

## Study on Education Policy in Rural China



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**ABSTRACT:** Rural education in China has been greatly improved since the implementation of nine-year compulsory education. However, there are still problems of low quality of compulsory education, single education structure, insufficient funds and facilities for development, weak faculty, and imbalance in the development of urban and rural education. In the context of comprehensive promotion of rural revitalization, it is more important to pay attention to the development of rural education. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the above existing problems and explore countermeasures for the improvement of rural education from the policy dimension, according to the existing literature research.

**KEY WORDS:** education, compulsory education, education quality, integration of urban and rural education.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of comprehensive promotion of rural revitalization strategy in China, rural education and talent cultivation have become hot topics. The development of rural education is of great significance to improve the education level in rural areas and to fully realize rural revitalization. There are a lot of studies that put forward the problems of lagging development of rural education, unbalanced development between urban and rural areas, single rural education structure, insufficient teachers and funds, and backward hardware facilities, and give some development suggestions. However, there are few comprehensive literature studies. This paper will integrate the existing literature and put forward constructive suggestions for the development of rural education, in order to make theoretical contributions to the improvement of education quality in rural areas and the comprehensive realization of rural revitalization.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

With a large rural population base and slow economic development, the development of rural education in China relies heavily on policy assistance. Since the promulgation of the Compulsory Education Law, rural education has been significantly improved, but there are still some problems. Some scholars point out (Yang, 2022) that due to limited economic capacity, the education of students in rural schools is often limited to imparting knowledge, while neglecting the equally important quality education. Especially at the compulsory education level, the emphasis of inclusive education on full quantitative coverage leads to low quality education. The development of rural education tends to neglect the overall development of students, and quality education is difficult to implement, often focusing only on test-based education (Li, 2021). At the same time, rural education is very limited in terms of structural types and modes, and is basically a single general education, i.e., compulsory education. Vocational education, adult education, and continuing education have not formed a systematic form of education (Song & Hu, 2020). The current lack of funding and backward equipment for rural education is another important issue, and there is a tight supply of school buildings, inadequate provision of functional rooms, shortage of educational and teaching facilities and equipment, shortage of public funds, and lack of teaching and research and teachers' continuing education expenses (Song & Hu, 2020). Rural schools are severely lacking in infrastructure, inadequate sports equipment, and single after-school activities for students (Nan, 2022). The current problem of teachers in rural education in China is prominent, and there is a trend of transferring high-quality teachers from rural areas to townships and from townships to counties due to the difference in treatment and living standards between urban and rural areas (Li Y., 2019). Other scholars' studies show that the average salary level of urban teachers is about 1/3 higher than that of rural teachers under the condition that their education and titles are at the same level (Xu, 2017), and the teacher force in rural education is weak and continues to deteriorate. Finally, there is a huge gap between urban and rural education. A survey shows that urban compulsory education school fixed assets account for 75.5% of the total compulsory education fixed assets nationwide, while rural compulsory education fixed assets account for only 24.5% of the total compulsory education fixed assets (Yang, 2022).

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### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This paper mainly uses literature research methods. To provide a comprehensive interpretation of the topic of Chinese rural education policy, we adopted a literature research approach. In the first step, a research question was formulated to guide the subsequent literature study, i.e., it aimed to explore the current policy research and shortcomings of rural education in China and to propose some improvement measures, which provided a clear direction for the literature review. In the second step, the literature was searched, using academic databases such as Google Scholar, CNKI, and UKM Library to secure peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and dissertations. To optimize the search results, we used a combination of relevant keywords, such as "rural education in China", "compulsory education", "education policy", and "education policy in rural areas". In the third step, selection and exclusion of literature, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to ensure the selection of appropriate literature. The inclusion criteria included papers related to studies specifically on education policies in rural China, studies on teaching conditions in rural areas, studies on differences in educational resources between urban and rural areas, and studies on intergenerational transmission in education. Studies that did not meet these criteria, or that were not relevant to the topic, were excluded from the review. Finally, after several studies of the relevant literature, the main content analysis of the literature was conducted, and several viewpoint refinements of the literature review were completed to support the arguments of this paper.

