

China's Education Policies to Solve Regional Educational Inequality

Jinrui Liu *

School of Education, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom

* Corresponding Author Email: 2775334l@student.gla.ac.uk

Abstract. After the year 1978, China has entered a period of fast economic development. However, the education industry has been extremely unbalanced. The development level of education in the central China and western China lags behind that in the eastern China, and the development level of education in rural places lags behind that in urban areas. In order to solve this inequality, the Chinese government has carried out reforms in three aspects, namely, education resources, teacher team training and teacher salaries, which has solved the problem of regional education inequality to a certain extent. However, these policies still have their own shortcomings, leading to the problem has not been completely solved. This paper analyzes the policies put forward by the Chinese government in recent years to solve the inequality in educational regions, find out their defects and put forward suggestions for improvement, so as to promote the development of Chinese education.

Keywords: Policy; Chinese education; Analyze.

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, equity in education is a necessary theme. The Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations point out that the world should "achieve universal primary education" and "promote gender equality and empower women". In a similar period, the Chinese government also promulgated documents related to the popularization of education and the construction of equality in education, for example, 'Plan for Revitalizing Education in the 21st Century'. However, under the theme of this era, the current situation of the whole world is not optimistic, and there are still different degrees of educational inequality in China.

Since 2010, China's GDP has become the second largest in the world. Although the Chinese government intends to reduce the overall GDP growth rate to less than 10% through adjustment since 2011, China still relies on the accumulation of the previous 30 years and has always been the world's second largest economy. However, the rapid development of China's economy depends on a huge group of rural residents entering the cities for intensive labor. The development of technology-based industries does not match the economic growth rate because of the low overall education level of the labor force. With this kind of development of urbanization, China's education has a huge imbalance between rural and urban development.

Faced with this situation, China has tried to give some policies to adjust. In 1998, The State Council of China announced the Plan for Revitalizing Education in the 21st Century. It told that we should actively develop vocational education and adult education, train a large number of high-quality workers and junior and middle-level talents, and especially intensify education to serve agriculture and rural work. However, the phenomenon of regional inequality in education is serious now in China. From 2004 to 2014, the enrollment rate of Beijing and Shanghai declined. The reason behind this is that some limitations prevented migrant children from entering high school locally and forced them to return to their hometown from junior high school [1]. The data from Zhang.et.al showed that there was around 38% children from rural areas cannot finish the 9-year compulsory education in China, while almost every student in urban areas completed junior high school education and 63% of them went into senior high school [2]. In the meanwhile, the educational achievement of rural children lags behind that of urban children, the example is that the average self-reported scores of word and math of urban children was higher than which of children in countryside in the research of Zhang [2].

However, the Chinese government has not stopped the reform to solve the inequality in education areas. In 2016, in order to comprehensively deepen reform, Communist Party of China Central Committee announced the some opinions on promoting the reform and development of urban and rural compulsory education integration as a whole, in which it said that we will scientifically promote the standardization of schools and comprehensively improve the basic conditions for schools in poor areas. In order to give more preferential policies to rural teachers to promote the development of rural education, in 2021 and 2022, China's Ministry of Education announced the Rural Teacher Preference Policy. The above policies are not perfect when they were formulated and implemented. This paper will specifically analyze their advantages and disadvantages.

The analysis of a country's policy formulation and implementation can be compared with the cases of other countries. Cambodia's education system has undergone significant changes around 2003, before that year, the government invested a large amount of resources in Phnom Penh and other big cities. After that year, the resources began to tilt to remote areas, which changed the extremely unbalanced education situation among Cambodian regions [3]. Education in the northeast of Ghana lags behind that in the southeast coastal area, which is related to history and infrastructure construction, and the government has paid money to schools in the north with equipment investment and food for students [4]. Under the dual influence of colonial and Confucian culture, Korean education is very similar to that of China, and there are also differences that can be used for reference. South Korea has chosen a way to gradually improve the majority of school aged populations and achieved success [3]. Compared with investing a lot of resources in general schools nationwide, it is also a new idea for China to draw lessons from.

Based on the above discussion, in the follow-up, this paper will analyze the rationality of the implementation of various national policies in China, compare and integrate the existing policies in China, and try to give a new idea to solve regional education inequality in China.

