

An Analysis of Educational Equity in American University Entrance Selection from the Perspective of Cultural Capital

Chenyao Zhai *

Department of English, Tianjin Foreign Studies University, Tianjin, China

* Corresponding Author Email: zhailw@gs-battery.com.cn

Abstract. The issue of educational equity has always been a hot topic of discussion. Whether educational resources are allocated fairly and whether children have equal access to education are key concerns, especially in many developed and developing countries where education has become an issue that cannot be ignored in society. Based on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, this article analyzes the influence of parents' own educational level, social status, and other factors on their children's growth process, as well as the direct and indirect effects on their children's education in the subsequent education process. The author finds through research that children's education process is influenced by their family environment and parents' own educational background. Therefore, the author suggests that the government should provide more assistance to children from impoverished areas and families so that they can be allocated more and better educational resources to make up for the lack of access to good education due to their poor economic foundation.

Keywords: Educational equity; cultural capital; parents direct and indirect effect on children.

1. Introduction

Social equality is the eternal pursuit and unremitting efforts of humanity, and educational equality is an effective means to promote and achieve social equality [1]. American higher education is the top field of global education, with half of the top ten universities in the latest world rankings, proving the leading position of American higher education. During the annual application season, outstanding talents from all over the world hope to study at American universities and engage in discussions with top scholars. In the United States, university education has always been a hot topic. That has become a resource exclusively enjoyed by the rich, while university education has become a luxury for the poor. After the fraud case in American universities was exposed by US prosecutors in March 2019, more and more American families have become skeptical about the evaluation criteria for college admission. At present, scholars have conducted research on the admission policies of American universities based on differences in family background or ethnic minorities. In response to the suggestions put forward by scholars, schools have also developed corresponding plans to compensate for the differences caused by economic issues or other factors, ensuring that children with different cultural capital can have the same admission opportunities. The implementation of these policies makes higher education in the United States not only a service for the wealthy but also a way for the poor to change their own life.

The author finds that in existing Chinese academic research, there is limited information on the impact of parents' educational background and class, which has an influence on kids' admission to college, and other factors on children's development from the perspective of cultural capital. Therefore, the author hopes to analyze from this perspective whether the current US university admission policies are fair for children from different life and social backgrounds and whether parents' educational levels directly or indirectly restricted their children's educational path at the same time.

This article uses Bourdieu's cultural capital theory to study whether the current admission policies of American universities are fair for students in different cultural capitals, whether exam scores are the only opportunity to enter higher education, and whether the operation of money has broken the balance of existing fair admission opportunities in the United States. To evaluate whether the reform

of the popularization of higher education in the United States has promoted fairness in university enrollment selection.

2. Theoretical Framework

Pierre Bourdieu is a renowned sociologist in France. With his rich knowledge and unique perspective, he was welcomed by France and the entire Western humanities and social science community, who broke the boundaries between subjects. He has pushed forward the continuous development and progress of contemporary Western humanities and social science theory, opened up broader space for the development of humanities and social science, and made the development prospects of humanities and social science extremely broad. "Cultural capital" is a new term derived from Bourdieu's expansion of the concept of capital in Marxist economics. Cultural capital, the theory to be applied in this article, refers to the education, skills, and comprehensive abilities that people receive from a young age. Bourdieu further divides cultural capital into three forms, namely the three storage methods of cultural capital: physical form, objective form, and institutional form. Bourdieu emphasized that cultural capital starts from infancy and early childhood, and within the family, parents or other members have a subtle influence on children. Meanwhile, social background can also influence a child's growth. From the perspective of the first form of body shape, family environment and school education are a long process of capital accumulation. Capital accumulation is not formed overnight, and there are differences in knowledge, upbringing, skills, and other aspects depending on the individual. It is an extremely time-consuming, energy-consuming, and monetary capital accumulation. Moreover, it cannot be obtained through monetary purchases or other equivalent exchanges. Another form of savings is objectified storage, which transforms knowledge into tangible items that people can see and touch, such as books. If a book lacks the cultural capital it possesses, it is simply a pile of papers listed together without any value. Finally, it is the institutional form, which includes materials recognized by society, such as diplomas and qualifications. These proofs can better assess a person's knowledge reserves and professional skills.

Through the exposition of the content contained in cultural capital, it is not difficult to find that cultural capital has a profound significance for a person's growth. The influence of parents after birth, the influence of social class, or the influence of social background will all have such influences on a person's growth path. So whether the cultural capital of parents will affect the storage of cultural capital in offspring is also a question worth studying, and what ways can be used to address this impact is also a question that needs to be considered by various aspects of society.

