

# The Disparity in Expenditure on Compulsory Education Between Urban and Rural Areas

**Hanyue Chen**

College of Horticulture, Nanjing  
Agricultural University, Nanjing,  
Jiangsu, China

rymutpobasi@outlook.com

## Abstract:

As an important component of State financial expenditure, education expenditure is of great significance in upgrading national quality and promoting social equity. However, even though China has launched a series of policies to promote the balanced development of compulsory education, there is still a significant urban-rural gap in China's compulsory education expenditure, which not only affects the development of rural education but also exacerbates the inequality between urban and rural areas. This paper analyses the current situation of the urban-rural gap in education expenditure, and concludes that the causes of the unequal situation are the difference in fiscal expenditure, the difference in education expenditure, the unequal allocation of resources, the difference in teacher strength, and the difference in the development of the economic level; it also puts forward the following countermeasures to improve the situation: improving the education infrastructure, perfecting the education policy and management system, and promoting the cooperation between home and school and the participation of the society; to provide references to the promotion of education fairness.

**Keywords:** compulsory education expenditure, urban-rural gap

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the state attaches great importance to the balanced development of compulsory education and takes it as an important way to achieve educational equity. The 2018 National Education Conference stressed the need to promote the transformation of education from scale growth to quality improve-

ment, and promote the balanced development of education among regions, urban and rural areas, and at all levels [1].

To achieve the balanced development of compulsory education, the Ministry of Education launched the supervision and evaluation of the balanced development of compulsory education in 2013, and by the end of 2021, all counties (cities and districts) passed

the basic balanced evaluation of compulsory education. In addition, the Ministry of Education also issued relevant documents, comprehensive deployment, and arrangements for the creation of the work, with emphasis on hardware more software, heavy indicators more emphasis on the satisfaction of the masses, heavy quantity more quality [2]. The gap between urban and rural compulsory education is a major challenge in the development of education in China, which involves resource allocation, education quality, funding investment, and other aspects. In recent years, the state issued a series of policies to promote the balanced development of compulsory education, compulsory education balanced development policy has achieved remarkable achievements, in promoting education power, promoting education fairness, and perfecting education measures to achieve the phased goals, but the integration of urban and rural education development boundary is still cannot ignore the problem, comprehensively promote compulsory education balanced development is an important goal of the development of education career in the new period. This paper will summarize from four aspects: the national balanced development policy of compulsory education, the urban-rural gap of compulsory education expenditure in China, the barrier to rural education development, and the existing solutions.

## 2. The Gap between Urban and Rural Areas in Compulsory Education Expenditure in China

### 2.1 Status Quo Analysis

There is a significant gap between China's compulsory education expenditure between urban and rural areas. According to a study by the China Institute of Education Finance and Science at Peking University, the difference between urban and rural areas in compulsory education funding has changed during the 13th Five-Year Plan period, but overall the gap between urban and rural areas is still large. Specifically, the average annual growth rate of general public budget education funds for urban primary and middle school schools is 8.8% and 10.5%, respectively, while the average annual growth rate of general public budget education funds for rural primary and middle school schools is 6% and 6.3%, respectively. The urban growth rate is significantly higher than that of rural [3]. Although the state has introduced a series of policies and measures in recent years to promote the balanced development of compulsory education, such as improving the conditions for running compulsory education in rural areas and increasing the financial funds for education, there is still an imbalance in the allocation of educational resources between urban and rural areas. For example, the

proportion of rural students who can take online classes on time is significantly lower than that of county students, which reflects the shortage of information education resources in rural areas, [4].

### 2.2 Reason Discussion

The reasons for the gap between urban and rural compulsory education funds mainly include the adjustment of the classification rules of education funds, the change of education funds in the general public budget, and the difference in regional economic development level [3]. In addition, the flow of rural population, the loss of teachers, and other problems have also intensified the shortage of rural compulsory education funds.

### 2.3 The Barrier of Rural Education Development

Lack of human resources, material resources, and financial resources in rural education, the household registration system of separation between urban and rural areas, and different social security also increase the gap between urban and rural education. At the same time, rural areas are generally faced with the problem of lack of social capital and social support, and various factors will also affect the development and construction of rural education [5].

## 3. Data Analysis

### 3.1 The Gap between Urban and Rural Areas in Compulsory Education Expenditure

#### 3.1.1 Differences in fiscal expenditure

The early primary and secondary school fiscal subsidies spending is the trend of rising year by year. Ordinary junior high schools nearly 5 years fiscal subsidy spending rose by 1.29%, the ordinary primary school rose by 1.25%, compared to the ordinary primary and secondary school education expenditure and fiscal subsidies, the rural primary and secondary schools rose smaller, 1.19%, and 1.14% respectively, can be inferred from the gap between urban and rural subsidies is still expanding.

