

# ***Analysis of the Gap Between Urban and Rural Education in China from the Perspective of Educational Equity***

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**Abstract:** The urban-rural education gap in China remains a significant social challenge despite substantial government reforms and investments in education. This paper explores the disparities in educational resources, opportunities, and outcomes for urban and rural youth, emphasizing the historical, economic, cultural, and institutional factors that contribute to this inequality. Through a theoretical analysis, this paper assesses the distribution of educational resources, focusing on teacher quality, teaching facilities, and government investment. Additionally, we investigate the impact of the household registration system, uneven economic development, cultural differences, and social mobility on educational equity. The findings of this study highlight the critical barriers faced by rural students, including limited access to resources and substandard educational conditions. This study proposes comprehensive reforms to address these disparities, emphasizing the need for targeted support mechanisms and the use of technology to enhance access to quality education. Future research should adopt mixed-method approaches to gain deeper insights into the complexities of the urban-rural education gap.

**Keywords:** Urban-rural education gap, educational equity, educational resources, China, policy reform.

## **1. Introduction**

The urban-rural education gap in China has a long history. Although the government has made significant progress in education reform and investment in recent decades, the inequality of educational resources, opportunities and outcomes between urban and rural areas remains a prominent social problem. In cities, students can generally obtain better educational resources, such as higher-level teachers, advanced teaching facilities and more abundant extracurricular activities. In rural areas, school infrastructure often lags behind, teacher resources are limited, and educational investment is insufficient, creating significant disparities in educational opportunities compared to urban students. The economic, cultural, and institutional differences between urban and rural regions have further intensified educational inequality. As China's economy rapidly develops and urbanization progresses, population mobility from rural areas has increased, leading to a further scattering of educational resources and placing additional pressure on rural students to compete in a highly competitive educational landscape.

In this context, examining the urban-rural education gap and its contributing factors, as well as identifying strategies to enhance educational equity, holds both practical significance and theoretical

importance. This paper will investigate the disparities in educational resources, opportunities, and outcomes for urban and rural youth in China, delving into the complex institutional, economic, and social factors contributing to these differences. Through theoretical analysis, the study will assess the distribution of educational resources between urban and rural areas, focusing on teacher quantity and quality, teaching facilities, and government financial investment in education. Additionally, it will explore how the household registration system, uneven economic development, cultural differences, and social mobility impact educational equity. By analyzing the current educational status of urban and rural youth, this research aims to uncover the root causes of urban-rural educational inequality and provide insights for future educational policy formulation.

## **2. Analysis of the Current Situation of Urban-Rural Education Gap in China**

### **2.1. Equity in Educational Distributive**

Equity in Educational Distributive to the fair allocation of educational resources across various regions, schools, and groups. Its primary objective is to ensure that all students have access to educational resources regardless of their geographic location, economic status, or social background. In the education system, distributive equity manifests in several areas, including the availability of teaching staff, the quality of school facilities, and overall teaching effectiveness[1]. One of the root causes of the urban-rural education gap in China is the uneven distribution of educational resources. Urban schools usually enjoy more financial support, better teachers and advanced teaching facilities, while rural schools are relatively backward. The government's financial investment in urban schools is relatively sufficient, while financial support for education in rural areas is still insufficient, leading to a significant gap in hardware facilities between urban and rural areas. Many rural schools lack modern teaching equipment and have shabby school buildings. In some areas, there is even a phenomenon of students attending dilapidated school buildings[2]. The lack of a strong teaching staff in rural areas poses a significant challenge. There is an insufficient number of teachers, coupled with high mobility rates among them. As a result, talented educators often prefer to remain in urban settings, which further intensifies the disparity in educational resources between urban and rural areas. This uneven distribution of resources has a direct impact on the learning conditions and quality of education for rural students. Although the government has implemented some policy measures in recent years, such as the compulsory education funding guarantee mechanism and rural teacher subsidy policy, these efforts have had limited effectiveness, and the disadvantages faced by rural schools in terms of resource allocation remain apparent.

### **2.2. Equity in Educational opportunity**

Equity in educational opportunity means that all students should have equal conditions and an environment in which to obtain educational opportunities, without being restricted by their family background, economic status, or regional differences. Equal educational opportunity is one of the important foundations for achieving social equality. In China's urban and rural education systems, there are significant differences in equal opportunity. Urban students can obtain more high-quality educational opportunities, such as better schools, richer extracurricular activities, and more opportunities for further study, while rural students are subject to many restrictions in these aspects. Urban students have access to a wider range of educational choices and opportunities for further study, while rural students often encounter significant limitations. Urban areas benefit from more comprehensive basic education facilities and greater admission opportunities, with a higher number and quality of prestigious schools than their rural counterparts[2]. Under the nearby enrollment policy, rural students typically can only attend local ordinary schools and lack the chance to enroll in key middle schools or quality private institutions, which are more readily available to urban students.

