

Marginalized Education: Dilemmas and Solutions for Rural Chinese Teachers

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Abstract: The difficulties that rural teachers face in China are complicated and varied. Not only do these teachers face minimal educational resources, but they also face low pay and a sense of isolation. However, underlying these quandaries is a great lot of societal duty. This study uses the literature review method to show the issues that teachers confront and provide solutions. First, the government can decrease turnover and address their fundamental requirements by boosting teachers' wages. Second, the government can deepen rural curriculum reforms to allow teachers to design content better and increase student participation. Finally, more extraordinary psychological support services from all sectors of society for rural teachers can help improve teacher productivity and mental health. In conclusion, by stressing rural education and giving essential support to rural teachers, the government may increase the quality of rural education and the development of rural areas. More importantly, boosting rural education is a critical step toward achieving equality in education between urban and rural areas.

Keywords: China, rural education, teachers' dilemmas, educational inequity

1. Introduction

Education is critical to China's complicated social structure. Education transcends basic academic endeavors to become a cornerstone of progress, with a history of appreciating wisdom and knowledge. China's fast economic progress and worldwide clout are intrinsically connected to its strong educational system. As a crucible of invention, education propels the country's technical growth and creates a competent workforce capable of driving industry. Moreover, education is a cornerstone for connecting many ethnic groups and teaching the moral ideals required for national progress.

China has pursued the goal of ensuring quality education for all its residents since time immemorial. However, behind the rising skylines and busy metropolises, one critical concern remains the arduous plight of the rural teacher. Education in rural China includes both aspiration and adversity. Rural teachers encounter hurdles despite the government's efforts to bridge the gap between urban and rural schooling. They are caught between limited resources, geographical seclusion, and the fundamental need to impart knowledge in an ever-changing world. Their difficulties stem from the stark reality of educational inequity, with urban areas benefiting from abundant resources and contemporary facilities. Rural schools, on the other hand, confront underfunding, outmoded instructional materials, and poor infrastructure.

Additionally, the cultural and social settings prevalent in rural complicate matters for teachers. Differences in urban and rural living might result in a cultural divide that affects rural educators' confidence and professional identity. This sense of isolation leads to feelings of inadequacy, limiting their capacity to reach their full potential as educators. Among these issues, the salary problem becomes particularly pressing. Rural teachers are frequently paid less than their metropolitan counterparts, despite the daily hardships they encounter. This economic disparity raises severe concerns about the value society places on rural education and those dedicated to it.

2. Teachers' Social Status

Since ancient times, China has placed high importance on education and has a long history of honoring teachers. Teachers are change agents [1]. Teachers have an important role in developing pupils' thoughts. They lead students through their academic endeavors while instilling values, ethics, and critical thinking skills necessary for navigating an ever-changing society. Beyond the classroom, teachers are cultural stewards, handing along centuries-old traditions and ideals. Their effect extends beyond academics to foster character development and the formation of responsible people who contribute positively to society. Teachers are a conduit for cultivating dreams and achieving potential in a country that sets a high value on education.

Moreover, Chinese society's urban and rural settings are polarized. Economically, the Chinese government has assisted rural communities in overcoming poverty and living a prosperous life. At the educational level, attaining educational equality is far more challenging. Rural and urban education are two distinct yet interconnected components of a country. Urban education benefits from more resources, modern technology, and a diverse range of extracurricular activities since it is strategically positioned. It introduces pupils to new cultures, ideas, and possibilities while creating a dynamic learning environment. Rural education, on the other hand, faces distinct problems such as limited resources, physical isolation, and cultural restraints. When resources are compatible, the quality of schooling in rural and urban areas remains the same.

The role of rural teachers is critical to achieving educational equality in China. They must do everything possible to give rural students access to quality education in resource-constrained and geographically remote locations, contributing to a more inclusive society. Therefore, rural education has far-reaching ramifications for societal progress and equitable development. Rural teachers are educators and catalysts for positive change in rural regions. Their contributions foster educational, social, and economic advancement, shaping the trajectory of individual lives as well as the trajectory of the country.

