

Analysis of the Current Situation of Rural English Education under the Difference Between Urban and Rural Areas in China

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Abstract: English is the most widely used language in the world. With the development of globalization, China is paying more and more attention to English education. Nonetheless, there are some obstacles to the advancement of rural English education given the disparity between urban and rural education. This paper analyses the current state of English education in China from the standpoint of the disparities between urban and rural areas and discusses the persisting issues. Rural children have additional challenges and obstacles when learning English because of a lack of educational resources, an inadequate linguistic environment and teaching resources, and the negative impacts of familial circumstances. Thus, enhancing the English learning impact for rural students and improving rural English education and teaching circumstances have emerged as critical issues in the current development of rural education. To improve this situation, this paper proposes to narrow the gap between urban and rural English education, including determining rural economic security, providing a foundation for language education, and strengthening teacher training.

Keywords: Rural English education, rural teaching, English teaching issues, Urban-rural disparity

1. Introduction

As economic globalization progresses, English is seen by people as a vital component of modernization. According to nationwide surveys, the number of English learners in China has reached approximately 400 million [1]. The population in rural areas accounts for the majority of China's population, and the issue of English education in rural areas has always garnered a lot of attention. China has implemented primary school English education in rural areas since 2001 [2]. However, the standard of English instruction in rural China lags considerably behind that of urban areas primarily due to such as the weak quality of English teachers in rural areas, uneven distribution of educational resources, and insufficient focus on English education [3-6]. In China, education has long been regarded as a means to promote social development. However, in recent years, rapid economic development and reforms have led to socioeconomic diversity among households, resulting in huge differences in education expenditures across regions and schools [7]. While certain areas in China of modern education have caught up to the standards, most areas still have relatively outdated educational facilities and equipment, such as most schools in rural areas have no pronunciation

training rooms for students to practice English speaking, which makes it challenging to offer helpful support to English teaching [4]. How to improve the standard of English teaching in rural areas has become the key to improving the standard of rural education. Within the framework of China's urban and rural differences, this paper will discuss the current situation of rural English education, analyze the primary issues, and provide potential solutions.

2. Current Situation of English Education under Urban-Rural Gap

2.1. Educational Resources

Although Chinese society generally has great enthusiasm for English education, there are huge differences in students' access to English learning resources [7]. In rural areas, educational resources are often relatively scarce, which puts rural students at a disadvantage in receiving English education.

The process of urbanization has had a significant impact on the distribution of educational resources, leading to issues such as unfair distribution of resources between urban and rural areas [5]. Resource allocation is one of the factors exacerbating the gap in English education between urban and rural areas in China [6]. For example, according to the educational statistical data of the China Education Bureau, in 2020, the average value of instruments and equipment for primary school students was 1809 CNY, and 1652 CNY for rural primary schools, which is equivalent to 80.4% of urban primary schools; The average value of teaching instruments and equipment for junior high school students is 2835 CNY, and that for rural junior high schools is 2541 CNY, which is equivalent to 77% of that for urban junior high schools [8]. In urban areas, many schools have implemented digital teaching and multimedia teaching, and teaching equipment in rural areas has also been greatly improved. However, many schools still use traditional teaching methods, especially in English education, listening, speaking, reading, etc., making rural students lack adequate learning resources and tools. For example, most schools in rural areas do not equip the school with pronunciation training rooms and related software for spoken English teaching and testing [4]. A study reveals that only 20% of teachers think their school is excellent for teaching English when it comes to using teaching instruments and equipment. For instance, the wealth of instructional resources and tools that the school can offer. Almost 90% of teachers vehemently advocate for more enhancements to the environment in which English is taught [9].

Socioeconomic differences and imbalanced distribution of educational resources have led to educational inequity between urban and rural areas, prompting poor rural families to migrate to cities [7]. Teachers and students are unable to stay in rural areas, which harms rural education.

