



# Difficulties in the Development of Local Education in Rural China

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**Abstract.** Education in China is growing at a rapid pace, but there are still many shortcomings in rural education. This article reviews the difficulties in the development of local education in rural China from different perspectives: Rural school construction dilemma is caused by government financial allocation is not sufficient, teaching spots are too scattered, shortage of modern teaching equipment. Professional development dilemmas for local teachers are caused by insufficient professional teaching ability, overburdened teaching responsibilities, and the limitation of teachers' career development. Rural students' learning dilemma is caused by poor home learning environment, Early school dropout due to economic backwardness, and the learning dilemma of left-behind Children. This article is a perspective and specific analysis of the rural education development dilemma, using multiple data to enable a more informed dissection of the problem.

**Keywords:** Rural education · Teaching points · Development dilemma · Left-behind children

## 1 Introduction

In today's society, rural education has received a lot of attention. However, in the academic area, there is not as much research dedicated to this area as society is concerned. Some research points out that rural education has developed considerably, and some even suggest that the development of rural education is now in line with the level of development of urban education. However, in fact, there are still many problems in the development of rural education, which exist in various aspects, most of which have not been implemented and effectively solved by policies. The same is true for the academic area, and the dilemma of showing rural education has not been adequately studied. Therefore, this paper wants to examine the construction of rural schools, the professional development of rural teachers, and the learning dilemmas of rural children. The paper aims to analyze the reality of rural education in China from different aspects such as economic and social.

## 2 Rural School Construction Dilemma

### 2.1 Government Financial Allocation

Since 2006, China has raised the average public funding standard for primary and secondary students six times. Currently, the benchmark public expenditure per student in

primary and junior high schools in central and western China is 600 and 800 yuan respectively, and the standard in eastern regions is increased by 50 yuan on top of that [1]. Public funds are allocated according to the actual number of students in the school, and small-scale rural schools with less than 100 students are allocated the full amount according to 100 students [1]. As urban and rural public funding standards move toward unity, public funding for rural schools continues to increase. However, there are still problems such as delayed allocation and insufficient allocation of public funds.

Public funds for rural primary and secondary schools are usually shared between the central and local governments. In rural China, there are schools with nearly 700,000 yuan in public funds approved for the 2018 county budget that should have been allocated but actually arrived at more than 10,000 yuan, with an actual allocation rate of only 2% [1]. A rural school principal responded that the school's public funds are allocated twice a year, once in April or May and once in October. The money that should be allocated down in April and May is not in place. As of the end of October, the central and provincial governments had approved nearly 1.5 million yuan of public funds for the year, but only less than 380,000 yuan had been allocated [1]. Once the public funds are late, school operations are at risk of getting stuck at any time.

The government requires rural schools to be renovated and rebuilt, but the fact is that the state has invested so much money that it can't even successfully build a school building. Schools often used public funds to cover the cost of design fees engineering supervision, etc. The total investment of 20 million yuan in the project, but the school added an additional burden of more than 1 million yuan, but the county-level financial and education department's "coordinated arrangements to make up" but no news [1]. These subsidy arrears add to the burden of the already poor mountain and rural schools, and many schools are unable to keep operating due to a lack of funding.

## 2.2 Teaching Spots Are Too Scattered

There are also many cases of students missing out on school due to the scattering of rural teaching sites. According to the data that can be collected, the number of rural elementary school students decreased by 37.08% between 2000 and 2010, while the number of elementary schools decreased by 52.1%. In 10 years, the number of rural elementary schools decreased by more than half, an average of 63 schools per day [2]. The number of rural teaching points plummeted from 178,060 in 2000 to 66,941 in 2010, a decrease of 62.41%, with an average annual decrease of 11,112 teaching points; according to a survey conducted by the 21st Century Education Research Institute in 2012 among county and city education bureaus, 38.5% of a central elementary school in cities and counties had few or no teaching points; 25.9% of cities and counties had few or no junior high schools in their townships or no junior high schools [2]. This is mainly due to the blind and excessive annexation of rural schools in some places, which has caused the prominent problems of rural students going far away from school, making schooling difficult and expensive, as well as losing and dropping out of school, which defeats the original policy intent of school layout adjustment and affects the healthy development of rural education.

