

Impacts of Regional Disparities and Policy Bias on Chinese Educational Inequality and Inequity

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Abstract. China's economy and society have achieved remarkable success over the past few decades. However, these outstanding achievements, on the contrary, have widened the inequality and inequity between regions. Nowadays, with the announcement of certain educational policies, educational inequality and inequity have been concentrated by the public recently. This study presents a relatively complete view of how economic and political reasons in China caused some educational inequality and inequity. Specifically, the article focusses on how the economy-allocation of educational resources and policy bias affect the issue of educational inequality and inequity. Four key pieces of research related to Chinese educational inequality and inequity are addressed in this article: (1) Local fiscal revenue, (2) Family income, (3) The National College Examination's preference policy, and (4) Double-Reduction Policy. After finishing the research above, it gives the readers a whole perspective on educational inequality and inequity, which can make the educational regulators clearer to deal with them.

Keywords: Educational inequality; regional disparities; policy bias; Chinese education.

1. Introduction

China's economy and society have made remarkable progress in the past few decades. However, the unbalanced economic development caused by it also indirectly and directly leads to the emergence of educational inequality. In previous studies on the impact of regional differences on educational equality, people tend to pay too much attention to the low investment in education caused by parents' low income. However, less previous studies have linked the imbalance of regional economy with the inclination of policies. The researcher will reveal what aspects and how regional differences affect China's education equality. This study of regional differences in China's education equality can help people understand the causes and processes of education inequality and provide a detailed and logical explanation. This article aims to inform people of the factors that cause the phenomenon of education leveling due to regional differences in China and the links in which it occurs. To help relevant personnel solve the problem of educational inequality and promote educational equality. This study reviews previous studies on regional differences and educational inequality in China and summarizes the factors that affect educational equality in China. This article also explains how these factors affect education equality. China cannot become an economic power without the prosperity of every Chinese. However, in the process of rapid economic development, differences have become obvious due to the imbalance of resource allocation and policy inclination. The most influential of these differences are economic and political factors. Their impact on education equity is profound that it affects several generations. In the following parts, this article will explain how the difference in local fiscal revenue leads to the difference in local investment in education, how the disparity of family income in different regions leads to different investments in children's education, and how The National College Entrance Examination's preference for students from ethnic minority areas and remote areas helps ease educational inequality in China.

2. Economy - Allocation of Educational Resources Influences Educational Equity and Equality in China

The local economy almost determines the education quality of the area. However, the economic - allocation of educational resources, which is indirectly influenced by the local economic situation, can also strongly affect the education quality of a particular area. Local educational resource allocation, especially in terms of primary education in China, mostly comes from the county governments and provincial governments. Besides, only a part of the funds and investment for some key projects come from the central government. By the National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2020, the central government of China spent RMB167.364 billion on education, while the local government spent RMB 3468.630 billion on education [1]. The wide gap between the two shows that local governments mainly invest in education in various regions. Therefore, it results in the helplessness of local education to get more resources from the redistribution by the central government. In this section, the essay discusses how the economic - allocation of educational resources influences educational equity and equality in China.

2.1 The difference in local fiscal revenue leads to the difference in local investment in education

According to the statistics published by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2020, the total investment in education in China was RMB 3635.994 billion. However, almost 95.4% of education investment came from the local government. So, the local fiscal revenue matters most in the local education investment.

In the view of the whole country, the local fiscal revenue of different provinces or cities differs significantly, leading to a significant gap in their education investments. Take Beijing, Jiangsu Province, and Jiangxi Province, for example. In 2019, their investment in education was 147947.89 million yuan, 310933.15 million yuan, and 145354.7 million yuan [2], respectively. Compared with their fiscal revenues, their education expenditure accounted for 25.4%, 35.3%, and 58.4%, respectively. The similarity indicates that the more local fiscal revenues, the greater the local government's investment in education.

The conclusion above leads to the direct link between local education investment and local fiscal revenue. Although the lower or higher education investment does not mean the low or high quality of a particular area, it does have significant effects.

In 2019, there were 152857 students in Beijing's senior high schools, 1050290 students in Jiangsu's senior high schools, and 1055368 students in Jiangxi's senior high schools [3]. That means there was a considerable gap between their average education investments to each student. Compared with Beijing, the average investment in education for each student in Jiangxi Province is almost 90% less.

