

Current situation and countermeasures of unbalanced development of urban and rural basic education in Hejiang County

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Abstract: *The report from the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China highlights the central role of education in national development. It also calls for the acceleration of constructing a high-quality education system and promoting educational equity through quality education. While Hejiang County has made significant strides in basic education development, the current state of basic education in the county does not meet the new standards put forth by the Party and the country. Additionally, it fails to meet the new requirements of regional high-quality development and the increasing demand from citizens for quality education. Urgent problems need to be addressed. Through field visits, literature analysis, and data comparison, this study investigates the current state of basic education in Hejiang County. It provides insights that can help the county overcome the difficulties in basic education development, promote the development of basic education, fully implement the Party's education policy, cultivate morality and talent, and achieve the goal of developing quality education.*

Keywords: *Hejiang County; Urban and rural basic education; Unbalanced development; Countermeasures*

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I. Research Background

Basic education is the minimum level of education provided to children as mandated by the state, and it is a fundamental component of the national education system aimed at ensuring quality education for all students. The state has set out the development goals and strategies for basic education through various policy measures, such as "China's Education Modernization 2035". Currently, research on basic education in China covers a wide range of aspects, including education policies, teaching methodologies, resource allocation, and educational equity. For instance, "Analysis of the Unbalanced and Insufficient Development of Basic Education - Jiang Fengyun" examines the issue of educational inequality. There are also studies that focus on the specific local conditions of basic education, such as "Focusing on Resolving the Unbalanced and Insufficient Development Contradictions to Run Basic Education in the New Era in Jiangxi Province - Huang Xiaohua". However, little research has been conducted on the current status of basic education development in Hejiang County. This study aims to objectively reflect the unbalanced development of basic education in Hejiang County through extensive research and field visits, and to identify strategies to address this issue, thereby contributing to the development of basic education in Hejiang County.

II. Imbalance in the Development of Urban and Rural Basic Education in Hejiang County and Related Issues

Hejiang County has implemented a series of measures aimed at promoting the balanced development of urban and rural basic education. These measures include classroom teaching reform, home-school collaboration, and practical labor education. The county is making efforts to promote the balanced development of urban and rural education. Additionally, the county is actively exploring the use of school district advantages to promote high-quality education development through collaborative construction, team development, and common development. As a result, the urban-rural education gap has been narrowed, and certain results have been achieved. However, there are still specific areas where imbalance persists:

2.1. Imbalance in the scale of urban and rural schools and their supporting facilities.

While the operating conditions and indicators of compulsory education schools in Hejiang County are qualified, a basic balance of development has been achieved. However, some schools, particularly rural schools, face challenges in infrastructure development due to geographical limitations. These schools are often small in size, with severe shortages in teaching and ancillary facilities, as well as playground areas. According to the "Guiding Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Comprehensive Strengthening of the Construction of Small Rural Schools and Town Boarding Schools", rural small-scale schools and town boarding

schools have insufficient operating conditions, such as unreasonable planning and layout, relatively poor operating conditions, inadequate teacher guarantee, etc. In contrast, urban schools usually have larger operating scales and complete facilities. This imbalance results in uneven distribution of educational resources geographically, affecting the quality and opportunities for rural students to receive education, thereby, widening the gap between urban and rural basic education.

2.2. Imbalance in educational investment between urban and rural areas

When it comes to investing in education, urban schools tend to receive more financial support and social assistance. For instance, the "Management Measures for Urban Infrastructure Supporting Fees in Hejiang County" stipulates that units and individuals who build, rebuild, or expand buildings within the central urban area should pay supporting fees based on the building area, with a standard of 35 yuan per square meter. This indicates that the government provides a certain level of financial guarantee for urban infrastructure construction, which in turn enables urban schools to offer richer educational resources and a better learning environment. On the other hand, rural schools often face tighter budgets for education, which makes it difficult for them to meet basic educational needs, let alone provide additional educational resources and development opportunities. This imbalance in investment further exacerbates the disparity in education quality between urban and rural areas.