2.2. Language Environment and Teacher Resources

In the context of globalization, urban areas have a high degree of internationalization, and China's international education is mainly concentrated in urban areas [10]. Students can access the English environment through various channels. Students in urban areas are more encouraged to communicate in English with each other and with teachers to improve their ability to learn English [11]. In contrast, English usage is lower in rural areas.

There are fewer possibilities to utilize English in rural areas due to the lower social communication, dialect languages are even employed when speaking with family and classmates [3]. Some students are reluctant to use English due to a lack of confidence. Therefore, teachers in these areas often have to use Chinese to teach, as it is a more familiar language for the students [12]. Growing up in such an atmosphere does not help students' English proficiency since it limits their opportunity to acquire the language and exposes them to real English contexts.

Teachers play important roles in students' English language environment, and the resources and quality of English teachers are very crucial. However, the shortage of teachers is a prominent problem

in rural education. Rural areas have a higher proportion of teachers who are less educated and have received little formal teacher training [13]. Based on the data provided by the China Education Bureau, in 2020 in China, there is 97.9% of teachers of associate bachelor or above in primary schools, of which counted for 99.33% were urban primary schools while rural primary schools accounted for 97.1%, with a gap of 2.2 percentage between urban and rural areas; The proportion of teachers of undergraduate or above in junior high schools reached 88.6%, with urban junior high schools having a proportion of 93.8% and 85.6% in rural junior high schools, indicating a gap of 8.3 percentage disparity between urban and rural areas [8]. Due to the relatively poor working and living conditions in rural areas, many excellent teachers are unwilling to work in rural areas [3-5]. The small number of excellent teachers leads to the inability to guarantee the quality of rural education. In a survey of teaching staff, 80% of teachers believed that schools lacked English teachers [9]. Owing to the lack of teachers, rural schools have the phenomenon of "one teacher with multiple subjects", which means that one teacher is responsible for teaching multiple subjects in school, including English [3,4]. This has led to the low quality of English teaching in many schools and difficulty in cultivating students' English learning abilities.

2.3. Family Factor

In terms of family aspect, families in urban areas usually have higher capital accumulation and better educational backgrounds, which can enable their children to obtain better opportunities and better educational resources. Numerous studies show that children who grow up with his or her biological parents have better academic performance and children who grow up apart from his or her biological parents are more likely to drop out of school [14]. However, the number of left-behind children accounts for a large proportion in rural areas. In a population survey, the sample provided 35,454 left-behind children under the age of 18, 88% of whom were in rural areas [15]. A study shows that there are significant differences in the educational attainment of urban and rural parents. The average educational attainment of rural fathers is nearly 1.5 standard deviations lower than that of urban fathers. Likewise, the average educational attainment of rural mothers is nearly 1.5 standard deviations lower than that of urban mothers. This means that rural parents generally have lower levels of education [16]. Parents in rural areas do not have enough time and energy to pay attention to their children's English learning. Coupled with the lower educational level of rural parents, rural students lack adequate support and guidance from their families.

In a survey, few parents spoke English at home or used English at work [7]. This leaves students lacking the environment and opportunities to learn English at home. Even though the development of social education has made parents more aware of the positive effects that learning English can have on their children's growth and development, many still find it challenging to give their children the proper direction and encouragement when it comes to their English language acquisition because of their own limited English literacy [3]. Children in rural areas might not have access to a language-learning setting, therefore it may be difficult for them to talk to their parents about the challenges they have while learning English. If things continue this way, their excitement for learning will be significantly diminished and they will grow scared of studying English. The determination of urban children to learn English is greatly influenced by the positive attitudes of their parents, but the lack of awareness and low expectations of rural parents contribute to the growing disparity in English education between urban and rural areas [6].

On the other hand, for a variety of reasons, including economic conditions and limitations, many rural families struggle to give their children the resources and encouragement they need to learn English. A study shows that students from low-income families have lower academic performance than students from higher-income families [7]. Since the 1990s, China has seen fast development, and regional disparities in education spending are enormous. High-income urban parents are more

likely to invest in English education for their children, providing them with additional resources and opportunities to enhance their English abilities, but rural parents confront increasing challenges if they do not have sufficient funds [7].

