Research on Educational Inequality in China

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Abstract. Education in China has been more or less unequal since ancient times. However, in recent decades, the issue of educational inequality has become more and more serious. A great educational gap exists between the rich and the poor, the majority group and the minority groups, and the well-developed regions and the underdeveloped regions. This paper, by using the document analysis method, aims to research Chinese educational inequality, including the phenomenon, the reasons and the solutions. From the research, it can be learned that reasons that cause educational inequality vary and that achieving the goal of educational equality requires the efforts of the whole society and what's more, the awareness of the importance of educational equality should be aroused. Even though China still has a long way from achieving equality in education, however, the government is still taking measures to narrow down the educational gap between different students and China will achieve educational equality and Chinese education will be at the forefront of the world.

Keywords: Education, social equality, educational inequality.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, parents in Beijing and Shanghai have been pursuing expensive school district houses in order to let their children receive a good education. This phenomenon of buying school district houses so as to select decent schools in the stage of compulsory education has been a serious issue in China, leading to the exacerbation of educational inequality. Although education equality is what China has been pursuing since the establishment of the New China, actual education equality has not been achieved as there are, indeed, not a few phenomenons of educational inequality.

1.1. School District Houses

The expensive school district houses are barriers to achieving educational equality. Take Shanghai as an example, in many districts, only children who are from specific neighborhoods can receive admission to enroll in specific schools. For this reason, prices of houses near the key schools are inflated, much higher than the ordinary houses. For example, according to the housing price app, a school district house in Shanghai, covering an area of only 44.9 square meters was sold at the price of 8,610,000 yuan on November 9, 2022. As it is a rigid demand that children go to school and not so many families can afford the expensive school district houses, these have led to the result that only children from rich families are able to enter the key schools whereas students from poor families can only enter schools whose educational resources as well as educational conditions are not so good and cannot receive education of good quality. However, many examples have shown that learning is an important way to rise up the class ladder. If children from poor families are not able to receive high-quality education as those from rich families do from the start of the compulsory education just because their families can't afford the expensive school district houses, this would go against the idea of equality in education and the gap between rich and poor will only widen in the end.

1.2. Regional Disparity

Apart from the expensive school district houses which have been mentioned above, there are many other phenomenons of educational inequality, including educational inequality caused by a gap of wealth and regional disparity. These serious problems have caused a minority of students from rich families to receive a high-quality education in key primary schools and junior high schools. On the

contrary, the majority of students in cities like Beijing and Shanghai where their parents are able to afford the soaring school district houses are not able to receive education equally. Furthermore, as there have been differences in economic conditions, the student who is from richer areas, for example, the southeastern coastal regions can receive a much better education than those who are from mountainous areas. Moreover, there are institutional loopholes in the educational system and some people can thus exploit these institutional loopholes to enter a better school. Apart from all the above, discrimination from teachers may as well lead to educational inequality.

As can be seen, there are so many educational inequality phenomenons in China and the reasons for these phenomenons vary, so it is important to explore the reasons for these phenomenons and to find out solutions. Therefore, this paper will focus on the issue of equality in education in China and the reasons that cause educational inequality, First, this paper will analyze the issue of educational inequality and its phenomenons in China. Then, it will discuss the reasons that cause educational inequality in China. Finally, it will provide solutions to the problems, including solutions that should be done by governments and schools. It aims to raise the consciousness of equality as well as hoping to raise the consciousness of equality in education in the whole society and to have more and more children receive an equitable education.

2. Reasons That Cause Educational Inequality

There are many different educational inequality phenomenons that have been happening in China and the reasons that cause educational inequality to vary.

2.1. The Gap between Rich and Poor

One of the most obvious causes is the gap between rich and poor, which is easy to understand. As the gap between rich and poor still persists in China, students from different social classes have unequal access to educational resources. Students who are from rich families are able to go to key schools that require school district houses or private schools and can receive a better education than those who go to normal public schools. Furthermore, students from rich families are more likely to attach to the outside world and will gain international views. Moreover, rich families can afford the high cost of studying abroad and their children will be able to gain a better education. On the contrary, students who come from poor families, most of whom can only go to public primary school and junior high school, in which the teachers are not as competent as those in private schools. What's more, some poor families in rural regions don't realize the importance of studying and will perhaps ask their children to drop out of school and go to work at an early age to support the family.

