

A Comparative Study of Educational Opportunities for Disadvantaged Children in China and The United States-- Taking Disadvantaged Children of Ethnic Minorities in The Two Countries as An Example

Bo Feng^{1, *}, Ziheng Jiang² and Qianqian Wang³

¹ School of Social and Public Administration, East China University of Science and Technology, Shanghai, 200237, China

² Chaminade College Preparatory School, Saint Louis, Missouri, 63131, United States

³ Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies, York University, Toronto, M3J 1P3, Canada

* Corresponding Author Email: 20003587@mail.ecust.edu.cn

Abstract. The issue of educational equity is a hot topic of concern to the whole society. Some researchers have found that there is a lack of educational opportunities for ethnic minority groups in China and the United States, but there is still a lack of unified explanation for the causes, current situation, and the advantages and disadvantages of solutions to the problem of educational equity for ethnic minorities in both countries. Therefore, this article conducts research on the education situation of ethnic minorities in both countries by collecting relevant data and summarizing and analyzing the data. Research has found significant differences in the causes and current situation of ethnic minority education issues between China and the United States, and there is also room for improvement in existing solutions. Therefore, China and the United States need to develop precise measures that are suitable for their own specific situations based on their respective special circumstances to address the issue of educational equity faced by ethnic minorities.

Keywords: China; America; minority nationality; educational equity.

1. Introduction

Good society needs to be sustainable, and every society needs to provide value to the organization. Education plays an important role, and the skills and knowledge learned in "formal education" can be used in the community. Therefore, education must be "fair," and everyone has the right to education. However, the reality is quite the opposite. A particular group in a society has a lower social status and access to fewer social resources, causing them to be disadvantaged compared to other groups. As a result, they are gradually marginalized [1]. This group is vulnerable. Similarly, some minority groups are lower than the majority in different aspects (such as economic and educational levels) [2]. In addition, this group also faces social inequalities (such as racial discrimination and the gap between rich and poor), which affects the barriers they face in accessing education. These barriers are due to innate or acquired characteristics such as race, economy, and ethnicity [3]. Therefore, the theme of this study is to reveal the problems faced by disadvantaged groups in China and the United States in the process of access to education. Its research aims to promote social equality and inclusion, social diversity and economic development. Therefore, focusing on the problems "disadvantaged groups" face in accessing educational opportunities is crucial for educational equity, and this study will use ethnic minorities in China and the United States as examples. Both China (ethnic minorities) and the United States (natives) are among the smaller population groups in the country. China's ethnic minority population numbers 125.5 million, or 8.89% of the national population [4]. Out of an overall population of 330 million, there are approximately 37,000,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives in the whole nation [5]. They are gradually marginalized for their own cultural and economic reasons.

2. Ethnic Minorities in China

2.1. Problems

A large number of ethnic minorities have resided in border or outlying regions since ancient times, where transportation is not convenient, information is blocked, and economic development is uneven, resulting in a lower level of basic education development for ethnic minorities. The Chinese government has proposed strategies to address this issue of minority education. For example, in the 1950s, a policy of reducing scores for ethnic minorities in the college entrance examination was first proposed [6]. In 1995, the Chinese government implemented the national compulsory education project, invested funds to support basic education, higher education and vocational education in several poor ethnic minority regions and opened high school classes for Tibetan, Uygur and other ethnic minority students in the developed eastern regions in the following years.

However, some policies that have already been implemented have disadvantages. For example, the bonus points policy. This policy has been maliciously exploited by many people, such as modifying ethnic composition to obtain bonus points that do not belong to them. Apart from malicious exploitation, this policy did not adjust specific bonus points on the basis of the practical education situation of distinct ethnic groups, which resulted in the inability to effectively balance the differences in educational resources among distinct ethnic groups.

In addition, the measures to establish ethnic minority classes in some developed areas also have potential problems. Firstly, ethnic minority students often find it difficult to integrate into the cultural environment of the Han ethnic group due to differences in language and culture, resulting in difficulties in normal communication with Han classmates and even psychological problems due to their inability to integrate into the local environment. Secondly, the educational resources in the eastern region are limited. Opening ethnic minority classes will occupy local educational resources and may lead to a decrease in the quality of local education.

2.2. Status of Ethnic Minorities in China

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China, higher education for ethnic minorities has made tremendous achievements. The rudimentary education system for ethnic minorities has undergone significant development, and a preliminary system of higher education for ethnic minorities has been established. However, due to historical, geographical, and conceptual reasons, ethnic minority education in China still has plenty of shortcomings nowadays. Firstly, the ratio of national minorities in higher education participation in China is still lower than the proportion of ethnic education, there has been differentiation and imbalance within ethnic minorities in different regions and ethnic groups. For example, the average cultural level of the Korean ethnic group exceeds the national average, while the education of ethnic minorities such as the Tibetan ethnic group still lags behind [7]. The current situation of education for ethnic minorities in China is still very complex.

