

Analysis of the Gap Between Urban and Rural Education in China from the Perspective of Educational Equity

Shanshan Ma

City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
msshasadream@163.com

Abstract. Urban-rural education gap is a social problem that has not been completely solved despite the government's great efforts to reform and develop education. This paper discusses the education gap between urban and rural areas in terms of resources, opportunities and achievements of youth in urban areas and rural areas. This paper analyzes historical, economic, cultural and institutional factors leading to the urban-rural education gap. This paper analyzes the distribution of educational resources through theoretical analysis, including the allocation of teachers, teaching facilities and government investment. Furthermore, this paper analyzes the influence of household registration system, unbalanced economic development, culture and social mobility on education. The results of this study show that the educational resources and environment of rural students are seriously limited, and the education level is below the standard. This study propose comprehensive reform plans to solve the problem of urban-rural education gap, including the formulation of corresponding support policies for rural areas and the use of technology to improve access to quality education. Future research should use mixed methods to study the urban-rural education gap.

Keywords: Urban-rural education gap, educational equity, educational resources, China, policy reform

1. Introduction

The urban-rural education gap in China has a long history. Although the government has made significant progress in education reform and investment in recent decades, the inequality of educational resources, opportunities and outcomes between urban and rural areas remains a prominent social problem. In cities, students can generally obtain better educational resources, such as higher-level teachers, advanced teaching facilities and more abundant extracurricular activities. In rural areas, school infrastructure often lags behind, teacher resources are limited, and educational investment is insufficient, creating significant disparities in educational opportunities compared to urban students [1]. The economic, cultural, and institutional differences between urban and rural regions have further intensified educational inequality. As China's economy rapidly develops and urbanization progresses, population mobility from rural areas has increased, leading to a further scattering of educational resources and placing additional pressure on rural students to compete in a highly competitive educational landscape.

Based on the analysis of urban-rural education gap and its causes, and finding out ways to improve the education equality, has both practical significance and academic value. In this paper, taking Chinese urban and rural teenagers as examples, this paper will analyze the gap of education between

urban and rural areas, and try to explain the causes of urban-rural education gap from the perspective of institution, economy and society. Furthermore, the research will make a theoretical analysis of the allocation of education resources between urban and rural areas, the quantity and quality of teachers, teaching equipment and the government's investment in education. In addition, this author will analyze the impact of household registration system, unbalanced economic development, culture and social mobility on education equality. Finally, based on the analysis of the current situation of Chinese urban and rural teenagers' education, this paper will explore the origin of urban-rural education inequality and provide reference for the formulation of future educational policies.

2. Analysis of the current situation of urban-rural education gap in China

2.1. Equity in Educational Distributive

Equity in Educational Distributive to the fair allocation of educational resources across various regions, schools, and groups. Its primary objective is to ensure that all students have access to educational resources regardless of their geographic location, economic status, or social background. In the education system, distributive equity manifests in several areas, including the availability of teaching staff, the quality of school facilities, and overall teaching effectiveness [1]. One of the root causes of the urban-rural education gap in China is the uneven distribution of educational resources. Urban schools usually enjoy more financial support, better teachers and advanced teaching facilities, while rural schools are relatively backward. The government's financial investment in urban schools is relatively sufficient, while financial support for education in rural areas is still insufficient, leading to a significant gap in hardware facilities between urban and rural areas. Many rural schools lack modern teaching equipment and have shabby school buildings. In some areas, there is even a phenomenon of students attending dilapidated school buildings [2]. The lack of a strong teaching staff in rural areas poses a significant challenge. There is an insufficient number of teachers, coupled with high mobility rates among them. As a result, talented educators often prefer to remain in urban settings, which further intensifies the disparity in educational resources between urban and rural areas. This uneven distribution of resources has a direct impact on the learning conditions and quality of education for rural students. Although the government has implemented some policy measures in recent years, such as the compulsory education funding guarantee mechanism and rural teacher subsidy policy, these efforts have had limited effectiveness, and the disadvantages faced by rural schools in terms of resource allocation remain apparent.