Chinese education system ensures every student readily available access to formal education. Chinese students can get free education at the stage of compulsory education. They are not asked to pay their tuition fee if they enter public schools, which accounts for 2/3 of all schools in China. Besides, most students enroll in public schools, especially when they are no more than 18. Therefore, the investment in education should cover all the fees they may use except for eating and buying learning materials. If an area has less fiscal revenue, it will pay less for its education system, which results in worse teaching conditions and consequences. In some rural areas and underdeveloped counties, the schools they have may even lack air-conditioners or multimedia teaching equipment. Nevertheless, almost all the schools in economically well-developed areas, for example, Beijing and Shanghai, have laboratories, indoor fitness venues, and expensive teaching equipment that are provided directly from the appropriation from local finance to schools.

2.2 The disparity of family income in different regions leads to different investments in children's education

Children's education in China, to a large extent, depends on their parents' and families' support. Chinese parents are willing to put effort emotionally and financially into their children's education

even after they come of age. Therefore, parents who are more economically prosperous can give more investment to their kids in order to expose their kids to excellent educational conditions or offer them more instructions after class.

A recent study by Guo stated that school choosing fees, school district housing, and other stressful factors are intermediary means for social resources to regulate educational resources. High-quality educational resources will be gathered for families with relatively high socio-economic status statistics provided by Fang show that, among the school districts where the best-ranked schools are located, 36.79% are teachers, lifelong teachers, engineers, civil servants, and senior managers of enterprises, while only 14.00% of the school districts where the middle-ranked and lower ranked schools are located [4]. This phenomenon indicates that children whose parents are relatively wealthy can get a more advanced and high-quality education.

3. Policy Bias Affects Regional Educational Inequality in China.

China has launched a series of educational policies, and each of them had profound effects on Chinese education. However, these effects function differently between undeveloped and developed areas and between poorer families and wealthy families because of the diverse circumstances they have. In this part, the passage will state how some of the policies' bias affects the regional educational inequality in China.

3.1 The National College Entrance Examination's preference for students from ethnic minority areas and remote areas helps ease educational inequality in China

In order to compensate for the lack of experienced and qualified teachers and their physical condition, the authority has been giving students from ethnic minority areas a preference in terms of grades in the National College Entrance Examination. From its beginning to now (2022), this policy has changed many times, but it still has a critical role in inequality in China's education. Following article 71 of the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy, the State increases investment in education in national autonomous areas. Furthermore, to raise the scientific and cultural level of individuals from all ethnic groups, it takes extraordinary measures to assist national autonomous territories in promoting nine-year compulsory education and the creation of other educational initiatives. [5]. Specifically, minority examinees can add a particular score to their unified cultural examination total when they apply for the college entrance exam if they live in border areas, mountainous areas, pastoral areas, or other areas frequented by ethnic minorities. The maximum score for those who meet the standards for college placement is 20, and the college will analyze the results before deciding whether to admit the student. Additionally, minority test takers will receive an additional five points on the National College Entrance Examination starting in 2021. This policy can, to some extent, release the disparity between common and relatively poorer areas. In China, due to this policy, the students who are benefited from this preference can enter a better university which they would not be able to get if there were no such a policy. In addition, most of the regions inhabited by ethnic groups don't speak Chinese (Mandarin). This causes the weakness in their examinees to learn Chinese and other subjects because they are shown in Chinese in the National College Entrance Examination. The policy preference for students from ethnic minority areas can partly release their congenital deficiency.

"For regions with large linguistic and cultural differences and low education quality, we should vigorously popularize bilingual education and adjust professional settings. In addition to improving teaching quality, the policy of adding points to the college admission exam should be maintained as it is a crucial step in helping minority students advance their studies.[6]." The statement published by China National Ethnic Affairs Commission addressed that this policy is still a crucial policy to reduce the gap.

3.2 Effects on educational inequality in China caused by the Double-Reduction Policy

The Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Students' Homework and Extracurricular Training in Compulsory Education were released by the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the General Office of the State Council on July 24, 2021. The Double-Reduction Policy was first introduced in this act. Its primary goal is to significantly lessen the pressure of the students' excessive schoolwork and extracurricular activities during the obligatory education stage [7]. Specifically, "Double-Reduction" refers to easing both the strain of off-campus training and the weight of homework for students enrolled in compulsory education. Its primary strategy is to severely restrain the market for extracurricular education and training.