3. Reasons

3.1. Reason 1: Few Educational Resources

Rural teachers are vital for teaching and promoting equality in education between urban and rural areas. However, kids require assistance in the guiding stage due to the social context. First, the social milieu in which rural teachers reside adds to their difficulties. It is commonly recognized that the social climate in rural places is significantly more difficult than in urban areas. One of them is the general populace's low literacy rate. Rural teachers face distinct cultural dynamics, limited social resources, and traditional thinking methods. Considering the Liangshan Prefecture in Sichuan, China. For a long time, Liangshan Prefecture has been isolated and has few educational resources. Moreover, the average age of the masses' education is less than six years old. The rural young adult labor force has an illiteracy and semi-illiteracy rate as high as 23.48%, and a considerable section of the population does not know the Chinese language or Chinese characters [2]. People in Liangshan Prefecture, which has a low literacy rate, require assistance in providing a better education for their

children. Brown and Park show that less educated parents are less likely to educate their children [3]. Less educated parents may value education less, have inherited lesser academic performance in their children, or need to be equipped to supply extra learning inputs. They may then assign responsibility for their children's education to rural teachers. However, teaching becomes increasingly challenging for rural teachers due to low literacy rates, because their instructional content may be halted because the children's literacy is low.

3.2. Reason 2: Lack of Transportation

Second, the inadequate transportation network is a component of the social environment. Vasconcellos says that rural areas in developing nations confront severe transportation constraints due to physical isolation, social and economic situations, and usually limited transportation availability [4]. Yi et al. indicate that teachers are willing to work near their homes [5]. Lack of transportation may increase teacher turnover in remote locations. This is because a lack of dependable transportation choices may impede instructors' capacity to travel to and from school, resulting in punctuality and regular attendance issues. As a result, the teaching and learning process may be disrupted, affecting students' educational experiences.

Furthermore, insufficient mobility may limit teachers' access to professional development, workshops, and training sessions in more urban locations. A lack of exposure to new teaching methods and technological innovations may impede their professional development and the quality of education they give. This is because many rural schools are in outlying areas far from urban hubs. Teachers may feel lonely and alienated from the larger educational community due to weak transportation networks.

4. Dilemma

4.1. Dilemma 1: Unavailability of Teaching Resources

Low literacy rates and inadequate transportation networks contribute to the various quandaries that rural teachers face in their employment and daily lives. The public can better grasp the multifaceted challenges that rural teachers encounter by understanding the interplay between these basic causes and the consequent issues.

One expression of the challenge is rural teachers' limited access to resources. Educational materials significantly impact the education quality and student learning experiences. A region's absence of educational resources is frequently linked to government policies and resource distribution. The government has a significant impact on the educational environment, and its decisions directly impact the availability and allocation of resources. China's fiscal system has struggled to generate adequate money, resulting in severe dispersion of fiscal obligations and a financial crisis for poor county governments [3]. When rural governments face financial difficulties, there are significant disparities in public investment in education and teacher quality. This is because state education financing is vital to rural towns. Adequate funding can help remote schools solve deficiencies in educational facilities, teacher training, and curriculum development. Inequality can be perpetuated by insufficient funding. According to China's Ministry of Education, state education spending should be "no less than 4% of GDP" [6]. However, governmental spending on education in 2010 was only 3.66% of GDP [6]. Inadequate government investment directly impacts the quality and accessibility of rural education.

Inadequate funding directly impacts the availability of teaching resources such as textbooks, teaching aids, classroom technology, and learning materials. Teachers in rural locations are frequently compelled to employ obsolete or insufficient materials, which can impact their efficacy in the

classroom. Furthermore, fiscal changes have decreased redistributive budget transfers while increasing inequality [3]. The quality of rural education, on the other hand, will deteriorate over time.

Second, rural teachers need help with using libraries as an instructional resource. Libraries are essential in education because they are lively hubs of learning, exploration, and community engagement. Every school in a city has a library, which offers pupils a quiet room for after-school study and is outfitted with sophisticated network equipment for accessing materials. Conversely, a library may be a luxury for teachers and pupils in rural locations because libraries and bookstores are sometimes absent or inaccessible in remote rural [5]. Libraries are valuable resource centers for instructors, providing a wide range of textbooks, reference materials, and digital tools to enhance classroom education. Libraries are more than just storage facilities; they enable teachers to find inspiration, access supplemental learning materials, and experiment with new teaching approaches. In addition to materials, libraries function as professional development platforms, allowing teachers to share ideas, review curricula, and collaborate to improve teaching techniques.

Furthermore, the scarcity of libraries in rural areas restricts teacher development and denies pupils the right to read. The study shows that students in impoverished nations frequently have limited access to reading resources [5]. In their daily lives, less than 10% of rural Chinese primary school kids indicate that their parents have ever purchased their books, and approximately 70% of pupils have no more than ten books at home [5]. Rural Chinese language teachers face unique challenges when teaching because rural pupils have limited access to reading resources. Chinese language learning is dependent on the accumulation of reading. For example, there is no library in a mountain village primary school in Guizhou, and the language instructor must trek a long distance into town to assist kids with extracurricular reading. Long-term teacher complaints have resulted in a high teacher turnover rate in rural areas.