2.2. Equity in educational opportunity

Equity in education means that students in different families, with different economic conditions and from different regions, have the same conditions and environment to acquire education opportunities. Equal education opportunity is one of the basic conditions for social equality. In comparison with urban and rural education, there are more equal opportunity in China. Firstly, equal opportunity in education. Urban students can get more high-quality education resources, such as good schools, abundant extracurricular activities and more opportunities for further education. On the contrary, there are many restrictions on rural students. Secondly, equal opportunity in further education. Urban students have more choices in education. They can choose different schools and have more opportunities to further their education. In contrast, rural students have many restrictions. Also, more basic education resources and more admission opportunities. Compared with the cities, there are more complete basic education resources in urban areas, and the number and quality of key schools are much more than that in the countryside [2]. In addition, more key middle schools. Under the policy of nearby enrollment, urban students can only choose to go to the ordinary schools in their own area. That is, the rural students can only go to ordinary middle schools in their own city, and they cannot

apply for key middle schools or other good private schools which are more available in cities [3]. Moreover, household registration. The household registration system also causes the above phenomenon [3]. Even if the rural students move to the city, they still cannot easily enter the city's public schools, and they often have to solve the registration problem. In addition, they have to pay a lot of money to enter the private school, and the condition of the private school is not necessarily good. Besides, there is a great difference in the family's economic expenditure on extracurricular tutoring and further education. Urban students often get more opportunities to receive additional training, while rural students have no learning opportunities.

2.3. Equity in educational outcomes

Equity in education results refers to the degree to which the results of education are fair, i.e., regardless of students' background, students should be able to obtain similar educational achievements and work and career development [4]. In terms of urban and rural education, the equity in education results is usually presented by the students' academic performance, enrollment rate, employment and career development [4]. China's school students' academic performance has a clear difference between urban and rural areas. The academic performance of rural students is generally lower, and the enrollment rate of urban students is generally higher. Especially at the key times of enrollment, such as the college entrance examination, there are huge differences in the amount of schooling and enrollment assistance that urban and rural students can get. In addition, the equity in education results is also reflected in the employment and career development after graduation. Due to the richer social resources and educational background, urban students are more likely to get more high-income and high-status occupations than rural students [4]. In addition, the equity in education results not only affects the individual development, but also has a profound impact on the overall equity of society and economic development [5]. In order to achieve the fairness of education, we should start from the level of resource allocation and opportunity provision from the beginning to ensure that students from different regions and groups get the same development opportunities in the whole process of education and finally achieve the same education results.

3. Factors affecting urban-rural education equity

3.1. Institutional factors

Institutional factors play a vital role in the urban-rural education equity, taking into consideration China's household registration system exerts a great influence on the allocation of education as well. China household registration system classifies the Chinese citizens into urban and rural household, and the rural students have no chance to enjoy the urban education resources due to the existence of household registration system. Because of the limitation of household registration, the children of rural migrant workers cannot enjoy the same education resources with the local students in cities. They either attend the private schools with low education quality or cannot enroll in the schools due to the lack of school fees. The institutional factor not only exerts an influence on the difference between urban and rural students in enjoying education resources, but also enlarges the gap of education resources allocation [3]. The imbalance of education fiscal policy investment issued by the government reveals a lot of institutional factors. The lack of overall fiscal investment, unreasonable system for compulsory education funding, imperfect supervision of the fund and lack of clear institutional mechanism for distributing the compulsory education all cause the existence of a big gap between the urban and rural compulsory education. Generally, the government invests more in urban schools, so the urban schools have better education facilities and more superior teachers. On the contrary, the rural school has to invest less in finance and government policy support, and the resource gap continues to expand [6].

3.2. Economic factors

Economic factors are another important factor affecting the gap in urban and rural educational equity. The imbalance in economic development between urban and rural areas directly affects the investment and allocation of educational resources. Due to the developed economy, cities can provide more financial support for education, and families are also able to invest more in their children's education, such as choosing high-quality schools and enrolling in extracurricular tutoring classes. In rural areas, economic development is relatively backward, and many families cannot afford the high cost of education, and even students drop out of school to work. The difference in economic conditions is not only reflected in family education expenditures, but also in regional education financial investment [7]. Due to limited local finances and insufficient education funds in rural areas, schools find it difficult to improve teaching facilities, teachers are poorly paid, and the quality of education is difficult to improve. Family economic conditions also affect the opportunities that students can get in the process of education. Rural families often cannot provide their children with the same educational support as urban families, resulting in a further widening of the gap between students' academic performance and future development. Economic factors have exacerbated the imbalance in the distribution of urban and rural educational resources and opportunities, making the realization of educational equity face greater challenges.

