

# ***A Brief Introduction to the Problem of Difficult Enrollment in China's Compulsory Education: Current Situation, Causes and Measures***

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**Abstract:** In today's society, more parents tend to pay more attention to the situation of children receiving compulsory education, so the problem of compulsory education is becoming more and more prominent. After a series of comparative analysis of data and fact research, this paper found that the difficulty of enrollment can be divided into enrollment difficulty and entrance difficulty, and the reasons can be divided into the implementation of enrollment policies, the current situation of population mobility, parents' educational expectations and other factors. To alleviate this social situation, various subjects as the government, schools, parents and children could make changes, in order to let children have better compulsory education conditions and correct learning environment. For example, the government should focus on narrowing the gap between private and public schools, developing more reasonable talent training programs and enrollment methods, schools should implement the policies the government carries out, reduce unhealthy competition, and parents and students should focus on learning themselves rather than blindly chasing external conditions.

**Keywords:** Compulsory education, enrollment, economic differences

## **1. Introduction**

The growing economic development has provided more choices for the compulsory education of Chinese children today. Several issues such as enrolment rate, study schedule and food quality matter when choosing schools. Among these issues, as China has an enormous population base and large land area, the difficulty of enrollment has emerged as one of the main concerns raised by the public and parents. There are also big differences between public and private schools, urban and rural schools, and eastern and western schools. This paper begins a series of collection and analysis based on these conditions.

## **2. Situation**

### **2.1. Difficulties in Enrollment**

The difficulty in school enrollment is mainly manifested in the form of educational inequality in public and private schools, as well as regions with different economic statuses, which can be roughly

divided into urban and rural areas and eastern and western regions of China. In the compulsory education stage, the choice of which type of school is mainly based on the wishes of parents.

There is a significant difference in the enrollment methods between public and private schools. During the compulsory stage, public schools are divided into school districts for each child, whereas private schools are separated based on entrance exams. Public schools only have to pay for books, meals, and lodging, while the tuition is much expensive in private schools. Public schools have uniform regulations regarding the curriculum and schedule, while private schools are more autonomous under the regulations of the Ministry of Education. There are only 10,500 private compulsory education schools, accounting for 5.23% of the total number of schools in compulsory education in China [1]. Lots of students want to be admitted. Although applying to a private school involves interviews and writing tests, and paying more for tuition, during the registration season, the number of applicants always far exceeds the actual number of recruits.

China's urbanization has entered the stage of transformation and improvement in the middle and later stages, and new characteristics have emerged in the spatial agglomeration of population [2].

One is that the characteristics of population agglomeration towards economically developed areas are more obvious [2]. A large number of migrant children from the West have followed their families to the East, causing an increase in the compulsory education population in the already densely populated East region, and bringing unprecedented pressure to the implementation of the nearby enrollment policy.

Second is that the phenomenon of population agglomeration towards cities is becoming increasingly common, and labor mobility has shifted from inter provincial mobility to within provincial mobility [2]. With the advancement of urbanization in rural areas and their education, the population, students, and schools in rural areas have significantly decreased. China's urbanization rate has increased from about 10% at the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic of China and less than 20% at the beginning of the reform and opening-up to over 60% in 2019. Rural schools, which accounted for 96.3% of the total number of schools in the country in 1980, have decreased to 28.9% in 2015 and 25.8% in 2018. During these 38 years, rural schools decreased by more than half [3]. It is enough to show that rural schools struggle to recruit students, and some of them are unable to operate, while students in urban areas have to compete to get into schools.

In conclusion, rural residents send their children to urban schools, while a large number of people from the west flow into the east, resulting in a shortage of schools and students in urban and eastern areas. At the same time, due to the shortage of students in a few rural and western area schools, withdrawal is inevitable, forming a vicious circle.

## **2.2. Difficulties in Entrance**

In addition to some regional private schools in response to the policy of opening a lottery to determine the admission list, most students who are ready to study in private schools need to participate in the entrance exam, according to the stage classification, which can be divided into can be divided into kindergarten to primary school, primary school to junior high school examinations. According to the form, it can be divided into interviews and written tests.