2.3. Imbalance of teaching staff between urban and rural areas

Due to the stronger economic power of cities and the availability of more education funds, they are able to attract and retain more highly educated and experienced teachers. In contrast, rural schools face issues with teacher shortages and uneven quality. To attract excellent teachers to rural areas, rural schools often lower their standards and requirements for teachers, which only widen the gap in teacher resources between urban and rural areas.

2.4. Imbalance in the quality of student sources between urban and rural areas

The imbalance in the quality of student sources is a significant indicator of the gap in basic education between urban and rural areas. The reasons for this disparity are as follows: (1) Disparities in teaching facilities, educational investment, and teaching staff between urban and rural schools. For instance, based on the budget preparation for Hejiang Middle School and Xiantan Middle School in Hejiang County in 2024, the expenditure budget for Hejiang Middle School is 72.52 million yuan, while that of Xiantan Middle School is 8.21 million yuan. This situation leads more families to opt for sending their children to urban schools for better education. (2) Higher economic development potential in cities, more job opportunities, attracting more rural families to migrate to urban areas, resulting in a decline in student sources for rural schools. (3) Preferential admission policies of some urban schools, such as the "Notice on Regulating the Enrollment Work of Ordinary Primary and Secondary Schools in Sichuan Province in 2020" (Chuanjiao Letter [2020] No. 139), which states that all public and private ordinary high schools enroll students synchronously, and admission is based on students' scores in the entrance examination. This policy attracts more students with better academic performance to study in cities, further widening the gap in the quality of student sources between urban and rural areas.

III. The Impact of Unbalanced Development of Basic Education between Urban and Rural Areas

The unbalanced development of basic education between urban and rural areas has multifaceted impacts, not only on the quality and equity of education, but also on social structure and individual development, presenting significant challenges, particularly in rural areas.

3.1. The decline in the rural consumer population has resulted in a lack of vitality in social and economic development.

The development of basic education in cities is flourishing, attracting more families to settle in urban areas to provide a conducive learning environment for their children, which further promotes urban economic growth. However, this has adverse effects on rural areas, such as population loss due to imbalanced education development. Talented young people in rural areas move to cities in search of better educational resources, resulting in a decline in the rural population, particularly among school-age children and young adults. According to the Statistical Communiqué of the National Economy and Social Development of Hejiang County in 2021 and 2022, the rural population decreased from 644,904 at the end of 2021 to 638,047 at the end of 2022.

Moreover, the population loss will directly impact consumption demand and market vitality in rural areas, slowing down local economic development, reducing employment opportunities, and creating a vicious cycle. Additionally, the changes in social structure caused by the migration of young people will leave behind mainly the elderly and children, leading to an imbalance in social structure and affecting social harmony and stability.

3.2. Insufficient Driving Force for the Development of Rural Schools

The imbalance in the development of basic education between urban and rural areas, coupled with the lack of impetus for the advancement of rural schools, has created a vicious cycle. The primary manifestations and influencing factors of this cycle include: (1) Weak teaching staff: Exceptional educators tend to gravitate towards urban areas, making it arduous for rural schools to attract and retain high-quality teachers, which adversely impacts the quality of education. (2) Scarce educational resources: Educational resources, such as teaching facilities, educational funds, and teaching materials, are relatively scarce in rural schools, which limit the ability to conduct teaching activities. (3) Decline in education quality: As a result of the shortage of teaching staff and resources, the education quality of rural schools is essentially incomparable to that of urban schools, further exacerbating the migration of parents and students to cities.

IV. Strategies for Addressing Imbalances in the Development of Basic Education between Urban and Rural Areas

Addressing imbalances in the development of basic education between urban and rural areas requires a comprehensive approach and efforts at multiple levels. By implementing the following strategies, we can gradually alleviate and ultimately resolve this issue, leading to improved equity and quality of education.

