

# *Music Education Inequality: A Case Study in Zhejiang*

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**Abstract:** This article describes the inequality distribution of music education resources in Zhejiang Province, such as the difference in music classroom facilities and music teaching equipment, and makes a statistical analysis of the data. Zhejiang Province has a high level of economic development compare with other Chinese provinces and the music facilities in the urban areas are great. Compared with rural schools, students in the urban area have more music learning opportunities and resources. However, for students in rural areas, the venues and conditions for music activities are limited, and it is difficult to meet the needs of students' music education requirements, so their level of music training is relatively low. Based on the differences between urban and rural schools in Jiaying and Haining cities in Zhejiang Province, the essay describes that there are certain differences between urban and rural schools. Urban schools have more perfect facilities and equipment, and they can invest a lot of money in education, while rural schools are relatively backward in facilities and lack of educational resources.

**Keywords:** music education, distribution inequality, Zhejiang Province, rural and urban school.

## 1. Introduction

Music education significantly contributes to the holistic development of children, fostering both their physical and mental growth. However, as music education becomes more widespread, issues of inequality within this field have garnered increasing public concern. One prominent issue is the unequal distribution of music education resources, particularly evident in many Chinese cities. This essay will explore the disparities in music education resources among middle and high schools in Zhejiang province.

Zhejiang Province is one of the economically developed provinces in China, and the family investment in education is also at a relatively high level. The province is known for its high teaching standards and its emphasis on developing students' critical thinking, creativity, innovation, and practical skills. However, despite its wealth of educational resources, Zhejiang Province still faces challenges with the unequal distribution of music education resources across different areas.

In Zhejiang Province, the disparity in the distribution of music education resources between urban and rural areas is strikingly evident. Some rural areas are short of music education resources, such as insufficient teachers, backward teaching facilities and outdated teaching materials. In contrast, some schools in urban areas have rich music educational resources. The total GDP of Zhejiang Province ranks fourth in China, but there are still significant differences in regional development, and there are

certain gaps in the quantity and quality of educational infrastructure between urban and rural areas, especially in rural areas[1]. This essay will analyze this problem, in order to take some corresponding measures to improve the inequality distribution of music educational resources between urban and rural areas in Zhejiang Province.

The research materials in this essay are mainly based on researcher's empirical experience and the data collected from both official and media material. The experience would be a kind of valuable data to investigate well-equipped urban private schools and rural public schools, which has inspired researcher to delve deeper into this issue, and aim to utilize these materials to conduct the research.

## 2. A Case Study in Zhejiang

Chinese Education Department (2023) reveals that the middle and high schools with a higher percentage of poverty in the rural area have shortage in the number of music teachers, poor quality of music courses, fewer dedicated rooms for music, and lack of proper music equipment. This means that students in middle and high schools in rural areas have fewer resources for musical education and have less opportunities to participate in music activities compared to their urban counterparts.

Education should be inherently fair, meaning everyone has the right to equal educational opportunities. However, varying financial conditions can result in unequal access to education for different groups of people.

In China, the difference between urban and rural areas is an important issue in education equity. There is a big gap between urban and rural infrastructure. Due to the inequality development of urban and rural economy, there will be a big gap in the construction of school infrastructure[2]. In urban areas, there are a large number of schools and most of them have better teachers and educational facilities and they can provide high-quality educational resources, while in rural areas, the number of schools is relatively small, most of them are in poor conditions and lack of teachers, so it is difficult to provide high-quality education.

The poor families in rural area will not be able to provide their children with the same education as the economically advantaged family in cities. This gap is even more obvious between urban private schools and rural public schools in China.

Take Jiaxing city as an example, In 2012, Jiaxing city's urbanization level reached 55.3%, urban and rural economic and social development is relatively balanced, the overall development of basic education is very good, but there are some differences between urban and rural schools, urban community education resources distribution is inequality, urban community schools teachers and infrastructure allocation is relatively good, while rural schools lack good teachers[3]. There is still a certain distance between the development of rural and urban education in Zhejiang Province. In recent years, the Department of Finance of Zhejiang Province has actively implemented the funding guarantee to support and promote the high-quality and balanced development of education in Zhejiang province by focusing on the decision-making and deployment of the provincial Party Committee and the provincial government. In 2022, the provincial finance implemented a special fund of 182 million yuan to support the establishment of a cross-regional education community, which has promoted the development between urban and rural areas.

Due to the high investment in urban schools, these institutions can afford to build specialized facilities and purchase equipment for their music programs. As a result, they offer advanced amenities such as concert halls, recording studios, practice rooms, and rehearsal spaces. They also provide a wide variety of musical instruments, allowing students to choose according to their interests. Additionally, urban schools often offer more performance opportunities, inviting professional musicians to train and guide students during rehearsals. These experiences boost students' self-confidence and provide them with valuable opportunities for growth.

It reflects the inequality of music education resources. Some students in rural area with musical talent may be affected by the economic conditions of their families. If the family is not located in the city and the financial conditions are not very good that students will not be able to get good music education opportunities.

According to the data reported by Haining City in 2021, schools in Haining City can strictly follow the curriculum standards and carry out art courses such as music and art. Each middle school take 1 lesson per week of music lessons. The total number of art teachers in middle schools is 717, including 307 music teachers. In 2021, the city's various art education funds at all levels were invested 366,1708.12 yuan. These schools had different art classrooms, including 179 music classrooms[4]. For example, the school based in another city of Zhejiang—Zhuji city, can offer vocal lessons, piano lessons and other courses. It has a total of 30 pianos, which is almost enough for every student in the class to have one piano.