In the Kindergarten to primary school stage, it is the examination form of the interview. Children should face the questions raised by the examiner at a very early age, and the answer probably will be memorized in advance. The interview is usually very formatted, candidates in the interview usually show the mature beyond their age, which can not show their real ideas, curb the nature of the child. In the interview at the beginning of junior high school, the answers answered by the students are also what the examiner wants to hear, not necessarily what they want to talk about, which in essence can not play the role of selecting talents. In the written test, the questions required sixth grade students to learn extra knowledge out of the textbook, seriously cutting children's extracurricular time, causing

premature learning pressure. In order to stand out in the exam, various kinds of cram schools have come into being. Under the implementation of the "double reduction policy", this seems to have fallen into a dead end.

Parents of students preparing to attend public schools or failing private school exams are caught up in the "district home buying craze", which originated from "nearby enrollment". The "nearby enrolment" policy is the entrance policy implemented in many countries during the compulsory education stage. The nearby enrollment policy is a norm aimed at the government, that is, in the process of the implementation of the policy, the government makes overall planning and reasonable distribution of schools within the jurisdiction, so that school-age children have equal opportunities to receive education. There is also a big gap between the reputation and strength of public schools in the same region, so the saying "school district housing" is formed. The idea that parents want their children to go to better schools is caught, and housing prices in neighborhoods with better schools are significantly higher than in neighborhoods without them. At the same time, many problems have also been exposed. In the implementation process of the nearby enrollment policy, it is impossible to divide the school area strictly according to the school radius, which requires the governments at all levels to analyze the specific problems [4]. For example, for some families who cannot afford to buy a house, this regulation precisely deprives their children of the right to enroll nearby. As early as the 1990s, some scholars proposed that the school district claims that allowing a hutong to choose a student's school will result in further inequality, school selection fees, and other oddities [4].

### **3. Causes**

#### **3.1. School Enrollment**

##### **3.1.1. The Way of Enrollment and Personnel Training Plan**

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is based on the 2009, 2012 and 2015 programs for International students. The results of the PISA test show that students from private schools around the world, except for Taipei, Hong Kong, Luxembourg, and Thailand, generally perform better than students from public schools in the three major assessment areas of reading, mathematics, and science [5]. Part of the reason is that private schools enroll students who get good grades in the exam in advance, which in turn promotes the enrollment fever of the school. Secondly, private schools have more obvious management advantages. Generally speaking, private schools have better teaching resources and a better study atmosphere, have some space for self-development under the regulations of the Ministry of Education, and have flexibility in personnel training plans. For example, private schools are allowed to have a commissary, students have a wider variety of clubs to choose from, and Western courses such as tea tasting and horsemanship are optionally offered. These courses help children to become well-rounded people and are relaxing and improving in the context of the examination-oriented education.

##### **3.1.2. Economic Input**

Educational resources and fundamental facilities are ultimately a matter of educational input and economy, and between public and private schools, the latter usually put more funds. When it comes to the type of school, the OECD warns that the advantage of private schools becomes less significant when the socioeconomic background of their students is stripped out. By sending their children to private schools rather than public ones, superior families are choosing a greater likelihood that their classmates will have similar or higher socioeconomic backgrounds, the OECD study points out [5]. The resulting teaching resources such as material conditions will be put into the class where the child is, creating a higher quality of education, a better class order, and a more inspiring atmosphere. These

parents believe that private schools can provide a better quality of education, a more conducive environment for learning, additional resources, and better institutions and operational mechanisms.

