



## Diverse Education Based on Specific Conditions in Rural Areas of China

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### Abstract

Connecting the spiritual outlook of the future society, education is the cornerstone of the rejuvenation of a nation. By the year 2018, nearly 600 million people lived in rural areas of China. For being such a large group, their basic necessities of life, and each and every move are closely related to the country's destiny. So when these two parts get associated, the problem become larger and more difficult. Nowadays we should view the rural education with new eyes. Affected by the deepening of the market economy, the expansion of higher education and the tough job market, rural residents' views on education are changing and can gradually be divided into two categories: the one is that education is the steering wheel which can lead to the change of fate; the other one is that the education is no longer the only way out. The cost of continuing a child's education must be seen first.

This article holds that in the process of revitalizing rural education, we should take measures according to local conditions basing on rural characteristics, and attach importance to the development of a multi-level and diverse education so that students can see more possibilities besides study and work, which will not only benefit the development of individuals, but also contribute to the progress of the whole society.

**Key words:** Rural education; Status quo; Measures; Diverse education

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### 1. STATUS QUO OF RURAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

After the efforts of the last decade, China's rural education as a whole has taken on a new look. The financial expenditures of pre-school education and compulsory education have been increasing. During the 12th Five-Year Plan period, the investment in rural pre-school education increased from 342.48 to 90.298 billion yuan, an increase of 1.64 times compared with five years ago (Qin & Qi, 2017); the scale of secondary education has gradually expanded and become more popular, and the enrollment rate of secondary education for the younger generation has reached 88.3%.<sup>1</sup> The subsidy system for poor students in ordinary high schools has gradually improved; social organizations have further penetrate into remote and backward areas to help the development of education; national policies have been tilted towards rural areas, which appropriately reduces the difficulty for rural students to enter higher education and also brings more outstanding young teachers to the countryside.

All these changes are gratifying. But behind these phenomena, we still have deep concerns about rural education. China has a vast territory, and its huge regional differences cannot be underestimated: the economic development level in the east is higher than that in the west, and the level of urban economic development is higher than that in rural areas. Even so, in the rural areas of the eastern region, although the wage income gap may

<sup>1</sup> 2017 National Education Project Development Statistics Bulletin.

not be large, but when it comes to living environment and public resources, the urban-rural gap is still obvious. We do not have the right to choose the wealth and poverty of the family we were born into, but we should have the right to choose our future lifestyle. Therefore, we should be more attention to how to let the children with different starting points can run to their own happy life bathing in the same sunshine.

If we briefly analyze the main problems faced by rural education, it can be summarized into two aspects: educational resources and educational idea.

### 1.1 Rural Educational Resources

**The distribution of educational resources is dispersed.** China's rural areas have large area, loose population, low prosperity and development, and the distribution of teaching resources is loose. It is often the case that several villages share a rural primary school. Rural schools often need to balance the needs of multiple villages, including some areas with sluggish economic development, limited teaching resources and complicated geographical morphology. Students need to go over the mountains and cross the river by boat to get to school. For these reasons, both teachers and students waste a lot of time in the home school round-trip.

**Poor mobility of teaching resources.** The economic and social life in rural areas is relatively occluded, which is not attractive to young teachers. Professional teachers of music, sports and beauty are even scarcer, which makes the quality of education greatly reduced. In addition, due to the lack of convenient digital equipment in a few remote areas, teaching resources cannot be updated timely, which affects the teaching effect to a certain extent.

**Resource utilization is not guaranteed.** With the help of the State, many schools already have well-established hardware teaching facilities, but sometimes they are not effectively utilized. For example, the proportion of new books added to the library each year is insufficient, the types of books do not meet characteristics of students' age, and the problem of valuing quantity over quality remains to be solved (Zheng, 2017). In addition, backward teaching materials also limit the improvement of educational quality so that teaching resources need to be updated from time to time, advancing with the times.

**Urbanization affects the distribution of rural educational resources.** Due to urbanization, more and more peasants leave the fields and moved to work and live in the county towns. As a result, the villages are increasingly "hollowed out", followed by the decline of rural education, medical care and other basic undertakings. While some wealthy rural people have entered the city, but those who are not rich try every means to send their children to the county to receive better education, resulting in the decreasing number of students in rural schools, the decline in the quality of students, the

outflow of teachers, the lack of family education and other problems. In the long run, the rural education will go down a blind alley of development. In addition, it is also worrying the problem of left-behind children produced by parents who work in cities.