3. The Influence of Parental Class on the Education of Offspring

From another perspective, the class of parents, due to their income or status, can provide different material conditions for their offspring, thereby affecting the school their kids attend. It is worth mentioning that on March 12, 2019, the US prosecutor's office exposed a scandal involving multiple prestigious universities such as Harvard, Yale, and Stanford. On the same day, the US Federal Justice Department announced that it had charged more than 50 well-known social figures, such as movie stars and financiers, with exam fraud, with a total amount of tens of millions of dollars, which attracted widespread attention in American society. Until 2021, as the case deepened, multiple wealthy individuals were imprisoned, and their children were expelled from universities. It was not until August that the largest enrollment fraud case in America was basically settled. It is not difficult to see from this case that due to the status of celebrities and billionaires, as well as their wealth, they have sufficient financial strength to bribe admissions personnel and allow their children to enter the world's top universities. This is clearly unfair compared to those who rely on their own efforts to get into these universities. However, this also confirms that the higher the social status of parents, the more money they can earn and the greater the help they can provide for their children's education. This goes against the prevailing meritocracy in schools today, which states that social and economic

rewards should be determined based on talents, efforts, and achievements. People compete fairly under equal opportunities, and the one with excellent performance wins. Therefore, the best universities should admit the students with the best grades, and the highest-paying positions should be reserved for the most capable individuals [2].

At the same time, not only this negative case, wealthier people can register for extracurricular tutoring classes and many other extracurricular activities so that their children can learn more skills and knowledge in their spare time. For example, in China, many parents choose to learn a series of skills such as dance or music while their children are still in kindergarten to stimulate their children's potential. Not only the cultivation of interests and hobbies, but more parents will also choose math, English or other extracurricular tutoring classes for their children to learn the knowledge they will be imparted in school in advance, which can accelerate their children's acceptance of new knowledge, thus achieving good grades and gaining an advantage in the process of further education. The high price of extracurricular tutoring is unaffordable for many middle and lower-class families. Even if parents discover a certain aspect of their child's talent, they cannot afford to spend money on continuing to cultivate it. Not to mention the price of professional tutoring, many families are hesitant about it. Based on the author's personal experience, the price of tutoring classes is determined by many factors such as grade, teaching experience or even types of classes, which is not simply affordable for families who can only earn three to four thousand yuan a month. Therefore, the material conditions that parents can provide to their children affect the environment in which they receive education, directly affecting their children's further education. However, this family cultural capital indirectly affects educational equity by influencing student participation in training [3].

Another factor is that the social status of parents indirectly affects the education of their offspring. Celebrities and other public figures have a greater chance of encountering people with higher academic levels than ordinary people, and their opportunities are also greater. Through social interaction, they can open up channels for their children to enter the upper echelons of society. In China, more education and better educational resources are always in economically developed regions, where there are many well-developed enterprises. This will lead to high-income people living in these areas, forming a virtuous cycle. Moreover, for those children in remote mountainous areas, their parents need to go out to work and have no extra money to take them to good areas for living and studying. They can only stay in the mountains, and from classroom conditions to the number of teachers, their learning environment is greatly limited. Parents also do not have the ability to help them in their learning process. They can only rely on their own efforts to study, which to some extent means falling behind the starting line. It cannot be denied that in recent years, the government has formulated corresponding policies to ensure that some children born in relatively low-income families have the opportunity to leave the mountainous areas, enter universities, and change their own destinies. However, in China, there still exist many inequalities in the admission rate of the college entrance examination due to differences in urban and rural areas and class levels [4].

4. The Indirect Impact of Parental Education Level on Offspring'S Education Biased towards Culture

From the perspective of the first form of cultural capital, the education received by parents has a significant impact on the education of their children, and the level of parental education also has a significant impact on the education of their children. It is reported that the School of Education at the University of London conducted a survey on the salaries and family backgrounds of 40000 men aged 25 to 59 in the UK. The survey shows that British men earn more if their parents have attended universities, while men whose parents have not received higher education earn 20% less than those with equivalent education. This indicates that the level of parental education has a particularly significant impact on the income of men in countries represented by the UK. It also indicates that the educational level of parents can affect their children's education. Parents with higher levels of education can recognize the importance of culture and understand that education affects not only their

economic income and family living standards but also their interpersonal communication and social status [5].