#### 3.1.2 Differences in education expenditure

According to the data of the Ministry of Education of China and the expenditure of compulsory education between urban and rural areas, the expenditure of ordinary primary schools and middle schools is higher than that of rural primary schools and junior high schools. According to the calculation data, it is concluded that the education expenditure of urban primary schools increases by 1.28% and the expenditure of rural primary schools by 1.15%; the expenditure of urban junior high schools increases by 1.32% and the rural junior high schools by 1.22%. Despite

both growing, the growth rate of urban primary and junior middle schools is higher and faster than rural primary and junior middle schools, further exacerbating the gap between urban and rural areas in compulsory education.

### 3.2 Reasons for the Gap Between Urban and Rural Areas in Compulsory Education

#### 3.2.1 Uneven resource allocation

The above data are from the eps database, the number of junior middle schools and primary schools in urban areas is increasing steadily year by year, and the number of rural junior middle schools and primary schools is decreasing, especially from 2013 to 2017.

Urban schools usually have better educational facilities and teachers, while rural schools face the problem of insufficient education funding, resulting in relatively poor teaching conditions. Through investigation and research, urban schools in many areas generally have modern teaching facilities, such as multimedia classrooms, science laboratories, libraries, etc., while rural schools may not even have the basic teaching equipment, and the teaching conditions are relatively difficult. For example, the computer course in rural schools may have only a computer as a teaching demonstration, and students lack the opportunity to learn the computer to practice themselves, which is a big weakness for computer learning in rural schools; the lack of sports equipment in rural schools is not conducive to the discovery of students expertise, which may prevent the development of a sports talent. The above significant differences in hardware facilities directly reflect the uneven allocation of educational resources between urban and rural areas. Due to sufficient funds, urban schools can constantly update and improve their teaching facilities, while rural schools find it difficult to improve their teaching conditions due to the shortage of funds.

#### 3.2.2 Faculty strength gap

Urban schools tend to attract and retain higher-level teachers, who are not only highly educated and have rich teaching experience, but also trained in more advanced educational ideas and methods. In contrast, rural schools find it difficult to attract and retain excellent teachers due to their remote geographical location and low treatment, and even the phenomenon of “no one editor” appears. At the same time, due to the difficulty of recruitment, rural schools often difficult to attract and supplement high-quality teachers. The superior conditions of the city have attracted a large number of rural backbone teachers to the urban areas. In terms of teacher flow, there is a trend of rural schools moving to urban schools and weak schools to excellent schools.

The following data are from the eps database, the number of employees in urban primary schools decreased from 2013 to 2018, peaked in 2015, and began to decline in

15 years until the number of employees in rural primary schools decreased significantly from 2013 to 15 from 16-16, and the peak was 137 in 2013. The number of full-time teachers in urban junior middle schools, primary school teachers, and primary school teachers shows a trend of steady increase over time. On the contrary, the number of full-time teachers in rural junior middle schools, primary school teachers primary school teachers and substitute teachers show a declining trend. Meanwhile, the number of teaching staff and workers in urban and rural areas increased steadily, but the number of rural teaching staff decreased in 21 to 22 years; the number of administrative staff in urban and rural primary schools decreased year by year; the number of concurrent teachers in urban primary schools increased from 13 to 18 years to 7717, and the number of concurrent teachers in rural primary schools decreased from 13 to 20 years.

#### 3.2.3 Differences in economic development level

According to the eps database, the income of national primary and junior high schools is on the rise. Ordinary primary and middle schools have increased by 1.27% and 1.30% in the past five years. In contrast, the increase in rural primary and middle schools is 1.15% and 1.21% respectively. It can be seen that the rural primary school junior middle school education income increase is less than the urban primary school junior middle school, and the gap between the two is expanding.

In addition, regional economic development and family economic support also affect the educational gap.

First of all, the regional economic development is unbalanced: the economic development level in different regions has a significant impact on the allocation of educational resources. Economically developed urban areas can invest more funds in education, while rural areas suffer from a shortage of educational resources due to relatively poor economic conditions and limited educational investment. According to the data from the China Education Funds Statistical Yearbook and some studies, the average annual growth rate of urban primary and junior middle school students is 8.8% and 10.5%, which has exceeded that of rural areas (6% for primary schools and 6.3% for junior middle schools).

Second, there are differences in family financial support: urban families are usually able to provide better educational support for their children, including buying learning materials and attending various interest classes. However, due to their relatively poor economic conditions, rural families may not be able to afford these additional educational expenses, which affects their children's study and development.

#### 3.2.4 Social and cultural factors

First of all, there are differences in educational concepts. The different social and cultural backgrounds in urban

and rural areas lead to differences in educational concepts. Urban families generally pay more attention to education and are willing to invest more resources and energy in their children's education. However, rural families may not pay enough attention to education due to the low education level or the influence of traditional concepts, or pay more attention to short-term economic returns and ignore long-term education investment [6].

Secondly, there are differences in educational expectations. Urban families generally have high expectations for their children's education, which not only pay attention to academic performance but also pay attention to the cultivation of comprehensive quality. However, rural families may pay more attention to short-term economic returns and have a lack of understanding of long-term education investment, which also affects the education quality and future development of rural students to a certain extent.

