Current Situation and Analysis of Educational Inequality in China

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Abstract: China's educational inequality has long been a concern. The purpose of this paper is to explore the current situation of educational inequality in China and analyze its main manifestations. First of all, the education gap between urban and rural areas, regions and families is significant, with cities enjoying abundant resources and rural areas lacking quality teachers. Secondly, the uneven distribution of educational resources between regions leads to a development gap. Family finances also have a direct impact on students' access to quality education. Although the establishment of branch schools, teacher rotation and government subsidies can alleviate these problems to a certain extent, the existing research has a narrow scope of education inequality and has not deeply explored the multi-factor influencing mechanism. In the future, more data will need to be obtained, and further research will need to be conducted using more effective and diverse methods in an effort to achieve the ultimate goal of educational equity.

Keywords: educational inequality, regional differences, educational resources.

1. Introduction

Education is an important cornerstone of the development of human society and plays a vital role for both individuals and society. Today, however, inequality in education is widespread in most parts of the world, and it is becoming more and more frequent in both developed and developing countries. China also has the problem of educational inequality, and unfair education is the biggest threat to social stability. The purpose of education is to improve the cultural quality of the whole nation, not to train only some advanced talents. The government cannot neglect education in rural areas for the sake of urban education. The unfairness of education also seriously violates the basic purpose of education. The all-round promotion of quality education in China aims to improve the national quality and focus on cultivating students' innovative spirit and practical ability. This kind of unfair education hinders the development of quality education. Therefore, how to narrow the education gap and promote education equity has become a common concern of the current society. This thesis will describe the current situation of education inequality in China from different angles, find out the reasons leading to these problems, and give reasonable measures to improve.

2. Education Inequality in China

2.1. Education Is Unequal across Regions in China

In terms of the unequal distribution of educational resources in China, the most serious problem is that educational resources are more inclined to developed cities. Figure 1 compares the number of colleges and universities in provincial capitals of China's four regions. The eastern part of China has the largest number, because developed cities such as Beijing and Shanghai are located in the eastern part of China. Although the western part of China occupies 72% of the country's land area, the number of colleges and universities is smaller than that of the eastern part. Figure 2 lists the number of colleges and universities in the capital cities of various provinces in China [1]. It can also be seen that the more developed cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, have a large number of colleges and universities, while Lhasa and Xining are both provincial capitals, but the number of colleges and universities is only in the single digits, indicating that educational resources are more inclined to developed cities. However, while the developed urban areas of our country have basically popularized high school education, some poor rural areas have not even been able to popularize middle school education. In some backward rural areas, senior high school education has stagnated or even retrogressed, and more and more rural junior high school graduates have joined the ranks of "migrant workers", leading to the overall low quality of human resources in China [2]. Another study shows that the government's investment in rural education is 33% less on average than that in urban education, which also proves the unreasonable allocation of educational resources between urban and rural areas [3].

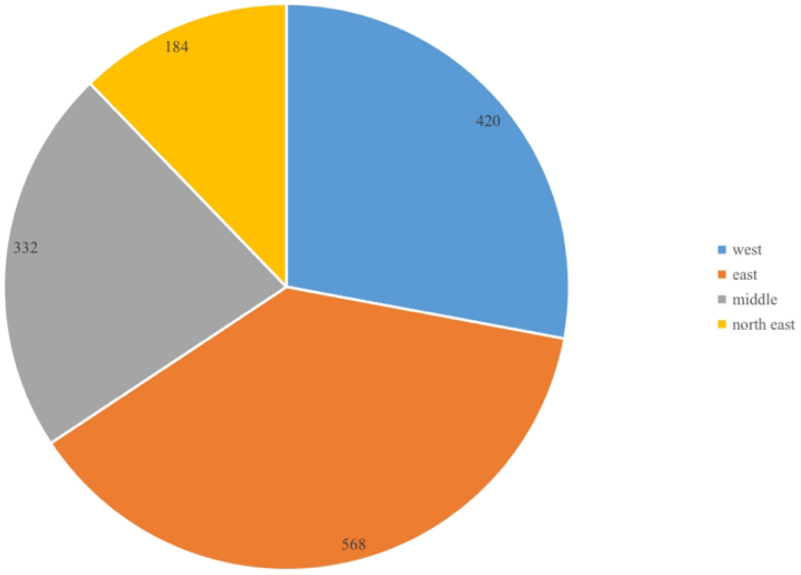

Figure 1: Comparison of the number of universities in provincial capitals of China's four regions

