

Gender Equality Education in China: Inadequacy and Outlook

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Abstract. Affected by traditional gender inequality consciousness, China's progress on gender equality in education was relatively backward, which led to the primary stage of gender equality perception of people and postponed the agenda of gender equality. Gender equality education, as an ideal and effective way, is able to promote the implementation of the gender equality procedure. To this end, the research probes into the status quo of gender equality in education around the world, including America, South Korea and Taiwan. Some lessons are extracted from these three cases, which could be utilized to improve China's development of gender equality education. Also, this paper proposes suggestions from three aspects, the government's role in the establishment of women's universities and legal support as well as the school's responsibility for teachers' development and teaching material improvement. By these multiple measures mentioned above, it would be easier and more efficient to achieve the goal of gender equality in modern China.

Keywords: gender equality education, teacher's development, legislation measures, gender equality courses.

1. Introduction

As global gender equality career advances by leaps and bounds, gender equality education has become one of the most valued research problems in current years. Building an equal atmosphere with fair career opportunities, access to public resources, and respect for the exploration of a new world for both males and females seems necessary if the managers hope for the development of a society or a group. Gender equity in education has become a controversial issue in recent days. Researchers from different field attempt to deal with such a problem from different perspectives, including education technology, legislation and so forth [1, 2]. Additionally, more and more scholars took into consideration gender equality education as a key part of the gender equality process. It is a widely acknowledged fact that gender equality education is not only a matter of marginal population, but a powerful solution to equality issues which originates from gender inequality history. By forming a pattern, the impact of gender equality education is still rising both in the educational system and social perceptions of gender. Thus, it is of importance to create a more gender-equitable, positive, harmonious and well-being social environment by ways of gender equality education.

Given that gender equality education becomes the driving force for education and the whole society, it seems that previous studies paid more attention to its functions or strategies, but lack systematic research that aims at figuring out the implementation of gender equality education in a specific country. Moreover, the object of most studies is often restricted to gender parity in education, which differs from gender equality in education. Gender parity in education is a conception that is related to equal enrollment in all forms of education, while gender equality in education is broader than that. Gender equity education indicates three educational stages: equal rights to education, equal right within education, and equal right through education [3]. Therefore, gender equality education has a closer correlation with gender equality problems throughout the educational procedure, which is the main topic that will be focused on in later sections.

With a long-term patriarchal history, China is greatly affected by the old-fashioned and unequal fixed mindset. Some of the old educational perspectives are still deeply rooted in the process of modernization so that they have a profound impact on the new generation. For example, in ancient China, a saying reads "a girl without education is a virtuous woman" which clearly represents the inequality in education between males and females. The aforementioned thoughts have a deep impact on China's education ideas in Chinese families. Specifically, female PhD students are always

regarded as an irony because this group typically faces the problem of looking for a partner and women up to 30 years old are considered a shame for the reason that it is not easy to find a suitable partner at such an age. The root of such prejudice, basically, comes from the traditional thinking patterns for gender inequality. In addition, China pursued so-called “education without gender” for a long time. Superficially, such an education model seems to respect gender quality. However, teaching without differentiating gender is a disregard for gender differences. In this case, this research aims to make clear the circumstance of gender equality education in China and summarize its inadequacy by comparison with some pioneering cases in other countries or regions. Meanwhile, the research also provides multifarious practical suggestions to overcome handicaps in gender equality according to the reality of gender equality education in China. The ultimate purpose of the research is to help innovate methods, foster change in gender equality education and achieve gender equality truly.

2. Terminology

2.1. Gender equality, gender equity and gender parity

These three terms always make confusion. Gender equality is a popular phrase which refers to “the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, girls and boys, and equal power to shape their own lives and contribute to society” [4]. Gender equality is respect for personal improvement and the ability with which females and males are equal to achieve their targets and access to resources provided by the whole society. On the contrary, gender inequality exists in prolonged periods of time which is associated with the development of human civilization. It is a key cross-cutting conception, which means it intersects with race, ethnicity or class. Comparatively, gender equity, a broader idea of gender equality, is defined as the fair treatment of women and men according to their respective needs and women and men are considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities. Thereby, gender equity represents the fairness and justice of the society people live in. Gender parity refers to the proportionate representation of men and women within a given group such as the balance of admittance to schools [5]. From a macro perspective, the goal of gender parity is to strike a balance that is important in some aspects but it is not the focus of this study. Instead, it can be proposed that the achievement of gender equality and equity is a core solution to gender problems in China under such an “education without gender” model.