3.3. Social and cultural factors

Social and cultural factors also greatly affect the realization of urban and rural educational equity. There are obvious differences in the educational concepts of urban and rural families. Urban families usually have higher expectations for education, attach importance to their children's academic achievements, and are active in investing in education. They are willing to provide financial support for their children's extracurricular tutoring, interest classes and other educational activities. In rural areas, due to economic pressure or cultural traditions, some families believe that it is more realistic to let their children work or get married too early, resulting in students being unable to receive a complete education. The traditional social and cultural environment in rural areas has constituted a certain obstacle to educational equity. In some remote rural areas, due to the backwardness of social development and the constraints of traditional concepts, the importance of education has not been fully valued, and parents and communities have insufficient support for education. Moreover, gender disparities still persist in some rural regions, where families may prioritize educational opportunities for boys over girls [8]. As a result, girls may face higher dropout rates or receive fewer educational resources. These social and cultural factors not only shape individual family educational choices but also have lasting and significant impacts on educational equity across society.

3.4. Urban-rural mobility

Urban-rural mobility is one of the important social phenomena that affect educational equity. With the acceleration of China's urbanization process, a large number of rural people have entered cities for work. This large-scale urban-rural mobility has brought new educational equity issues. The children of rural migrant workers face the problem of difficulty in enrolling in cities. Due to the restrictions of the household registration system, they are often unable to enter public schools and can only choose expensive private schools or schools for children of migrant workers with poor conditions, which makes it difficult for them to enjoy the same educational resources as urban registered students. The problem of left-behind children has also arisen. As a large number of rural parents go out to work, rural left-behind children face the lack of both family education and school education. The long-term absence of their parents has a negative impact on their psychological development and academic performance. Urban-rural mobility also affects students' mobile education

experience. Rural children who follow their parents to the city often move between different cities. The inconsistency of education and the frequent changes in living environment make their learning process more difficult [9]. These problems brought about by urban-rural mobility have further widened the educational gap between urban and rural areas and increased the difficulty of achieving educational equity.

4. Discussion

In the past few decades, Chinese government has been taking some measures to reduce the gap between urban and rural education and realize the educational justice. Such policies as carrying out Compulsory Education Law (which means every child can get nine years of education) to lay the legal foundation for urban-rural education fairness, raising fund to guarantee the urban-rural schools to improve their situation and raise teachers' pay, encouraging the university graduates to work in the rural areas by designing Special Post Program to solve the lack of teachers, and guaranteeing the poverty alleviation education in target areas.

However, there are still a long way to go to achieve the educational justice. On the one hand, the household registration system makes the students from the countryside can't enjoy the same education environment as the students from the city, especially can't get the same treatment as the students in public school when they enroll in the school. On the other hand, the economic disparity between city and countryside makes the rural family can't give their students much education expenditure, which means the students from the countryside can't get as many as tutoring resources as students from the city. Though the government has invested more in the countryside education, the disparity in resources and teachers' training and retention can't be eliminated, which will cause the education quality continues to decline. What's worse, the left-behind children whose parents left them because of work can't get perfect care and will affect their study and mental health.

In order to realize the educational justice, the government should take more policies to promote the education development in the countryside. Firstly, the household registration system should be reformed to break the restriction. Secondly, the government should continue to invest in the countryside education, especially the teachers' training and retention. Thirdly, the left-behind children should get more support to make sure of their healthy growth. Fourthly, the "Internet + Education" model should be implemented to balance the teaching resources. Finally, the government should promote the integrated education development and develop the policy to reduce the disparity in resources and quality, so that the students from all students can get the same education opportunity and quality as possible, no matter where they come from.

5. Conclusion

The urban-rural education gap in China remains a critical issue, reflecting deep-rooted disparities that affect millions of students. Despite the government's commendable efforts to promote educational equity through various policies, significant challenges persist. The uneven distribution of resources, exacerbated by institutional barriers such as the household registration system, economic inequalities, and cultural factors, continues to hinder the educational opportunities available to rural students. This study reveals that while urban students benefit from superior educational resources and opportunities, rural students often face substandard conditions that impede their academic and personal development. The interplay of economic constraints, social expectations, and mobility issues further complicates the landscape, highlighting the multifaceted nature of educational inequality in China. To address these disparities effectively, comprehensive reforms are essential. Policymakers must prioritize the elimination of systemic barriers, enhance financial investment in rural education, and develop

targeted support mechanisms for vulnerable populations, including left-behind children. Additionally, leveraging technology to improve access to quality educational resources can help bridge the gap.

This study is not without limitations. The reliance on existing literature may overlook recent developments and grassroots initiatives that address educational disparities. Future research should incorporate mixed-method approaches that combine quantitative analysis with qualitative case studies, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the urban-rural education gap.

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