Due to various reasons such as natural conditions, historical basis, geographical location and specific policies, the central and western regions or remote areas have relatively little policy support and slow economic development. The eastern region develops rapidly, the local investment in education is large, coupled with national policy support, so the improvement of hardware facilities is significantly higher than that in the western regions. Compulsory education needs to be supported by the economy and backed by investment. However, the long-standing social structure of dual governance between urban and rural areas leads to a large gap in educational resources such as educational funds, fundamental facilities. According to statistics, since the proportion of national fiscal education expenditure in GDP exceeded 4% for the first time in 2012, it once reached 4.30% in 2013, but then it declined slightly, and it was 4.26% in 2015, 4.22% in 2016, 4.14% in 2017, and 4.11% in 2018. In 2019, it was 4.04%, until 4.22% in 2020 [6]. As for Finland, it has long been one of the top countries in the world for fundamental education, with the Education Ministry's budget accounting for 16% of the total government budget in 2008. In China, the state stipulates that the investment in education at the county level should account for 20% of the total annual fiscal revenue at the county level, but the 20% of the total annual fiscal revenue at the county level of several hundred million yuan or one billion yuan in a western county is one hundred or two hundred million yuan, and even the investment in education in some western counties accounts for 50% of the total annual fiscal revenue at the county level, which is only several hundred million yuan. The annual fiscal expenditure of the eastern county is often tens of billions or hundreds of billions. The investment in education accounts for 20% of the annual fiscal revenue of the county, which is several times or even ten times more than the 20% of the annual fiscal revenue of the western county [7]. It can be seen that the total investment in education in China is not high, and it is not even in different regions. This shows that China's total investment in education is insufficient, and regional investment is uneven according to areas with different economic conditions.

### 3.1.3. Teacher Resource

Although the urban-rural gap in the proportion of teachers with more compulsory education than the required qualifications has narrowed, the imbalance in the quality of teacher education is still obvious. In terms of the title of a technical post, in 2020, the proportion of urban junior middle school teachers with high-level titles is 1.3 percentage points higher than that of rural teachers, while the proportion of rural junior middle school teachers with undetermined titles is 2 percentage points higher than that of urban teachers. In terms of age structure, the problem of aging of rural teachers still exists, especially in the primary school stage, the proportion of teachers over 50 years old in rural primary schools is 6.4 percentage points higher than that in urban areas [2]. This reflects a lack of highly qualified teachers in poor economic areas.

It is not hard to explain why private schools and those in more economically developed areas, such as the cities and the East, find it easier to recruit students compared to other regions. As for now, Project Hope and the Spring Bud Project have sent a lot of money to school construction, equipment purchase, and selected qualified teachers to support poor areas, which also shows that the development of regional education can not be separated from the support of teachers resources.

## 3.2. Educational Expectations

Educational input plays a decisive role in the final educational achievement of the educated. In the act of investing in education itself, the main executor and decision-maker is not the students themselves, but the parents of the students. As the actual owners and dominators of social resources,

parents' attitude toward education depends on their educational expectations for their children to a certain extent.

Canadian researchers have found that the proportion of children of Canadian immigrants from Asia, Africa and China attending university in the total population is very high [7], which presents Chinese parents attach importance to children's education.

The emergence of the one-child policy has created more one-child families, the reduction of the number of children enables parents to spend more time on their only child, and the education of children has become one of the key issues that parents pay attention to [8]. Chinese traditional culture attaches great importance to learning, in order to achieve the ideal of looking forward to the son and the woman, the elders will attach great importance to the relevant performance of the exam and score, and pursue the level of education. At present, Parents have high educational expectations for their children in the early schooling of enrollment due to the cultural restrictions established by demand [9]. In addition, the fierce competition in the college entrance examination or the competitive pressure in future employment will lead to the whole society's high requirements for students' academic qualifications, resulting in the social problem of school choice [8].

The above three examples and reasons are only a small part of the representatives, parents are always in the pursuit of high enrollment rates, good teachers, education hardware facilities equipped with complete, higher quality of education schools.

## 4. Measures

### 4.1. Government

As the most important part, the government should improve by increasing capital investment, improving talent training plans, and introducing various effective measures. The improvement of infrastructure and hardware equipment can be summed up as capital investment. In the data shown above, China's investment in education is not only insufficient in total, but also uneven in different areas of economic development. Poor counties and cities can not even equip classrooms with blackboards, multimedia teaching tools and desks and chairs, which limits the development of western and rural schools to a certain extent. Therefore, the government should ensure that the investment is tilted to a certain extent. Increasing the investment in education and balancing the proportion of education funds between rural and urban areas, east and west areas can reduce the difference in hardware facilities, so that students can stand on the same starting line.

