "men are the breadwinner of the family" and that "Men are responsible for wages while women are responsible for housework" has an influence on the mentality of both males and females when they look for jobs. Most females pay more attention to time freedom when looking for a job, while men pay more attention to salary and benefits, which is also an important factor influencing the gender education return gap.

4 Influencing Factors

4.1 Families' Educational Expectations for Children of Different Genders

The popularization of higher education promotes the formation of educational equity, which is the premise of realizing social harmony. There are many factors that affect the fairness of education, among which family factors account for a large part. This part will analyze and summarize the generation of gender differences in higher education from parents' educational expectations and family's economic situation.

"Involution", one of the hottest Internet words of 2021, accurately describes the current state of society. It refers to the phenomenon that a cultural pattern can neither stabilize nor change into a new form after it has reached a certain final form, but can only become more and more complicated internally. Circulating on the Internet, many college

students use it to refer to irrational internal competition or “voluntary” competition. There is great pressure of competition in all walks of life, and there is also great pressure of competition among students, even among primary school students, there is the situation of internal examination. The term also came into being because some parents have high standards for their children, but some parents have no educational expectations for their children. Children whose parents place educational expectations on them usually have a full holiday schedule, while those whose parents do not place educational expectations on them enjoy the holiday.

Usually, parents who have educational expectations for their children divide the vacation into two parts, the first half of which was to learn one specialty and the second half was to learn another specialty, most of them are upper-middle-class. Thus, parents have placed higher expectations on their children. For girls, parents pay more attention to the cultivation of personal temperament, and hope she becomes a talented girl with both political integrity and ability; For boys, parents pay more attention to personal character training, often through sports to make boys more manly. In higher education, parents expect girls to find “iron rice bowl” jobs, such as teachers and civil service. Therefore, every year when choosing colleges and universities major, normal colleges and universities will become the majority of girls’ favorite majors. For boys, parents prefer them to find high-paying jobs, especially in recent years, the development of Internet technology has made computer science the primary choice for boys.

In addition, family background and economic status also have a strong impact on the gender gap in higher education. According to Wang and Shi, parents with higher socioeconomic status have stronger expectations for their children to attend college [9]. They can provide their children with quality educational resources and help them broaden their horizons. On the contrary, parents of low socioeconomic status have limited educational resources for their children, which is why “children from poor families are difficult to produce”, which is what we call social reproduction. Liu states that in both rural and urban areas, girls are more likely to pursue higher education; The probability of girls’ parents expecting them to receive higher education is higher, girls are encouraged more by teachers and their peer groups are more motivated [10].

4.2 Gender Discrimination in Employment Opportunities

Although China has achieved equality in education, there is still a long way to go for equality in employment. Employment discrimination is still a major problem in today’s society and one of the important factors leading to gender differences in higher education.

Gender discrimination in employment refers to the unfair phenomenon caused by gender in seeking jobs, working opportunities and working treatment. The influence of traditional ideas is a major factor in female employment difficulties. As women have to give birth to children, women will have a stage of physical loss and low energy during pregnancy, so this has become the biggest concern for women when looking for a job. Women are burdened with the dual tasks of material and spiritual production and human reproduction, and their family and social roles are in conflict. Some employers exaggerate the negative effects of childbearing, rearing, and menopause on women’s employment, which aggravates females’ disadvantage in employment competition. Even though some employers do not openly refuse to recruit women, they actually hire employees according

to the principle of male preference. Xu and Zhang point out that the gender pay gap in non-state-owned enterprises is much larger than that in state-owned enterprises [11]. Men and women are paid differently for equal work, and it is more difficult for women to advance in the workplace than men. In order to be on an equal footing with men in the job market, women are more likely than men to pursue higher education.

4.3 Gender Stereotypes in Social Values

Gender stereotypes refer to people's stereotyping of gender roles, such as the general assumption that men should be masculine and women feminine.

Broverman [12] claims that men and women agree on what men and women should be, and masculinity is more socially desirable than femininity. In China, there is a general understanding of men and women, which is men should be strong and brave, have ideals and ambitions, while women should be careful and quiet. When there are more feminine men or more masculine men in society, it's often seen as an anomaly. It is these stereotypes that lead to gender radicalization in professional choice or employment opportunities. In science and engineering, most classes have only one or two women, and in liberal arts, there are few men. In the job market, kindergarten teachers, nurses and other jobs naturally become women's jobs. In this case, if men dream of becoming a kindergarten teacher or a nurse, they will be regarded by parents as unpromising and ambitious.

5 Conclusion

As a result, there is still a large gender gap in higher education. Due to the differences in family factors and regional and ethnic groups, gender differences in higher education enrollment opportunities are caused. In general, higher education enrollment rates in rural areas are lower than in urban areas, and there are fewer opportunities for females in rural areas than for males, while there is little difference between males and females in urban and rural areas. In terms of major selection, male students are more inclined to major in science and technology, and male students will consider many factors such as employment opportunities and future salary level when choosing a major. Since girls will consider whether their future work is safe and whether the time is sufficient when choosing a major, most of them prefer to major in normal education or liberal arts. Gender differences in higher education are mainly caused by family factors, employment market factors and people's stereotypes. Therefore, education in rural and remote areas should be given priority, and the state should introduce appropriate policies to support the development of education in rural areas. The society also needs to remove some stereotypes and give females equal opportunities and pay as males. The purpose of this study is to explore the gender gap in higher education, to attract the attention of society, especially the education department, so that Chinese citizens can receive higher education per capita.

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