

Study on the Implementation Dilemma and Countermeasures of the Nearby Enrollment Policy at the Compulsory Education Stage in China

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Abstract: Equity is the key to education reform. China has implemented a policy of nearby enrollment in compulsory education, which guarantees the basic right of schooling for school-age children and adolescents based on the concept of educational equity. To a certain extent, this policy has promoted the realization of universal education, and in the early stage of its enforcement, it played a crucial role in promoting the balanced development of schools and guaranteeing the fairness of education. However, in the later stage, due to the irregular implementation of the policy, the limited educational resources, the game of stakeholders, and the ineffective supervision and other factors, the policy has been deviated towards the deviation. This paper interprets the original intention of the compilation of the policy and the reality of the dilemma, and tries to reflect on the deviation of the implementation process of the policy, explore the direction of its future development, and make a certain degree of efforts to promote the balance of education in the stage of compulsory education and educational fairness.

Keywords: Nearby Enrollment Policy; Educational Equity; School Choice.

1. The Original Purpose of the Policy of Nearness to School and its Rationality

With the gradual enrichment of China's educational resources and the growth of national demand for education, compulsory education is no longer a competitive education, but a universal education. As a result, there is a trend to change the effective use of educational resources to the fair allocation of educational resources [1]. It is against this background that, since the 1980s, China's compulsory education stage has gradually abolished the selection examination for primary to junior high school, no longer based on students' examination results for enrollment, and both primary and junior high school students are enrolled in the schools near their household registration areas.

In 1986, China's first Compulsory Education Law was promulgated, reforming primary and secondary school enrollment throughout the country, article 9 of which stipulates: Local people's governments at all levels shall appropriately set up elementary school and junior high schools, so that children and adolescents may be enrolled in the schools close to their homes. The nearby enrollment policy was introduced to strengthen the link between schools and the lives of the public, in order to relieve some of the pressure on students, the public and education. The counterpart of nearby enrollment policy is selective schooling, which leads to an imbalance in the quality of the student population, which in the long run will lead to a widening of school disparities, and ultimately is not conducive to a balanced development of education. As a public policy, it is oriented towards guaranteeing citizens' right to equal education. Compulsory education is a typical public product, and its fairness is indisputable according to its characteristics and development goals. Therefore, it is reasonable in value. However, due to the policy system and implementation of the relevant policies and systems are not in place, resulting in the policy faces a lot of controversy, and its original intention and

reasonableness is also questioned [2].

2. An Analysis of the Manifestations and Causes of Alienation in the Implementation of the Policy of Nearby Enrollment

2.1. The Starting Point of the Policy Encounters the Challenge of Encountering Educational Inequity

Promoting fairness in compulsory education is one of the original purposes of the policy, but the implementation of this policy is based on the uneven distribution of educational resources in China and the quality of teaching and learning, which is a fait accompli and difficult to change in the short term, that is to say, the starting point of education is not fair. Therefore, the policy in the coming period will inevitably encounter the goal of equity and inequality of results, long-term equity and short-term inequality, theoretical equity and practical inequality of the contradictions and conflicts, in the different regions and schools between the imbalance of the chasm has not been eliminated, this contradiction and game will continue to exist [3].

From the appearance, the nearby school constraints on the right to choose education, but in fact, the restriction is mostly political, economic and cultural capital are not enough for the general public, but holders of the three kinds of capital can be legal school choice. This shows that the policy has not realized the original purpose of promoting equity in education; on the contrary, it has widened the gap between schools and artificially created inequality in the right to choose education. The nearby enrollment policy has bound school-age children to the school district where their property is located, which has artificially suppressed the public's demand for school choice. When the strong desire to choose a school conflicts with the policy of proximity to the school district, the phenomenon of undesirable school choice emerges[4]. Some

