



**AgEcon** SEARCH  
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

*The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library*

**This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.**

**Help ensure our sustainability.**

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>

[aesearch@umn.edu](mailto:aesearch@umn.edu)

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

*No endorsement of AgEcon Search or its fundraising activities by the author(s) of the following work or their employer(s) is intended or implied.*

# Thoughts and Proposals on Equity of China's Rural Compulsory Education

Aiwu XIAO \*

International Cultural Exchange and Training Center, Zhongkai University of Agriculture and Engineering, Guangzhou 510225, China

**Abstract** Based on the requirement of improving rural compulsory education quality and balancing education development proposed in "the twelfth five – year" plan, difference in compulsory education between urban and rural areas in China is analyzed. Fairness of rural compulsory education is taken into consideration and the corresponding countermeasures are suggested.

**Key words** Rural education, Compulsory education, Fairness

Compulsory education, as the national education for children of school age and teenagers to acquire knowledge, is the basis for learning higher – level knowledge. Compulsory education in China has the features of being compulsory, free and popular. The popularization and balanced development of compulsory education maintain the fairness and justice of education and are the important components of establishing the harmonious society. During the "eleventh five – year" plan, tuition fees for the compulsory education in China were exempted with the reform of a series of education funding guarantee systems and were changed to be supported by the government. According to the white paper of Progress of Chinese Human Rights Cause in 2009, the population coverage rate of nine – year compulsory education in China has reached 99.7% by the end of 2009<sup>[1]</sup>. The brilliant progress achieved over the past 30 years after the reform and opening up also drives the development of Chinese compulsory education, especially the dramatic change in rural education, which provides abundant human resources for establishing the new socialist countryside.

The Proposal on Formulating the Twelfth Five – Year Plan of National Economy and Social Development by the Central Committee of Communist Party of China passed in the Fifth Plenary Session of the Seventeenth Central Committee of Communist Party of China on October 18th, 2010 further emphasized the importance of promoting rural modernization and quickening the establishment of new socialist countryside, taking the problems of "agriculture, countryside and farmers" as the priority<sup>[2]</sup>. The balanced development of education and constant improvement of teaching quality in rural compulsory education should be emphasized. This paper will study the fairness problem of current rural compulsory education in China.

## 1 Status quo and problems of rural compulsory education in China

### 1.1 Gap in compulsory education fund input Equal distri-

bution of education funds is the basis of balanced development of compulsory education. The relatively obvious difference in economic development in different regions throughout China and the fundamental features of Chinese compulsory education financial system have caused the unbalanced development of current compulsory education in China. Over the past 20 years, particularly the past 10 years, compulsory education input in China has been unfair, which has captured attention from the party, country as well as related departments like the Ministry of Education and governments at various levels have strengthened the investment in rural compulsory education. Due to the unbalanced economic development in rural areas, especially in the western area where economy development is relatively slow, rural economic development in the mountainous area can hardly provide powerful financial support for education.

Education funds input is the basic index reflecting the fairness in education investment of the country and government and an essential index evaluating balanced development of the whole compulsory education. There are differences in compulsory education funds input not only between eastern coastal area and central as well as western areas but also in different cities within a province, which directly affects the equity of balanced compulsory education. Rural compulsory education in eastern coastal area with rapid economic development has favorable conditions with sufficient various education resources while there are difficulties in rural compulsory education in underdeveloped central and western areas, particularly the shortage in education funds. Besides, students in middle and primary schools in large, middle-sized and small cities as well as rural areas receive different compulsory education, hence relatively big difference in educational result.

It has been 26 years since the promulgation of *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China* in 1986. It can be concluded that the adopted strategy during the compulsory education development is "city before countryside and developed area before underdeveloped area", which results in expanded difference in education funds input between urban and rural areas<sup>[3]</sup>. And the difference causes difficulty in formulating the standard of

education funds input. Those areas with underdeveloped economy, especially the poverty-stricken regions, cannot reach high standard, which will hinder the initiative in developing balanced compulsory education among different regions. Low standard, however, can be easily reached by large and middle-sized cities with relatively developed economy, which cannot exert favorable effect on settling the difference in compulsory education between urban and rural areas within a province. In recent years, education funds input in underdeveloped central and western areas is higher than that in coastal area, but difference in education operating expense of budget per student has been gradually enlarged which can be easily seen from the index of total education funds per student<sup>[4]</sup>.