2.2. gender equality education

Gender equality in education is a hot issue involved in human equality discussions. Gender parity and gender equality are interpreted in one of the six EFA goals elucidated in the Dakar Framework for Action [6]. Gender parity aims to guarantee the right to attend school for students, while gender equality emphasizes the distinction of different genders. To be specific, as gender equality suggests, it is inappropriate to require a girl to do the same physical exercise in a sport class. It is because gender equality should be based on respecting physical differences among different genders, not homogeneous treatment without any careful consideration of different genders.

Gender equality in education, from the point of view of Duncan Wilson, should concern three-fold characterization of rights, including rights to education, rights within education and rights through education [7]. These rights are indivisible and they represent equality in different stages of education. First, women and men are endowed with the rights to access education. Parents are not supposed to reject the education request made by their children. Also, people are not allowed to force a person to attend school. Both of the scenarios are an abomination of the right to education. Second, people have the right to be respected within education. Sexual abuse and physical violence from teachers or classmates against a person are disrespect of human rights within education. People have rights through education which means a teacher should not insult students and should not allow bullying in classrooms. In accordance with the above mentioned, the role of teachers should not be ignored, which also is an important aspect and is discussed in the following sections.

3. Status Quo in China

Due to the long history, Chinese people have always been affected by traditional feudal thoughts. Before the Qing dynasty, women were marginalized in education. Compared with men who could learn techniques, poetry, etc, women were defined as a tool in their families [8]. Therefore, the focus of education for women at that time was on how to cultivate a woman as a nice housewife and good mother. At the end of the Qing dynasty, western equality thoughts were spread into China's society and Chinese people's gender equality thoughts were awakened. The awakening process was reflected in Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth Trilogy: The Good Earth, Sons, and A House Divided* where from three generations women gradually experienced from being silenced to fighting for the right to speak out and get rid of the shackles of men [9]. After the foundation of the People's Republic of China, gender equality has become a policy which should be upheld all the time. From the timeline, China's gender equality work lasts only less than one hundred years. So far, even though China's Affirmative Action has made great progress, gender equality in education is still at the edge of education work. In detail, two problems in China's gender equality in education are clear, one is related to traditional unequal thoughts, and another highlights inappropriate guidance in school.

For the first problem, gender inequality in education is non-institutional, marginal and hidden, and derives from a historical legacy of traditional thinking. For instance, Qu probes into the attitude toward female and male students in China's classrooms and found that teachers have different expectations for women and men. Teachers prefer to give more positive encouragement to male students, and comparatively, women students would get less positive feedback from their tutors [8]. Thus, teacher feedback is a phenomenon reflecting inequality problems existed. Another example is teaching materials. The proportion of female images in teaching materials gradually decreases as children grow older [10]. The reason why female images have been diminished is that males symbolize the core parts of society and they represent the highest capacity of a field. Meanwhile, women are connected with families in people's cognition.

Moreover, guidance in school is an important factor for gender inequality. Before 2012, China's gender equality education differentiates people via gender. Requirements for female and male students regarding their characteristics and behaviours are totally different in either study or daily life. Male students are expected to be brave and strong while females are exposed to be gentle. Such stereotypes hinder the progress of gender equality. After the year of 2012, primary education began to focus on personal development and teach students in accordance with their aptitude. Overall, the process of gender diversity education in schools is later than that of western developed countries, which began to arise in the mid-20th century.

Nowadays, China faces three challenges which are still huge obstacles in gender equality education. First of all, even if primary schools started to pay attention to personal cultivation as mentioned, stereotypes for females and males still exist. Specifically, male students prefer to choose science in high school and females are expected to learn arts. Accordingly, males take over around eighty percent in the class of natural science and engineering whereas in classes of social science and humanities and arts female students "hold all the trumps". Meanwhile, in physical work and natural science research, such as firefighters and physicians, males are the most. Relatively, in the service industry and social science research, such as school teachers and consultants, more females are involved in these fields that conforms to feminine qualities in stereotypes. Gradually, stereotypes that different genders should work in different jobs occur in society. More seriously, once such stereotypes are formed, people would affect their children's thoughts and stereotypes circulate. Personal values and choices should be respected; however, within the stereotype circle mentioned, due to immaturity, it is possible for students to be affected by their parents and the people around them and give up their interests for a major corresponding to their own identity [11]. Last, gender equality education is carried out in an outdated and monotonous way, making gender issues still a huge challenge. Gender equality education should focus on diversification, as to which some countries and regions did well.