4.1. Achieving a Balanced Allocation of Teaching Resources

In order to address the serious lack of educational technology equipment and severe shortage of teachers in rural schools, joint efforts from the government and education departments are required to improve the situation. By implementing various measures, such as policy support, financial investment, and teacher training, the overall level of rural education can be enhanced. Here are some applicable solutions and measures: (1) Increase investment in rural education to improve infrastructure. According to the Ministry of Finance's support for accelerating the high-quality balanced development of compulsory education and urban-rural integration, transfer payments for high-quality balanced development of compulsory education and urban-rural integration will reach 227.4 billion yuan in 2023, an increase of 14.8 billion yuan from the previous year, which will be used to enhance public expenditure guarantee levels, narrow regional gaps, and strengthen teacher team construction. (2) Improve the treatment of rural teachers to attract and retain excellent teachers. (3) Provide regular research and teaching activities for rural teachers and strengthen teacher training. (4) Establish an effective education quality supervision system to improve the quality of rural education. Through these measures, the vitality of rural basic education development can be enhanced, the educational quality of rural schools can be gradually improved, the education gap between urban and rural areas can be reduced, and the balanced distribution of educational resources can be promoted. At the same time, it also helps to retain talent in rural areas and promote comprehensive social and economic development in local areas.

4.2. Improvement of transportation between urban and rural areas

Improving transportation plays a multifaceted role in promoting the balanced development of basic education in both urban and rural areas. This includes: (1) Improving rural transportation conditions to facilitate resource sharing between urban and rural areas and alleviate the shortage of resources in rural schools. (2) Enabling teachers to move more conveniently between urban and rural areas, which helps to alleviate the shortage of teaching staff in rural schools. (3) Convenient transportation promotes communication and cooperation between urban and rural schools, which is conducive to improving the teaching quality and management level of rural schools. According to the Xinhua News Agency's "Opinions on Building a High-Quality and Balanced Basic Public Education Service System" issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, tasks such as promoting regional coordinated development, advancing overall urban-rural development, accelerating inter-school balanced development, and ensuring fair development for all groups are proposed, among which improving transportation conditions is one of the foundations for achieving integrated urban-rural education and high-quality balanced development.

4.3. Enhancing Rural Infrastructure

Enhancing rural infrastructure is crucial for promoting balanced development of basic education in both urban and rural areas. As stated in the "Opinions on Building a High-Quality and Balanced Basic Public Education Service System", priority should be given to ensuring basic public education services, filling gaps, and promoting comprehensive coverage of services for all people in a high-quality and balanced manner. The specific roles of enhancing rural infrastructure are as follows: (1) It helps to improve the level of rural public services, empower rural socio-economic development, increase rural attractiveness, and attract and retain high-quality teachers and residents. (2) It supports modern teaching activities, such as the construction of youth centers and various research and study sites, which are crucial for improving teaching quality. (3) It promotes balanced development of infrastructure, thereby reducing the differences in education opportunities and

conditions between urban and rural areas, and promoting educational equity.

V. Limitations of the Study

When discussing the current situation and countermeasures regarding the unbalanced development of urban and rural basic education in Hejiang County, this study objectively reflects the urban-rural imbalance in the current development of basic education in Hejiang County through on-site investigations, data comparisons, and other methods. Additionally, it proposes practical solutions through extensive literature research and policy analysis. However, there are limitations to the research process, including: (1) Difficulty in obtaining comprehensive and up-to-date education statistics, particularly detailed data on student mobility, teacher turnover, and fund allocation. (2) The research only includes some schools or regions in Hejiang County as research samples, and not all schools and educational institutions are covered. (3) Changes in education policies may affect the stability and predictability of research results. (4) The research results are limited to the specific situation in Hejiang County and may not be generalizable to other areas or have universality.

VI. Conclusion

The unbalanced development of urban and rural basic education has become a prominent issue in Hejiang County, which is seriously impacting the overall development of education. Addressing this challenge requires collaborative efforts from the government, society, and education departments. By providing policy guidance, investing in funds, and improving infrastructure, we can gradually narrow the urban-rural education gap, promote educational equity, and achieve balanced social development in Hejiang County.

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