2.3. Solutions

In response to these issues in the current situation, the government needs to adjust policies appropriately and adopt some new solutions. With the development of the social economy, the education situation in some ethnic minority areas has been improved to a certain extent. For example, in 2015, Jilin Province had 207 ethnic primary schools and 202 ethnic middle schools and 1.182 million Korean nationality people, accounting for 61.5% of the total population of Korean nationality [8]. Among these people, about 2 million 130 thousand students have received high-quality compulsory education, vocational and technical education and higher education relying on Jilin Province's educational resources [8]. However, there are still many minority areas with poor development, such as Yunnan Province, where there are even significant internal development differences. Therefore, the traditional bonus policy based on ethnic standards needs to be changed. Policymakers should consider factors such as regional differences and economic level differences among ethnic groups, comprehensively examine them from multiple dimensions, and implement

differentiated bonus policies to reduce educational differences between different ethnic groups and regions.

Besides, some education-related departments need to mobilize more social forces and let them participate in supporting ethnic minorities. In the past, education funding for ethnic minority areas mainly relied on government funding, but the funds and resources needed for the growth of education in ethnic minority regions go far beyond these. Therefore, the relevant departments can initiate initiatives for the whole society through social media to support the education of ethnic minority groups. The relevant departments should gather funding from universities, enterprises, social organizations, and private institutions, and build a diversified education funding system.

Finally, relevant departments should also pay attention to the enthusiasm and adaptability of minority children towards learning. According to some scholars' statistics, in 2017, over 76.4% of minority children had deficiencies in language ability and social interaction with other ethnic groups or teachers, and over 63% of parents did not pay attention to the learning situation of minority children [9]. So, the local government and other relevant departments should make schools and families pay attention to children's learning situation by formulating policies and other means.

3. Native American

3.1. Problems Faced by Native American Students and the Causes

In obtaining fair education, Native American children mainly face obstacles caused by historical factors, cultural differences, and low-income family economics. First, due to the colonization and imperialism of the European whites, the European whites wanted to occupy the American continent. They caused the genocide of the Indians (massacres and the spread of foreign epidemics). In addition, colonization allows people under two different social systems to live on one piece of land, and the cultures of the two are different due to the various social systems. European whites worship individualism and autonomy, and dominance over nature.

In contrast, Native Americans are the exact opposite -- they value the interdependence of their members and like interdependence with nature, which is where cultural opposition arises [10]. At first, after the white people with cultural imperialism realized the difference in culture, they chose to make the ideology of the locals more fit by building Westernized schools (boarding schools) [10]. However, this approach worsened their relationship instead of making them more similar. Initially, due to the cruel history, the Aborigines hated the white people very much, and the white people greatly impacted the "assimilation" of the Aborigines -- the Aborigines began to fear and distrust non-aborigines. After the U.S. government realized its problems, it began to take some useless measures --- aboriginal apologies, revoking boarding schools and establishing Aboriginal reservations. However, this tragic incident will affect Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students will likely face problems in school--racial discrimination from non-aboriginal people and difficulty adapting to campus culture. They tend to feel lonely in school due to a lack of cultural identity. Moreover, Native American students did not communicate well with teachers due to cultural differences. Finally, many Native peoples did not develop well in societies where the dominant group was white due to historical factors and cultural differences. Correspondingly, they still survive on Native American reservations but face economic problems. Not to mention the locals living in cities, they are also in poor economic conditions. Table 1 shows that the poverty rate for children living on reservations was higher than 40 percent between 1990 and 2015. According to the survey, Aboriginal people living in cities are the same ----- 25% of Aboriginal people live below the poverty rate [11]. Three obstacles (children's health, family factors, and educational resources) appear in children's access to education, which are caused by the family's economic status. Aboriginal children's health is poor, and their health insurance is not universal [12]. Indigenous children are not in good health and do not have the energy to spend on their studies due to a lack of primary medical care, which results in them being absent from school for long periods due to illness. Informal education is also crucial in children's education, as children imitate behaviour in their surroundings. Unfortunately, high-risk behaviours (alcohol and violence

and suicide and drugs) are commonly imitated by children. Sampling shows – that Aboriginal children are three times more likely to commit suicide than whites and use drugs before age 13 [11]. In addition, their lack of access to educational resources (formal education) is attributed to poverty and the skills and knowledge learned in formal education can be used in society for self-development. No matter which factors it is, it will become a stumbling block in the fairness of education and prevent them from receiving education.