**1.2 Difference in educational resources allocation** The strategy of "city before countryside and developed area before underdeveloped area" in compulsory education has resulted in the backward basic education facilities in rural area. With the increasing national funds in compulsory education in recent years, school conditions of most middle and primary schools in the countryside have been improved. However, in most remote mountainous areas with underdeveloped economy, education funds cannot be guaranteed and basic facilities in those schools are relatively poorly equipped. Houses of many rural schools are still old and in poor quality, and even dangerous.

There are differences in teaching materials for the current basic compulsory education in China among different regions, particularly the content of teaching materials. Knowledge has experienced dramatic changes with social progress. With the process of new curriculum reform, teaching materials have been constantly updated with new knowledge points and teaching methods. Teaching materials for compulsory education in cities and towns have been promptly updated, following closely social progress, especially subjects like computer, English, art, music and PE have more advantages. However, because of the restricted geological location, rural area cannot catch various changes promptly and new content can hardly supplement, therefore students' learning interest cannot be stimulated. For some courses requiring laboratory, difference is much more obvious shown by the index of instrument possessive quantity per student. Shortage of equipment is a significant component of difference in compulsory education between urban and rural areas. Students in some rural schools can only watch their teachers demonstrate the experiments. Old experimental instrument cannot satisfy students' requirement for practical operation. Matching equipments for demonstrating experiment in some schools have been damaged due to long-time use and lack of effective maintenance. Students' understanding of experimental phenomena only depends on the limited pictures on the textbook. Computers have become the common study necessities for students in towns while middle and primary school students in the countryside can only know the computer from the limited pictures. Although computers have been equipped in some schools, the small amount cannot satisfy students' requirement and usually two or three students share one computer. Apart from learning science

and knowledge, students must have strong body, strengthening physical exercise, actively participating in various sports activities and developing personal qualities comprehensively. Schools in cities and towns have sports facilities like formal plastic annular race-track, football field, basketball field and table tennis tables while those in the countryside only have simple sports facilities on the yellow soil or built with concrete.

Due to the unfair educational resources allocation, rural teenagers cannot receive decent education. The unfair starting point of educational rights will surely affect educational result and severely impede the development of rural young people. Middle and primary schools in cities and towns generally possess excellent educational resources and are the key development objects of governments at various levels and further become national or provincial key schools. These schools are more likely to accumulate advantageous educational resources with excellent resources and brand effect. However, weak schools have worsening resources and the limited teaching resources in a majority of rural schools are deteriorating, which directly affects the equity of compulsory education and the educated population.

**1.3 Deficiency and instability of rural teaching staff** Teachers are the first resources. Building a stable and high-quality rural teaching staff is an essential aspect in Chinese rural education as well as establishment of the new socialist countryside. However, the differences in geological location, education funds input and educational resources allocation result in the unbalanced teaching resources in urban and rural areas and polarization of compulsory education is becoming serious<sup>[5]</sup>.

Relatively low salaries are the actual condition of rural teachers at present. Although rural teachers' salaries have been improved and most teachers throughout China have gained reasonable incomes after being a regular member through examination, there are still big difference in salaries between rural teachers and those in the county and city. Most rural teachers are in sub-health and even suffer from some chronic diseases due to long-time living burden and heavy workload. Some teachers in the mountainous area have not been brought into social basic medical insurance. The main reasons for shortage of rural teachers are hard working environment in the countryside, unfavorable office conditions, old teaching equipment, few opportunities for advanced studies and difficulties in improving themselves. Relatively speaking, teachers working in cities have abundant training funds and more training opportunities, such as trainings of backbone teachers, courses and teaching reform as well as multimedia teaching. Advanced teaching equipment and improved teaching skills also increase the professional abilities. Most rural teachers are willing to be promoted to cities where conditions of running schools are superior when they get the opportunities. This unidirectional flow from the countryside to the city causes unbalanced teacher strength and enlarges the difference in compulsory education between urban and rural areas.

Based on the analysis of amount, middle and primary schools

in cities and towns have abundant teacher resources while those schools in the countryside lack teachers seriously. Low salaries of rural teachers, bad conditions of running school, inconvenient transportation and information block cause difficulties for rural schools to absorb teachers, hence severe shortage of teacher strength. According to the investigation, rural middle and primary schools lacking formal teachers for each subject account for nearly 25% of all middle and primary schools in the city and teachers for short – line subjects like physical education, music, geography, fine arts, biology and computer are in urgent demand<sup>[6]</sup>. However, among the limited teacher resources, it is common to find that middle school teachers teach subjects which do not fit their majors. The employed teachers have no opportunities for advanced studies and they can improve educational background only with ways like correspondence on vacations. But the current correspondence teaching in most schools cannot improve students' knowledge structure. Shortage of formal teachers affects the course development of some subjects in rural middle and primary schools and impedes the improvement of teaching quality, which is not beneficial to the balanced compulsory education in urban and rural areas.