The service radius of rural schools has greatly increased after the layout adjustment, from an average of 5 km in the past to more than 10 km, up to a radius of more than

20 km [3]. A considerable number of students thus need to attend boarding schools or be accompanied by their parents to the city, and family education expenses have increased significantly, to a large extent contrary to the principle of free compulsory education. This has also greatly increased the dropout rate of primary and secondary school students: China's elementary school dropout rate picked up significantly after 2007, rising from 5.99‰ in 2008 to 8.22‰ in 2011, an increase of more than 37% [4]. This means that 800,000–900,000 rural elementary school students drop out of school each year. However, the main reason for the rebound in the dropout rate is the continued abolition of rural elementary school teaching points.

### 2.3 Slow Development of Multimedia Education Equipment

In recent years, multimedia teaching equipment has become more functional and quantifiable than ever before in rural schools in China, but the results are not satisfactory.

Rural teachers, who generally have low education, have little or no contact with this new teaching method. And they are reluctant to re-learn due to their age and lack of learning resources. Trying to popularize or equip teachers with multimedia application skills in daily teaching is still a major challenge. Usually, these devices end up as a blackboard with a changed shape, and the classroom format is still the “teacher talks, students listen” model. Teachers' wrong orientation to multimedia teaching leads to a large number of multimedia teaching equipment idle. Therefore, the introduction of multimedia equipment does not meet the expected goals of government investment.

## 3 Professional Development Dilemmas for Local Teachers

### 3.1 Overburdened Teaching Responsibilities

There is also a huge gap in the allocation of teacher resources in rural China. The “one teacher, one school” situation is quite common in rural schools. For example, in Luxi County alone, there are 18 “one student, one school” teaching points and 96 “one teacher, one school” teaching points. According to the 2019 National Education Development Statistics Bulletin, there are 96,500 elementary school teaching points like Luxi County in China [5]. As mentioned above, rural teaching points in China show a pattern of wide distribution, many school sites, scattered layouts, and small scale, with fewer students, scattered age groups, lack of teachers, and inconvenient living conditions, so few teachers are willing to stay in rural areas to teach. The situation of “one teacher, many responsibilities” and “one teacher, one school” is bound to happen.

There are many benefits to having a wide range of teaching locations. As it facilitates students to attend school close to home and helps to shorten the distance between home and school, which is necessary for students in preschool and elementary school. The proximity to school reduces the financial burden on families, eliminates the need for students to take additional transportation to school each day, reduces unnecessary financial expenses, and eliminates many safety hazards.

But overall, the disadvantages of “one teacher, one school” far outweigh the advantages. The scattering of teaching points leads to a lack of centralized educational

resources, making it difficult to standardize the management of education in townships, which makes it impossible to improve teaching efficiency and monitor teaching quality. If there is only one teacher in a school, it means that this teacher must teach different grades and different subjects. This can result in overburdening this one teacher. Without sufficient resources, teaching and research activities cannot be carried out and teachers have no space to improve their teaching level, so they can only continue teaching by using their old knowledge. With complex teaching content and teachers without a major focus on teaching and research, low-quality teaching is a very observable reality.

### 3.2 The Limitation of Teachers' Career Development

It is difficult to retain good teachers in rural schools. Very good teachers are usually poached by urban schools, and then teachers themselves think that the development space in rural schools is too small, they take the initiative to apply for jobs in urban schools, graduate studies and leave the countryside. This is a great challenge for maintaining the status of rural teachers. Rural teachers' ability to improve their practice is also lacking. The problem of rural teachers' low education has been mentioned earlier, which also leads to their inability to get the first training, teaching, and research guidance. As a result, rural teachers can only improve their teaching skills through self-study and other means. After rural teachers take up their jobs, there are obvious problems such as "fewer opportunities, lower levels, shorter training time, and higher out-of-pocket expenses". This is an obstacle to the professional development of rural teachers.

According to the data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, the national average salary of the education sector in 2019 was 97,681 yuan [6]. The survey on the income of rural teachers shows that the highest proportion of China's rural teachers' average monthly income throughout the year is concentrated in the range of 3000–4000 yuan (including 4000 yuan), reaching 34.55%, while the proportions of 2500–3000 yuan, 4000–5000 yuan, 5000–6000 yuan, and more than 6000 yuan are 20.57%, 19.43%, 9.45%, and 4.84%.