Additionally, the household registration system significantly contributes to these disparities[3]. Even when rural students relocate to cities, they frequently struggle to access local public schools due to registration issues, often facing high tuition fees for private schools that may offer subpar conditions.

Furthermore, there is a stark contrast in the economic investments made by urban and rural families regarding extracurricular tutoring and preparation for further education. Urban students are more likely to receive additional training opportunities, while rural students have limited access to learning resources. This gap in educational opportunities creates a substantial inequality in the starting points for education, which increasingly manifests in disparities in academic performance and future development.

### **2.3. Equity in Educational Outcomes**

Equity in educational outcomes means that the distribution of educational outcomes should reflect fairness, that is, all students, regardless of their background, should have the opportunity to achieve similar academic achievements and career development[4]. In the context of urban and rural education, equity in outcomes is usually reflected in differences in students' academic performance, enrollment rates, employment opportunities, and career development. In China, there is a significant gap in academic performance between urban and rural students. Rural students generally face lower academic performance and lower enrollment rates. In particular, in key stages of enrollment such as the college entrance examination, there are huge differences in the educational resources and support that urban and rural students can obtain. In addition, equity in outcomes is also reflected in employment opportunities and career development after graduation. Urban students, due to their richer social resources and educational background, are more likely to obtain high-income and high-status occupations than rural students[4]. Equity in educational outcomes not only affects individual development, but also has a profound impact on the overall equity of society and economic development[5]. Achieving equity in educational outcomes requires starting from multiple levels such as resource allocation and opportunity provision to ensure that students from different regions and groups have equal development opportunities in the educational process and ultimately achieve fair educational outcomes.

## **3. Factors Affecting Urban-Rural Education Equity**

### **3.1. Institutional Factors**

Institutional factors are a core issue affecting urban-rural education equity, especially China's household registration system, which has a profound impact on the allocation of educational resources. The household registration system divides China's population into urban and rural households, limiting the opportunities for rural students to enjoy urban educational resources. Due to household registration restrictions, many children of rural migrant workers find it difficult to enjoy the same educational resources as local students in cities. They can only attend private schools with poor conditions, or cannot enroll in schools due to high tuition fees. This institutional barrier not only affects the difference in educational opportunities between urban and rural students, but also exacerbates the inequality in the allocation of educational resources [3]. The government's uneven investment in education fiscal policies reflects various institutional factors. Insufficient overall fiscal investment in education, an unreasonable system for compulsory education funding, inadequate supervision of these funds, and a lack of clarity in the mechanism for distributing compulsory education resources have all contributed to a significant gap between urban and rural compulsory education. Urban schools typically receive more financial support, allowing them to offer superior educational facilities and teaching resources. In contrast, rural schools often face challenges due to limited financial investment and policy support, resulting in an expanding resource disparity. These

institutional factors complicate the issue of educational equity between urban and rural areas and hinder the effective implementation of policies aimed at achieving educational equity[6].

### **3.2. Economic factors**

Economic factors are another important factor affecting the gap in urban and rural educational equity. The imbalance in economic development between urban and rural areas directly affects the investment and allocation of educational resources. Due to the developed economy, cities can provide more financial support for education, and families are also able to invest more in their children's education, such as choosing high-quality schools and enrolling in extracurricular tutoring classes. In rural areas, economic development is relatively backward, and many families cannot afford the high cost of education, and even students drop out of school to work. The difference in economic conditions is not only reflected in family education expenditures, but also in regional education financial investment[7]. Due to limited local finances and insufficient education funds in rural areas, schools find it difficult to improve teaching facilities, teachers are poorly paid, and the quality of education is difficult to improve. Family economic conditions also affect the opportunities that students can get in the process of education. Rural families often cannot provide their children with the same educational support as urban families, resulting in a further widening of the gap between students' academic performance and future development. Economic factors have exacerbated the imbalance in the distribution of urban and rural educational resources and opportunities, making the realization of educational equity face greater challenges.

