

Education Inequality in China between Rural and Urban Area

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Abstract:

Education inequality is a pressing and undeniable social issue in China, where disparities in educational opportunities and resources are starkly evident between urban and rural regions. Public policies and societal perceptions significantly influence the allocation of educational resources, resulting in a polarized educational landscape. This essay aims to delve into the intricacies of educational stratification caused by various policies, utilizing a Quantitative Methodological approach to address three pivotal questions. Firstly, it seeks to identify the key factors contributing to the unequal distribution of educational opportunities and resources across the country. Secondly, the essay will explore the profound impact of educational inequality on the socio-economic development of both urban and rural areas in China. Thirdly, the effectiveness of government initiatives aimed at redistributing resources to bridge these educational gaps will be scrutinized. This includes evaluating the success of policies such as the “Two Sessions” system, which aims to provide equal access to quality education for all children, regardless of their geographical location or socio-economic background. By addressing these questions, the essay will conclude that while education inequality is indeed a pervasive issue in China, there is a critical need to understand the root causes and impacts to develop targeted and effective solutions. It will highlight that the provinces with the greatest demand for educational resources are often those that are most underserved, emphasizing the urgency for policy reform and resource reallocation to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all.

Keywords: Sociology; Social Studies; Inequality; Equity; Diversity Education.

1. Introduction

Education is a significant part in social composition. It is not only just a social institution, but also an important part to create social stratification. The Industrial Revolution, along with the scientific and technological revolutions, shows us that skilled individuals play a crucial role in advancing national growth, and that an educated population is key to sustaining a country's development [1]. On the one hand, education create social institutions to socialize people. In sociology, socialization includes three stages, family, school and workplace. Education is the secondary stage of socialization; it teaches people some fundamental academic concepts and basic social norms. On the other hand, education is a tool of social stratification. Even though education can't fully decide people's fate, but it's an important tool to select and spreading people into different groups. Generally, the people who have better education sources and experiences will own more privilege in the process of social stratification.

Social stratification seems very equal to the people who have access to the educational resources, but not equal to the people who have less chance to access the educational resources. It is unfortunate that the unequal separation of education resources promotes the social stratification to be more unequal. There are a huge number of people can't get the education resources they need. This is what China is facing right now toward the problem of social stratification. This research will explain the current Chinese education system and residence registration system to identify why does the current residence registration promotes the inequality in Chinese education system.

2. China's Gao Kao and Hukou System

Before discussing about the problem of inequality in Chinese education. We need to know about two important factors that leads to these issues, which are Gao Kao and Hukou System. Gaokao, which is a Chinese abbreviation of "National Higher Education Entrance Examinations", is a standardized test system in the college admission system in China. This is testing system plays a significant role in shaping many of Chinese student's future academic and career development. The Gaokao system was first introduced in People's Republic of China, and it has been suspended during the ten years of the disaster of Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. During Deng Xiaoping's leadership, the Gaokao system was reformed in 1977 as a start of the new development of Chinese education system until now. Students are required to get tested in science subjects and Humanities subjects. In recent year, some region of China started to reform the Gaokao test system

by allowing students more flexibility in choosing subjects. After choosing their study area and subjects, the preparation of Gaokao test is intense for many of Chinese students. The preparation of Gao Kao test often begins years in advance, many of Chinese students attend extra tutoring session after regular school time to improve their chances of achieving high scores. Plus, regular Chinese high school are largely oriented toward preparing students for this exam. In these schools, students need to take many of mock exam to master their skill of taking the exam. Also, their parents are deeply invested in their child's education. It's not uncommon for families to move closers to better school or to invest lots of money into tutoring and getting additional resources. For many parents, a high Gaokao score is seen as the ticket to a better life for their child.

The importance of Gaokao scores in determining university admissions cannot be overstated. China's Universities are ranked with "985" and "211" universities being the most prestigious. These universities receive more government funding and offer better job opportunities after graduation. However, students who don't score as well may only get into less prestigious schools. Even though some universities are trying to offer different way to admit students, the Gaokao score is still the most important factor for many students in Chinese College admission.