2.2. Education between Different Races Is Not Fair

Another reason that leads to educational inequality is that education between different races is not fair. Take English studying as an example, in coastal regions, students live in metropolises and economically good places than the minority groups who live in remote areas and therefore, Han students in coastal regions have far more opportunities to attach to the outside world [1]. As the coastal regions are in good economic condition and are able to provide high salaries and good treatment to teachers, many teachers are attracted to coastal regions whereas only a small amount of teachers are willing to go to remote areas to teach. Moreover, more money is invested into education as coastal regions attach great importance to education. In this case, the education equipment will be more complete. As for the minority groups who mostly live in remote areas or even live in mountainous areas, where transportation is not convenient and the economy is in less developed condition, few good teachers are willing to go to those places, which leads to the result that the teacher resources in remote areas that the minority groups have been much worse than those in developed areas. There is also no advanced teaching equipment, which can also lead to a teaching gap.

2.3. Inter-school Gap

Educational inequality may as well be caused by the inter-school gap and this is the reason why some parents are keen to buy expensive school district houses and select key schools for their children. Because different schools are at different levels, the education resources that different schools get vary [2]. The key schools always get better educational resources than the normal schools. Therefore, students who go to different schools receive different levels of education, which is a manifestation of educational inequality. As there is an inter-school gap between different schools, parents all hope their children to enter good schools to receive better education and this is how "private schools selecting fervor" appears. The reason that parents select private schools and the gap between different schools is that screening, rationing and leading effects in the process of running schools exist [3]. Under the rationing effect, private schools offer high salaries to attract good teachers and therefore, quality teacher resources converge in private schools. Under the screening effect, students have unequal access to school as some students are able to enter schools without an entrance examination [3].

2.4. Teachers' Reason

Moreover, teachers can also lead to educational inequality. Teachers in China have absolute authority in the class and they can arrange the seats as they want. As seating affects the interaction between teachers and students and as well affects the distribution of attention of the teachers, therefore, good seats have actually become limited education resources [4]. Some teachers, out of utilitarian purposes and wanting to pursue the maximum benefit of educational resources, will assign seats according to grades. Because students sit in different seats, the amount of attention they get from the teachers and their opportunity to speak vary, which will lead to the result of educational inequality [4]. While asking questions, teachers tend to ask the top students as they don't believe that poor students will be able to answer the questions and asking them is a waste of time. Classroom questioning can help students think and integrate old and new knowledge and if discrimination in classroom questioning exists, there will be educational inequality phenomenon even in the same class [4]. Discrimination of content interpretation also exists in the class. While teaching, teachers will choose what to teach and may perhaps neglect the simple questions, which the top students can easily understand and the poor students do not. What's more, there is discrimination while appraising students. While correcting the homework of the top students, teachers are more likely to correct it more carefully. Even though their hand-writing is not good, teachers will still give them special treatment unconsciously. For poor students, however, teachers tend not to correct their homework so carefully [4]. However, homework is an important part while studying, and if teachers discriminate in homework-correcting and appraising students, educational inequality in the class will exist.

2.5. Unfairness in the Educational System

Finally, educational inequality can also be caused by unfairness in the educational system. There are loopholes in the educational system in China and some people may make use of these loopholes. For example, in China, overseas Chinese students enjoy preferential admission policies and therefore, some students who are born in and study in China use the loopholes and change their identity into overseas students in order to avoid the pressure of Gaokao, which is called NCEE migrant. NCEE migrant destroys the ecology of college enrollment and leads to actual educational inequality [5]. Apart from the NCEE migrant, the provincial quota system also leads to educational inequality. Because of the provincial quota system, the college admission score lines in different provinces vary. In Qinghai, the college admission score lines are much lower than those of Henan and Hebei. In 2016, the score line to enter key universities in Henan is 517. However, the score line in Qinghai is only 457. Therefore, students in Qinghai have more obvious advantages in college-enter score lines over students from populous provinces. Due to this reason, some students from the populous may "immigrate" to provinces like Qinghai or Xinjiang, which lead to the widening of educational inequality [6].