## **2 Countermeasures for promoting the healthy development of rural compulsory education in China**

### **2.1 Strengthening the system construction of financial input in compulsory education**

The percentage of educational funds input in GDP in China is much lower than the bottom line of world level and the goal of educational funds input accounting for 4% in GDP has been postponed for many times, first from 2000 to 2010 and later to 2012 again. Fiscal budgetary expenditure on compulsory education accounts for a relatively low percentage in national financial education funds, achieving between 70% and 75% in recent years, which is much lower than the figures in most other countries in the world, including the percentage between 85% and 90% in developing countries. The result shows that national input to compulsory education cannot satisfy its development, especially the actual requirements of rural compulsory education. Increasing total financial input to compulsory education is the essential way to overcome funds shortage. Under the circumstance of inadequate total input, the country may invest more in important fields or regions for the sake of political or social development while other fields and regions may lack sufficient financial support, hence unbalanced development. Therefore, only adequate total finance can avoid this kind of unbalanced development. Total input to education funds and the percentage of compulsory education funds input in China should reach the world level.

*Compulsory Education Law* clearly stipulates that people's government above the county level and the educational administrative departments should promote balanced development of schools and reduce the gap in conditions of running schools. Schools should not be divided into key schools and ordinary schools and schools cannot set up key class and ordinary class separately. In fact, there are key schools and ordinary schools and those key

schools are generally more likely to win political support from the government and gain better survival as well as development. For example, some areas even establish key private middle schools, which directly borrow superior public education resources and seek interests for a small group. And some governmental departments get benefits from them to form interest community. To completely reverse this situation, the government should change thoughts, weaken the position of key schools in assessment and strengthen the reform of ordinary schools. For those real key schools, the government should respect and follow market selection, allowing high tuitions. However, a certain proportion of tuitions should be handed over to governmental departments for the construction of ordinary schools in order to guarantee the efficiency of educational resources allocation and maintain equity.

### **2.2 Perfecting resources guarantee system of rural compulsory education and establishing indistinguishable schools between urban and rural areas**

Rational allocation of educational resources plays a substantive role in balancing resources allocation between urban and rural areas, ensuring basic educational rights of vulnerable region and group as well as promoting the comprehensive quality of rural education in China. Under the condition of market economy, government's responsibility in rural education is to guarantee rural educational resources allocation, provide public educational service for rural social members and ensure fairness in education. Development of rural education should not be ruled by man, but by law and equal allocation of educational resources should not be affected by the supersession of leaders as well as governmental preference. The institutionalization and legalization of rural educational resources management should be achieved. Resources guarantee system of rural education requires specific and feasible regulations as well as effective supervision mechanism. However, legal punishment and supervision bring relatively high social cost. Only with all social members recognizing the development of rural education, abiding these regulations and achieving moral self-discipline, inequity in resources allocation of compulsory education at present can gradually disappear, more beneficial social conditions can be offered to settle problems in schools like shortage of hardware facilities and utilization efficiency of educational resources can be improved.

"Being indistinguishable" means no difference in hardware facilities to a certain extent in order to achieve fairness in compulsory education. Compulsory education is the fundamental national education and it plays a decisive role in everyone's growth and development. Since school is the implementer of compulsory education, there should be no difference in hardware facilities in schools, which can effectively ensure the fairness of compulsory education. If there is no difference in hardware facilities in each school, people can receive indistinguishable compulsory education and inequity in compulsory education between urban and rural areas, among difference regions and schools will disappear naturally. In countries with developed compulsory education throughout the world, there is little difference in hardware facilities in schools of

compulsory education stage. For example, in South Korea and Japan, schools in compulsory education stage in remote villages or in Seoul and Tokyo share almost the same hardware facilities and teachers' level<sup>[7]</sup>.