After almost 50 years of reforming the Gaokao test policy, there are some reformations to address some of the issues with the system. However, the state council's Gaokao reforms did not attempt to address hukou-related institutional Barrier [2]. For instance, some provinces have adopted a system where students can choose from variety of subjects instead of strictly choosing from science and humanities subjects. Also in the past, students in big cities like Beijing or Shanghai had an easier requirement to getting into top schools in China because they have lower requirements exam score and easier exam paper. Now, changes are being made to start to reform and renew the whole system. Despite all these changes, many people still criticize the Gaokao system by arguing that it focuses too much on memorization and test taking rather than encouraging student to think critically or solving the real social problem. Even though there are some weakness of this system, Gaokao exam system is still a window for the students who were born with poverty. And those students need to face a greater obstacle to go to the top school than Gaokao exam--the Hukou system.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Data Collection and Sampling Plan

This study is research based on secondary data; it uses

existing data rather than collecting new data. It uses data from all 27 provinces and 4 province-level municipalities in China. Here are some main sources from those data in data collection.

Sixth National Population: Data on child population, including age groups and dependency ratios.

China Statistical Yearbook (2012): Data on economic growth which contains GDP and per capita.

China Education Statistical Yearbook (2010): Data on educational resources like classroom, libraries, and teacher-student ratio.

China Educational Finance Statistical Yearbook (2010): Data on government spending on education.

3.2 Data Analysis Plan

The analysis uses province-level data, it covers all 27 provinces and 4 major cities in China.

Analysis Method: This study uses a statistical method called OLS regression analysis to determine how economic growth (measured by GDP) and government spending on education inflect the availability of educational resources for children.

Independent variable: Economic development (GDP) and government spending.

Dependent Variables: Availability and need for educational resources like classroom, books, computer, and the overall quality of education (teacher's qualifications).

Process: This study first put resources in three categories, school buildings, teaching equipment and human resources. Then, look at these sources and data for primary and secondary schools separately.

4. Hukou System's Influences on the Inequality in Chinese Education System

Hukou system is a household registration system in China that has been in enforced for more than 60 years in the People's Republic of China. It's a system to assign each Chinese citizen a registration based on their place of birth by categorizing people into two gain groups, urban resident and rural residents, in addition, each individual's Hukou is tied to a specific location. If someone has an urban Hukou, they are more privileged and eligible for benefits and social services in that city, such as medical insurance, housing, and education opportunity. Conversely, if someone has a rural Hukou, they are eligible for those benefits in the rural area where registered. Which further means the rural resident are not able to access the many of the social resources in the city. Plus, this system makes it difficult for rural resident to move freely within

the country and access the same level of social resources. According to Zhang: "The household registration system, since its first implementation in 1958, has played a key role in discrimination against the rural population, restricting their mobility and access to social benefits. It has left the large population of internal rural migrants in a rather disadvantaged situation and has, therefore, caused various social problems" [3].

Besides of those inequality, one of the biggest areas where the Hukou system creates inequality is in education. In China, the access and registration for schools is largely determined by a family's Hukou registration records. Students are only allowed to attend and register for schools in the area where their Hukou is registered. However, for the rural resident family who migrate to cities for work, the situation is much more challenging. Since the Hukou is still tied to a rural area, they need to face numerous barriers to enrolling their children to local urban schools. If they can't get into the local urban students, they need to either stay behind their rural hometown to attend local school with limited educational resources or they attend migrant schools in cities with the issue of lower funding and lower educational quality compared to the regular urban schools. However, what is the reason of causing those parents with rural resident sending their children into urban schools? Rural school, especially in very undeveloped regions in China, are suffering from a lack of funding and educational resources. According to "An Analysis of education inequality in China": "Moreover, as a result of the scarcity of educational resources (especially for good quality educational resources most prevalent in urban areas), such negative effect from income inequality causes advantaged groups to receive a disproportionate amount of the available good quality education [4]". These schools in rural areas often have outdated and old facilities, and fewer qualified teachers, and limited access to the current modern teaching materials. As a result of these poor study environments, students in rural areas generally receive a lower quality education compared to the urban schools. This gap of education becomes even more serious as student reach high school and prepare for the Gaokao exam. Urban students usually have access to better educational resources to help them better prepare for the exam, while rural students often struggle to compete with urban students because the lack of the educational resources. More importantly, the Hukou system also affect college admission. The overall requirement of Gaokao score for college admission can be different depending on where you are from. For instance, students in big cities like Beijing or Shanghai often need lower scores to get into top universities than students from central areas of China. This makes it easier for urban students to go to the best universities,