### 1.2 Rural Education Idea

There are two extreme orientations in the process of rural education governance. One is the "only the city" which loses its own development direction in the blind pursuit of urbanization; the other is the orientation of "only the village", which is a simple self-reform circulation in rural education and rural life.

One manifestation of the "only the city" orientation is the emergence of the famous "super high school" or schools that prefer military management. However, this is understandable because the reality is that the quality of education in rural areas lags behind that in cities, as a result, rural students have to work harder if they want to stand out from the rest in gaokao to enter higher education.

The manifestation of the orientation of "only the village" includes dropping out of school, entering into work in an early age, establishing a family early and so on. In fact, it makes sense because the education is a long-term investment. When some parents don't see the benefits within a certain period of time, they will turn to the direction of seeing the benefits, which is work. Such a choice can reduce the economic burden of rural families and bring more labor force to the society. This choice has both advantages and disadvantages for individuals.

Behind these two orientations, perhaps we can see a trace of helplessness. If the quality of education in rural areas is similar to that in cities, students who want to pursue higher development can have a relatively easy time. If rural families were more affluent, rural students would have fewer scruples on their way to school. This helplessness stems from the backwardness of economy, which leads to the lack of the right to choose in education. So what can we do to improve the situation besides developing the economy?

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## 2. RURAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS

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### 2.1 Reaffirm the Purpose

The development of things is guided by the value orientation, and the biased value orientation often affects and hinders the normal development of things. Therefore, before exploring specific actions, perhaps we should first review what our starting point is.

In the book "Reflexive Education" published by UNESCO in 2015, points out that "the following humanistic values should be used as the basis and purpose

of education: respect for life and human dignity, equal rights and social justice, cultural and social diversity, as well as the awareness of unity and shared responsibility for building our common future.” In the interpretation of **humanistic education** given by the United Nations, there is no single word about knowledge, social status, higher standard of living nor any other concepts that we seem to be closely related to education. Instead, the emphasis here is on the meaning and dignity of the individual, on the equality and value in a diverse society, and on the ultimate goal of building a harmonious society.

Therefore, under the guidance of such values, China’s rural education should also develop in a similar healthy direction. We should respect each one’s different ways of realizing the value of their own life. We should give individual diverse choices based on different social conditions, and also we should build a harmonious, mutual assistance, mutual benefit and win-win social atmosphere. We believe that this will be a way to make rural education sustainable.

## 2.2 Starting From Educational Resources

**Improve the utilization of existing resources:** Teaching resources are not limited to books and teachers. In this sense, there are many teaching resources that are not available in cities. If they can be effectively used, they will become the advantage of rural education.

The child educator Piaget emphasizes the design of the learning environment rather than the teaching environment. As long as the students achieve self-improvement and other learning purposes, any form of teaching resources is appropriate. From the perspective of resource allocation, urban schools have strong faculty, complete teaching facilities, and the advantages of resource concentration. However, rural areas are also rich in natural resources and vast land. Rural natural conditions also facilitate teachers to conduct on-the-spot teaching and guide students to explore. Teachers can even build a teaching system that conforms to local resources according to the psychological development stages of different rural areas with different natural characteristics.

For example, rural areas retain more traditional customs, such as folk songs, making holiday foods, national musical instruments, etc., guiding children to close to these traditional cultures, increasing knowledge while enhancing cultural identity; in addition, most natural resources in rural areas enriching, leading children to explore Chinese herbal medicine will also be an interesting way to enter scientific interest; most of the nightlife in rural areas is relatively calm. If you use this time to open a library or build a movie theater, you will have a subtle influence on children. In addition, the author believes there will be more other practices.

These localized teaching methods have got rid of the traditional management model of “one side for all people”

in basic education. Knowledge is not only in books, but also stimulates the students’ deep potential, and promotes students to proceed from reality and achieve self-value perfection.

