



Urban-Rural Disparities Influence Educational Equity in China

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Abstract. In the past decades, China has experienced explosive economic growth; however, unbalanced urban-rural development also brings serious educational inequality. Educational inequality does not only have negative impacts on the economy, such as leading to fewer educated workers, but also has bad social impacts, such as causing an increase in juvenile delinquency. Although enormous empirical studies have confirmed the negative impacts of urban-rural disparities on educational opportunities, educational processes and educational outcomes, few scholars provided a systematic framework to incorporate all evidence. Thus, this article reviews 30 scholarly journals to summarize how urban-rural disparities affect educational equity in China from 2012 to 2022. It concludes that urban-rural disparities affect educational equity by school education, family education and social context. In addition, we provide several practical recommendations for policymakers to diminish educational inequality.

Keywords: Educational Equity · Urban-Rural · Inequity

1 Introduction

In the last century, China has experienced explosive economic growth through reform and opening and has become the world's second-largest economy [1, 2]. However, it has also arisen with unbalanced developments between urban and rural areas, such as the unbalanced development of education, which leads to educational inequity in China. In this article, educational equity refers to equal educational opportunities, processes, and outcomes. Moreover, Educational inequity has negative economic impacts, such as fewer educated workers, and negative social impacts, such as more juvenile delinquency.

As the issue has drawn more and more attention from the public, numerous empirical studies have also been conducted. Most previous studies have explored how disparities in urban-rural areas have badly influenced educational equity, including instructional activities, teacher-student ratios, and parenting styles [3–5]. Given the multiple components of educational equity, however, a comprehensive overview needs to be provided

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to summarize the impacts of urban-rural disparities on educational equity and provide guidelines for policymakers to promote educational equity. In this review, we categorize the disparities of urban-rural areas affecting educational equity into three aspects. They are school education, family education, and social context. For school education, we find disparities in school facilities, teacher resources, and instructional content. We find the disparities in parenting style and parenting economic strength for family education. Lastly, for social context, we conclude gender distinction and educational standards for the masses [6].

Regarding the methodologies of our studies, the most critical mission is to review the development stages of China from 2012 to nowadays from a mainstream point of view and then extract valuable information to offer practical guidelines for policymakers. Therefore, this article mainly focuses on previous and relevant studies in the past ten years.

2 Overview of Educational Equity

2.1 Definition of Educational Equity

Scholars have reached a consensus on the definition of educational equity to some extent. Educational equity refers to the phenomenon that students have access to equitable educational opportunities, educational processes, and educational outcomes [5, 7, 8].

2.2 Importance to Society

Ensuring educational equity can bring a series of positive economic and social impacts. When rural students are provided with high-quality elementary and secondary education as urban students are, they are more likely to achieve their personal goals and obtain successful career development [9–11]. On the one hand, there will be more educated workers who will energize the economy. On the other hand, the number of juvenile delinquencies will decrease, which will largely improve public security.

2.3 Overview of Existing Policies for Educational Equity

To facilitate educational equity, the Chinese educational department has already made various policies. One major policy is that all kids must receive nine years of compulsory education without any interference by family socioeconomic status or urban-rural residence [12]. Also, the educational department has launched Information Computer Technology (ICT) mitigation programs to help disadvantaged rural students by sharing human and technological resources [7]. What is more, the Chinese government reformed the HuKou system to enable the children of migrant workers from rural areas to have access the urban public schools [13]. More recently, the educational department issued the Double Reduction policy that aims to reduce students' study burden [14]. One main measure is banning academic tutoring institutions. It not only reduces students' burden but also improves educational equity by preventing urban students from taking advantage of tutoring sessions.

3 Definition of Urban-Rural Areas

There have been a great number of scholars who had researched how urban-rural disparities are badly affecting educational equity. The division between urban and rural areas is clearly defined. According to Hong et al. (2015), urban areas refer to the region with a population density higher than 1500 people per kilometer square and rural areas refer to villages and towns with a population of less than 3000 people [5].

4 Impacts of Urban-Rural Disparities on Educational Equity

We summarized the manifestations of educational inequality between urban and rural areas into three categories -- school education, family education, and social context.