3. Solutions

There are some ways to solve educational inequality and achieve educational equality. In order to solve the problem of educational inequality caused by the gap between rich and poor, firstly, the government should subsidize education for poor families [7]. At the same time, schools should set up grants for poor students so that their families will be able to afford the tuition fee. Many students from poor families are willing to study but poverty in their families limits their learning and many of them have to drop out of school to go to work at an early age. If governments can provide funds to students from poor families and support them to go to school, they will have the opportunity to enter universities and become well-educated and education inequality will be reduced.

In order to alleviate the phenomenon of regional educational inequity, first and foremost, governments at all levels should strengthen policy guidance and financial input. As an educational gap exists between regions and urban and rural areas, governments should strengthen macro-regulation and invest more money into rural education to narrow down regional, urban and rural differences in teaching equipment. Furthermore, governments should invest capital to provide better teaching conditions and higher salaries. In this way, more teachers will be attracted to rural areas so that the teaching resources will be better and the education inequality between regions will therefore be narrowed down.

What's more, governments in poverty-stricken areas should work hard to develop the economy to improve economic conditions in order to provide financial security for education [8]. Governments should also perfect laws and regulations to realize equal opportunities in education [2]. Secondly, schools should also make efforts to narrow down the educational gap. Schools should strengthen the construction of educational facilities to attract good teachers and improve teaching quality.

Educational inequality between the Han people and the minority groups is also a problem that cannot be ignored. To solve the problem, China has made enormous efforts. Firstly, the state funding for education is tilted towards areas inhabited by ethnic minorities. Moreover, China has adopted a number of preferential policies for minority areas in the entrance examinations of all kinds of schools. For example, ethnic minorities get extra points in high school and college entrance exams. In addition, China has set up a number of classes in education-developed areas so that students from minority groups are able to receive a better education.

To reduce the inter-school gap and to enhance the educational competitiveness of ordinary schools, it is important to strengthen teacher training and implement the teacher rotation system and weed out unqualified teachers [8]. Furthermore, ordinary schools can attract good teachers by raising salaries. In this way, the teaching staff of the school will be developed. Besides, the government should increase the supply of advantageous educational resources and narrow the differences in teaching quality between key schools and ordinary schools [9]. In addition, teachers should treat students with equal eyes and should care for the poor students as well.

As there are loopholes in the educational system of China that results in educational inequality, governments should remedy it. The high frequency of NCEE migrants requires the government to crack down on it and take legal measures if necessary. Schools and universities should also reform the enrollment system and reduce the proportion of students who are exempted from entrance examinations. Moreover, the phenomenon of getting in by the back door in examinations must be severely cracked down on. For example, students who have a back door to enter the school should be disqualified from admission.

Accelerating the popularization of online courses is also a good way to reduce the education gap. Online courses can solve one of the core problems that lead to education inequality as it can provide weak schools with better quality courses. Through online courses, the excellent teaching resources of the whole country can be gathered and even students from schools that are not so good can also enjoy being taught by famous teachers [10]. By this means, the educational inequality caused by the inter-school gap will be reduced.

4. Conclusion

Educational inequality has long existed in China. The phenomenons of education exist in all stages of compulsory education and higher education and the causes vary, including the gap of wealth, regional and ethnic inequalities in education, the inter-school gap as well as the inter-school gap and the teachers' reasons. To solve these problems of educational inequality and to achieve a part of the goal of social equality, governments and schools should take measures. In addition, the advanced technological achievements of the Internet, which are able to spread educational resources, are also able to contribute to education equality. This paper can arouse the awareness and attention of society to the phenomenon of educational inequality with the expectation that students. In the future, different classes of families, different races and different areas can receive quality education equally.

If more and more people can realize the importance of solving the problem of educational inequality, more regulations and policies can be made to alleviate educational inequality. Though the Chinese government has made long-term efforts to achieve equality in education, it is far from enough as many students still cannot receive equal education as the other students for various reasons. How to make every student receive quality education equally? How to eliminate the phenomenon of educational privilege? How to achieve the goal that students can have an equal starting point and process of education? These are questions that need to be considered on China's road to educational equality.

In the future, the educational resources in China will be enriched and access to education will become more diverse and convenient so that more students, even though coming from poor families, can be equipped with a decent education and that the problem of educational inequality will be remitted. In this way, great changes will take place in Chinese education and Chinese education will therefore be at the forefront of the world.

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