**Strengthen the development and utilization of new technologies:** More and more practices have proved that the proper use of science and technology not only can have a positive effect not only on amplify commerce or or the teaching effect.

Recently, the remote live telecast teaching project in Sichuan Province has aroused everyone’s attention. Students in the mountainous areas of Sichuan Province can watch their peers’ classes thousands of miles away in provincial capitals via a live webcast. The quality of teaching resources began with the pressure and anxiety of rural students, and the children felt that the urban school curriculum was too difficult. But with time and effort, rural students can also keep up with the city’s classrooms, and rural teachers also got trained indirectly. Practical data and countless real stories prove that this measure opens the door to higher education for more rural students.

In addition, new technologies can be applied not only in schools but also in every households. In terms of the most commonly used smartphones, the penetration rate of smartphones among people aged 16 to 59 in China’s first-tier cities reached 94 percent in 2015, but only 32% in rural areas.<sup>2</sup>We want more parents to realize that electronic products are not the same as video games. As long as they are properly guided, they will have a beneficial impact on children’s learning and open a broader window of knowledge.

## 2.3 Strengthen the Development of Adult Education

When we talk about rural education, we are not only referring to children’s education, but also including adults’. A good adult education can promote the formation of a good family atmosphere and social atmosphere, create a comfortable growth environment for the next generation; it can also promote the current economic development and contribute to the construction of new countryside.

With the implementation of the “*four modernizations*” (simultaneous development of industrialization, informatization, urbanization, and agricultural modernization), “*separation of three rights*” (ownership, contracting rights, management rights), “*return migrant workers’ entrepreneurial tide*” has emerged across the country. Farmers are no longer an identity, but a profession. According to incomplete statistics, about 7 million people returned to the village in 2017, 4.8 million of them migrant workers. Therefore, it is imperative to improve rural adult education. To this end, we can

<sup>2</sup> *The 36th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China*, China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC).

consider from the following perspectives.

—strengthen adult vocational education and improve vocational skills;

—strengthen adult spiritual education and form a good social atmosphere;

—strengthen innovative education for adults.

Under the guidance of the policy of revitalizing the countryside, more and more young people are moving back to their hometowns. The value of rural entrepreneurship lies in the rise of a positive social climate, the discovery of business opportunities in life, which has a positive guiding effect on the next generation.

In fact, not only young people are those we should pay attention to, but also we ought to still keep in mind the education of the middle-age group for the reason that most of them play the most important role in the whole family.

We're glad to see that there are already some meaningful practices can be our guide, for example, learning a scientific way to plant fruit trees can actually increase family income; learning how to use mobile to put county-side-life video on the internet to earn extra money or to make living; learning the knowledge of management in order to run a private business, etc.

#### 2.4 Pay Attention to Rural Vocational Education

Rural vocational education provides talent guarantee, intellectual support and technical support for the rural revitalization strategy, and is an important part of the popularization of high school education in China. Numerous practices have proved that rural vocational education can not only enable poor people to gain employment and entrepreneurship by obtaining skills, and help their children to change their destiny, and block the intergenerational transmission of poverty, but also reduce the pressure on ordinary high schools in the corresponding regions, cultivate various talents, and increase the economic vitality of the corresponding region.

Over the years, many rural vocational schools in China basing on local and regional industrial development and talent demand have actively cooperated with relevant industry enterprises, institutions of higher learning, research institutes, large agricultural production enterprises and farmers' production cooperatives, and achieved good results.

As long as China's rural society still exists, the issue of "agriculture, rural areas and farmers" has not been fundamentally resolved. Rural vocational education is promising. There is still a long way to go in developing rural vocational education.

## CONCLUSION

The fact that rural areas are relatively backward makes it difficult for rural students to compete with urban students from the same starting point. What is worth it would be: firstly, to make it clear that the goal of education is the dignity of the individual, equality and value in a diverse society. We must not impose the appropriate criteria for cities to rural areas. Secondly, we must look at how to make good use of the present educational resources instead of worrying too much about their lack. Thirdly, it may be good to develop a multi-level and diverse education from many aspects based on the special conditions of rural areas and taking into account that we have numerous measures apart from sticking to the development of economy, for example: promoting vocational education and adult education. In the end, trust and perseverance is required because it will not be an easy job.

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