4.2. Dilemma 2: Low Wages

Teachers' wage is an essential factor to consider. Salary discrepancies in the education sector substantially impact rural schoolteacher recruitment, retention, and overall quality.

One of the signs of being in distress is poor wages for rural instructors. The rural teacher compensation conundrum is a serious issue that directly impacts educational quality and the sustainability of learning environments in remote places. An examines that teaching is a highly specialized profession [7]. Furthermore, the level of teachers' wages and income influences whether good job applicants are attracted to teaching positions and whether existing teachers stay in their positions or migrate to schools with greater income levels [7]. In other words, wages for educators in primary and secondary schools are positively related to teaching consistency. In China, educators in rural areas are paid far less than those in urban ones. This wage inequality reflects economic disparities and continues the cycle of unequal access to great education.

Society frequently regards rural teachers as selfless and outstanding. They are courageous enough to forego the city's high-quality resources to labour in the countryside to reduce China's educational disparities. On the other hand, rural teachers are working people who need to be compensated for their daily expenditures. Despite their dedication to shaping the next generation's growth, rural teachers frequently require financial assistance. They are not only rural educators, but they also act as surrogate parents for rural orphans. They need help to match their social obligations with their limited wages, frequently leading to burnout and high turnover.

Before 2001, there was little difference in average compensation levels between teachers and other public agencies. There was also a modest compensation disparity between urban and rural teachers [7]. However, the true compensation disparity results from rural primary and secondary school teachers' salary arrears. This has a major impact on the stability of rural instructors and leads to a teacher shortage in rural schools [7]. The salary disparity directly impacts the overall quality of

education in rural areas. It makes attracting and retaining talented educators difficult, resulting in higher turnover rates. From September 2012 to February 2016, for example, a total of 9,941 teachers in Yunnan province resigned to join the government or other organizations, the vast majority of whom were rural teachers [8].

Rural teachers are crucial to providing pupils with a positive learning experience. Rural schools face a teacher shortage as experienced teachers depart for greater prospects in cities or other sectors. This scarcity weakens educational continuity and exacerbates disparities between urban and rural areas. Rural teachers' low salaries are merely a surface issue; the underlying conclusion may be that rural education is undervalued. It fosters a cycle of school underinvestment, harming teachers and students who deserve the same level of education as their urban counterparts. In rural communities, the persistence of unequal access to education exacerbates existing social and economic imbalances and impedes efforts to break the cycle of poverty.

4.3. Dilemma 3: Complex Shift in Roles

Low wages are the primary cause of rural teachers' high turnover, but concealed behind the wages is a social phenomenon specific to rural China. Many children are left behind in classrooms in rural China's migrant labor-exporting towns. This poses a significant issue at the school level, as teachers must cope with day-to-day classroom management, including many left-behind students who are perceived as undisciplined and disruptive [9]. The enormous number of youngsters left behind causes unique challenges for teachers.

Rural teachers believe their muddled sense of identity contributes significantly to their challenges. Left-behind children are a direct result of China's rapid economic development and a significant social phenomenon generated by farmers' relocation to cities in the context of social transformation. Children under the age of 16 must be cared for by others since both or one of their parents must work or do business [10]. As economic opportunities entice parents to the city, more youngsters are left behind to care for relatives or themselves [10]. While this separation is meant to help families, it unintentionally presents several educational challenges for these children and teachers. Because the parents of left-behind children are missing, most of their caretakers are elderly grandparents. This is because the absence of parents hurts the heart and academic achievement of left-behind children. As a result, teachers are responsible for caring for the youngsters. Rural teachers, notably beginner teachers, must fulfill numerous roles, including educators, surrogate parents, and discipline makers, to ensure that these pupils benefit from their educational experience [11].

According to a Chinese saying, once a teacher, always a father. This aphorism imposes an unyielding load on educators. Rural teachers may be more than just knowledge dispensers or caregivers for at-risk youngsters. When they have many identities, the lines between their personal and professional lives might get blurred. This complex shift in roles may result in a desire for greater clarity in their professional identity, and so their obligations extend beyond the traditional scope of teaching. Also, teaching is regarded as one of the more emotionally taxing jobs, necessitating emotional work [12]. Emotional labor suggests that teachers must effectively regulate their emotions in the classroom. However, their hearts are more delicate because left-behind children have been separated from their parents for an extended period. They frequently react emotionally in the classroom over trivial matters. Although they may perceive this as a lag in classroom progress, for humane reasons, this is when rural teachers may need to play the role of parents to console these children. Because of the necessity to flip between the two identities for extended periods, this sense of identity ambiguity makes it difficult to strike the correct balance between academic ambitions and community expectations. It may contribute to the trend of instructors leaving the profession. This is because teachers must attend to the minor details in the lives of the students who have been left behind while sticking to educational standards. Teachers may face emotional and mental strain because of

this. Furthermore, the long-term blurring of identities between the “parent” and “teacher” jobs may impede their ability to advocate for their needs, pursue professional development opportunities, or address personal growth.