of the irrationalities of the neighborhood school policy have led to unregulated and undesirable school choices to some extent. From the perspective of educational equity, the policy puts disadvantaged groups in a more disadvantaged position. The economically, socially, and culturally disadvantaged groups will be in a more disadvantaged position in the context of the nearby enrollment policy. As a result, the rationality of the policy has been seriously jeopardized. In recent years, the greatest resistance has come from parents of school-age children who support school choice. The reason for this is that the lack of investment in education resources has resulted in an unbalanced allocation of education resources, leading to great disparities in the quality of education between regions, urban and rural areas, and between schools[5]. On the one hand, China's annual education expenditure hovers around 3% of the total GDP. Due to the tightness of educational resources, the state is unable at this stage to equalize the allocation of educational resources to all regions and to spread them equally. As a result, there is a huge gap between urban and rural areas and between regions in terms of teachers' strength, teaching equipment and quality of teaching. For a long time, most of China's educational resources have been utilized for the construction of key schools, artificially creating unfairness and imbalance in the allocation of educational resources between schools.

When the policy of nearby enrollment is carried out strictly on the basis of school districts, and when local governments at all levels formally announce the schedule of zoning for school enrolment, parents looking for their children to receive a high-quality education spend a lot of money to buy school-area housing near the school, setting off the phenomenon of the hot sale of school-area housing. Against this background, the policy admission will further promote the solidification of the student population, and reproduce and reinforce the differentiation and solidification of classes. The mobility of student population can effectively promote social integration, but the long-term solidification of student population will cause the imbalance of educational resources, leading to a widening gap between schools, which is not conducive to the realization of educational equity. Some other scholars believe that the neighborhood school is essentially a choice of schools by housing, buying a house and choosing a school has become the best way for parents to choose a school, while the middle and upper classes with rich economic, cultural and social capital to become the success of the choice of schools, the disadvantaged with little capital to become the losers of the choice of schools. In this process, prestigious schools have become a legitimate way for the middle and upper classes to enjoy quality education resources, and the nearby school for the purpose of promoting fairness in education has become the driving force to legitimize the choice of schools, so that more quality education resources can be aggregated to the advantageous classes[6]. This, on the contrary, exacerbates the inequality of education, thus making it more difficult for the lower social classes to realize their desire to move to the upper class through education, and aggravating the solidification of social classes and the stereotyping of educational opportunities.

In the reality of the country, where the distribution of high-quality public education resources is seriously uneven, the realization of no examination and close to the school is not conducive to the protection of educational property rights, especially the disadvantaged groups of the starting point of equal opportunities. If the distribution of high-quality public

school resources in our country is even, without geographic differences, the nearby school can indeed ensure that the disadvantaged groups enjoy the opportunity to receive high-quality education[7]. If the policy of nearby enrollment is a favorable policy in the case of scarce educational resources, in the case of education resources are no longer scarce, and quality education resources are scarce, the policy is a bit out of place, and the development of a more reasonable system of school choice is imperative.

2.2. Serious Tendency Towards Superficiality and One-Sidedness in the Process of Policy Implementation

In the course of implementation, the main bodies of policy have ostensibly responded to the call of the State, but in fact have not taken concrete measures, resulting in the policy of nearby enrollment failing to achieve the stated goal. Although China has clearly stipulated that local governments at all levels are obligated to carry out the policy, and that local governments at all levels should rationalize the establishment of elementary school and junior high schools, some local governments are in fact still implementing the policy in accordance with the original system. The backwardness of teaching in rural areas has led parents to choose schools across districts, which has led to a growing imbalance in education for students in the lower grades who should be enrolled in schools near their homes. When the conditions have not yet been provided by the government, making it possible for children and adolescents of school age to attend school in their own neighborhood has become an educational slogan[8]. In practice, local governments are often selective in their practice, which is manifested in the fact that their own interests are the main focus, and they consider the extent to which they will carry out the policy according to the gains and losses, choosing the parts of the policy that are favorable to them and responding negatively to, or even abandoning, the parts that are unfavorable to them. When the policy conflicts with their own interests, the relevant departments and schools will try to take advantage of the loopholes in the policy, and choose the part that is favorable to them, which formally implements the policy stipulated by the higher education administrative departments, but in fact, it is to take advantage of the loopholes in the policy for their own convenience. At the same time, the policy lacks a clear division of authority and responsibility. The implementation of the policy involves a number of departments. In the actual practice, there is a lack of effective collaboration between departments and confusion over responsibilities, which makes it difficult to enforce accountability and creates a major obstacle to monitoring the policy.

