

Challenges in China's Integration of Rural and Urban Education

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Abstract: The Chinese government's promotion of the integration of urban and rural education is an important measure to solve the problem of urban-rural education imbalance in China. However, there are still some imbalanced issues. Therefore, this article first describes and analyzes the existing imbalances in the construction of educational integration through literature analysis, and then proposes suggestions to address these issues. According to research, there are issues in combining urban and rural education include the loss of students, uneven distribution of educational resources and funds, and gaps in teaching staff. In response to these issues, rural areas need to achieve local urbanization. The government should adhere to the principle of "rural priority", evenly allocate education resources and increase investment in education funds. Additionally, government should innovate and improve the rural teacher team. The imbalance in education between urban and rural areas in China can only be resolved in this way, which will also help China better promote the integration of urban and rural education.

Keywords: urban and rural education, imbalance, integration

1. Introduction

The implementation of rural revitalization is a major decision and plan of the Communist Party of China. Rural rejuvenation cannot be achieved unless the disparity between urban and rural education in China is addressed and efforts are made to integrate urban and rural education. Prioritizing the advancement of rural education, it is required to construct and enhance the institutional framework for the growth of urban-rural integration. Chinese government is always coming up with new policies and reforms to address the disparity between rural and urban education. However, there are still some problems in the mainstreaming of different regions construction, which seriously restrict the promotion of rural schooling. This unbalanced appearance in China can only be completely changed by identifying and resolving these issues. This article analyzes the phenomena and reasons in the integrated construction through literature analysis and puts forward suggestions. Firstly, it analyzes the current situation and reasons for losing students in rural communities. The issues and causes of the Chinese government's uneven allocation of educational resources and funding are then examined. The analysis then moves on to the issues and motivations underlying the rural teacher's group. Finally, corresponding suggestions are proposed based on these three existing problems and reasons.

2. The Current Situation

The lag in rural education has always been a longstanding problem in China. On the morning of May 19, 2020, the Ministry of Education held a press conference and announced that a total of 2767 counties in China have achieved basic balanced development of compulsory education, accounting for 95.32% of the total number of counties [1]. This shows that because to China's ongoing reform and improvement of its educational system, the majority of pupils in rural areas have access to equal educational chances. But problems faced by China's education are the prominent contradictions caused by the dual division of urban and rural areas, such as uneven public education services, unequal distribution of teaching professionals and the distribution of educational resources. The impact of the countryside environment and the effects of the government system are the two main causes of the underdeveloped teaching in the village [2].

2.1. Severe Loss of Students in Rural Areas

The number and caliber of pupils impact how rural school education develops because they are the basis of education. On the one hand, a lot of rural parents think that there is a big difference between the quality, approaches, outcomes, and conditions of education in rural and urban areas. Therefore, in order to provide their children with better education, more and more parents are even willing to spend more money to send their children to study in cities. Due to the impact of rural economic development, many parents choose to work in cities. In order to make it easier to take care of their children, they choose to let their children enter urban life and study with them. On the other hand, rural schools have outdated hardware conditions and relatively rudimentary educational facilities, such as a lack of teaching equipment like media, projectors, and experimental instruments. Additionally, the teaching philosophy of rural teachers is outdated. Influenced by traditional adaptive education concepts, rural teachers still regard high scores as the only criterion for measuring students, causing excessive pressure and increased burden on students. Subsequently, there are issues such as the mental health of accompanying children, the shortage of educational teachers in the destination, tight school buildings, and large class sizes. On the surface, it appears that rural students can enjoy high-quality teaching environments and resources in cities. However, in practice, the customized needs of students are diminished as a result of the huge student body and class size, which has not had the desired impact on high-quality education in cities. Moreover, whether the education of accompanying children will be restricted by local policies and the attitude of the moving location towards accompanying children should also be considered. Taking Beijing and Shanghai as examples, in the past decade, the enrollment rates in Beijing and Shanghai have decreased due to a decrease in transfer rates from primary to secondary school and from junior to high school [3]. This is likely due to local policy restrictions on immigration, which means that children who move with them cannot attend local high schools, forcing them to return to their hometowns for high school education. The city administration may have a negative attitude toward providing a fair education for accompanying children as a result of the financial burden that immigration has placed on the community.