2. Mainbody

2.1 Interpretation and Analysis of China's Educational Policy

Since 1999, the State Council of China has announced an action plan to revitalize education in the 21st century, China's various departments have made various attempts to reform and develop China's education. On October 26, 2000, the State Council issued the Notice on Several Policies and Measures for the Implementation of the Western Development, which formulated the policies for the development of China's western region in the next decade [5]. Among them, the policies on attracting talents and increasing educational investment have become the guidelines for various policies in the future. The policies in the document, such as expanding the enrollment scale of schools in the central region in the west, building the distance education system in the west, and increasing the education support to the western China from the eastern China, have far-reaching effects. Until today, many policies are still based on them. Since then, the formulation of China's education policy has been developing with the overall national policy. There are many educational policies in China. This paper will focus on three aspects: educational resources and funds, teacher team training and teacher team income.

2.1.1 Educational resources and funds

Adequate funds and resources are the basis for the improvement of education. Due to the lack of educational funds, the development of compulsory education will stagnate [6].

After entering the 21st century, the investment from Chinese government in rural education has been increasing and gradually inclined, and its growth rate is showing a faster growth trend than that of cities. In December 2005, the Notice on Deepening the Reform of the Rural Compulsory Education Funds Guarantee Mechanism was approved by the State Council, which mainly includes making rural compulsory education into the scope of public finance step by step [7]. In ten years, rural educational resources have made a major breakthrough. In 2014, the public education expenditure within the

average budget of rural primary school students increased by 143.84% compared with 2010, and the public education expenditure within the average budget of rural junior middle school students increased by 116.20% compared with 2010. In 2014, the average budgetary public education expenditure of rural primary school students increased by 143.84% compared with 2010, and the average budget on public education expenditure of students in rural junior middle school increased by 116.20% compared with 2010. The growth rate of these data is higher than that of cities [8]. The State Council announced the Notice on Further Improving the Funding Guarantee Mechanism for Urban and Rural Compulsory Education in November 2015. And it stipulated that we should further give more investment to education funds on rural areas [9]. Under the trend of increasing capital investment, the modernization of education in rural areas in China has also achieved a breakthrough. By 2016, 72% of rural teachers had used modern scientific and technological tools and resources to carry out teaching, and more than 4 million students in backward places had access to high-quality resources about education [10]. In the 2035 of China's Education Modernization issued in 2019, it is pointed out that we should increase the percentage of equalization of compulsory education and make the compulsory education more balanced in different regions in China.

In addition to a large increase in macro investment, more detailed policies show the Chinese government's determination to improve education in rural and backward areas. Since 2011, with the approval of the State Council, the central government has begun to change the situation of insufficient food funds for 26 million students in poverty-stricken areas by allocating funds, and has established various charity projects to subsidize the food of poverty-stricken students in combination with charity organizations. Until 2019, the government has given 147.2 billion yuan of nutritional food subsidies since 2011 [11]. In 2022 Ministry of Education carried out a selection which named as "quality courses of basic education", which purpose is to make the disparity between urban and rural education quality smaller. It was written in the selection requirements that we should share and use of excellent educational resources, help rural schools fully open national courses, accelerate the development of rural education quality, cut down the disparity between rural and urban education, and promote the construction of a balanced and high-quality basic public education service system.

In addition to compulsory education stage, the Chinese government has increasingly adjusted the education investment to the preschool education stage, making every effort to enlarge the range of China's education equity. The 12th Five Year Plan about the Development of National Education proposes that until 2017, the preschool children in the kindergarten will become 34 million, and the total enrollment rate of preschool will reach 65%. The National Plan for the Development of Children in Poverty stricken Areas (2014-2020) issued by the State Council on December 25, 2014 pointed out that we should increase the preferential support of the central government's major pre-school education development projects, rural pre-school education promotion projects and provincial pre-school education projects to the concentrated contiguous areas with special difficulties [12]. From 2010 to 2018, the percentage of new students who have got pre-school education in rural primary school in China jumped from 87.99% in 2010 to 98.07%, and the gap about the percentage of students who have got the pre-school education between rural and urban areas has narrowed sharply [13].

