

Concrete Manifestations of Equity in Education, Using Finland as an Example

Nuo Xu^{1,a,*}

¹Xia Qing Communication School, Handan University, Handan, Hebei, 056006, China

a. 1643948342@qq.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: With the development of the economy and the times, education equity is receiving increasing attention. Educational equity in China has been gradually developed and improved in the optimization of policies, including the universalization of compulsory education, etc. However, in the context of rapid economic development, the problem of educational resource distribution has increased the difficulty for the complete realization of educational equity. In solving their own problems, they can learn from other countries' excellent education methods and strategies to create various possibilities for their own optimization. Therefore, this paper chooses Finland as a case study of education research, and based on the study of educational equity in Finland, it uses qualitative analysis and literature review to explore the problems China encounters in realizing educational equity. The ideas in this paper can help the government to alleviate the problem of educational inequity and make more people understand educational equity.

Keywords: Educational equity, Finland, China's compulsory education, Resource allocation in China.

1. Introduction

Educational equity in China has always been a hot topic of social concern, and with the efforts of the government, certain progress has been made in recent years in the basic universalization of nine-year compulsory education and the promotion of information-based education [1-2].

China has long emphasized investment in and reform of education, and has continued to promote the cause of equity in education in China. With regard to the universalization of compulsory education, improvements in the conditions for compulsory education have expanded the opportunities for school-age children to attend school. In 2012, the net enrollment rate of primary school-age children reached 99.85%, an increase of 0.06 percentage points from the previous year. The gross enrollment rate for junior middle school was 102.1%, an increase of 2 percentage points from the previous year [1]. The development of compulsory education in China has continued to grow over the past decade and has achieved remarkable results, with indicators such as enrollment rates and promotion rates showing an upward trend, and the population coverage rate of compulsory education approaching the 100% level, which also marks China's entry into the stage of universalizing nine-year compulsory education. In the development of information technology in education, the penetration of all school segments and all subjects has been realized. Informatization applications have been popularized and applied in pre-school, elementary school, middle school and high school, and have become the main

teaching method in middle school and high school [2]. Considering the age characteristics, cognitive characteristics, physical and mental development of preschool students, the application of information technology has been conservative in the preschool stage [3]. In addition, the application of information technology has been involved in several subjects, with emphasis on mathematics and information technology.

Since 1999, with the rapid expansion of education in China, the strong supply of access has advanced the equalization of education in China [3]. However, with the expansion of schools around the world and the improvement of education quality, the current allocation of education resources has become unbalanced. This has had a negative impact on the coordination and sustainable development of China's education system, and has further inhibited the realization of the concept of equity in education.

In exploring the path of educational equity in China, it is possible to draw on the development experiences and educational policies of other countries to assist in policy formulation in their own countries. In the current world, Finland, as a global educational powerhouse, has been able to create its own educational model by adhering to its own value system while learning from international experience in the evolution of educational thinking. This paper will use qualitative analysis and literature review to address the problems China encounters in achieving equality in education based on the study of educational equity in Finland. The ideas in this paper can help the government to alleviate the problem of educational inequality and make more people understand educational equity.

2. The concept of equity in education

Equity in education means that every educational target has fair access to the opportunities and resources provided by the main body of education and is treated fairly in educational activities, i.e., regardless of gender, race, birth background, living environment, family conditions, appearance, beauty and ugliness, etc., can have the same opportunities as others to receive education, enjoy the right to education, and be able to rely on the education received and their own efforts to reach A generalized social standard [4].

Educational equity lies not only in guaranteeing everyone's basic right to education and providing fair educational opportunities, but more crucially in taking human development as the fundamental starting point and ultimate goal [5]. Focusing on the "people-oriented" core of education, society should think about and evaluate the issue of equity in education from this perspective. For each specific individual, true equity is not only access to the same resources as others, but also the full respect of personal choices, the full realisation of personal values, and the full exploitation of individual potential, so that each individual can achieve substantial growth and development. Educational equity is centred on human development, respecting individual differences and diversified needs, so that every learner can enjoy fair opportunities for development. In addition, equity in education is also concerned with the quality of human development and seeks to promote the free and comprehensive development of each individual by stimulating a sense of human autonomy, guiding the release of life's potential and expanding the boundaries of development.

Educational equity not only focuses on the fulfilment of material needs, but also provides humanistic care. It transcends the cold and rigid distribution of resources and institutional norms and reaches out to every living being. Not only does each person have a real sense of being treated fairly and an authentic experience of fairness, but he or she also receives reasonable acknowledgement of that care, in which self-worth is demonstrated and potential for inner development is stimulated. Equity provides a solid foundation for each person's growth through "recognition".

3. Equity in education in Finland

Finland has topped the list of the world's happiest countries for many years in a row, thanks to its high welfare state system. Finland, as one of the countries with one of the best education systems in the world, has always emphasised and implemented strategies for equity in education [6].