Many local governments, especially in areas where the quality of education is weak, have turned it into a mandatory requirement that must be observed by students and parents to ensure that children and adolescents of the appropriate age receive nine years of compulsory education, and at the same time to ensure that weak schools can recruit enough students to carry out normal teaching, while for high-quality schools, local governments at all levels and schools based on self-interest considerations, in addition to meeting the number of students within the school district, to provide more opportunities for outstanding students and paying students to attend. To the excellent students and paying students more opportunities. Local governments and schools have partially implemented and negatively responded the policy based on

their own interests, and have utilized a variety of school choices for their own benefit.

Given China's system of financial investment in compulsory education, local governments have a great deal of autonomy. The development of education cannot be separated from the support of the economy, so economically developed areas are bound to have sufficient quality education resources. Some high-quality talents in order to pursue good income and welfare benefits, are willing to stay in economically developed areas, which gives full play to the clustering function of high-quality resources and scale effect. High-quality talents will inevitably bring more high-quality resource reserves, over time, the formation of education development and high-quality resources between the Matthew effect. Relatively speaking, the economic weakness of the marginalized areas, economic development is relatively lagging behind, the lack of quality resources, and the lack of opportunities to attract quality talent, the situation will only be increasingly downward. The underdevelopment of education will not be able to catalyze the internal drive of the economy, and the economy and education will gradually enter a vicious circle.

2.3. Policy Outcomes Contradict the Laws of Education

The implementation of the policy of nearby enrollment has to some extent constrained the right to choose education, and has had some negative consequences. In many countries around the world, the right to choose education is a fundamental right of citizens. However, during the implementation, most governments have only pursued its efficiency, but neglected the rational layout and equal access to compulsory education[9]. This environment has given rise to rent-seeking and has led to the alienation of educational development.

The basic principles and laws of education require that individual differences be observed and that education be tailored to the needs of the individual, and that students be able to choose schools and classes suitable for them according to their own interests and specialties, so as to meet the diversified, differentiated and individualized educational needs of students, and to comply with the requirements of the humanization of education, so as to achieve the goal of education to cultivate the many talents needed by society. At the same time, the right to choose which school to receive compulsory education according to one's own individual characteristics is also a basic right given to students by law. With the development of society and the change of people's concepts, the diversification of market demand for talents is more and more obvious, and the differentiation of students' needs and development is also more and more significant. If the policy of nearby schools is strictly enforced, it will inevitably limit the students' right to choose their own schools, and the legal right of choice of the students will not be realized, and the diversified educational needs of students and the diversified development of the schools will be difficult to realize, and ultimately, the effect of education will be greatly reduced and the educational goals will be greatly undermined. In the end, the effect of education will be greatly reduced and the goal of education will be difficult to realize.

As the public's demand for quality education becomes more and more prominent, the problem of school choice arises. At present, the Chinese government mainly adopts the idea and means of restricting and prohibiting school choice,

trying to reduce the behavior of school choice by strictly enforcing the policy of nearby enrollment, but this idea and means have not solved the problem of school choice, and the phenomenon of choosing schools is getting more and more intense, so it can be said that choosing schools has already become the educational demand of many families, and this demand does not change according to the policy changes. The governance of zero school choice to promote the convergence of the student population of compulsory education schools, forcing the gap between the quality of school operation to narrow, and forcing the balanced development of compulsory education is contrary to the inherent pursuit of the legalization of education governance.