The author found that it is not the education level of parents that affects their offspring but rather the influence of parents' behaviours and thoughts on their children's learning habits, thinking patterns, and other aspects after obtaining higher education. Parents with higher education may be referred to as academic achievers; thus, they have more efficient ways of learning and pass them on to their children, which is able to correct their children's mistakes at once, whether in the learning process or in various aspects of life. More importantly, it is a process of gradually cultivating good habits, conveying to children a positive and upward attitude towards life. It is much more useful for children to face and solve difficulties in their future growth process, which cannot be taught by knowledge. Parental education and children's own practical experience are the keyways for them to have a place to survive in society when they grow up. Looking at the reality of the child, the reality of the child means catching the reality of the child's world and the reality he sees [6]. By contrast, some parents do not attach enough importance to their children and do not know how to accompany them, thinking that giving pocket money is enough [7]. For example, in rural China, many parents have not received an education, and their children, especially girls, choose to go out to work and earn money after completing compulsory education. It is precisely the low cultural level of some parents that subtly affects their children's attitude towards learning - after the compulsory period, they make money to support themselves or even their cousins. Especially for the girls in China's suburban areas, it is better to study for just a few years and to earn money to share the pressure of the family earlier or marry others.

From the Chinese proverb, "It takes ten years to grow trees, but a hundred to rear people", it is proved that cultivating people is a long-term process that requires mastering certain methods. Billings and Young found that family cultural capital shapes the mental health of college students and their attitudes towards psychological counselling [8, 9]. Only by understanding the methods of raising trees well can trees grow into towering trees, and the same goes for humans. Only when parents have a certain knowledgeable foundation can they better grasp the methods of educating their children. For example, in many reports, due to poor academic performance, especially in remote areas, parents may beat and scold their children, causing psychological trauma. However, if they are well-educated parents, most of them will first comfort their children, help them find problems together, and make new demands on them. This invisibly helps children build confidence. After they grow up and become parents, they will also use the same method to teach their children. This forms a virtuous cycle; therefore, the author emphasizes that parents' educational backgrounds will have a significant impact on their children's development.

5. Reflection and Suggestion

In response to the current phenomenon and the impact of existing resources, the author suggests that the government should first formulate stricter laws and ensure the enforcement of laws. If everyone is not afraid of breaking the law, then this society will not achieve stability, harmony, and peace. At the same time, training for policy implementers should be strengthened, and power should not be too concentrated, especially on individuals. The government should also ensure a balanced supply of regional educational resources and improve the opportunities for vulnerable groups to access high-quality educational resources [10]. Overall, it should be ensured that the admission decision undergoes multi-party review and approval by multiple relevant personnel. Of course, while not violating the most basic social responsibility of the law, residents themselves should also improve their own quality. Finally, the government should allocate the economy reasonably and increase financial allocations to less developed areas so that children in poverty-stricken areas can enjoy the same social education as those from the upper class and improve the overall quality of the population. Advertisements on how parents can educate their children should be published on other public platforms such as television, and public welfare courses should be carried out so that families can

learn how to become good parents and excellent first teachers for their children. Subsidies should be provided to families in extreme poverty, while the government needs to intervene in the cost of extracurricular tutoring, formulate relevant policies, limit excessive costs, conduct regular and surprise inspections of relevant institutions, and establish corresponding punitive measures.

6. Conclusion

In summary, Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, to some extent, explains why parents with higher education often have higher academic or social status issues when their children graduate from school in existing universities. Education has a specific effect in addition to the general effect related to the stratification of society for both men and women [11]. With practical examples, it can be concluded that the influence of the family of origin on children's education is significant, both materially and spiritually. These impacts start from the birth of a child, from material provision to subtle spiritual influence. Moreover, due to differences in parental education, the educational level of the child can also be affected, forming a cycle that affects the next generation. The higher the probability of excellent parents cultivating excellent children, the more vicious the cycle that those who will never have access to higher education will create; always trapped in areas with relatively backward education, their children will also do the same. This article once again confirms the direct and indirect influence of parents on their children's education through the analysis of related cases such as fraud cases. Especially the indirect impact is always overlooked by the public. Meanwhile, this article also has certain limitations. Due to the author's long-term residence in China, the author has a better understanding of the influence of parental education, political status, and other factors on Chinese children. For other countries or regions, analysis can only be conducted through news reports and information on the Internet, lacking on-site research and observation. Therefore, the author hopes that future research can delve deeper into the impact of American social class or cultural background on offspring based on this foundation and hopes to gain a better understanding of the educational environment of students in the American cultural context and the impact of existing government policies.

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