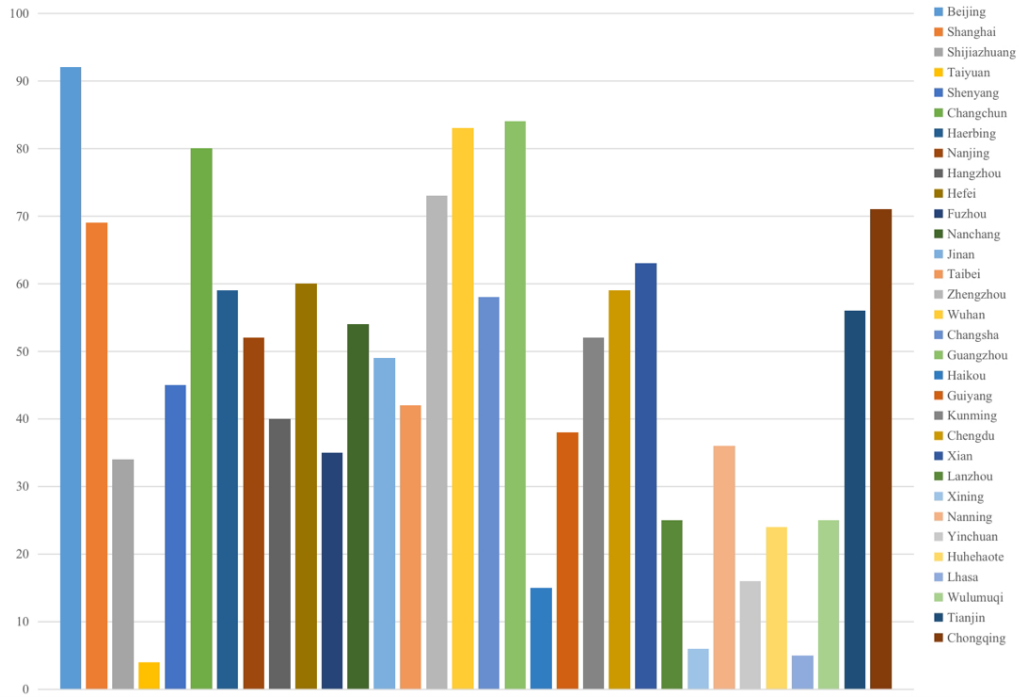

Figure 2: Number of colleges and universities in provincial capital cities of China [1]

2.2. Financial Resources and Family Background

From the perspective of family financial resources and family background, the income of urban and rural residents has a significant regional gap. According to the analysis of the income gap between urban and rural residents in 31 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in China, there is a significant regional gap in urban and rural income in China: the urban-rural income gap shows a significant widening trend from the east to the middle to the west, especially the largest urban-rural income gap in the western region [4]. This financial gap between urban and rural areas also affects the education students receive. In the developed eastern cities, the middle class with the financial resources and background usually send their children to international schools to receive better educational resources. In some remote cities, such as mountainous areas, children can only go to the local school to receive compulsory education, and will start to work after the compulsory education is over, which is unfair to them.

At the time of birth, children cannot choose their family background, including family financial resources, parents' education, etc., but family education is also crucial for students. A study mainly explores the relationship between family education, learning quality and academic performance. From the correlation point of view, there is a significant correlation between the three variables. Among them, there is a significant positive correlation between the dimensions of learning quality and academic performance. Starting from the impact degree of each dimension of learning quality and the scores of the three subjects, we can see that the correlation degree of Chinese and math scores is in order of learning creation > learning concentration > learning interest. The correlation of English scores was in the order of learning interest > learning creation > Learning concentration [5]. Among them, interest in learning and concentration in learning can be cultivated and supervised by parents at an early age. If parents receive higher education, they will pay more attention to their children's education.