3. Suggestions for Promoting Rural English Education

3.1. Improve Education Investment

Nowadays, in terms of educational resources, schools located in urban areas tend to be better equipped than those located in rural areas. In most cases, this is due to government investment in urban areas compared to rural areas [13]. The government ought to increase investment in rural education and improve the software and hardware facilities available to these institutions. Enhancing teaching and multimedia resources in rural school infrastructure, to enrich English classes can improve students' comprehension of English knowledge [4].

While the government and relevant departments increase investment in rural schools, they can also introduce targeted policies to encourage enterprises, social organizations, and individuals to provide educational assistance and donations to rural areas [5], provide necessary teaching equipment and resources, and provide more support and assistance to rural schools. Improve English education for students in rural areas by optimizing the allocation of educational resources.

3.2. Strengthening Teacher Training

Strengthening the training of rural English teachers is one of the keys to improving the quality of English teaching. Students' English language competency is directly impacted by English instructors' personal development [4]. The government and education departments can organize teacher training and other forms, such as establishing a regular training mechanism for English teachers, to improve teachers' professionalism and teaching abilities [4]. Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for teachers to enhance their teaching practice and learn about the latest research and methods, to improve the quality of teacher teaching [17].

The government can also introduce relevant policies to encourage excellent English teachers to teach in rural schools and improve the quality of English teaching in rural schools. Many countries have carried out some policies on teacher mobility [18]. China has also made some attempts, but there are currently obstacles to carry out. This can be used as a reference to China. Teacher exchange rotation may provide teachers with opportunities and platforms for personal development, providing them with valuable odds in different school environments, and enhancing personal teaching literacy [18]. Increase the proportion of qualified teachers in schools through teacher mobility [17,19]. Simultaneously, more economic and professional incentives can be provided to rural teachers to encourage outstanding teachers to stay in rural areas and engage in education work [13]. By taking this action, the advancement of rural education may be advanced and the teacher quality in urban and rural areas may be more evenly distributed, and provide children with better education.

3.3. Promote Rural Economic Development

More left-behind children in rural areas are partly due to the relatively backward rural economic development, so adults in rural families choose to go to other areas to work and leave their children at home. The government needs to increase capital investment in rural areas and vigorously develop the economy to promote and effectively narrow the income gap between urban and rural areas [20]. Developing the rural economy can increase employment opportunities and sources of income, as well as better living standards and economic conditions for rural residents [21]. There will be a greater need for English as the economy grows. More possibilities and demands for English learning may be

created, and the excitement and motivation of rural students for English learning can be increased, by supporting rural economic development.

4. Conclusion

From the perspective of urban and rural differences, the current situation of English education shows an obvious gap. Rural students have additional challenges and obstacles when learning English as a consequence of insufficient educational resources, lack of language environment and teacher resources, and the adverse effects of family factors. To improve the current situation of English education in rural areas, it is recommended that the government and social forces should invest more in rural education, particularly in English education, to give students better resources and learning environments. This will allow rural students to learn English more frequently and improve their English proficiency and competitiveness. Strengthening teacher training is necessary at the same time. The quality of rural English education depends to a large extent on the level and professionalism of teachers and the ability of instructors to bring new ideas and perspectives to rural English instruction greatly influences the quality of that education. In addition, economic growth is a major factor influencing the advancement of education. The profits and living conditions of people in rural areas may be raised through the development of the rural economy, thereby increasing investment and attention in English education.

In summary, collaboration and multifaceted efforts are needed to address the issue of disparities in English education between urban and rural areas. The government, education departments, educators, parents, and students should all be aware of this issue and take action to raise the standard of English education and integrate more steadily into globalization. Simultaneously, reality-based approaches must be taken, in-depth research and analysis of English education issued in various regions and groups must be done, more rational and scientific policies and measures must be developed, and coordinated development of English education in both urban and rural areas.

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