4. Cases and Lessons

4.1. Cases

4.1.1 The United States

In the United States, gender courses include both women's studies, gender studies, and others related to gender studies. The openness of these courses has played a vital role in promoting gender studies and gender education in American universities and colleges. In 1997, more than 600 universities in the United States offered 30,000 women's studies/gender studies courses, covering bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree courses, involving history, literature, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, law, psychology, demography, geography, political science and many other disciplines [12]. Gender equality education in America demonstrates diversification. All kinds of gender equality courses are available for students and anyone who are interested in gender studies can be the promotion for the gender equality cause.

4.1.2 South Korea

South Korea also made progress in gender equality courses. According to the policies and regulations of South Korea, all cities and provinces in South Korea have to set up basic gender equality-related courses or lectures for teachers, including teacher's qualification training courses, teacher's professional training courses, as well as qualification training courses for principals and vice principals. According to statistics, "In 2005, 165 gender equality education courses were available in 16 cities and provinces in South Korea, accounting for 15.2% of all advanced courses"[13]. Gender equality-related courses offered by South Korea's training colleges mainly include three categories. One is courses directly related to gender equality and gender equality awareness, such as gender equality awareness education, comprehension of gender equality education, gender equality-related laws and regulations, methodology of gender equality education, cultural background of gender equality, gender equality policy, etc. The second class is courses about teachers' positions in gender equality, such as gender equality and school culture, gender equality and administrative services, gender equality and school organization, the establishment of gender equality society and the role of women, case study of gender equality practice, current situation of gender education in primary schools, gender equality among teaching staffs, principles and gender equality consultation. The third course category includes gender equality and sex education, as well as sexual harassment prevention, such as gender equality and sexual harassment prevention, adolescent sex education, early childhood sex education, sex education and gender equality, sexual violence prevention education, workplace culture and sexual harassment, gender equality awareness and sex education, etc.

4.1.3 Taiwan

Taiwan deals with gender equality education by means of laws. "In 2004, the Taiwanese government enacted the Gender Equity Education Act (GEEA) to address the increasing number of gender inequity incidents on school campuses"[14]. This Act protects the diversity of gender orientation and it requires all schools to offer gender equality courses so that children can learn to understand, respect and accept people who have different gender orientations from an early age. Also, in the process of gender equality education, guidance by teachers is quite important.

4.2. Lessons

Both America and South Korea have made their effort on class construction. Classrooms are the place where students spend most of their time thereby gender equality education should be combined with class. Schools, colleges and universities are supposed to make gender equality courses available to the best of their ability as America and South Korea did. Meanwhile, school teaching should involve teachers because education is the interaction between teachers and students and the teachers play the role of instruction and guidance. Thus, teacher development is necessary. South Korea did

well in this aspect. Last but not least, gender equality education should be together with legislation. It is of vital importance to promote the establishment of laws and regulations and educational administration because legal laws are the basic guarantees.

5. Suggestions for Chinese Gender Equality Education

Historically, China's gender equality education has made great progress, but it is still affected by traditional gender concepts. So far, the main deficiency of gender equality education in China can be attributed to one point: the lack of sufficient attention to the social nature of the concept of gender, which is the lack of awareness of "social gender"[11].

First of all, China's government can take the advantage of social media to enlarge the influence of women's organizations such as the Women's Federation. When society knows more about women's organizations, social consciousness would be affected. Meanwhile, women would be braver to share their experiences and give help to other women. Government has the power to establish universities, thus more women's universities can be built in each province. Additionally, legislation measures are important by which women's rights to have education can be protected.

To deal with the disregard of gender ability in teaching, researchers investigate the way of gender equality in education contexts. Brody proposed that the cognition of teachers has a great influence on their teaching practice and instruction thus illustrating teachers' moral education can be one solution [15]. Thus, teachers' moral education is necessary. Also, as schools in America and South Korea have presented previously, schools, colleges and universities can consider teacher development, teaching material improvement and care for students together. Specifically, schools can allow students to attend courses about gender consciousness. Finally, teaching materials are books and slides that students study with, thus they play a very important role in gender equality teaching. China's education system should improve the quality of teaching materials in order to serve gender equality teaching.

6. Conclusion

Gender equality requires everyone's involvement. With the successful experience of America, South Korea, and Taiwan, the forward steps for China's gender equality education are discussed. There are three independent powers, namely government, schools, and society. As to the government, their public power can protect the movement for gender equality. Schools are the direct education place, thus it is necessary to pay attention to teachers' imperative role in creating a gender-equitable environment. Society should respect and support women's groups and organizations. For further research, how to make these three aspects cooperate smoothly is valuable to be discussed. More investigations on the fieldwork can be conducted to give more depth to the issue.

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