However, in the process of constantly solving the imbalance, there are still some problems. First of all, in terms of the overall allocation of funds, the public funds per student in the eastern region are still in the forefront of China. In the process of resources tilting towards the west, the educational needs of students in central China started to be not met [14]. By analogy, in the classroom, the central region of China is just like the most ordinary student. It can't attract attention like a gifted student by shining performance, nor can it get extra attention like a defective student. It can only accept the most ordinary arrangement in obscurity. However, due to historical reasons, the central region has a huge population. This requires a change in the direction of the Chinese government's investment. The existing policies pay more attention to increasing the investment in backward areas. Under the premise of the economic downturn caused by the epidemic or from a new perspective, the way of reducing the investment in a certain area can be used to better balance educational resources. For example, we will reduce the investment in education in the eastern region and distribute the

reduced part to the central China and western China. Because the development of education in eastern China is developed enough from the domestic perspective. According to Sun's survey, because the pace of life and the amount of information in cities are obviously bigger than those in rural places, it produced the psychological pressure of urban students in China is much higher than the pressure of students in rural regions in the same grade [15]. Analogy for the same reason, the pace of life and the amount of information in eastern cities are also much higher than those in other places in China, which means that the pressure on local students will be greater than those in other cities. This tells that reducing the educational investment in the eastern region will not necessarily have a negative effect on local students. Reducing the speed of its educational development can reduce the pressure of students by reducing their rhythm, which is more conducive to their healthy development.

In terms of preschool education, there is no national preschool education law in China, and there is no legal provision on the deep-seated and key issues in the preschool education [14]. Preschool education not only affects the development of students' language communication ability, but also has a long-term influence. Burlacu pointed that the impact from preschool education continues into adulthood. Those students who have received a good pre-school education can better complete their high school and college studies, because it is the starting point of their academic career, and pre-school education is essential to eliminate educational inequality [16]. This means that the Chinese government needs to complete the legislation of preschool education as soon as possible.

2.1.2 Teacher team and training

Teachers are an indispensable part of the education process and play an important role in guiding students to explore and impart knowledge to students. The ability of teachers is inextricably related to the final outcome of education. In order to improve the quality of rural teachers in China, the Chinese government has conducted a series of targeted training programs for rural teachers' teams. Since 2004, the education sector of the government has started a training plan which is established for students who will become a rural teacher. In this plan, the students will get a master's degree. Since 2007, six normal universities directly under the Ministry of Education have trained free normal students. In 2016, the targeted training policy for rural teachers has been implemented nationwide [17]. In 2021, the government and education sector launched a "Teacher Excellence Program". The purpose of these policies is to give some preferential resources to college students through the state to encourage them to join the ranks of rural teachers on the premise of having teachers' skills. Over the years, relevant policies have trained a big number of new teachers for education industry.

In 2015, the government announced the rural a plan to support rural teachers. It is proposed to encourage the flow of urban wonderful teachers to rural schools and make the teachers in rural regions get better abilities. Under this premise, the Ministry of Education has formulated specific specifications: provincial and municipal overall planning, district and county organization, relying on local training teams, integrating expert resources outside the region, taking a task driven approach, innovating the rural teacher training system, regularly carrying out the training of making urban teachers to the backward places, and improving the effectiveness of rural teacher training. According to the research conducted by Lin in Putian City, this policy has made most rural teachers think that their teaching ability, teacher training and school teaching and research system have been improved [18].

In addition to training rural teachers and reserving talents for rural teachers, the Chinese government also encourages urban teachers to enter rural areas for assistance. The education sector in government gave the opinion on promoting urban teachers to support rural education in 2006,. In 2012, the Ministry of Education issued a new special plan which aimed to train teachers in remote areas and old revolutionary base areas. At the same time, provinces and cities have also established their own detailed regulations. According to He's survey, L County in Nanjing has achieved good results through years of supporting education, urban teachers have achieved spiritual sublimation, and rural teachers have improved their skills [19].

In addition to the above achievements, there are some problems to be solved during the teacher skills training. The first is the talent reserve plan initially mentioned. The vast majority of students

make choices when they graduate from high school. They do not know their future plans, or even whether they are suitable to be a teacher. Because of the spirit of contract, some students must become teachers. In this process, many students have psychological problems. In Jiang's research, many questions were investigated, and the results were not optimistic. Only about one fifth of people really wanted to be village teachers [17]. This situation requires the Chinese government to strengthen the ideological education and interest education in the process of training the public funded normal students, and try to improve the willingness of students to become teachers or rural teachers in the training process. Here the writer propose a bold policy reform plan that with the reference of the current policy of taking the university entrance examination in advance in some provinces of China and the art examination policy, we can take the examination of public funded normal students in advance, and set up additional interviews or interest tests in the examination to screen out involuntary candidates. At the same time, the preferential model should be adjusted appropriately to guide more free normal students to the places where they need.