### **4. THE CURRENT STATE OF RURAL EDUCATION**

#### **4.1 Overview of rural education**

In recent years, with the continuous promotion of nine-year compulsory, the net enrollment rate of elementary school nationwide has reached 99.9%, and the gross enrollment rate at the junior high school level has always remained at 100%. In addition, the government has continuously increased investment in rural education in rural areas and implemented a series of supportive policies, such as the nutrition improvement plan for students in compulsory education, the special post teacher program, the free teacher training program, and the targeted enrollment program for rural students in poor areas. The level of education in rural China has been improving. However, due to the rapid socio-economic development, there is still a huge difference in the level of education between urban and rural areas, and problems still exist in terms of insufficient funds and weak teachers in rural education.

#### **4.2 The issues at present**

In the context of the national comprehensive implementation of rural revitalization strategy, a series of problems still exist in rural education in China. Firstly, it is committed to grasping the 'quantity' of nine-year compulsory education at the expense of 'quality', and the quality of compulsory education needs urgent improvement. Secondly, the development of rural education is in a single form, and there is a lack of vocational and adult education. Thirdly, the lack of funds for the development of rural education, mainly in terms of hardware facilities and teachers' salaries in rural schools. Fourthly, it's the lack of teachers, the treatment of rural teachers and living environment is not as good as urban teachers, and the brain drain is serious. Finally, the development of urban and rural education is unbalanced, and the level of development of rural education lags far behind that of urban areas.

### **5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IMPROVE RURAL EDUCATION.**

With a high proportion of rural population in China, which accounts for 44.57% of the total population as of 2021, the issue of rural education is directly related to the future of the country. First of all, the development of rural education is not only to improve the comprehensive quality and cultural level of rural residents, but also to promote the development of rural economy, realize rural revitalization, and enhance the overall social development of the country. Secondly, the Chinese current labor market has an imbalance between supply and demand, with difficulties in employment for ordinary college graduates, and a persistent labor shortage for skilled workers. Therefore, it is important to develop vocational education for rural youth, cultivate skilled personnel needed by the labor market and balance the labor market. Finally, the development of rural education can better realize rural revitalization, narrow the gap between urban and rural areas, and promote social equity, stability and sustainable development.

### **6. IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS**

#### **6.1 Improve the quality of nine-year compulsory education.**

Since the release of nine-year compulsory education in 1986, as a country that has never achieved universal primary education, China has achieved a remarkable consolidation rate of 95.2% for nine-year compulsory education and a gross enrollment rate of 91.2% at the high school level by 2020. However, with the quantity of universal education rising and society developing, the society also demands higher quality of education, especially in rural areas, where the quality of development lags far behind than urban.

In response to the needs of the times, we need to pay more attention to the quality improvement of nine-year compulsory education in rural areas. Liu Ziqi mentioned that 'to better achieve rural revitalization, we need to improve the quality of rural education in many aspects' (2022). Except for investing in the improvement of material conditions such as rural school buildings,

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teaching facilities and nutritious meals, we should focus more on cultural teaching to improve quality. On the one hand, the government should carry out examination-based education reform, reduce the percentage of test scores, implement the concept of 'moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and labor' education, cultivate students' comprehensive abilities, improve their hands-on skills, and reduce the dilemma of leaving school without some useful skills. On the other hand, due to the economic and cultural level of rural families and other restrictions, the lack of arts and other courses in rural education is serious. Free courses in art, music and sports should be offered to rural children according to the local financial situation, to enhance the creativity of rural children, increase the opportunities for fair education and close the gap between urban and rural education.

