

Study of the Main Components of Educational Inequality in Contemporary China

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Abstract: The idea of educational equity has a long history, and the pursuit of educational justice is a long-standing human society ideal. China is one of the largest educational countries in the world. The government has been working hard for educational equity. With the continuous development of society, many educational hidden dangers left in the past have gradually emerged. The main research object of this paper is the inequity phenomenon in modern China's education circumstances, and through the research data, policies, and existing research theories to look for the root of the inequity in China's education. The results of the study found that it is difficult to generalize the root causes of the existing educational inequity in China. Policies, resources, and regions are one of the main manifestations of inequity, among which resources are the most important. Their origins are interrelated, and inequality of opportunity is one of the reasons. This paper puts forward some feasible schemes to improve the current situation of educational inequity in China from the perspective of different areas.

Keywords: China, inequality, education, resources, opportunity

1. Introduction

The issue of educational equality in China has always attracted the attention of education policymakers and scholars. The Chinese government has also issued a lot of relevant policies to promote educational equality, but many pieces of evidence show that the issue of educational equality in China has not been effectively alleviated, there are still many problems to be solved to achieve the desired goal of educational equity. Existing studies focus on educational policy-making and resource construction. For example, there is an important paper on preschool education that focuses on "...making quality improvement the plan's key goal, and forming a new preschool education development mode with Chinese characteristics". The content of the article is very pioneering and raises the problem of systematic deficiency in preschool education, however, the development design plan does not fully consider the existing problems of educational equity [1]. Although there are historical and periodic studies on educational inequity, it is difficult to correlate various inequity factors and find the source. The research topic of this paper is the analysis of the components of educational inequality in China and the exploration of why educational inequality in China still exists in the current environment. This paper will collect data from four aspects: policy, resource, and region, and conduct a combined analysis based on policies and existing research experience. Some of the conclusions of the study may clearly show the reasons for the inequity in different fields, sort out the

connections between different inequities in education, and point to the more fundamental reasons leading to the inequity in education. So, while this study may not directly present the clear origin of the problem, it may be able to contribute to future research on inequality in education in different areas.

2. Different Components of Educational Inequality in China

2.1. Education Policy

Policies play a guiding role in the distribution of educational resources. Educational inequity is a complex issue. The distribution of educational resources by policies will promote the realization of educational equity to a certain extent, but with the implementation of policies, there will be some emerging problems, which need continuous policy improvement. At the same time, education policies and other policies will also be interrelated and mutually affected.

Higher education expansion policy is an example to explain the cause of the inequality is it as the policy itself for the region might not equal, but we are not able to immediately establish a single contact model, namely the policy has led to regional inequality, inequality because there may be some policy for regional inequality will cause the side effects of the birth of other types of inequality.

Since 1998, China's education policy has gradually shifted its focus to the expansion of higher education, trying to expand the popularization of higher education, this is a higher education reform designed to solve the economic and employment problems, in other words, to allow higher education, like urging undergraduate or graduate schools to keep expanding enrollment. However, the effect is not ideal, and the expansion of educational inequality has been aggravated [2]. "After the policy of higher education expansion, individuals living in Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai enjoy more opportunities for higher education than those in provincial capital cities" [3]. The policy of higher education expansion is presented only as a classic example of a way to widen inequalities in education, not a complete failure. The original intention of this policy is to more effectively find talents and participate in national construction, but it has a negative impact on educational equity, such as the unequal competitive background of different regions, which is understated. Each kind of policy is made in stages. It can only be said that the higher education expansion policy itself brings a variety of opportunities for equality, but also creates obstacles to other opportunities.

2.2. Regional Educational Inequality

Educational inequality among regions is the most obvious manifestation of educational inequality, especially in China. For example, the number of people entering universities in each region is not proportional to the population of the province.

There are many reasons for regional educational inequality, such as skewed policies and insufficient resources. The construction of basic education is also one of the key projects in China, which mainly focuses on the popularization of remote mountainous areas and the balance of education below the county, township, and other urban units, among which the educational inequality is quite significant. Gansu is a typical example of regional educational inequality. "...the results of urban-rural inequality, inter-school inequality, and the gap between primary and secondary schools indicate that the objective of equality has not been achieved to an expected level in Gansu Province" [4]. This paper evaluates the education development of Gansu Province by combining the spatial distance of different regions in Gansu and EDI (educational development index) standards. The conclusion is that there is inequality in education in Gansu, and it is found that different regions in Gansu are seriously differentiated by the influence of teacher resources and the economy. In terms of regional issues, it is difficult for various regions below the city level to pursue educational equality, not only because of the lack of manpower and material resources but also because of the participation of policy

inequality. The secondary education mentioned in the above article and the educational inequality in higher education are more serious.

