



Reflection on Multifaceted Inequalities Manifested in Chinese Contemporary Education —A Comparative Analysis from Four Aspects of Policy, Social Class, Region, and Gender

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Abstract. National development and social harmony are inseparable from the progress of education. Every country has attached attention to education because of its irreplaceable importance, all countries, including China, try their best to pursue equality in education. Therefore, educational inequality is one of the most common topics in pedagogy research, and countless scholars have done relevant research. However, with the change of the times, the inequality in Chinese contemporary education is still obvious. On account of the principle of seeking truth from facts, through the analysis of foreign scholar's research on inequality in foreign countries, the commonness and particularity between them and the causes of education inequality in China are found and summarized. This article starts from the current situation of educational inequality and tries to find the real reasons and essence behind the phenomenon, to discover the factors leading to educational inequality. Then the current study selects and discusses the four most obvious perspectives that influence educational inequality in China: policy, region, social class, and gender, and finally puts forward some views and suggestions on eliminating educational inequality.

Keywords: education · inequality · factors

1 Introduction

Education is the foundation of a century-long project. Nowadays, no country would question the role of it in national strength and social development, and every nation has attached importance to education because education is related to the livelihood of every member of society. Because of the irreplaceable importance of education, all countries try their best to pursue equality in education, so the existing problem of inequality has attracted much attention. Therefore, educational inequality is one of the most common topics in pedagogy research, and countless scholars have done relevant research. Equality in education refers to the reasonable principles or norms on which the state allocates educational resources [1]. Each person owes the same opportunity to attend classes,

be treated equally in the process of receiving education, has equal chances for rewards and this is a common thought among countries. On the other hand, according to the National Committee for the Examination and Approval of Scientific and Technological terms, inequality in education represents that citizens fail to enjoy equal rights because of various factors such as ethnicity, gender, social class, religion, and so on in education process [2].

An analysis of the link between education and income in South Africa in 1993 shows that the labor market had a strong influence on the education of Africans, particularly in primary and secondary education. The return on investment in education is about 15–21% [3], which is around half the average in South Africa, reflecting not an absolute positive relationship between education and income but a very low labor-market opportunity cost caused by widespread youth unemployment. This also explains why many students from poor families drop out of school after only a few years. They are limited by the economy and time. Because the policies to reduce the cost of education have little impact on poor families, there is still a long way to go before the equal distribution of educational capital can be realized.

The characteristics that may be involved in “discrimination” in educational provision are broad. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child explicitly mentions gender, race, and disability, which may have implications for education inequality, as well as family income and place of residence. Besides, research and data that emerged in the late 20th century confirm that there are considerable gaps in education [4]. Access to higher education shows lots of differences related to social backgrounds in the West. In Poland and Hungary children with the highest social status were nearly four times to have achieved higher education or higher education qualifications, while those from non-professional families were twice as likely [5].

In the United States, some researchers believe that the bottom class culture is unique in social values and organizational forms. Although there are many different definitions of this. Most researchers believe that working-class and low-income families do not attach as much importance to education as middle-class families. Other analysts say parental involvement in school education can be traced back to some educational institutions. Some claim the school system of discrimination. They make middle-class parents feel more welcome than the working-class and lower-class parents [6].

Then look at some of the educational inequities in Japan in Asia. Private hagwons have a long history in East Asia, and they now behave much like Japanese Juku. They stem from the expansion of secondary education. In the late 20th century it was often mistranslated in English as a “cram school”. Although years of government researches show that they learn mainly by cram learning, the private tutoring system is still a potential abstract concept, it is in a dangerous position between the education system and the economic system, resulting in education anxiety at the same time. Also because it supports control technology, such as examination and teaching methods, added to their survival anxiety. Not everyone can enjoy private education reflects the unfairness in Japanese education culture [7].

From the above discussion, we can see that educational inequity in the world is a topic of great concern and has many influential factors: gender, social class, race, disability, economy, and so on. The unfairness is particularly evident in China as well. China is a

country with a late start to modern education but rapid development. The factors leading to education inequality in China are partly the same. However, due to the particularity of China's education and the different development milestones, some different situations are reflected. For example, the educational inequality caused by China's unique college entrance examination system needs to be analyzed separately. First, the additional score system is exploited for certain interests, and there may even be the existence of entitlement in practice, further exacerbating inequality. Second, the college entrance exam is linked to household registration. The same exams, unified scoring, while different regions of the admission score are not the same [8]. Take Tsinghua University, for example, the difficulty for candidates from other provinces is completely different from those with Beijing hukou. Similar cases will be analyzed in detail in the text. Based on previous literature, it can be seen that there are many studies on educational inequality in foreign countries, but few in China, and no systematic understanding has been formed. Therefore, this article aims to sort out some previous studies and select the four most obvious angles that influence educational inequality in China: Policy, region, social class, and gender, to discuss the current situation and offer insights that will help readers better understand and maximize the elimination of this kind of inequality.