### **3.3. Social and cultural factors**

Social and cultural factors also greatly affect the realization of urban and rural educational equity. There are obvious differences in the educational concepts of urban and rural families. Urban families usually have higher expectations for education, attach importance to their children's academic achievements, and are active in investing in education. They are willing to provide financial support for their children's extracurricular tutoring, interest classes and other educational activities. In rural areas, due to economic pressure or cultural traditions, some families believe that it is more realistic to let their children work or get married too early, resulting in students being unable to receive a complete education. The traditional social and cultural environment in rural areas has constituted a certain obstacle to educational equity. In some remote rural areas, due to the backwardness of social development and the constraints of traditional concepts, the importance of education has not been fully valued, and parents and communities have insufficient support for education. Moreover, gender disparities still persist in some rural regions, where families may prioritize educational opportunities for boys over girls[8]. As a result, girls may face higher dropout rates or receive fewer educational resources. These social and cultural factors not only shape individual family educational choices but also have lasting and significant impacts on educational equity across society.

### **3.4. Urban-rural mobility**

Urban-rural mobility is one of the important social phenomena that affect educational equity. With the acceleration of China's urbanization process, a large number of rural people have entered cities for work. This large-scale urban-rural mobility has brought new educational equity issues. The children of rural migrant workers face the problem of difficulty in enrolling in cities. Due to the restrictions of the household registration system, they are often unable to enter public schools and can only choose expensive private schools or schools for children of migrant workers with poor conditions, which makes it difficult for them to enjoy the same educational resources as urban registered students. The problem of left-behind children has also arisen. As a large number of rural

parents go out to work, rural left-behind children face the lack of both family education and school education. The long-term absence of their parents has a negative impact on their psychological development and academic performance. Urban-rural mobility also affects students' mobile education experience. Rural children who follow their parents to the city often move between different cities. The inconsistency of education and the frequent changes in living environment make their learning process more difficult [9]. These problems brought about by urban-rural mobility have further widened the educational gap between urban and rural areas and increased the difficulty of achieving educational equity.

#### 4. Discussion

In recent years, the Chinese government has implemented a series of policies aimed at narrowing the education gap between urban and rural areas and promoting educational equity. Key measures include the enforcement of the Compulsory Education Law, which guarantees nine years of compulsory education for all children, thus establishing a legal foundation for urban-rural educational fairness. The government has also introduced the "Compulsory Education Funding Guarantee Mechanism" to provide financial support to rural schools, improving their infrastructure and teacher salaries. Initiatives like the "Special Post Program" encourage university graduates to teach in rural areas to alleviate the shortage of qualified teachers. Additionally, the "Targeted Poverty Alleviation in Education" policy ensures resources reach the most disadvantaged groups.

Despite these efforts, significant challenges remain in achieving educational equity. The household registration system is a major barrier, preventing rural students living in cities from enjoying the same educational opportunities as their urban counterparts, especially regarding enrollment in public schools. Economic disparities between urban and rural families limit the educational support that rural households can provide, putting rural students at a disadvantage in accessing tutoring and resources. Although investments in rural education have increased, disparities in resources and teacher retention persist, leading to a continued decline in education quality. The issue of left-behind children, due to parental absence, exacerbates these challenges, affecting students' academic performance and mental health.

To further promote educational equity, policymakers must adopt more comprehensive measures. Reforming the household registration system to eliminate restrictions will enable more rural students to access equal educational opportunities in cities. Continued financial investment in rural education, particularly for teacher training and retention, is essential. Addressing the needs of left-behind children requires enhanced support mechanisms to ensure their healthy development. Implementing the "Internet + Education" model can help bridge the gap in teaching resources. By promoting integrated educational development and formulating targeted policies, the government can reduce disparities in resources and quality, ensuring equal educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their background or location.

#### 5. Conclusion

The urban-rural education gap in China remains a critical issue, reflecting deep-rooted disparities that affect millions of students. Despite the government's commendable efforts to promote educational equity through various policies, significant challenges persist. The uneven distribution of resources, exacerbated by institutional barriers such as the household registration system, economic inequalities, and cultural factors, continues to hinder the educational opportunities available to rural students. This study reveals that while urban students benefit from superior educational resources and opportunities, rural students often face substandard conditions that impede their academic and personal development. The interplay of economic constraints, social expectations, and mobility issues further complicates

the landscape, highlighting the multifaceted nature of educational inequality in China. To address these disparities effectively, comprehensive reforms are essential. Policymakers must prioritize the elimination of systemic barriers, enhance financial investment in rural education, and develop targeted support mechanisms for vulnerable populations, including left-behind children. Additionally, leveraging technology to improve access to quality educational resources can help bridge the gap.

This study is not without limitations. The reliance on existing literature may overlook recent developments and grassroots initiatives that address educational disparities. Future research should incorporate mixed-method approaches that combine quantitative analysis with qualitative case studies, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the urban-rural education gap.

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