Table 1. From 1990 to 2015, the impoverished rate of Native American children living on reservations [13-16]

Panel A: American Indian Alaska Natives either individually or Together	1990	2000	2010	2015
Total Children Under 18 Living in Families Receiving Fewer Below the Poverty Level		94,024	84,473	89,471
Total Number of Households without Children Under 18		215,777	191,937	192,608
Percent of People who are poor		0.44	0.43	0.46

3.2. Status of the Native American Institute Issue

The status of Native Americans in today's society is not ideal, and this problem and difficulty manifests itself in different ways. Social status is an essential measure of inclusion and well-being. Unfortunately, Native Americans continue to experience social marginalization and discrimination. More than one in five Native Americans report getting social disdain, and 15 percent have given up their right to get health care for themselves because of fear of being discriminated against [17]. A large proportion of Native Americans also said they experienced varying degrees of violent oppression (38%) and threatened or harassed (34%) [17]. Native Americans reported higher rates of discrimination than whites in some areas, including health care and court complaints. Moreover, the relationship between geographical characteristics and Native American discrimination is complex, which means that the degree and probability of Native American discrimination in different regions are different. This alienation challenges building a strong cultural identity and contributes to the erosion of traditional practices and values.

From an economic perspective, most Native Americans have low-income levels. Their children are usually sent to inferior rural schools that have lower education levels and learning resources of these schools are very scarce. Therefore, they are at a disadvantage both at home and at school in terms of receiving higher education. Of the 2.5 million Native Americans, nearly half a million live on more than 300 reservations and trusts [18]. Out of approximately 550 tribes, only 6 have a population exceeding 100,000, 4 have a population of at least 50000, and the majority have a population of less than 10,000 [18]. While efforts have been made to promote tribal economic development and self-sufficiency, the scale of the challenge requires further attention and support.

Education is vital to social mobility and empowerment, but Native American students often face obstacles in accessing quality education. Native American children are forced to be educated in learning environments that are more or less culturally or linguistically different from the environment they are familiar with at home. Under such conditions, these children reportedly struggle to acquire the learning content and the manner needed to master the school curriculum materials and teaching methods. Cultural disconnects in the curriculum and language preservation challenges also contribute to educational disparities. Consequently, the educational achievement gap persists, limiting the opportunities and prospects of Native American youth.

3.3. Measures of Resolution

Both Aboriginal and nonindigenous people should accept this tragic history. Nonindigenous people should understand cultural centrism, respect different cultures, and reject "assimilation." Simply put, the biggest problem for Native Americans in education is cultural differences and economic issues, so there are two aspects (cultural learning and increasing cultural identity) that can

better solve cultural problems, and the help of the government will alleviate the pain—the economic pressure on the resident family. The first is adding Aboriginal history and culture to public education, intending to inform non-Aboriginal people about Aboriginal culture [10]. So, they feel comfortable and friendly with non-Aboriginal people. The second is about cultural identity. Although the cultures of European whites and Native Americans are completely different, the same can be found when the aborigines join the society, such as the forest. So, they can solve the forest resource loss and environmental problems in today's society.

The government can add courses on forest resources and the environment to the school curriculum of the Aboriginal people so that the knowledge and skills they learn can also be applied in society. However, the method for Aboriginal development is limited. Moreover, have their schools on their reservations. It is worth noting here that the teachers in the schools in the Native American schools were either culturally aware or Native American themselves. Data indicates that just under five percent of Native American teachers and administrators are employed in schools wherein more than 60% of Indian/Native American students are educated [19]. In the problems mentioned above faced by Aboriginal students, it is also mentioned that Aboriginal students are afraid to interact with teachers because of different classroom cultures. It is imperative for students to feel a sense of cultural identity in the education system. Cultural similarities can help students complete their studies and get along better with teachers. Ultimately, the root cause of Aboriginal children's low-income families is their parents' lack of employable skills and wages. Thus, training and education programs for Aboriginal adults must be improved - by establishing universities on Aboriginal reservations [12]. In addition, the school's management is handed over to the Aborigines to avoid problems caused by cultural differences. The government should reduce their taxes on indigenous people living in cities [12]. At the same time, the government can implement a "lunch program" for Aboriginal children living in cities whose income is below the poverty line [20].