4.1 School Education

There are three aspects in school education affecting educational equity. The first aspect is how urban-rural disparities of school facilities affect educational equity. For instance, Xue and Li (2021) suggest that the area of dilapidated primary schools in rural areas still accounted for 72.65% of the total area of dilapidated primary schools in China in 2018 [15]. What is more, as ICT has been an effective tool in the classroom, Yang and Yang (2019) mention that computers could break down at any time in rural areas while few staff knows how to fix the problems, which largely discourages their use of technologies [16]. While urban and rural students are studying in different levels of environment and using different technologies, they do not receive equal educational processes. The second aspect is how urban-rural disparities of teacher resources affect educational equity. For example, Yang et al. (2018) argue that there are still many one-teacher schools in rural areas, where a single teacher needs to teach all subjects for all grades, indicating the scarcity of teachers [7]. Moreover, the problem is not just the shortage of teachers but also the shortage of good teachers. The qualification rate of urban teachers is much higher than rural teachers and good teachers in rural areas mostly flow to urban areas in the pursuit of higher welfare [15, 17]. As rural students do not have equal teacher resources, they do not receive equal educational opportunities and educational processes. The third aspect is how urban-rural disparities of instructional content and strategies affect educational equity. For instance, rural elementary and secondary schools use national textbooks as urban schools do; however, the textbook writers are usually located in urban areas and lack of investigation on rural schools such that the textbooks are appropriate for urban students but not for rural students [15]. What is more, urban teachers are usually embedded into strong professional networks, which facilitate them to collaborate with their colleagues to improve their teaching methods while rural teachers who are more isolated usually have static instructional methods [4]. While rural students are educated with different instructional content and strategy, they do not receive equal educational processes.

4.2 Family Education

Parents with high incomes can provide supplementary classes as an influencing factor for children's extra learning, which has been confirmed to be a robust indicator of students' academic performance [18].

Parents' socioeconomic status determines their parenting styles [19]. Some scholars found that parental styles can be defined as rural parents having more rejection due to the inequality of economic income and parent's education level and that urban parents have more emotional warmth and understanding than rural parents [20]. Parents in cities often can give their children a better learning environment. However, in contrast, rural parents cannot give their children such a suitable growth environment because of financial factors. High-income parents value education more. So they tend to put more energy and resources into cultivating children's interests and personalities than poorer families [9]. Additionally, most high-income parents have been well educated with high-level divergent thinking, sociability, and problem-solving ability, which also play role models for their children [21].

4.3 Social Context

China's traditional ideology on gender is deeply ingrained, especially as the gap between urban and rural development widens [22]. Families in rural areas tend to give more educational opportunities to boys, thus girls who even do not get the opportunity to go to school at the age of five or six. Instead, these girls have to stay at home and start working until adulthood to join society and begin to earn money.

Education will be divided into multiple levels to develop a higher-quality society. However, the educational atmosphere in regions with different levels of development is also very different. For example, first- and second-tier cities (Beijing, Shanghai) will have a more active, inclusive, and positive educational environment [23]. On the contrary, people in some rural areas (Liangshan, Sichuan) will feel that reading is useless.

5 Policy Suggestions

The whole society's emphasis on the cities and the neglect of the rural areas is the root of current educational inequality. We need the cooperation of the government, schools, and families to change the status quo. Here are some policy suggestions.

5.1 Government

Firstly, it should improve investment and construction in rural areas. There is still a significant gap in the school facilities between urban and rural areas. Ensuring that urban and rural students have an equal level of school facilities is the basis of education equity. Secondly, the government should incentive excellent urban teachers to teach in rural areas. Teacher plays an important role in the educational process. It is impossible to achieve equal educational outcomes unless rural students receive an equal educational process.

5.2 Schools

Firstly, the urban and rural schools should improve their cooperation with each other. Urban schools usually have more novel instructional content, which rural schools can learn from. What is more, as the cooperation is improved, the urban teachers will have a deeper understanding of the rural schools such that they may become more willing to teach in rural areas. Secondly, rural schools should provide professional trainings for their teachers. As a great number of rural teachers are unqualified, it is important to offer trainings to improve their teaching skills such that rural students can receive education with good quality.

5.3 Families

Firstly, parents are the best teachers for children. However, if the quality of parents is not high enough, there will be loopholes in nurturing offspring. Thus, parents must strengthen their learning regarding personal quality and working ability. Secondly, the reason why children are called children is because of their immature minds. At this time, the role of parents is significant. They should devote their time to paying closer attention to the troubles that children encounter growing up and give guidance and methods to warm their children.

6 Conclusion

Urban-rural disparities are the root causes of educational inequality in China and their impacts can be summarized into three categories. The first category is school education. The disparities of school facilities, teacher resources, and instructional content between the urban and rural areas are badly affecting the educational opportunities and educational process that rural students receive. The second category is family education. Students in rural areas receive lower average level of family educational resources and parental style than students in urban areas do, which negatively affects the educational outcomes that rural students have. The third category is the social context. Rural students are living where they have backward attitudes toward gender and educational qualification, which cause unsatisfying educational outcomes. Based on all the above information, several guidelines are proposed from three aspects, the government, schools, and families. As urban-rural disparities are spread into every aspect of the country, it is important to have the cooperation of the government, schools, and families to ensure the promotion of educational equity. In this paper, we summarized the impacts of urban-rural disparities into three categories, which provide a framework for policymakers to make corresponding policies. As we have concluded the impacts of urban-rural disparities on educational equity, it will be important to explore detailed measures to promote educational equity in the future.

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