2.2. Differences in Education Resources

In China, the availability of educational resources varies significantly between urban and rural locations. The primary carriers of educational resources—which are essential to the growth of rural education—include educational money, teacher resources, and teaching resources. Firstly, there is education funding, which is the primary resource for promoting the development of schools. Education funding can be used for infrastructure construction, teacher salary distribution, student education subsidies, daily operation of educational institutions, and other aspects. On the one hand, support for national financial education comes from all tiers of municipal finance in addition to the

federal government. There is a sizable difference in education progress between urban and rural areas as a result of the various economic growth standards in different regions, which cause education funds in various regions to display varied investment scales. On the other hand, rural governments largely rely on imposing informal taxes on students to compensate for their meager education budgets. Between 1990 and 2000, tuition fees, miscellaneous fees, and rural education surcharges paid by parents became the main source of funding for compulsory education in rural areas [4]. Therefore, the policy of dispersed education funds has brought excessive economic burden to rural residents. The second point is the teacher resources. Teachers are an important subject in educational activities and greatly affect the effectiveness of education, which will be emphasized in Section 2.3. The third point is teaching resources, which are important assistants in the teaching process. Divided into software resources and hardware resources, software resources mainly include high-quality courses, practical platforms, teaching modes, etc. Hardware resources mainly include teaching equipment such as computers and multimedia. Particularly in terms of the quantity of books and computers in classrooms, rural areas currently lag behind metropolitan areas in terms of the space used by primary and secondary schools, the number of classrooms, and the number of schools building campus networks. The key causes of this phenomena are the advanced infrastructure for teaching, the high quality of instructors, the high degree of urban economic development, and the relatively lagging economic development in rural areas.

2.3. Uneven Distribution of Teacher Resources

The key to implementing educational work lies in teachers. Improving the overall quality and educational quality of rural teachers is an important way for rural education to continue to develop. There are still many problems for rural teachers in China. Firstly, due to the influence of rural environmental factors, some teachers in rural areas have weak sense of responsibility and moral awareness. A small number of teachers lack work enthusiasm. Their educational ideas are outdated, and their teaching methods are single, which affects the healthy growth and development of students. Second, there is a sizable age gap between instructors in cities and countryside, and there is a considerable difference in the number of teachers between the two. For example, there are 76 teachers in a village level primary school or teaching site in a certain school district, and 30 teachers over 46 years old, accounting for 40% of the total. For example, a certain school is a nine-year school with 36 teachers, of which 9 are over 50 years old, accounting for 25% of the total number of teachers in the school [5]. The average age of teachers in rural schools is over 46 years old, which seriously restricts and affects the improvement of teaching management efficiency and teaching quality in schools. In recent years, due to the large number of teachers admitted to primary and secondary schools and kindergartens in urban schools, some teachers with higher quality and strong professional level are recruited to teach in urban primary and secondary schools every year. Some teachers in music, sports, and aesthetics, as well as backbone teachers in township central middle schools and kindergartens are recruited to urban areas [5]. It leads to a shortage of professional structure for rural school teachers, and the phenomenon of one teacher concurrently serving multiple subjects. Between urban and rural areas, this phenomenon has increasingly expanded the disparity in educational level and teaching quality [6]. Finally, there is a lack of educational innovation among rural teachers. Due to underdeveloped transportation and communication in rural areas, rural teachers lack professional learning resources. They have incomplete knowledge structures, and lack a broad disciplinary perspective. Although some rural school teachers' educational qualifications have basically met the standards, most of them have been obtained through correspondence education, self-taught exams, and the transfer of private teachers to formal positions. Many teachers have not received strict teacher education.

3. Suggestions

Suggestions are proposed to address the serious loss of students in rural areas, significant gaps in education and teaching, uneven allocation of funds and resources, and gaps in teaching staff in the above-mentioned urban-rural education integration construction.

3.1. Implementing the New Development Concept and Realizing Urbanization on the Spot

Local urbanization is the most effective way to solve the problem of student outflow, which can effectively avoid the increase in the number of children who come to study and move in cities. At the same time, it can alleviate the pressure on teaching resources in urban areas caused by population mobility and maintain the psychological health of children who move in. Local urbanization can effectively solve the problem of “rural empty, urban crowded” from the root [1]. Firstly, the government should increase investment in rural facilities, such as improving the conditions of student dormitories and adding hardware needs for students’ learning such as libraries, laboratories, and sports equipment. This can not only meet the needs of students, but also reassure parents. At the same time, it can enhance the standard of instruction and essentially resolve the issue of student exodus. Secondly, the school should do a good job in publicity work to strengthen family school communication. The school should properly train parents to help them establish a healthy and correct school selection concept from the perspective of family education philosophy, education methods, education values, etc. [7]. Through two-way communication, parents can overcome the crowd mentality and achieve rational choice. In order to enhance parents’ trust in rural schools, and thus solve the problem of student turnover. At the same time, schools should implement preferential policies and provide special care for special groups. For example, schools can establish records of left behind students, allowing teachers to comprehensively record their learning, psychology, and behavioral habits. Additionally, regular online teacher meetings should be held for left behind students to strengthen cooperation between families and schools and promote the effective development of rural education on the basis of refined education management. Finally, it is necessary to change the traditional education mode in rural areas. On the one hand, rural teachers should develop teaching methods that are suitable for the rural students. For example, schools should regularly hold collective seminars to exchange ideas based on the new curriculum standards and the characteristics of various subject courses. Different students should be managed in a hierarchical manner, and on the basis of optimizing the teaching mode. Every rural student should receive personalized education. On the other hand, the school should innovate the learning concept. Rural students have poor learning ability, learning habits and practical ability. Therefore, the school should change the single teaching method into carry out more group activities and extracurricular practical activities, and guide students to active learning. This can ultimately lead to a balanced growth of urban and rural education by piquing pupils’ favour in studying as well as improving their learning outcomes.