2.3. Teacher Level and School Hardware

In different areas, due to the differences in teacher resources, the teaching results will be very different. If there is a school with outstanding teachers and sufficient educational resources, it will attract many students from different places or even other cities, which will cause other schools to lose their appeal. The ideal teaching quality needs some regular teaching as the basis. However, only conventional teaching cannot effectively promote students' development, which needs to be supplemented by cognitive stimulation and flexible evaluation. If teachers can take into account cognitive stimulation and flexible evaluation on the basis of what they have said, it will be more conducive to the occurrence and development of the learning process, help improve students' learning quality and implement the cultivation of core qualities [6]. The importance of teachers and teachers to schools is self-evident. They are the primary resource for the high-quality development of education and the core driving force for the development of schools.

Just as important as the teacher resources are the hardware measures of the school. In developed cities, almost all schools have been properly repaired and maintained. Since the beginning of the new century, an increasing number of schools have strengthened their infrastructure construction by increasing investment, including replacing standard desks and benches, installing air conditioners and equating them with advanced information and multimedia teaching equipment. Modern teaching facilities can improve teaching methods, improve teaching efficiency, and thus improve teaching quality. On the other hand, in some undeveloped areas, such as Nanning, Guangxi, many schools even have no floors, each floor is concrete, the walls are full of potholes, and the teaching facilities are not perfect, which will lead to the implementation of the teaching process is difficult, and the lack of air conditioning will also cause students to feel uncomfortable in winter and summer, reducing the learning efficiency.

3. Cause Analysis

3.1. Historical Causes

The first reason for the educational inequality between eastern and western China is history. There are a lot of port cities in eastern China. Before the founding of People’s Republic of China in 1949, many places were concessions of other countries. For example, Shanghai was one of the most developed cities in China before liberation, and even more so after liberation, and is now one of the most prosperous cities in China. The central and eastern regions of China have always been the political, economic and cultural centers, which has led to the advantages of the central region over other regions. However, the western and northeastern regions have been affected by war and political turmoil in history, and their development is relatively lagging behind. To a certain extent, the reform and opening up and market economy have promoted the economic development of our country, but they also intensify the imbalance of regional development. Due to the innate conditions and the advantages of the open policy, the eastern coastal areas have attracted a large number of foreign capital and talents, and the economy has been rapid development. The central and western regions are relatively backward due to inconvenient transportation, resources and market constraints. These talented people who come to developed cities in central or eastern China will stay for work reasons, and they want their children to receive the best quality education, which also leads to more good schools being built in developed first-tier or super-first-tier cities.

3.2. Markets

In addition to public schools, there are many private schools in China. At present, China's private education market has formed a relatively complete industrial chain, covering many fields such as

preschool education, basic education, vocational education and higher education. The market scale continues to expand, showing a steady growth trend. Especially in some high-end education and characteristic education fields, private education institutions have won wide recognition from the society by virtue of their unique education concepts and teaching models. From the perspective of student size, from 2012 to 2019, the number of private school students in China has been expanding, from 39.1102 million in 2012 to 56.1661 million in 2019, with a compound annual growth rate of 5.31%. From the growth rate of each year, the growth rate increased year by year from 2013 to 2015, reaching the largest growth rate in recent years of 6.24% in 2015, and the growth rate slowed down year by year after 2017. In 2019, there were 56.1661 million students in various types of private education, an increase of 2.384 million over the previous year, an increase of 4.43% [7]. This shows that private schools and educational institutions have a large market in China's education industry, and more and more middle class began to send their children to private schools. While the middle class is mostly concentrated in developed cities, there will be a market when there is demand, which also leads to more private schools in the east than in the west.