Although it was made out of a kind attempt, some specialists say it may cause a more significant gap between the poor and the rich. They infer that it makes after-class instructions and classes more expensive and rarefied so wealthier families can let their children attend more after-school classes without extra financial pressure. However, the initially poorer parents cannot do this. It is more complicated than what they supposed to be.

As for the effects of Double-Reduction on educational inequality, the most evident one is the academic advantages of some student groups to one-to-one tutoring. To understand why this transformation could make such an unpredictable side effect, it should be clarified that the Double-Reduction Policy did hand the educational responsibility back to schools. Still, it did not reduce the demand for after-school tutoring for a considerable grade.

The Chinese College Entrance Examination now, is the dominant examination, which plays the most significant and decisive role in millions of Chinese examinees annually in China. In a conventional concept derived in ancient China, the examinees who failed in such a decisive examination will not be or hardly successful and influential persons in the future. Although the concept is disappearing thanks to the new growth, certain Chinese families are firmly convinced of this concept. Several reasons can explain this. The most convincing one is that students can get a decent job and salary after graduating from a famous university. They can live a good life with well-being. This is a slippery slope. However, the chain reaction is likely to occur in students under the Chinese college entrance system because Chinese students have less opportunity to transfer to their dream school after enrolling and relatively high employment competition pressure. Moreover, due to the large population, most employers will screen qualified interviewees simply through the former school before screening interviewees. This results in the quality of the school of graduation having become a necessary factor in obtaining a decent job, not merely a competitive skill.

Due to this circumstance, Chinese children still require after-school tutoring. However, due to the Double-Reduction Policy's drastic reduction of the after-class training market and associated organizations, after-class tutoring is now primarily conducted one-on-one. Families with specific resources, such as those with very intelligent members or significant family wealth, are more likely to enjoy a general monopoly on academic resources. In a survey by Yu (2021), up to 87% of the parents stated they would continue to send their children to after-school tutoring because of the institutions' governance. Tutoring in small groups or one-on-one settings was also acceptable to 37% of parents as a substitute for traditional after-school programs. The demand for college tutors has surged dramatically compared to prior years during the first summer break following the establishment of the Double-Reduction Policy, and the business volume of the majority of employees has increased by 50% to 100% compared to the same period last year. In addition, 43% of the training institutes' teaching staff members who were surveyed said that they could consider transitioning to (or temporarily working in) the private tutoring sector for future employment. Some families with better financial circumstances started to employ private teachers under the guise of live-in nannies as a result of the concealment of private tutoring. There was a trend where highly educated parents, particularly teachers, helped one another's kids. Some students in primary and secondary schools also organized organizations to compete for the services of well-known teachers. It is evident that the after-school tutoring market is shifting from training institutions to private tutors under the Double-

Reduction Policy, which eliminates the appearance of disorderly development of after-school training institutions, and that there is a trend of dishonorable and illegal development. [8].

The educational track of children among different classes of families in China has been divided. According to theory of cultural reproduction cultural capital, as an endogenous capital, can form a stable reproduction path through nurturing models and educational expectations. When domestic education is involved, and higher education enrollment is expanded, the elite tends to use their accumulated cultural capital, economic capital, and symbolic capital to influence their education acquisition, seek overseas education diplomas for their children to change the educational competition track and maintain or enhance their position in the social stratification. By taking this approach, some elite classes can continue to stabilize or strengthen their children's status and identity while avoiding the effects of the Double-Reduction Policy of Education. [9]. under this transformation, some privileged and wealthy families can still pay their children a one-to-one tutoring or other targeted and specialized education.

Therefore, Double-Reduction Policy improved the quality of public schools by forcing teachers previously employed by training organizations go back to public schools, and improved the proportion of teaching contents in public schools in students' learning stage. And objectively reduced the dependence of Chinese parents on after-school tutoring institutions. However, the corresponding development trend will further aggravate the solidification of social strata. As families with academic resources can still easily avoid the negative impact of the double reduction policy.

Secondly, regional educational inequality, especially in terms of off-school tutoring, has been increased by the Double-Reduction Policy. Initially, in remote and less developed locations, it can be difficult to find funding for private educational institutions and out-of-school time programs. After the Double-Reduction Policy was announced, more professional teachers were willing to move to big cities to gain more opportunities to teach students who could afford a higher price. Moreover, the chance to conduct teaching activities through private channels is also more common in big cities.