3.2. Maintain the Idea of “Prioritizing Undeveloped Areas” and Distribute Educational Resources Fairly

Firstly, the country should prioritize the development of rural economy and narrow regional economic disparities. Rural areas must insist on vigorously developing productive forces. The government should encourage the masses to change traditional concepts and support poverty alleviation through education in order to promote the sustainable development of rural education. Secondly, the government should increase financial investment in rural education, especially by strengthening supervision and guidance in the process of financial investment, allocation, and use. Finally, the government should tilt towards underdeveloped regions when allocating educational resources, especially providing more support to impoverished and disadvantaged households in rural areas [6].

The government can employ contemporary technical tools to enhance the quality of teaching in undeveloped and villages in addition to increasing expenditure in these sectors. For example, online teaching, remote learning, or live streaming teaching can be used to enable students from underdeveloped and rural areas to enjoy high-quality teachers and teaching resources in the city [8].

3.3. Innovate and Improve the Teaching Staff

The Chinese government has issued a series of policies, including the 2006 special Position Plan, the 2007 Free teacher Education Plan, and other preferential policies to guide and encourage excellent teachers and graduates to teach in rural areas. Especially in 2015, the Chinese government issued a national document named “Rural Teachers Support Plan” with the goal of retaining rural teachers and encouraging the recruitment of outstanding metropolitan educators for countries [9]. Using Shijiazhuang City, Hebei Province as an example, three recommendations are made to raise the level of teaching staff as a whole and support the advance of pedagogy in a balanced manner. Firstly, there is the alliance school pairing assistance activity. Construct a “1+2+X” collaborative development model, where “1” refers to one high-quality school directly under the city, “2” refers to two high-quality schools in two school districts, and “X” refers to several weaker schools in the school district that require assistance [10]. There are management exchange, research and training linkage, resource sharing, and teacher cooperation between schools, namely there are regular discussions, job exchanges, exchange of management and teaching experience between urban and rural schools. It will build the formation of a shared resource pool. The second is the sharing and interaction of online teaching. The resource platform consists of three systems: educational resource platform, on-demand recording system, and synchronous classroom system. The education resource platform consists of three parts: the cloud teaching research theme, the resource list, and collective lesson preparation. The online interactive platform can help rural teachers receive online training, which will raise their level of instruction and overall quality. The third is the training of Golden Seed teachers, which entails combining online and offline teacher preparation in the early stages to raise the general level of rural educators’ abilities, and undertaking assessment and evaluation in the latter stages. Schools should also follow the practice of combining annual assessments with ongoing job evaluations. In the previous school, instructors’ salaries, professional title promotions, recognition, and prizes should be based on the assessment results [6]. The three measures taken by Shijiazhuang City to improve the overall quality of the teaching staff have achieved great success, providing a good case for the improvement of rural teaching staff in China. In addition, the government should also vigorously increase the salary and benefits of rural teachers and provide living subsidies and subsidies to rural teachers. Moreover, the government should increase publicity efforts by broadcasting the touching stories of grassroots teachers through the media, in order to attract more ambitious young people to join the rural education team.

4. Conclusions

This study proposes some current situations of imbalanced teaching in the cities and villages, like student loss, uneven distribution of educational resources, and gaps in teaching staff. At the same time, this article also analyses the reasons for these problems. First, the loss of students is mainly due to family reasons and rural school environment reasons. Second, the uneven distribution of educational resources is mainly due to insufficient government funding and constraints from factors such as rural economic development. Third, the main difference in teacher strength is the urban-rural differences in teacher recruitment, and the psychological factors of teachers are influenced by the rural environment. In response to the above issues, this article also proposes solutions. The government should increase investing money for countries. In addition, the government should

strengthen supervision and guidance in the process of financial investment, distribution, and use. At the same time, government should support and relief efforts for primary and secondary schools in rural areas in order to improve the rural education environment. The aim for rural government is to retain students and also retain excellent teachers. Positive connections should be established between city and countryside in order to achieve the sharing of educational resources between urban and rural areas. This study provides ideas for the education reform of the Chinese government. As stated in this study, education is the foundation of a country's development. Only by narrowing the urban-rural education gap and building an integrated urban-rural education system can China provide strong talent guarantee and intellectual support for regional economic development and social progress. It is hoped that in the future, the advancement of teaching in different regions in China will be more balanced, achieving true educational equity.

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