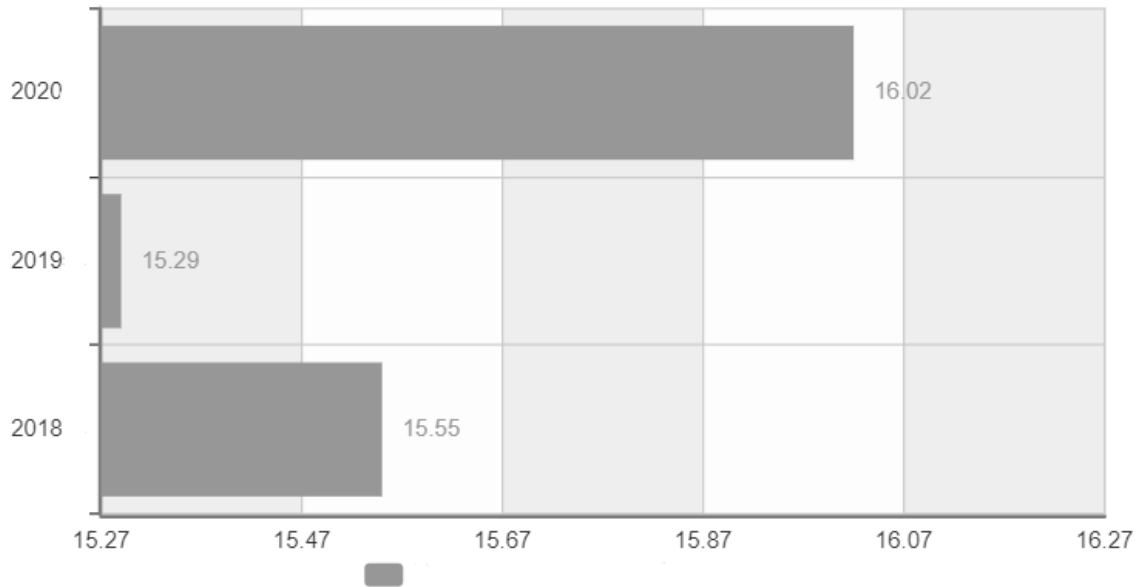


Figure 1: The total number (ten thousand) of high school students in Beijing from 2018 to 2020 [5].

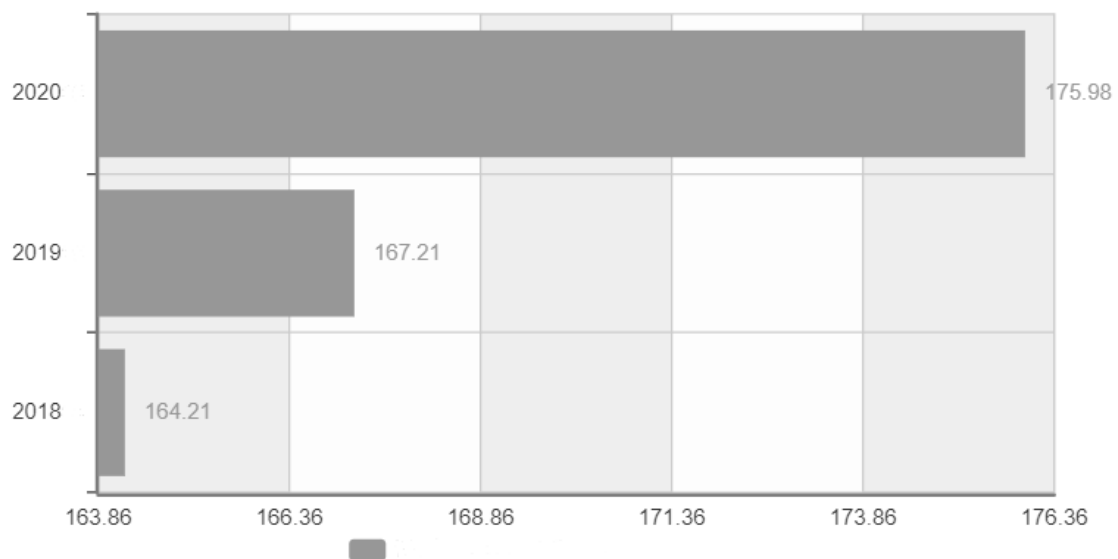


Figure 2: The total number (ten thousand) of high school students in Shandong from 2018 to 2020 [6].

As can be seen from Figure1 and Figure2, the gap between the number of high school students in Beijing and Shandong from 2018 to 2020 is more than ten times, and this figure will be even larger in 2022. Nearly 800,000 high school students took the Gaokao in Shandong province in 2022. Such a large number should provide more opportunities, but the university's independent enrollment policy has resulted in fewer opportunities for Shandong high school graduates.

Table 1: 2022 C9 University places reserved for high school graduates from Shandong province [7].