For backward areas such as western areas and rural areas, the workload of teachers should be comprehensively measured from many aspects, such as subject-teacher ratio, grade-teacher ratio, class-teacher ratio, student-to-teacher ratio, etc. [10]. The fixed thinking of measuring and staffing teachers solely based on the student-to-teacher ratio should be changed in the past, and a system of teacher replacement and exchange and training should be established in urban and rural areas, east and west, to gradually realize the integration of teacher staffing. It is not difficult for urban teachers to support rural areas because in some cities the boundary between urban and rural areas is not clear or they are close. However, a series of institutional guarantees are needed to ensure that high-quality teachers in the East region can volunteer in the underdeveloped provinces and cities in the West region. The government should continuously improve the treatment of teachers in backward areas, give preference to these teachers in terms of training, advanced selection, professional title promotion, etc., protect the rights of teachers, attract young teachers to enrich the front line of education, establish public housing, medical insurance, physical examination and other policies for teachers, relieve worries and mobilize their enthusiasm for work. Schools should explore the rule of teacher development, give play to the cumulative effect of various policies, and continue to implement effective teacher development related policies. For example, the government could solidly promote

the general teacher training program in rural primary schools, improve the adaptability of teachers to education and teaching, and effectively improve and implement the special post teacher program.

For public and private schools, the government should reduce the disparity between public and private schools, lower the tuition fees charged by private schools, and control the unreasonable soaring prices of housing in public school districts. In addition, the government should improve the admission policy by restricting the difficult test for private school students.

#### **4.2. Recruiter**

Schools should abandon the thinking of competition between schools to attract students, and focus on strengthening connotation construction [5]. High-quality students" have long been an important competition object for all schools in the stage of compulsory education in China, and are one of the key factors for schools to ensure recruitment and enrollment rates. As early as a few years ago, private schools had the absolute advantage. However, according to the latest data, in 2022, there will be 10,500 private compulsory education schools, 1,626 fewer than in the previous year, accounting for 5.23% of the total number of compulsory education schools in the country. The number of students in school was 13.5685 million, a decrease of 3.1725 million compared with the previous year [1]. It can be seen that private schools are losing their previous status with the support of the government. Measures such as "private and public schools enroll students together" and "computer to choose students" make private schools unable to enjoy the priority of time and space in enrollment as before. Policy bans on academic aptitude tests and parent surveys have also limited private schools' ability to select students based on academic ability and family background. As the OECD research pointed out, once private schools cannot have an advantage in student enrollment, the overall competitive advantage over public schools will be greatly reduced [5]. Therefore, for private schools, the source of students is important, but it is necessary to transfer the core competitiveness to the connotation construction, give full play to the advantages of private primary and secondary schools in the system mechanism, based on equality of enrollment opportunities, through innovative educational concepts, efficient allocation of educational resources, strengthening curriculum teaching and teacher construction, to foster morality and educate people. Improve the quality of education and teaching as the core, to achieve high-quality of education results, truly reflects the unique value of the development of private schools. Similarly, excessive competition among public schools for students should be reduced. Enrollment measures should be implemented in both public and private schools. No matter what the district or the school, schools, and teachers must not lose confidence.

#### **4.3. Family and Students**

Every year, the enrollment policy changes according to the number of children enrolled and society's situation, parents and children should pay great attention to the relevant adjustment and naturalize every step. Parents and children should make choices according to their circumstances. For example, if a family decides children to study abroad, children can attend private schools or international departments in advance. On the contrary, if want to follow the traditional Chinese teaching mode, they can consider the comprehensive choice based on economic strength and school district housing allocation.

Parents and students need to develop a change in thinking. Parents should not blindly follow the trend, blindly follow the upsurge of "school district housing" or spend too much of savings on tuition, after all, the most important thing to learn is to depend on the child himself. Students should strengthen their self-discipline and learning ability, not thinking that the future is hopeless only because the starting point in school is lower than others.

## 5. Conclusion

This article is based on the hot topic of today's compulsory education enrollment problem through a series of analyses and research, the initial explanation of enrollment difficulty, the entrance difficulty phenomenon, and possible reasons. Finally, some suggestions are put forward by three main bodies respectively. For example, schools should abandon competition for students and strengthen policy implementation. Parents and students should treat the phenomenon of "school district housing hot" rationally and focus on improving their strengths. The government and the Ministry of Education should add financial investment and distribute reasonably, implement assistance policies, and design more reasonable talent training plans. They should jointly and effectively solve the problem of enrollment difficulty to provide higher quality education and learning environment for students.

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