The aforementioned situation occurs both in urban and rural locations; rural citizens, who are primarily low-income groups, cannot afford tutoring costs because the economic and social conditions in rural areas do not support a large-scale private tutoring market. Rural pupils will be less able to access after-school tutoring services if personal tutoring becomes the new standard of after-school tutoring in metropolitan areas and shifts to the underground. If the aforementioned problem is not successfully managed, it will deepen the difference between pupils in various locations when it comes to exam competitiveness and create a new gap between big cities and small and medium-sized cities for after-school tutoring [8].

The education gap between less developed and developed regions may potentially widen if the role of after-school assistance is returned to the school. Conditions, instructional tools, and instruction quality are all higher in high-quality schools. They can offer additional after-school activities so that kids can develop more thoroughly while taking topic learning into account, giving them more options for further study and future development. In contrast, underperforming schools, schools in rural areas, and small schools will face greater disadvantages [8].

3.3 The Positive Impact on Education Equality of the Double-Reduction Policy

Student-centered is the guiding premise of the Double-Reduction Policy. By lessening the workload of schoolwork and extracurricular activities, it protects the right to relax and the maintenance of physical and mental health. Education is a human cultivation activity, with schools serving as the primary institution for cultivating pupils. The general people ought to uphold the rules governing education, physical and mental development, and overall development.

3.3.1 Focus on educating a complete person instead of an intelligent person

In the announcement of the Double-Reduction Policy, the Chinese Ministry of Education claimed that the purpose of Chinese education is to foster character and civic virtue. However, expanding private educational institutions will inevitably lead to the utilitarianism of schooling. That is to say, participating in after-school tutoring by private educational institutions is for the sake of competition

and examination, not just for the sake of itself. In addition, the after-school tutoring carried out by private educational institutions also lacks the cultivation of morality, which deviates from the original intention of education.

In the nationwide suppression of private education, more families will choose to make full use of education of public education, which is more concentrated on virtue education. As capital tends to concentrate in affluent areas, the big cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, have very intensive private educational institutions. However, in some less-developed countries, private educational institutions cannot cater to all their needs. This phenomenon slightly widens virtue gap between rich and poor areas. So, the Double-Reduction Policy is conducive to promoting schools and training institutions to change from paying attention to learning achievements to paying attention to learning process and from paying attention to academic education to paying attention to training comprehensive people so that students can learn happily, develop comprehensively, and return education to its original nature [10].

3.3.2 Educational equality will be the majority in China

The education of a sizable portion of middle-class families is made more equal as a result of the high threshold created by the high cost of private tutoring, which causes most Chinese households to decrease or discontinue their children's participation. The Double-Reduction policy reduces injustice caused by off-school training by standardizing governance of off-school training and preventing varied instruction offered by off-school activities connected to family economic circumstances. The Double-Reduction Policy will encourage schools to enhance the quality of instruction and learning, support the prudent use of regional educational resources, support the balanced and high-quality growth of compulsory education, and promote more equity in education. Since high-quality education equity is the kind that fits the needs of personality development, education equity does not offer the same education. The Double-Reduction Policy mandates that schools raise the quality of their after-school programs and cater to students' individual requirements, which will contribute to the synchronized rise of educational equity and tailored development [10].

4. Conclusion

The article illustrates to the readers which aspects of the economy and policy affect educational inequality and inequity in China and how they affect it. In the economic sphere, the author mainly analyzes the unbalanced situation derived from the difference in local fiscal revenue and the disparity of family income in different regions. Then, the inevitable link between China's educational inequality and these two factors turns out to be that, due to the direct connection between them, students with lower financial support from their parents or in poor areas may suffer from educational inequality and inequity. Furthermore, the author also makes some studies on how the same policies have diverse influences on different regions under different development and various student groups. After a detailed analysis, the author finds that the preference for the National College Entrance Examination and the Double-Reduction Policy, especially the latter, have strong and complicated effects on changing Chinese educational inequality and inequity. Besides the article's success, the author should also add other factors to make up for the deficiencies of this study. Family education background and other particular and specific factors cannot be ignored when studying educational inequality and inequity. That is what the study should improve in the future.

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