In the process of skill training, there is still the problem of inapplicability of methods caused by the fact that the trainers and trainees are not in the same educational environment. The results of Gu's survey show that most of the urban teachers who go to rural areas to support education are for the purpose of professional title evaluation, which leads different disadvantages about structure and managing [20]. This phenomenon reflects the most essential problem, the economic problem. Without money, there is no way to keep teachers in rural areas, nor can urban teachers give up their convenient living conditions.

2.1.3 Teacher team income

As mentioned above, the income of teachers is the key to ensure that teachers can keep working, especially in the rural places. In the 1990s, arrears of rural teachers' salaries were an extremely prominent problem which continued until the Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China was revised and promulgated in 2006 [21]. In 2015, the rural teacher support plan issued that the evaluation of various professional titles should be inclined to rural teachers. Education sector of China gave the suggestions on Strengthening the Construction of Rural Teachers in the New Era in 2020. It is said in the opinion that we will improve the honor system and improve living standards. The state will grant honorary certificates to teachers who have worked in rural areas for more than 30 consecutive years. And local governments will reward them in light of actual conditions. The country also will improve the mechanism for ensuring the treatment of rural teachers and make sure that the average income of teachers is higher than or the same as the average income of local civil servants. All of these ways have fundamentally guaranteed the life of rural teachers and enabled them to stick to their work.

However, it is not enough for those who are going to join the teaching team. First of all, the 30 years mentioned in the document are too long for a new teacher. In addition, even if the quota is tilted in the evaluation process, rural teachers cannot match urban teachers in some hard requirements, such as students' grades. In addition, the average wage level in the backward areas is low. So, the wage higher than that of the local civil servants is not enough to attract new people to leave the developed areas for rural areas or other backward areas. For the Chinese government, the follow-up work can further improve the income of teachers who work in rural and backward areas, and raise more preferential policies to the standards of developed cities. When evaluating teachers' professional titles, rural teachers should also be given lower requirements to avoid their original weaknesses.

3. Conclusion

Many policies made by the Chinese government to solve the problem of educational inequality have been successful to varying degrees. Under the guidance of the Plan for Revitalizing Education in the 21st Century, the Chinese government has made various adjustments to the education in backward and rural areas in three aspects: educational resources, teacher team training and teacher income.

In terms of educational resources, the Chinese government has used a number of policies, including the Notice on Deepening the Reform of the Rural Compulsory Education Funds Guarantee Mechanism, to increase the proportion of investment in rural education funds. And under the guidance of the State Council, it has increased the academic security for students in remote and backward areas, so that their daily diet is guaranteed. And under the effect of The Twelfth Five Year Plan for the Development of National Education, pre-school education in rural areas has also achieved rapid development, providing a guarantee for the quality education stage. In terms of teacher team training, the Ministry of Education has successively issued some training plans by granting different degrees and tuition exemptions to students in order to give more teachers to backward places. These policies constantly provide talents for education posts, enriching the number of rural and backward teachers. For the existing teacher teams in rural and remote areas, the Chinese government encourages urban teachers and teachers in developed areas to provide support, so as to increase their educational capacity. The Chinese government has also given preferential policies for the salaries and career prospects of rural teachers, setting minimum standards for the salaries of rural teachers, and continuously giving preferential treatment during the professional title evaluation.

However, in terms of resource input, because of the large gap in the initial base, the education level of developed eastern regions, including Shanghai, is still highly ahead of other regions, and the central region of China has a problem of insufficient per capita education funding due to policy bias. This means that the Chinese government should re-examine the allocation of resources and the level of education development in various regions. Moderately slow down the speed of development about education in developed cities to reduce the national educational inequality. And during the teacher team training, education system should concentrate on the willingness of talents in the candidate team, and select people who are really willing to become rural teachers through early selection and other methods. And through more wage increases and other means to better ensure the lives of teachers in backward areas. Only in this way can we attract more talents to stay and make long-term contributions to education in backward areas and rural areas.

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