After the above analysis, it can be found that the policy has not fully realized its original intention, and its implementation has led to a series of bad consequences, which has been controversial and caught in a predicament that is difficult to realize.

3. Reflections on the Future Direction of the Policy of Nearby Enrollment and its Modifications

3.1. Improve The Relevant Laws and Systems to Provide Institutional Protection for the Policy of Nearby Enrollment

The lack of refinement of the policy and the lack of a clear and feasible monitoring mechanism have led to a prolonged period of time in which distortions in the implementation have not been effectively corrected and the policy has failed to achieve its stated objectives. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the monitoring mechanism. The government and education authorities should, on the basis of investigating the problems with the policy, revise and improve the relevant laws and systems. They should clearly define the responsibilities of the main parties involved in the executive process, and make clear provisions for the allocation of educational resources, the allocation and use of teachers, and the issue of school districts, in order to prevent and correct any deviations from the policy. A professional evaluation organization should be set up to evaluate and report on the current state of educational resource allocation, and then revise the education investment plan, reducing investment in schools that are already close to saturation of educational resources, and tilting the allocation of educational resources in favor of relatively backward and weak schools, so as to lay a systematic foundation for the realization of a basic balance of educational resources as soon as possible.

On the other hand, it should clearly stipulate the punitive clauses for the failure of local governments, schools and parents at all levels to strictly obey, establish the authority of the policy through mandatory penalties, strengthen the binding force of the policy on people's behavior, and enhance the responsibility of those involved, so as to make them take it seriously. Once someone violates the policy without being punished, others will follow suit, and parents are often willing to take the risk of violating the policy in order to get their children into quality schools. When parents violate the policy, the policy fails to achieve the goal of promoting equity in education and becomes a tool for promoting non-equitable development of education. Therefore, it is necessary to strictly control the behavior of choosing schools, so that those who choose schools will bear the corresponding policy costs

or penalties.

In addition, internal and external supervision should be fully integrated, combining specialized supervisory bodies with the power of the public, and establish transparent and open supervision mechanism, so that the public can understand and support the policy of nearness to school, participate in the supervision of its implementation, and have a channel to reflect all kinds of false phenomena, so that the process can be supervised by the public, and operate in a transparent manner, avoiding the breeding of corruption in education, and contributing to the development of non-equity in education. This will make the process subject to public scrutiny and operate in a transparent manner, so as to avoid the breeding of corruption in education and the encouragement of all kinds of unhealthy school choice. In due course, the number of students enrolled in each year in the region will be announced to the public, as well as the number of students likely to be enrolled in that year in the region, so that the entire enrollment process can be made transparent.

3.2. Transforming Society's Educational Values and Recognizing the Legitimacy of the Phenomenon of School Choice

In order to get out of the dilemma of thinking about the policy, it is necessary to re-conceptualize the concept of balanced development of education. Education equalization will not have an end, education equalization is only relative, imbalance is the norm, which determines that as long as the balance of educational resources can fundamentally stop the argument of school choice is untenable, education equalization is endless, school choice will also be endless. What we should and can do to equalize education is only to equalize the conditions of school operation, as for the development of schools based on the equalization of conditions of school operation, it is not something that the government and society can do. At the same time, equalization of education cannot be equated with equity in education. Balanced or not is based on facts, while fair or not is a value judgment, although education balance helps to realize education fairness, but education balance does not mean education fairness. Because everyone is endowed with different talents and has different learning achievements, the pursuit of educational equalization will not enable educators to tailor education to the students' abilities. To promote educational equalization to the detriment of educational fairness and to confuse the means with the end is essentially to undermine the spirit of educational fairness.