Due to its geographic location, Finland is a country with few resources and a small population, and in this environment the concept of education, in which "everyone is an integral part", has been gradually recognised. After a long period of war, Finland has learnt that only through education can a nation be strengthened, and that only human beings can continue the vitality of a nation [7]. Based on this social environment factor in Finland, the Finnish Government has created and operated a highly developed education system in which everyone has access to equitable educational resources, and based on the well-established education system has established an education system in which learning can take place at any time and in any place, thus fostering an atmosphere of lifelong learning in society as a whole.

Equity in education in Finland is reflected in the implementation of education policy in the three areas of equal access to education, equal distribution of education resources and planning for future development.

3.1. Educational opportunities

The Finnish education system, which is based on educational equity, has established some 450 municipal governmental institutions throughout the country that are responsible for the provision of basic education services to children in their respective jurisdictions, thus ensuring that all children of school age have access to basic education on time and legally enjoy their right to a quality education. According to Finnish law, basic education in Finland is free of charge, and pupils are exempted from the costs of teaching and attending school. Textbooks and other learning materials are provided free of charge by the Government. As well, each pupil receives a free nutritious lunch every day. In addition, basic education in Finland is subject to the principle of proximity. If a student needs to apply for a school more than five kilometres away from his or her home, the municipal government agency is responsible for arranging and financing the transport [8].

Regarding interest classes or speciality classes outside the scope of non-basic education, parents who need them can apply to the state for a project to organise relevant interest classes and speciality classes, and the fees and establishment of the courses are strictly controlled by the state, which does not allow private individuals to set up the relevant tuition fees separately [9].

The exemption of school fees is a decisive and important policy in the education system and in education policy, which reduces the expenditure of families on the education of their children and thus reduces the overall burden on the family. And the exemption of the tuition fee threshold makes it possible for school-age children of whatever family background they are born into to enjoy equally the right to the same education, regardless of the income of their parents.

3.2. Educational resources

3.2.1. Teaching methods

School education in Finland is no longer focussed on subject knowledge, and it is now generally recognised that a positive attitude to learning and the rapid acquisition of learning skills are more important. Therefore, there is a strong focus on general knowledge education, and children are taught how they can use this knowledge in their lives [7].

Teachers in Finland have a great deal of freedom in the actual teaching process, and they are able to set the classroom content in accordance with the broad programme of study. The Finnish classroom

is characterised by group learning, in which the teacher usually prepares the topics for discussion in advance and gives the pupils plenty of time to think carefully and discuss them freely and flexibly in small groups. In the discussions, equality is always present, and each student is given the opportunity to speak actively, to think for themselves, and to explore the answers to their questions. This format greatly ensures that every student is motivated to learn, so that they are all involved in learning, ensuring the scientific and fair nature of education [9].

3.2.2. Teacher level

Teachers in Finland enjoy a high social reputation and status, as well as a very high level of professional well-being, making it a dream career for many. However, becoming a qualified teacher is not an easy task, and academic excellence alone is not enough [10]. Every incoming Finnish teacher must pass a rigorous selection and training process. Only the country's eight top research universities are qualified to train primary and secondary school teachers.

Upon completion of the high school programme, you are required to undergo an intense selection process of interviews and written exams to enter a five-year undergraduate study programme. If the career plan is to be a primary school teacher, a master's degree in education must also be obtained [11]. During their college years, students are not only required to complete the required number of credits, but they are also required to attend regular annual internships and receive supervision from professional teachers starting from the beginning of their college enrolment [7].

Teachers in Finland play a great role in educational equity, and very strict screening ensures the quality of the teacher training pool to a large extent. Teachers also need to understand each student's family environment and expectations for learning, personal health, etc. Such professional development and in-depth understanding allows teachers to develop more reasonable student development plans based on the specific circumstances of the students, thus avoiding unnecessary academic stress and reducing the burden on students [12]. Moreover, teachers are treated and paid at the same level, whether in urban or rural areas. These policies and regulations make it possible for all students to receive an equal and excellent education.

3.3. Development project

In Finland, the ability and opportunity to receive education is equal, and the school gives the student the opportunity to receive education of his own free choice, rather than society pushing him to have to choose [7]. Vocational education in Finland has the same status as general education due to the fact that the Finnish Higher Education Act gives universities of applied technology the same legitimacy as comprehensive universities. There are currently 16 comprehensive universities and 25 specialised colleges in Finland. The universities and colleges are spread throughout the country, ensuring that all students have equal rights to higher education studies. Nearly 65 per cent of Finnish students of every age group have access to a comprehensive university or professional college. It is the goal of the Finnish Government to ensure that an increasing number of Finns have access to higher education [12].

When choosing a career, students take into account first and foremost their own interests and personal wishes, and parents and society do not discriminate against students' choice of profession or vocational school. Moreover, Finnish vocational high schools will let students go to work first and have a deep understanding of their work before letting them enter higher education institutions. And work experience is one of the key items that Finnish universities look for in their students [7]. Finland gives every student the same respect for their individual wishes and for their profession, which is also a good reflection of equity in education.