### 3.2.5 Policy and institutional factors

First, there are differences in the implementation of education policies: although the state has issued a series of policies to promote the balanced development of compulsory education, there are differences between urban and rural areas in the actual implementation process. Policy implementation in rural areas, often faces more difficulties, such as inadequate implementation of funds, lack of teachers, and other problems, leading to the reduction of policy effect.

To sum up, there are many reasons for the urban-rural gap in compulsory education, including uneven allocation of educational resources, differences in economic development level, social and cultural factors, and policy and institutional factors. To narrow the education gap between urban and rural areas, the government, schools, and all aspects of society need to make joint efforts to improve and optimize it from many aspects.

## 4. Solutions to Narrow the Gap Between Urban and Rural Areas in Compulsory Education

Narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas in compulsory education is a complex and systematic project, which requires the joint efforts of the government, schools, families, and all sectors of society. Based on the current education policy, the following suggestions are proposed:

### 4.1 Increase the Investment in Educational Resources

The first point to be improved is to increase financial input: the government should increase financial input in rural compulsory education to ensure that rural schools can obtain enough funds to improve school conditions and

improve the quality of teaching. This includes increasing the budget for education funds and setting up special funds for rural school infrastructure construction, teacher training, and the purchase of teaching resources.

The second point that needs to be improved is to optimize the allocation of resources: while increasing the investment, it should optimize the allocation of educational resources to ensure that the resources can be tilted to the rural areas. Through policy guidance and financial support, it can encourage the flow of high-quality urban educational resources to rural areas, such as high-quality teachers, teaching equipment, books and materials, etc.

### 4.2 Optimize the Construction of Teachers

Improve teacher treatment: Attract and retain excellent teachers to teach in rural areas by increasing the salary treatment, welfare treatment, and career development opportunities of rural teachers. At the same time, strengthen the training and continuing education of rural teachers to enhance their professional quality and teaching ability.

Establish an exchange mechanism between urban and rural teachers: promote the exchange and cooperation between urban and rural teachers, to teach, excellent urban teachers to rural schools and treasures, and at the same time, rural teachers have the opportunity to learn advanced teaching methods and concepts in urban schools.

### 4.3 Improve the Educational Infrastructure

Strengthen school construction: increase the investment in rural school infrastructure construction, and improve the school conditions. Including the construction of standardized classrooms, laboratories, libraries, sports venues, and other teaching facilities, as well as providing safe and comfortable dormitories canteens, and other living facilities.

Promoting information teaching: using modern information technology to improve the teaching level and education quality of rural schools. Through the construction of a distance education network platform and the introduction of high-quality online education resources, rural students can enjoy the same educational resources as urban students.

### 4.4 Improve the Education Policy and Management System

Formulate targeted policies: formulate more targeted education policies according to the actual situation and needs of rural areas. For example, increase the funding for poor rural students, and the implementation of rural teachers' special post plan.

Strengthen education management: improve the rural education management system, and improve the level of education management. Through the establishment of a sound education management system and the strengthening of

education supervision and evaluation, the implementation of education policies and the improvement of education quality are ensured.

#### 4.5 Promote Home-School Cooperation and Social Participation

Strengthen home-school cooperation: establish and improve the home-school cooperation mechanism, and strengthen the communication and contact between school and family. Through parent meetings, home visits, home-school contact manuals, and other ways parents understand their children's learning situation and living conditions in school, and pay attention to their children's growth and development together.

Encourage social participation: encourage all sectors of society to actively participate in the development of rural compulsory education. It can provide more support and assistance to rural schools by setting up educational foundations and carrying out public welfare activities.

### 5. Conclusion

According to the above analysis cases and results, the gap between urban and rural areas of compulsory education expenditure is a long-term problem, which is mainly reflected in the investment of educational funds, the allocation of educational resources, the construction of teachers, and the improvement of educational infrastructure. The existence of these gaps not only affects the education quality of rural students but also aggravates the

unfair phenomenon of urban and rural education, which is not conducive to the realization of the goal of balanced education development and educational equity. At present, narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas in compulsory education spending is the top priority. Only through the joint efforts and continuous investment of the government, schools, families, and all sectors of society, can every child enjoy high-quality educational resources and achieve balanced development and fairness of education.

### References

- [1] General Office of the CPC Central Committee, General Office of the State Council. Opinions on Building a High-quality and Balanced Basic Public Education Service System, 2023.
- [2] The General Office of the Ministry of Education. Notice on the Establishment of Quality and Balanced Compulsory Education at County Level (No.43,2021). 2021.
- [3] Wei Y, Zhu L, Ji C. Analysis report on urban-rural gap in per-student expenditure level of compulsory education in China. China Education Finance, 2022.
- [4] Wu Z, Qin Y, etc. China Rural Education Development Report 2020-2022. 2022.
- [5] Zhou X, Li G. The realistic dilemma and optimization Path of rural education construction. World Agriculture, 2024, (4).
- [6] Zheng L, Zheng Y, Chen R. From narrowing the gap to integrated development: the Reality and Thinking on the Integration of Urban and Rural compulsory Education. The Educational Economic Review, 2023, 8(06).