And according to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the average annual salary of employed persons in enterprises above the size of the country was 68,380 yuan, or an average of 5698 yuan per month; the average annual salary of employed persons in urban non-private units was 82,461 yuan or 6871 yuan per month; the average annual salary of employed persons in urban private units was 49,575 yuan or 4131 yuan per month. Thus, it seems that the average salary is higher than the average salary of rural teachers in both urban and rural areas, state-owned enterprises, and the private sector. In this low-income, high-paying work environment, many rural teachers choose to leave school, change careers, take civil service exams, and choose a more lucrative career, thus creating an even greater brain drain in an already scarce teaching resource. As the number of rural teachers is not guaranteed, the teacher community shrinks and receives less attention from the community, which places greater restrictions and obstacles on improving one's teaching skills and career path in education.

### 3.3 Insufficient Professional Teaching Ability

“To build a high-quality education system and accelerate the modernization of education, it is crucial to improve the quality of the teaching force in all aspects, especially to raise the academic level of our basic education teaching force. From the entry threshold of basic education teachers and the current level of in-service education, there is a big gap between China and developed countries, and even with some developing countries” [7]. The proposal points out that, from the entry-level educational requirements for teachers, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, and other developed countries have set the educational level for teacher qualifications at master’s degree and above; the entry-level educational requirements for kindergarten, elementary school, junior high school, and high school teachers in China’s Teachers Law academic requirements for teachers are still at middle school specialist, and undergraduate levels, respectively.

The proposal points out that, in terms of the education level of in-service teachers, the proportion of junior high school teachers with a master’s degree in 2018 is 44.2% on average in OECD countries and 54.9% in EU countries; some developing countries such as Bulgaria and Latvia exceed 60%, and Romania and Mexico exceed 20%. In 2019 China’s graduate-level teachers in junior and senior high school, the proportion of teachers among teachers is only 3.5% and 10.6% [7]. And as the shortboard of China’s teacher construction, the educational situation of kindergarten teachers is even more unpromising, with 27.1% of teachers in rural kindergartens having educational levels at high school and below.

The aging of teachers in rural schools is also serious. In Jiangxi Province, for example, in 2019 statistics show that in township secondary schools, for example, the proportion over 55 years old is about 20%, over 50 years old is about 40%, teachers over 45 years old is about 50%, over 40 years old is 70–80%, and the proportion of post-80s and post-90s is only about 10–20% [8]. The aging of teachers has a great impact on the education of students. Many of their teaching methods are decades-old content, although the essence of the content may not be tremendously different, some of the knowledge points and the general knowledge of the new generation is this group of teachers has no way to keep pace. The teaching methods of aging teachers are still stuck in the same way as they were decades ago, mostly teaching by rote, with teachers speaking and students listening. Children in this boring classroom, it is difficult to speak knowledge points all understand, the lack of hands-on personal practice of some experimental classes, originally set some relevant knowledge students with to have the opportunity to understand and learn. This is a complete derailment of the more advanced education for rural students who already lack a sense of innovation in education.

The relatively low education level of teachers at the compulsory education level in rural schools has a significant negative impact on the development of rural education in China. In 2017, the proportion of teachers with special education or above in elementary school was 95.26%, including 93.80% in rural areas; the proportion of teachers with bachelor’s degrees or above in junior high schools was 84.63%, including 81.10% in rural areas, with the gap between urban and rural areas narrowing compared with 2016 [9]. Recently, the State Council issued the “Fourteenth Five-Year Plan” to promote agricultural and rural modernization. In the main indicators of agricultural and rural modernization, it is proposed that by 2025, the proportion of full-time teachers with

bachelor's degrees or above in rural compulsory education schools will increase from 60.4% in 2020 to 62% [10]. From these two sets of data, it can be seen that in rural China, the proportion of highly educated teachers at the compulsory education level is much lower than that of high schools. Yet the low quality of teacher education at the compulsory education level has a great impact on students. Some secondary schools do not have professional subject teachers, all that lack to make up for, teaching any subject, teachers with low education, without professional training in psychology pedagogy, it is difficult to understand the various paranoid behaviors of students. The lack of specialized teaching training and some unscientific teaching methods will make students fail to achieve very good results in the compulsory education stage, which is one of the biggest obstacles to students' later schooling.

## **4 Rural Students' Learning Dilemma**

### **4.1 Poor Home Learning Environment**

As the main place where students live after school, the family plays a vital role in the enlightenment of children. Good family education is conducive to the cultivation of excellent character and correct values, which have a profound impact on children's future learning and life. However, in rural areas of China, the development is relatively lagging behind, and under the premise of uneven distribution of educational resources, parents of rural children usually do not know enough about education, which has a great negative impact on the development of rural children's education.