4. Conclusion

Research has shown that ethnic minorities in both China and the United States face the problem of lacking educational opportunities. For the disadvantaged minority groups in the United States, in addition to the lack of educational resources caused by economic and other reasons, they also face long-term and obvious issues of racial discrimination and cultural differences. The ethnic minorities in China are relatively more harmonious and united, and their lack of educational opportunities is mainly due to the lack of educational resources and unequal distribution of educational resources caused by the backward social development in ethnic minority areas. China and the United States can learn from each other's effective laws, enrollment policies, financial assistance, and educational intervention measures, and then accurately formulate and implement support policies and measures on the basis of the actual situation of distinct ethnic groups in the respective countries, in accordance with the principle of equality and justice, in order to better solve the education problems of minority ethnic groups.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

References

- [1] Wu, L., Shi, GQ. et al. Summarize in Study on Problems of Vulnerable Groups in China. Social Sciences In Nanjing 2004, 9,73-80.
- [2] Liu, Y. Study on the Definition, Types and Root Causes of Socially Vulnerable Groups. Legal System and Economics (Mid-Term Issue), 2011, 187-189.

- [3] Shields, L., Newman, A., & Satz, D. et al. Equality of Educational Opportunity (E. N. Zalta, Ed.). Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy; Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. May 31, 2017. August 4, 2023. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/equal-ed-opportunity/#WhatEducOppo>
- [4] National Bureau of Statistics of China. Seventh National Census Bulletin. May 11, 2021. August 4, 2023. https://www.gov.cn/guoqing/2021-05/13/content_5606149.htm
- [5] Bureau, U. C. Facts for Features: American Indian and Alaska Native Heritage Month: November 2022. October 11, 2022. August 4, 2023. <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2022/aian-month.html>
- [6] Zhang Huixia, Tian Xuerui&Ma Ling. Research status of Bilingual education of ethnic minorities in Xinjiang Education and Teaching Forum 2017, (45), 197-198
- [7] Qin Hongxia. Conflict and Integration: Reflections on the Development of Higher Education for Ethnic Minorities in China Guizhou Ethnic Studies 2004, (03), 130-136
- [8] Quan Wentian&Li Mingji. Investigation and Research on the Current Situation of Korean Ethnic Education Resource Construction in China Primary and Secondary School Electronic Education 2021, (Z1), 4-6
- [9] Sun Jieyuan and Han Xiaofan. The "Chinese Experience" in the Development of Basic Education for Ethnic Minorities in 2019 Research on Ethnic Education 2019, (06), 5-14.
- [10] Haynes, J. Broadening the Meaning of Citizenship Education: Native Americans and Tribal Nationhood. Action in Teacher Education, 2012, vol 32, pp:70-81.
- [11] Weaver, H. N. Urban and Indigenous: The Challenges of being a Native American in the City. Journal of Community Practice, 2012, vol 20, pp:470-488.
- [12] Akee, R., Simeonova, E. Poverty and Disadvantage among Native American Children: How Common Are They and What Has Been Done to Address Them? National Academies of Sciences. 2017.
- [13] US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 2015 ACS 5-Year Average, Tables B01001 for AIAN Alone, AIAN alone and in combination. June 15, 2023. August 4, 2023. <https://www.census.gov/data/developers/data-sets/acs-5year.2015.html#list-tab-1036221584>
- [14] US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 2015, 2010 ACS 5-Year Average, Table3s 17010C for AIAN Alone; 17010 for AIAN alone or in combination. June 15, 2023. August 4, 2023. <https://www.census.gov/data/developers/data-sets/acs-5year.html>
- [15] US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 2000 US Census File SF3 Table P160C for Reservation AIAN Alone. July 2007. August 4, 2023. <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2000/technical-documentation/complete-tech-docs/summary-files/sf3.pdf>
- [16] US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 2000 US Census File SF4 PCT157 for Reservation AIAN Alone or in combination. July 2007. August 4, 2023. <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial/2000/technical-documentation/complete-tech-docs/summary-files/sf4.pdf>
- [17] Findling, M. G., Casey, L. S. et al. Discrimination in the United States: Experiences of Native Americans. Special Issue: Experiences of Discrimination in America: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality., 2019, vol. 54, pp:1431-1441.
- [18] Varma, R. Attracting Native Americans to computing. Communications of the ACM, 2009, vol.52, pp:137-140.
- [19] McCarty, T. L. The impact of high-stakes accountability policies on Native American learners: evidence from research. Teaching Education, 2009, vol. 20, pp:7-29.
- [20] Kain, J. F., Singleton, K. Equality of educational opportunity revisited. New England Economic Review, 1996, 87-111.