5. Solutions

While the causes indicate the complexities of the rural teacher problem, there is also a need for various initiatives by appropriate authorities to address the situation of rural teachers. The educational landscape in rural communities can be improved through focused solutions and joint efforts by key sectors to build a brighter future for teachers and students.

First, the government should raise teacher compensation in rural areas. Chronically low incomes cannot cover teachers’ fundamental living needs in rural locations due to poor living conditions. The first article in the government’s Rural Teacher Support Program discusses boosting wage subsidies for rural teachers and improving rural teachers’ living conditions [13]. Also, the government should raise the pay of rural teachers may restrict teacher migration. The leading cause for high teacher mobility in rural areas is low pay. According to studies, teachers respond to salary, and better wage reduces the risk of teacher mobility [5]. Once larger pay is provided, rural teachers are more likely to stay in their posts, resulting in better educational continuity and a more stable learning environment for kids.

Second, rural school curriculum reform should be strengthened because curriculum reform directly impacts teachers’ instructional methods and educational quality. Because China with significant disparities in schooling between regions, it is critical that the current pilot of the new curriculum and the actual situation of rural schools be considered in the curriculum’s development [14]. Rural towns frequently have distinct cultural, economic, and environmental features influencing kids’ learning experiences. If teachers apply an urban curriculum to rural children, the effects may be disastrous. Rural teachers can strengthen the connection between learning and community by connecting the curriculum with the local context, making education more relevant and applicable.

Finally, rural schools should provide some psychosocial assistance to rural teachers. The ambiguity of identification that the issue of left-behind children brings to teachers might cause some self-doubt and add to their daily workload. Parents are their children’s first teachers, and when parents are absent for an extended time, no teacher can solve the children’s psychological difficulties. Teaching and parenting raise rather than lessen the everyday workload of rural instructors. According to surveys, non-educational chores account for 33.49% of a teacher’s daily working hours [8]. Due to a lack of home education for children, these responsibilities are finally delegated to teachers. The long-term sense of identity uncertainty and high workload substantially impact teachers’ mental health, even leading to depression.

It is critical to equip teachers with psychosocial assistance. The isolation of their employment, along with the weighty duties they bear, frequently leads to increasing stress and burnout. Psychosocial support improves teachers’ well-being and directly impacts their teaching performance by fostering stronger teacher-student interactions, enhancing classroom dynamics, and fostering a more positive learning environment.

6. Conclusion

In the end, the issues faced by rural Chinese teachers show a multidimensional socioeconomic problem that reaches far beyond classroom challenges. These educators are the lifeblood of education in distant regions, where they must contend with a complicated interplay of isolation, limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and societal views. As a result, their well-being, professional development, and educational quality are frequently threatened. Nonetheless, they have shown

tenacity in the face of adversity, as evidenced by their undying dedication to their students and rural education.

However, solutions to these quandaries are still feasible. Government help in raising rural teachers' wages, government commitment to revising rural curricula, and psychosocial support for teachers from all societal sectors are critical components of creating an enabling environment that empowers rural teachers. By emphasizing the importance of the teacher's role, the standing of rural teachers can be elevated, and a new generation of educators can be inspired to enter the field, bringing new perspectives and enthusiasm to the task at hand.

Furthermore, the rural Chinese educational environment is intricately related to the greater picture of China's development and prosperity. Closing the educational divide between urban and rural communities is a moral necessity and a critical driver of equality, economic prosperity, and social cohesion. When rural instructors are given additional development tools and resources, rural kids can receive a quality education, helping to break the cycle of rural poverty and contribute to the prosperity of their region.

The difficulties that China's rural teachers face in achieving fairness in urban and rural education must be addressed. Their condition is a microcosm of larger socioeconomic concerns that necessitate the collaboration of governments, educational institutions, communities, and individuals. Finally, the situation of China's rural teachers is bearable. Governments can pave the path for a more inclusive, empowered, and successful future for rural educators and the kids they serve by working together with collective determination and a commitment to educational justice.

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