Some feudal families even still adhere to the traditional concept that "a woman's lack of talent is a virtue", and there are very few opportunities for rural girls to attend school. All these problems are caused by the outdated idea of parents, which shows that family factors can have a negative impact on children when they start school. In addition, it is very common for rural parents to work outside the home, and even those who are in the area rarely have the time and energy left to focus on their children's learning. They leave all responsibility for both home and school education to teachers. This is undoubtedly a challenge for schools, which have many students and cannot estimate the feelings of each child, which leads to many children being neglected between home and school and not getting timely help even when they have problems in their studies.

### **4.2 Early School Dropout Due to Economic Backwardness**

Poor rural economic development and family poverty have a significant impact on rural students dropping out of school. In today's society, the economic development of the country is rapid, but the economic development of rural areas is relatively backward, and not a few families in rural areas are economically weak. Most rural children's parents work outside the home to earn money, and their income is already low. The children's school fees and other daily expenses are an additional burden on the family. Just relying on parents to earn money and the family's land income simply cannot change the poverty situation. Many parents may think that instead of spending their money on their children's education, they should let their children go out to work early to earn money to subsidize

their families. Therefore, the best solution to the current poverty situation is to let children enter society early and work to earn money. When some children drop out of school to earn money for their families, it serves as a negative example and leads more parents to let their children drop out of school to support their families.

In rural China, it is more common for girls to drop out of school. Due to traditional beliefs, almost all rural families in China will have at least one boy, but many families will continue to have children until they have a son because the first few children are daughters. This situation results in a rural family having to pay for multiple children's school fees to keep them educated. However, in this patriarchal culture, rural families with limited financial resources choose to drop their daughters out of school to save their sons' tuition fees in order to ensure their sons' education. However, now that compulsory education is gradually becoming universal, girls are generally able to finish primary and junior high school with state subsidies. However, in high school, the distance from the school to the student's home increases the cost of travel and boarding, and girls are now able to take on some family work.

### **4.3 The Learning Dilemma of Left-Behind Children**

Since parents are always away and busy, they rarely have the energy and opportunity to care about their children's learning, and they are unable to communicate with teachers about their children's learning, so they have no way to solve their children's learning problems personally. Parents who work outside the home have very low expectations of their children's performance and therefore lack rigid constraints on their children's learning. Most of the left-behind children are raised by their grandparents, who have a relatively low level of education, and most of them do not pay enough attention to their studies and cannot give their children appropriate help in their studies. The grandparents, who are already old, do not have the energy to supervise their children's studies every minute of the day, nor can they communicate effectively with their teachers. The elderly tend to spoil their children, and when the children do not want to study and want to look at their cell phone, the grandparents have no way to continue to force the children to study, which makes the children's interest in learning distracted by cell phone games, etc., and the grades are bound to decline. Therefore, left-behind children have great difficulties in family education and communication between home and school.

The mental health of left-behind children is also very worrying, as they lack parental care since childhood and have to take care of grandparents and family responsibilities, their psychological pressure is actually very high. Children in this family environment are prone to be withdrawn and reluctant to interact with others and are more likely to suffer from depression. They are more likely to rebel against teachers, parental discipline, and criticism or simply ignore it, and lack self-confidence and motivation. Under such conditions, it is difficult for children to achieve excellent results. Children who are still in school tend to have poor self-control, and without parental discipline, they cannot control themselves, and often miss school and then hang out in Internet cafes and game halls, and the effect of grandparental discipline is minimal. The effect of grandparents' discipline is minimal. With such neglect of school, the final result is definitely bad.

## 5 Conclusion

There are still certain problems in the development of rural education in China, and the causes of these problems are not problems that can be solved by a few national policies. This paper has systematically reviewed the following aspects. In terms of construction, government funds are lacking in implementation, teaching sites are too scattered, and the development of multimedia equipment is slow. In terms of local teachers, teachers are overburdened, have limited career development, and lack professional teaching skills. In terms of individual students, the family education environment is worrying, the dropout rate is high due to economic backwardness, and the problem of left-behind children is serious. All these problems have seriously slowed down the development of rural education in China. It can provide a basis for policy formulation and improvement of rural education. The issue of rural education development still needs more comprehensive and practical investigation to solve the fundamental problems more effectively.

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