3.3. Local Characteristic Education

Local characteristic education in basic education is also a part that cannot be ignored. Education with local characteristics refers to a unique form of education that is carried out according to the culture, social background and resource characteristics of different regions, aiming at the needs and development potential of local students.

First of all, the importance of local characteristic education in basic education cannot be ignored. There are 56 ethnic minorities in China, most of which are located in western and northeastern China, each with its own unique cultural traditions and social background. By integrating these characteristics into their education, students can strengthen their sense of identity and pride in their culture. This helps develop students' love and responsibility for their region and promotes their physical and mental health. In addition, education with local characteristics also helps to stimulate students' creativity and innovative spirit, and cultivate their independent thinking and problem-solving ability. Therefore, education with local characteristics is an indispensable part of basic education. The characteristic education in different regions is different in content, form and method. For example, in rural areas, agricultural education is a common form of education with local characteristics. By carrying out agricultural practices and rural cultural inheritance, students can understand and participate in the development of rural society. These forms of education aim to cultivate students' artistic literacy and scientific and technological abilities to adapt to the needs of local society. However, such education will also lead to the skew of educational resources to the city, and children in the mountains or rural areas will not have access to more sophisticated knowledge and equipment.

4. Suggestions

4.1. Setting Up Branch Schools

The opening of branch schools can allow famous universities to bring high-quality educational resources to different cities and regions, and students will have more choices. The opening of branch schools can improve the quality of teaching, and the running of branch schools can enable universities to provide high-quality teaching in different regions and better serve students. Branch school can promote local economic and social development, attract talents and investment, and improve the overall level of education and science and technology in the region.

4.2. Teacher Rotation

Teacher rotation can improve teachers' quality and teaching ability, and can also improve the problem that excellent teachers are concentrated in key schools in developed cities. Teacher rotation can enable teachers to get in touch with different teaching environments and education models, better understand local teaching needs and education resources, and thus improve their teaching level and education teaching ability. Through teacher rotation, schools can share educational resources, optimize the efficiency of the use of educational resources, improve the quality of education, and help improve the equity of education. For teachers, job rotation allows teachers to broaden their horizons and experience in different schools and teaching positions, laying a solid foundation for their career development. For students, teacher rotation can provide students with different education and teaching modes and teaching resources, so that students can get a richer experience in learning, so as to enhance students' learning interest and motivation.

4.3. Government Investment

Increasing investment in education can narrow the education gap between urban and rural areas, rich and poor, and between regions, and promote education equity. By increasing investment in education in poor areas and rural areas, the government will provide more educational resources and equal educational opportunities to help children from poor families realize their educational dreams and promote social stability and harmony. Education is an important part of human resources, which is of great significance to the development of poor family economy. Increasing investment in education can improve the quality and efficiency of personnel training, enhance the creativity and technical level of workers, promote scientific and technological innovation and industrial upgrading, and promote sustainable economic development.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Research Summary

There are obvious inequalities in China's education system. First of all, urban and rural education resources are not evenly distributed, and urban schools have better teachers, curriculum and facilities, which is a huge gap compared with rural schools. Secondly, education investment is uneven, with schools in rich areas more adequately funded, while poor areas face the dilemma of lack of funds. Third, the household registration system has caused the inequality of educational opportunities between urban and rural students, and urban students have more advantages in education and employment. The main reasons for this inequality include the improper formulation of government policies, the unreasonable allocation of social resources and the shackles of traditional concepts. In order to solve the problem of education inequality in China, active and effective measures should be taken, including gradually adjusting the allocation of education resources in urban and rural areas, increasing investment in education in rural areas, amending the household registration system, and strengthening the formulation and enforcement of laws and regulations on education equity.

5.2. Research Limitation and Reflection

However, there are some limitations to this study. First, the scope of the study is narrow and does not fully cover all possible factors of educational inequality. Secondly, there is still a lack of research on the influence mechanism of educational inequality and the relationship between different levels. Future studies need to collect more data, expand the scope, and advocate for more targeted policies to promote equity in education.

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