### **6.2 Variety of education types**

Chinese rural education in a single form, in the new era of development, rural education diversification is imminent. A relevant study mentions that 'technical skills learning serves industrial needs and promotes rural revitalization' (Dong, Cui, 2022). Firstly, vocational education should be vigorously developed. Many rural students who have finished compulsory education and dropped out of high school to go to work without technical skills and cultural education level sufficient for clerical work, and a large number of young laborers lack stable jobs. At the same time, workers who need certain vocational skills continue to experience labor shortages in a variety of industries such as domestic service, light industry and manufacturing, and there is a misalignment and imbalance between talent training and social talent demand. The government should pay more attention to the development of rural vocational education, expand investment in vocational education, improve the treatment of skilled workers, and provide more options for rural youth who fail to enter university with clear employment directions, enrollment subsidies, and development prospects to divert more rural youth who dropped out of school after nine years of compulsory education to attend vocational education. Secondly, different kinds of adult education suitable for the development of local rural industries should be carried out according to local development needs to improve the knowledge level of the existing rural labor force and promote the modernization of rural industries. Chairman Xi Jinping pointed out in his speech at the 10th meeting of the Central Finance and Economics Commission in 2021 that the most difficult and onerous task of promoting common prosperity remains in rural areas. A relevant study shows that 'The current rural vocational education tends to be detached from 'San Nong', and 'the content of farmers' training mostly lacks applicability and lags behind the actual situation in rural areas and the update of agricultural science and technology, as well as fails to make farmers' learning useful' (Dong, Cui, 2022). The government should support special funds and the education system to develop rural adult education and promote the upgrading of rural industries to achieve rural revitalization.

### **6.3 Increase financial investment.**

Although government spending on education has continued to increase over years, the shortage of funds for rural education is still prominent. The central government should continuously increase investment in rural education, especially in west areas, in which local governments' finances are constrained and the funds allocated to education are insufficient. In addition, the central government should allocate special funds according to projects, such as investment in farmers' vocational education transformation and special investment in rural adult education and skills training. Some studies on the role of the 'Compulsory Education Law' point out that 'the law can inhibit the intergenerational transmission of low rural educational attainment achieved by the cultivation effect by relieving the pressure of low-education families to invest in the education of their offspring' (Mao, Zhang, 2023). Therefore, increasing fiscal spending on education can effectively improve the current educational dilemma, and within the state's fiscal capacity, it is recommended that the government consider upgrading the 9-year compulsory education to 12-year compulsory education in rural areas to improve the overall educational attainment and weaken the intergenerational transmission of low educational attainment in rural areas. This will reduce the limitation of educational attainment of the new generation and the waste of rural talents due to the underinvestment of the father's generation and improve the overall human capital in rural areas.

### **6.4 Guarantee the strength of teachers.**

The lack of teachers is a major problem in the development of rural education. Some survey results show that the average salary level of urban teachers is about 1/3 higher than that of rural teachers under the same level of education and title, and the treatment of urban teachers is better than that of rural teachers in terms of other invisible benefits such as housing, insurance, and provident fund (Yang, 2022). Improving rural teacher deployment mainly requires addressing rural teachers' income, security, promotion, and welfare benefits, enhancing rural teachers' working and living environments, and attracting and retaining outstanding teachers to teach in rural areas. In addition, the teaching resources of rural schools and the teaching standards of existing rural teachers can be enhanced through current technological means to strengthen urban-rural teaching exchanges and through remote exchange courses and teacher training.

### **6.5 Promote the integration of urban and rural education.**

There are significant differences between rural and urban education in terms of hardware and software support, and the development of rural education is slow and greatly influenced by local economic development. To promote the integration of rural and urban education, the government needs to introduce policies that are favorable to the development of rural education, such as tax exemption policies for enterprises to invest in rural education and priority policies for rural teachers' title evaluation, to attract

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relevant funds and talents to invest in rural education. At the same time, urban-rural education exchange should be directly promoted through policy level, such as stipulating model schools in developed eastern regions to organize regular online courses to share teaching process and teaching contents for rural schools corresponding to help, so that rural students can be exposed to better quality education resources. Promoting education urban-rural integration requires more policy support and implementation.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, promoting the development of rural education in China is critical to the success of rural revitalization strategies and to narrowing the gap between urban and rural education. This article summarizes the current problems of rural education and pinpoints a synthesis of existing research to make some recommendations on these problems, such as improving the quality of compulsory education through aspects such as compulsory education policy reform, establishing a diversified rural education system, developing rural vocational and adult education, increasing financial investment in rural education, ensuring the strength of rural teachers through better incentives and policy support, and adopting favorable policies and resource-sharing initiatives to promote the integration of urban and rural education. To strengthen rural education and achieve comprehensive development of rural areas for rural revitalization strategies and socio-economic development.

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