**2.3 Providing teachers with development space and fully motivating their working enthusiasm** Feasible incentive policies should be formulated to attract and keep excellent teachers in rural area, such as establishing teaching achievement prize for rural teachers with high qualities and strong teaching ability and providing no-interest housing loan for young teachers who earn low salaries and do not have personal houses. For subjects lacking teachers, high salaries should be offered in order to attract outstanding college graduates or in-service teachers to work in rural area, being engaged in teaching.

Training for rural teachers should be strengthened and school-work burden should be reduced. Firstly, role of various education training institutions should be fully played and the open training system with internal training strength of educational administration as the subject and participated by various training institutions in society should be established to effectively promote teachers' training. Meanwhile, the effect of current training institutions should be fully exerted. Secondly, establishment of training team should be strengthened. Teachers should be supported and encouraged to further their education and improve theoretical knowledge to better adapt to the new requirements of teaching reform. Communication among teachers in different schools should be encouraged and strengthened and various teaching resources should be fully utilized to form convenient, flexible and effective cooperation mechanism. Lastly, training methods and contents should be enhanced. According to the actual conditions of schools and teachers, various training methods should be actively explored, such as in-service training, customized training as well as off-job training. Long-distance training should be carried out with modern educational technology, making it possible for most rural teachers to participate in teaching theory and quality training.

(From page 99)

- [6]ZHANG XH, SUN X, ZHANG HB. Studies on land resources management major construction in science and engineering colleges——A case study of Henan Polytechnic University [J]. *Anhui Agricultural Science Bulletin*, 2011, 17(17): 183-184. (in Chinese).
- [7]LIU XF, GUAN X. A study of the teaching reform of the land resource management major——A case study of Hunan Agricultural University [J]. *Forum on Contemporary Education*, 2010(8): 69-70. (in Chinese).
- [8]ZHOU W, CAO YG. Practice bases construction of land resources management major ——Taking China University of Geosciences (Beijing) as an

### 3 Conclusions

Education is of fundamental importance to the fulfillment of our great long-range mission. To achieve the balanced development of compulsory education between urban and rural areas is a conspicuous issue which affects the education of children in rural area and the enhancement of comprehensive quality of the Chinese nation. Therefore, fairness of compulsory education is the main part of educational equity. Compulsory education involves the equity of educational rights and educational opportunities. Compulsory education tests the ruling idea and decision wisdom of governments at all levels and evaluates their social credit. The government should ensure the required resources for compulsory education in society, strengthen the adjustment of inner allocation, allocation in urban and rural areas as well as regional allocation of national education resources, distribute educational resources equally, guarantee the balanced development of compulsory education and provide equal educational opportunities for every student.

### References

- [1] ZHAO C, CUI J. The coverage rate of nine-year compulsory education population in the whole country reaches to 99.7% [EB/OL]. (2010-09-26) [2010-12-14]. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2010-09/26/c\\_12606881.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2010-09/26/c_12606881.htm). (in Chinese).
- [2] The suggestions on develop the Twelfth Five-Year Plan for economic and social development from Xinhua net [EB/OL]. (2010-10-27) [2010-12-14]. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2010-10/27/c\\_12708501.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2010-10/27/c_12708501.htm). (in Chinese).
- [3] WANG WJ. Analyzing the institutional obstacles to China's urban-rural gap in compulsory Education [J]. *Research on Financial and Economics Issues*, 2009(9): 3-10. (in Chinese).
- [4] DI B. A practical analysis on balanced development of Chinese basic education [J]. *Educational Research*, 2007(7): 22-30. (in Chinese).
- [5] National Education Inspection Team. National Inspection Report of Education 2008 (Abstract)——Focus on compulsory education teachers [J]. *Exploring Education Development*, 2009(1): 1-5. (in Chinese).
- [6] JIANG P, WANG ZH. Test of post tuition-free compulsory education: problem and way out [J]. *Journal of Hebei Normal University*, 2009(8): 33-37. (in Chinese).
- [7] WEN J. Enlightenment to compulsory education in Japanese rural areas [J]. *Japan Problem Studies*, 2008(2): 41-45. (in Chinese).

example [J]. *Chinese Geological Education*, 2011(4): 74-77. (in Chinese).

- [9] LI XJ, YU KQ, WANG AL. The status quo of land resources management major and the countermeasures [J]. *Theory Research*, 2010(31): 285-287. (in Chinese).
- [10] HU SG, WANG ZQ, GAO Y, *et al.* The innovative talents training mode and paths of land resources management major based on team-based organization [J]. *Journal of Changchun University of Science and Technology*, 2011, 6(12): 136-137. (in Chinese).