4. Discussion

Throughout the history of black education in the United States, due to years of racial discrimination, black students in the United States have not had an equal right to education as the local white population. After a long struggle, they have gone from not having any right to education before to being gradually valued, and in general, there has been some progress. However, the majority of black students are still unable to enter higher social classes through their studies. Black education in the United States still has a long way to go before it reaches the standard of educational equity like that of the Finnish countries [13].

In recent years, China's education policy has been adjusted and optimised by the government, gradually improving the overall quality and fairness of education.

The current state of education policy is threefold. First, compulsory education has been developed in a balanced manner, but there is an imbalance in the allocation of resources between urban and rural areas and between regions. The Chinese Government should increase its investment in education in rural and impoverished areas and promote the equalisation of educational resources. Secondly, Chinese candidates have always used only the college entrance examination as the main pathway to higher education, but traditional examination-based education has neglected the development of students' personalities, so there is a need for further adjustments regarding advancement to higher education. Thirdly, for a long time, vocational education has had a relatively low social status in China, and there is a lack of outstanding vocational and technical talents. The Government should attach importance to vocational education and emphasise the importance of skilled personnel. Finally, the issue of professional development and treatment of teachers is not proportional to the effort put in, and there is a need to upgrade the treatment of teachers and improve working conditions.

5. Conclusion

This paper mainly introduces the basic universalisation of compulsory education and the promotion of information-based education in China, which have made some progress. However, China has not yet achieved complete equity in education, based on the excellent experience of Finland, which has achieved equity in education in three aspects: equality of opportunity, equality of resources, and equality of students' ability and opportunity to receive education. China also needs to make long-term efforts and implement comprehensive measures in the areas of balanced resource allocation, education reform and support for vulnerable groups.

The data analysed in this paper are not comprehensive enough, no empirical research is done, fewer countries are referred to, and the scope of the discussion in Finland is narrower; in the future, more data analysis should be done, and field research should be done to better improve this article.

References

- [1] Tan, J. (2014). *Research on Evaluation of Resource Allocation Efficiency of Compulsory Education in China Master (Dissertation, Xiangtan University)*. Master http://kns.yyttgd.top/kcms2/article/abstract?v=uhsBGgC2NqxLUwd03Hknh11Oe2_UVGfQT3r1l99l44BZs7yFHOUjSiow6pbOnaan5j84lVbOGyMOEe6-iSqqoYLwXtlp8-zUYMZ4FdEmsqF8-P7lUMSSe55h8BHCNw1FvPqJQJeNjnkH7MJPRcBMNMmLHFYyxoBo&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS
- [2] Chen, Y., Tao, W., Hu, H., Jing Y., & Shen. S., 2011 A new genus and species of the genus *Pterocarpus* (Coleoptera, Staphylinidae, Pterocarpiini) from China. (2021). *Progress and reflection on the research of informatisation teaching in China's basic education - an analysis based on papers from China Knowledge Network 2016-2020*. *Digital Education*(03),50-57.
- [3] Bao W., Liu Y. *Inter-regional differences in the allocation of higher education resources in China under the perspective of equity*[J]. *Education Development Research*,2009,29(23):37-43.
- [4] Xu Y. *Reflections on the Equity of Basic Education in China*[J]. *Western Quality Education*,2020,6(12):20-21.DOI:10.16681/j.cnki.wcqe.202012008.

- [5] Cheng T.J. High-quality Education Equity--Introduction of National Strategy for Education Equity in the New Era[J]. *Education Research*,2024,45(04):4-16.
- [6] Zhou Z .Inspiring Practices in Educational Globalization:The Case of Finland[C]//George Washington University, Department of Social Sciences, Northumbria University, Department of Kinesiology & Health Education, The University of Texas at Austin.Proceedings of the International Conference on Global Politics and Socio-Humanities(part7).University College London,BA Education Studies;,2023:7.DOI:10.26914/c.cnkihy.2023.110111.
- [7] Li W, Yang H. Why Finnish Education is Sought After[J]. *The masses*,2024,(02):68-69.
- [8] Cheng L. The Finnish Education System:Ensuring the Right to Education for All Finns[J]. *Shanghai Education*,2012,(35):6-9.
- [9] Huang Mingyong. Fair education blooms the beauty of life harmony[J]. *Educational Science Forum*,2019,(26):15-18.
- [10] Federick A. Finland education system[J]. *International Journal of Science and Society*, 2020, 2(2): 21-32.
- [11] Zuljan, M. V., & Vogrinc, J. (Eds.). (2011). *European dimensions of teacher education: Similarities and differences*. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana..
- [12] Feng K,Li X. How to achieve "light burden and high quality" in Finnish basic education - Based on the perspective of ecosystem theory[J]. *Education Guide*,2023,(03):91-96.DOI:10.16215/j.cnki.cn44-1371/g4.2023.03.010.
- [13] Hu Y,Gu C. Research on the education policy of black Americans in the vision of education equity[J]. *Journal of Xinjiang University (Philosophy-Humanities and Social Sciences Edition)*,2011,39(06):70-74.DOI:10.13568/j.cnki.issn1000-2820.2011.06.028.