Since it is impossible to eliminate the public's need to choose quality education, the only thing we can do is to regulate the behavior of school choice and put it on a benign track. Measures should be taken to further correct society's erroneous judgment of school quality and student standards, society's and parents' inappropriate concepts of success and school choice, and teachers' erroneous views of the profession. Only when schools of different types and levels are treated fairly in terms of policy support, educational inputs, and the evaluation and recognition of educational results, and are able to compete fully and freely, will it be possible to bring about a gradual change in people's attitudes. Therefore, we must first narrow the huge gap between the investment of educational resources and the conditions of the teaching environment, and support and encourage different types of social capital to prioritize the investment in weak schools. Schools should boldly explore how to activate the school's

internal school dynamics, improve the legal person system of school running, respect the inherent laws of education governance, and at the same time, establish the idea of integrating the power of school governance education, to give teachers the right to fully teach, students the right to learn freely, and parents the right to equal choice. Under the diversified school-running model and the authenticity education evaluation mechanism, students of all types and stages can realize their own value, schools are full of vitality and vigor, parents' demand for diversified and selective education can be satisfied, and the problem of choosing a school will finally be solved.

3.3. Rationalizing the Allocation of Quality Education Resources and Coordinating the Interests of All Parties Concerned

Policy resources are the fundamental guarantee for the effective implementation of the policy. Under the current conditions of insufficient total investment in education, guaranteeing a balance of policy resources is a necessary prerequisite for the implementation [10]. Only when the funds and other resources needed for education can meet the requirements of teaching and learning, then the discussion of the allocation and utilization efficiency of educational resources will have a realistic basis and significance. Therefore, all levels of government should strengthen the education budget and expenditure, to ensure that the proportion of education investment. According to the current situation of educational resources, in the education investment, the government should increase the financial investment in rural schools and other schools in a disadvantageous position, and with the passage of time, the development of the school and the regular and irregular surveys and adjustments, and gradually reduce the inter-school disparities, and to achieve a balanced allocation of educational resources. The key to the success lies in the balanced development of schools, and the key to the balanced development of schools lies in the quality of principals and teachers. Under the environment of insufficient investment in education, especially the unbalanced distribution of quality education resources, it is especially necessary to rationalize the distribution of limited quality education resources. Strengthening exchanges and interactions between high-quality schools and weak schools will enable weak schools to introduce advanced education and teaching concepts to improve their own deficiencies and create an atmosphere of positive interaction between high-quality schools and weak schools to ensure the implementation is effective. Local governments should give maximum support and assistance to schools that actively coordinate, support weak schools to move closer to high-quality schools, narrow the inter-school gap, and create a strong environment for the policy.

In practice, the relevant stakeholders have hollowed out the enrollment policy and put their own interests first, unilaterally reinforcing local interests and weakening the interests of the whole. In order to minimize the resistance to the policy, to promote the policy, and to ensure it is supported and embraced by all parties, we need to harmonize the interests of all sectors of society. In the process of formulating the policy, we need to take the fundamental interests of school-age children and adolescents as the basis and increase the voice of schools and parents, conduct extensive surveys to solicit the public's wishes and suggestions, and reasonably satisfy the interests of schools and parents in the pursuit of the maximization of

the public interest in education. Further improve the rational distribution of schools, rationally guide the behavior of school choice, and balance the interests of all parties. Strengthening the rational allocation of schools and expanding the diversity of school allocation methods is an effective way to promote balanced education.

4. Conclusion

Educational policies play an important role in promoting the fair and just development of society, and the formulation and implementation of educational policies need to take into account not only short-term and local interests, but also coordinate long-term and overall planning. The phenomenon of school choice has always been a problem that has plagued the advancement of educational equity, and in order to solve this problem, China has introduced the policy of nearby schooling. Although it has guaranteed the right of school-age children in China to receive compulsory education, it has been nearly 40 years since then, and with the constant changes in China's social contradictions, the problems of implementing the policy have also come to the forefront, urgently requiring the relevant governmental departments to introduce more comprehensive policies to guarantee the realization of citizens' right to education.

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