2 Four Major Factors Affecting Educational Inequality

2.1 The Influence of Policy on Educational Inequality

Perfect education policies are very significant for the achievement of the aim of equality in education [9]. However, there are many irrationalities in China's educational policies, which seriously hinder the process of equal education. In the late 1970s, the state introduced a preferential policy of "concentrating on running key schools well". It widened the gap between the parallel development of schools and increased educational inequality. Besides this, the college entrance examination system also leads to educational inequality. First, the additional score system is exploited for certain interests, and there may even be the existence of entitlement in practice, thus exacerbating inequality. Some students in order to get extra points and enjoy favorable policies in the college entrance examination, their parents would start earlier to get the rural hukou through guanxi or money, but actually they are fake hukou. Second, the college entrance exam is relevant to household registration. The same exams, unified scoring, while different regions of the admission score are not the same [10]. Take Tsinghua University, for example, the difficulty for candidates from other provinces is completely different from those with Beijing hukou. To be specific, in 2020, Tsinghua University's admission score for Beijing students is 680 points, while Henan students need to score more than 704 points to be admitted. This explains why nonlocal examinees should pay more energy and effort to gain the same outcome, which shows unequal treatment.

According to the 2004 Blue Book on Chinese Education Inequality, "Tsinghua University and Peking University, which have the most sufficient higher education resources in the country, are even more impressive. For example, in 2010, only 1002 of the 5080 undergraduate students enrolled in these two colleges were from rural areas, or 18.8%, in sharp comparison to the same year when about 60% of China's population lives in rural areas. Admissions data from Peking University shows that out of China's 900 million

rural residents, only a few students are admitted to Peking University, and not as many as those from the Beijing area alone [11]. As we all know, this situation is not the result of fair competition. The examination system is the most important part of the education system. Among all kinds of examinations, the college entrance examination is particularly important and outstanding. However, the gaokao system also leads to educational inequality,

2.2 The Influence of Region on Educational Inequality

The imbalance of economic basis leads to the skewed distribution of educational resources between regions, which is another important factor affecting educational equity. Firstly, China is now on a dual track, with a fast-growing coastal region and a poor interior growing at a lower rate, so the development of education in coastal areas and inland areas is seriously unbalanced and naturally unequal [12]. Secondly, most of China's minority areas are located in lagging mountainous areas, insufficient financial supply causes education financing difficult, and investment in education is extremely limited. The Chinese government has given special attention to ethnic minority areas in many aspects. As can be seen from the admission conditions of the national college entrance examination, ordinary college students of ethnic minorities can enjoy preferential treatment that is more than 20 points lower than that of Han students. However, it is not difficult to see that the contents of textbooks in primary and secondary schools are also heavily chinesitized, most of which have been exposed to Han students, while contents about minorities are rarely included, thus losing the unique features of ethnic minorities, which in a way contains the tendency of chinesization and disrespect of ethnic minority culture. To take care of the life, culture, and religious feelings of ethnic minorities, it is suggested that the future textbooks for primary and secondary schools should be compiled according to the classification of ethnic groups, and the content should pay attention to the representation of ethnic groups and ethnic characteristics, to remove the color of big localization as far as possible. Thirdly, low educational attainment and low rewards for education in rural areas are the two main factors contributing to rural-urban inequality [13]. To eliminate such negative effects, we need to break the dual social structure in urban and rural areas and reduce the gap in educational resources between regions. For example, the government should reduce the support and preference for urban hukou, increase educational investment in rural areas, and provide financial assistance and additional subsidies to teachers teaching in rural areas to attract high-quality teachers, thus improving teaching levels. In addition, we can further encourage young people to work as teachers in the central and western regions. Many universities sent some normal university students to Xinjiang to volunteer teaching, which is a good measure to provide them with internship opportunities and promote regional integration.

2.3 The Influence of Social Class on Educational Inequality

There are three different classes in China, which reflect the imbalance of income levels and the gap between rich people and the poor in modern society. Being rich symbolizes having mass property, possession of commodities, stuff, houses, and so on [14]. The essence of this gap between the rich and the poor is the difference between the possession

of the property and the possession of wealth. The gap between the rich and the poor has been a serious problem since ancient China. Reform and opening up for 30 years, our country has made a remarkable achievement, the quality of people's lives has greatly improved, and it is planned to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society by the end of the century. However, the huge gap between the rich and the poor remains unresolved. China currently has one of the widest gaps between rich and poor in the world. What's worse, the gap between the rich and the poor leads indirectly to inequality in education. Take the impact of the gap between rich and poor on preschool education as an example. Many capable parents in urban areas will choose to send their children to school in advance to receive systematic preschool education so that their children can win the starting line that their children start education at the age of three on average. In rural areas, however, the situation is quite different. Children usually have to wait until they are older than normal, even five or six years old, to go to school. Due to environmental constraints, parents are busy with work and have no free time to pick up their children. In rural areas, there is no school bus to support school picking up students. Therefore, parents can only dare to let their children go to school when their children have certain self-care abilities and can go to school by themselves. In this view, the enlightenment of urban students is much earlier than that of rural students, so children of different classes cannot enjoy equal education. In addition, education inequality caused by the gap between the rich and the poor not only exists in urban and rural areas but also exists in cities. Just as the old saying goes that "knowledge changes fate" if children in urban areas do not have money, they lack education as much as children in rural areas. If they have no access to higher education, then they can only repeat the fate of their parents who are backward, leading to a vicious circle. Such a circle is not conducive to achieving harmonious economic and social development. So China has to get out of this cycle. Countries must take risks. Improve the student loan system, so that banks are willing to lend money to poor students, and solve the problem that they can not afford to go to school, because this is conducive to changing the wealth gap and changing the fate of the majority of people.