In the economically developed Shaoxing city, the basic conditions of music education in rural primary and secondary schools are relatively good, 97% of schools are equipped with special music classrooms, 100% of teachers have teaching pianos, and 84% are equipped with pianos, and all use unified formal music textbooks. Among them, there are also some problems, such as some non-full-time music teachers, 21% of non-music professional teachers only take music lessons with subjective enthusiasm, and more than half of the teachers rarely participate in teaching and research activities, poor ability of music teaching methods, weak understanding and application of teaching materials, and insufficient curriculum resources[5].

The fifth meeting of the Standing Committee of the Eleventh People's Congress of Zhejiang Province deliberated on the education work of the education working group in our province. The meeting pointed out that the investment in education in Zhejiang Province is still relatively insufficient, and the level of funding protection needs to be further improved. The problems are mainly manifested in four aspects. Firstly, the situation of insufficient investment in education still exists. Secondly, the actual increase of the investment in education is small, which is offset by the reduction and exemption for the benefit of the people. Next, the daily public fund quota in the per capital budget is low, especially in rural schools. Then, the teachers in rural areas are poorly paid. Although the salary of rural teachers in Zhejiang Province has been increased year by year, there is still a big gap between them and urban teachers. The primary reason for this disparity is that public funds allocated to primary and secondary schools cannot be used for personnel expenses, including non-salary welfare benefits, which must be funded by the schools themselves. If the local government does not provide these welfare benefits for primary and secondary school teachers, there are no alternative funding sources available. Consequently, many rural schools can only offer the government-provided salaries without any additional benefits, leading to a significant salary gap between rural and urban teachers.

The researcher's experience has given a deep understanding and strong feelings about this kind of inequality. In the Shaoxing city of Zhejiang province, the rural middle school and high schools like Huangze school researcher used to visit, and researcher wanted to sign up for that music class. During the visiting, researcher found that the music facilities there were a little backward - there was only one music teacher and there was no various musical instruments besides a piano and some electronic piano, not each students had opportunity to play the piano during the class. As the data presentation, they have music class for only 45 minutes a week. If you want to improve yourself quickly, you can only go out to the other places to practice.

Later, researcher moved to a school in the town and found that its music education resources presented a different landscape- The music learning conditions were superior there. In the school, there have a music department and they can provide various and sufficient musical instruments like

piano, violin, and flute for students to learn. They also have professional music teachers who can play different instruments. They take the music as a very important part of their education system.

The geographical location of the school and the different awareness of parents are also one of the reasons for the inequality of music education resources. A large part of parents in rural areas have a little understanding of the importance of music and they pay more attention to their children's math and Chinese lessons. Even if some children have good musical talent, parents may refuse them to learn music because of the educational expectation. In rural schools, the teaching facilities are imperfection, and what students learn in the classroom is only the theoretical knowledge about music. There are few opportunities for students to attend the practical exercise. In contrast, parents in the city have more advanced and open-minded educational ideas, and they will train their children according to what they are good at.

Everardo Francisco Reyes mentioned "Music Desert" and he analysed the data that people with low-income in rural areas had less access to music, and this study is similar to the USDA research on Food Deserts, which doesn't mean that people in low-income areas don't eat, but that people with low-income don't have access to fresh food and produce [6]. People in Music Deserts also lack the resources to participate actively in music and music deserts have significant implications that they not only exclude low-income people, but may also deprive them of their right to participate actively in music.

In the music education environment of China, there are also many people who like music but cannot get good music education because of their location and family economic conditions. They lack good music resources because their family income is low, which may limit their right to participate in music activities. This situation is consistent with the Music Desert.

### 3. Conclusion

The research examined the disparity in music education resources between urban and rural schools in Zhejiang Province. The level of educational resources is significantly influenced by economic factors. Rural residents typically have lower incomes compared to their urban counterparts, resulting in rural schools having limited financial resources and fewer educational funds. This financial constraint restricts the development opportunities for students in rural areas. Conversely, urban schools benefit from more substantial financial resources, enabling greater investment in education. These schools are often equipped with superior educational facilities and offer more learning opportunities, providing students with a better learning environment. This disparity contributes to the unequal distribution of educational resources between urban and rural areas.

As for the inequality distribution of music educational resources between urban and rural areas, we can also take a series of measures in the future, so that most children can enjoy more high-quality and equal educational resources. First of all, the government should strengthen the investment in education and they should increase financial subsidies for rural education and improve the hardware facilities and education quality of rural schools. In addition, the government should also guide social forces to participate in education, establish a special education fund, and provide more financial support for rural schools. Next, the government should improve the educational infrastructure of rural schools and invest some relatively perfect educational facilities in rural schools, so it can provide students with a better learning environment and improve their education level. Then, the government can raise the salary of rural teachers appropriately, so as to attract more excellent teachers, and it is also necessary to strengthen the training of rural teachers and improve their education level.

In a word, the inequality distribution of music educational resources in urban and rural areas is a very serious problem now. Therefore, it is important for us to take effective measures to solve this problem, which needs the joint efforts of the government, schools, families and society.

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