Universities in the C9 consortium	Planned enrollment number in Shandong
Peking University	66
Tsinghua university	74
Fudan university	65
Harbin Institute of Technology	248
Shanghai Jiao Tong University	174
Nanjing university	83
Zhejiang university	170
China University of Science and Technology	42
Xi'an Jiaotong University	46
Total	968

C9 is an educational alliance of China's nine top universities, similar to the Ivy League in the United States. Compared to 800,000 total candidates, they can enjoy high-quality teaching resources with fewer than one thousand people. Not only are there fewer students in Beijing, but they also enjoy better teaching resources most of the time. In addition to similar problems in Shandong, Zhejiang, and Heilongjiang, the pressure on the local government goes both ways, considering that Shandong's extensive basic education is difficult to develop. Therefore, the dilemma of educational inequality in Shandong persists. The state invests more and more education funds every year, but there is still no effect, which indicates that the mechanism of the college entrance examination, the independent enrollment policy, and the populous provinces similar to Shandong have regional conflicts, resulting in the emergence of regional inequality (as shown in Table 1).

2.3. Inequality in Educational Resources

Whether the amount of educational resources and the use of the key direction applicable to solve the problem of education fairness has played a big role, such as several teachers in basic education investment will be satisfied with the rapid rise in education penetration, or in a bustling city of higher learning into economic resources can support a very important research project for the future. Here we can see that there are different kinds of educational resources, and their respective characteristics are very important.

There are two kinds of educational resources. One is human resources, that is, teachers, and the other is economic resources. The inequality of educational resources is a common occurrence. The main problem lies in its possible concealment, which leads to the failure to find problems and make adjustments in time and the incomplete clarity of policy guidance. The former is very common, such as the aforementioned Shandong education problems. The government offers a wide range of education funds, and manpower and material resources are still not able to make the Shandong education problems ease tension, so the question is, might be the direction, is the goal of resource input errors, too little or too much cause adverse reactions? The excessive investment in basic education construction likely leads to the lack of higher education. A notable feature is that only two "985" universities exist in Shandong.

Since 2014, the enrollment rate of secondary education in China has been increasing year by year, and the proportion of private schools has also increased year by year. One of the reasons is that junior high school is compulsory education, while senior high school is not [8]. This seems to be a good situation. It is not difficult to judge from the previous case analysis that the average value is greatly influenced by individual data, which is easy to be given a false impression of areas with good education forms. In fact, due to the uneven distribution of resources, Hainan, Guizhou, Gansu, and

other places had to use new education systems to reform, and also served as experimental areas for new policies. This resource inequality may have contributed to China's previous problems because the regional differences are also significant in these provinces. "The financial system of rural compulsory education with county-led overall planning at the provincial level has clearly defined the responsibility of funding guarantee at the central level, but the responsibility of funding guarantee at the provincial level and below are still not clear, and local governments at the grass-roots level are often in a dilemma" [9]. The inequality of resources caused by such problems in the past may also be one of the reasons why educational inequality is so difficult to eradicate today.

3. Discussion

Although it is difficult to sum up the root causes of educational inequity in China with simple words, it is not difficult to find that almost all cases of educational inequity are closely related to resources. Therefore, if the country aims to solve the problem of unfair education in China, the basic approach is to formulate policies from the perspective of the economy, balance the capital investment of various colleges and universities, blur the class gap of various schools, and rationalize the distribution of teachers. In the third chapter of *Reforming Education and Challenging Inequalities in Southern Contexts: Research and Policy in International Development*, Taylor and Francis' group analyzed the unfairness of educational opportunities from an economic perspective, which also has many similarities with the current situation of the unfairness of education in China [10]. This analysis model can be used to solve the problem of the unfairness of educational opportunities in China.

4. Conclusion

No matter in terms of policies, regions, or resources, China's educational inequality cannot be analyzed without the keyword "opportunity". All the measures that have been taken to ensure equality in education have been put in place to ensure equal opportunities for all educated people. However, absolute fairness is impossible to achieve, educational resources are restricted by economic development, the formulation of a policy needs to sacrifice some interests, and regional inequality can be broken because of the economy. The three main factors of educational inequity are interlinked, and the possibility of their separate existence is very small. They are not unidirectional, so it is almost impossible to sort them out and analyze them through a two-dimensional or three-dimensional model. This article just in general will be the main reason for education inequality, or mainly as a result. Through the existing research and combining the data on a general analysis, the conclusion is that these factors are the cause and effect of each other, which can't be completely solved through the source, which means constant trade-offs to reach the balance of possible adjusted measures to local conditions, to make education development more quickly. In the future, with better technology, it may be possible to build a 3D model or a framework that can simulate the changes in parameters, to better simulate the knock-on effects of any change. Future research may therefore focus on balancing the trade-offs of different educational inequalities.

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