while rural students have to work harder for the same opportunities. Thus, with those policies, the Hukou system keeps many rural families stuck into a cycle of poverty because rural children often receive lower-quality education. They tend to do worse on the Gaokao exam, which limits their chances of getting into a good university. Without a university degree, it is harder and more challenging for them to get a well-paying job, and this pattern continues into the next generation.

As a conclusion, the Hukou system has caused significant inequality in China, especially in education. It creates unfair advantages for urban children over rural and migrant children. The Hukou system continues to widen the gap between rural and urban China, making it difficult for millions of children to access the education they need for a better future.

5. Possible Solution and Prediction for the Future Chinese Education

One solution is to make it easier for people to change their Hukou. Right now, it is hard for people from rural areas to get urban Hukou, which means they can't access city services like education. By simplifying the process, migrant workers and their families could change their registration to the city they live in. They would allow their children to attend urban schools and receive the same benefits as city kids. Some cities are already testing. For instance, in places like Chengdu, people can apply for an urban Hukou after living in the city for a certain period. By expanding this new form of reformation to more cities would help migrant families settle in cities more easily and give their children better education resources and opportunities. Another solution is to invest more money in rural schools. Rural schools often don't have enough resources, like good teaching facilities or qualified teachers. By putting more funding into these schools, the Chinese can improve the quality of education in rural areas. This would mean rural children wouldn't have to move to cities just to get a better education. Improving rural schools would also reduce the pressure on urban schools. The government could also set national standards for education, so that the quality of education is the same in both urban and rural areas. This could mean they can take the same curriculum and resources across the country. The Gaokao could also be fairer to those students. Currently, students in cities like Beijing need lower scores to get into top universities than students from rural areas. Plus, migrant children often can't get into public schools in cities, so they end up in underfunded migrant schools. The government could improve these schools or create special programs to help mi-

grant children get the same quality of education as urban children. Urban schools could also be more flexible with their admission process, it would allow migrant children to attend without making it too difficult for their parents to qualify. A more extreme solution would be to get rid of the Hukou system entirely. If people did not have to be registered in specific areas to access resources. Everyone would have the same access to education, healthcare and housing, no matter where they were born. This would allow families to move freely across the country without worrying about losing benefits. The actions of changes need to take times and careful planning, as the system is deeply tied to how local government manage resources. However, abolishing the Hukou system could lead to society with fair where everyone has the same opportunities.

As Chinese government continues to work on reforming the Hukou system, the country's education system is likely to undergo significant changes in the coming years. The Hukou system, which ties individual's access to public resources including education, has created long disparities between urban and rural students. Plus, based on the article "Child Population, economic development and regional inequality of education resources in China: "Central government's redistribution is only a fraction of local spending which is not sufficient in the presence of massive economic inequality in China [5]". However, with the government's growing efforts to address these inequalities, the future of Chinese education is in a new transformation. One of the most important changes likely occur in the future of Chinese education is greater equality in access to education for both urban and rural students. For decades, students in cities have had access to better schools, more qualified teachers and compared to those in rural areas. This is largely due to the Hukou system, which limits the ability of rural students to join urban schools unless their families move and secure urban Hukou registration.

6. Conclusion

As a conclusion, Education Inequality is an undeniable problem in Chinese education system. The province with greater demand for educational resources are more lacking in educational resources. If Chinese government wants to solve the problem of education equality, starting with the Hukou system is a good choice. They need to change the Hukou system and make other big adjustments to better support migrant children in cities. This will help ensure they get equal educational opportunities and avoid falling into a new cycle of poverty related to their education.

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