2.4 The Influence of Gender on Educational Inequality

Gender inequality in education is a cultural problem tracing back to history. The idea of male superiority over females has not been completely eradicated, especially in lagging rural areas and mountain villages. Although national efforts have been made to advocate equality between genders, in some of China's rural and poor areas, due to the conservative and traditional ideas, girls are much less valued than boys at home, because it is widely believed that the boy is the mainstay of familie's labor, they rely on sons to support parents grow old, and the daughter will grow up apart from their parents sooner or later. Therefore, under the circumstances of limited economic ability, families always give priority to boy's education. In Junxia Zeng's article, she said her team used a meta-analysis approach and comes to this conclusion: Girls still encounter inequality in rural areas and when they reach high school or beyond [15]. This result is consistent with the findings of surveys on the progress of children and families in high school and higher education in Gansu Province [16]. Analyzing the reasons, it can be seen that the influence

of the economy is enormous, and the education level of parents in economically backward areas is relatively low, so they tend to be more conservative and feudal. Because of this, the preference for boys over girls is also more obvious in these places, resulting in educational inequality between the genders. Although educational opportunities for women have improved, there are still many barriers. For example, gender differences show up quite differently in urban and rural areas. Taking the distribution of higher education opportunities as an example, urban women's higher education opportunities show an obvious upward trend, while rural women's higher education opportunities show a downward trend. This trend is leading to a widening gender gap in higher education opportunities for the rural population at a time when women are showing competitive advantages. In addition, a prominent problem in women's education is the phenomenon of discrimination against women in the admissions process. Some schools either explicitly or implicitly set different grades, leading to discrimination against women. For instance, some schools set different scores for men and women examinees in the recruitment process. The scores of female examinees in liberal arts and science are 8 and 17 points higher than those of male examinees respectively. Some colleges and universities have introduced separate lines for male and female candidates to alleviate the serious imbalance.

3 Conclusion

Nowadays, countries all over the world are pursuing education equality and vigorously reducing education inequality, and there is no denying that China has achieved high achievement in education in recent years, but inequality is still widespread, such as education inequality between ethnic groups, gender education inequality, regional education inequality and so on. There are many reasons for the inequality in education. From the analysis of its causes, the factors affecting the inequality can be summarized as follows: The imbalance of economic development has a great impact which is mainly reflected in both the economically developed areas and underdeveloped areas in the region. The school-age population in the rich areas has preliminarily realized the equality of opportunity, while poverty has become the equality of educational opportunities for children in the backward areas. Rural and urban education opportunities are not equal, the vast rural areas are at a disadvantage in education, the enrolment rate and school rate in rural areas are generally low and the dropout rate is much higher than that in urban areas. The difference in income between social classes is another factor. What type of education one receives is positively correlated with the income of class. Besides, the differences between family and cultural background which may result in gender discrimination influence a lot as well. Parents are the first teachers of children. The types and levels of education parents receive, as well as the professional and technical levels they acquire, all shadow the educational opportunities for girls. The internal factors can be divided into disadvantages of the educational system, imbalanced allocation of educational resources, and disadvantages of teaching and evaluation mode. The education system of our country is mainly through the school assessment to select the elite of the society. The allocation of educational resources is inseparable from the educational input of a country and a region. From the amount of educational input can see whether

a country attaches importance to education. In our country, the investment in educational resources tends to be tilted toward cities, especially in key schools, which leads to obvious inequality in educational opportunities. What's worse, some teaching models and evaluation methods are unequal in educational opportunities, such as "track", "diversion", "science and technology class" and "Olympic Class", which can explain the inequality of educational opportunities.

Unfair education is not conducive to the realization of social justice. Therefore, we can never ignore the phenomenon of such inequality. However, it is impossible and impractical to eliminate inequality completely. What we can do is mitigate the inequality to the greatest extent. This article mainly considers the internal and external causes of education inequality, discusses it from four aspects, and puts forward some suggestions to improve this situation. However, there are far more factors affecting educational inequality than these, and there are many other factors that have not been fully introduced in this paper. Later, scholars can continue to study and discuss other aspects, and then form a more complete system.

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