

Analysis of the Education Status in China and Suggestions of Countermeasures

Tianyu Shen^{1,a,*}

¹Suzhou North America High School, Jiangsu, 215104, China

a. shentianyu651@gmail.com

**corresponding author*

Abstract: After the establishment of the Peoples Republic of China in 1949, the long-term domestic chaos suspended and the economy developed rapidly but unequally. To be more specific, the coastal areas and the leasing territory during the wartime, such as Shanghai, Hong Kong and Guangdong, developed quickly because of the convenient international trading and historical background, while the rural areas, especially the mountainous areas in Chinese inland areas, such as Henan and Hunan, developed very slowly or even did not develop anymore. Based on the education situation in Hunan, China, this paper analyzes the root cause of the failures of increasing the quality of education in China and proposes some feasible solutions to solve the problem. This study finds that conducting the periodic psychological survey and providing psychological counseling, and providing the citizenship of some metropolises for the volunteer teachers who teach in the education left over areas can be some approaches to fixing this problem.

Keywords: Education, Inequality, left-behind children, field study, psychology.

1. Introduction

Since 1979, following the leading of the socialist principles of public ownership of possessions, the economy in China experienced a boom of productivity and economy, while since 1980, the economic development in urban areas is more rapid than that of rural areas (Figure 1) [1]. As a result, life in rural areas, especially in mountainous areas, was difficult, and most people were in poverty. In order to improve the living standard and obtain a higher salary, a huge amount of people decide to migrate to metropolises for work but leave their family numbers in the remote areas, which have lower living costs. The children in such a migration family are called left-behind children (LBC). According to the UNICEF China 2018 Annual Report, there are about 69 million LBC in China, which approximates 30% of children in rural areas [2]. Because of the long-term separation from parents and the negligence, the LBC are exposed to a lot of psychological problems, such as depression, anxiety, sleep disorders and so on [3]. Based on the research, the LBC are always psychologically unhealthy, both showed internal and external, compared to the non-left-behind children (NLBC) [4]. According to the data collected by Lepinen in 2018, about 20% of LBC have a sense of loneliness [5].

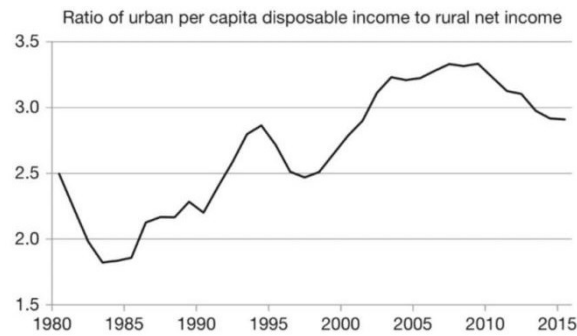


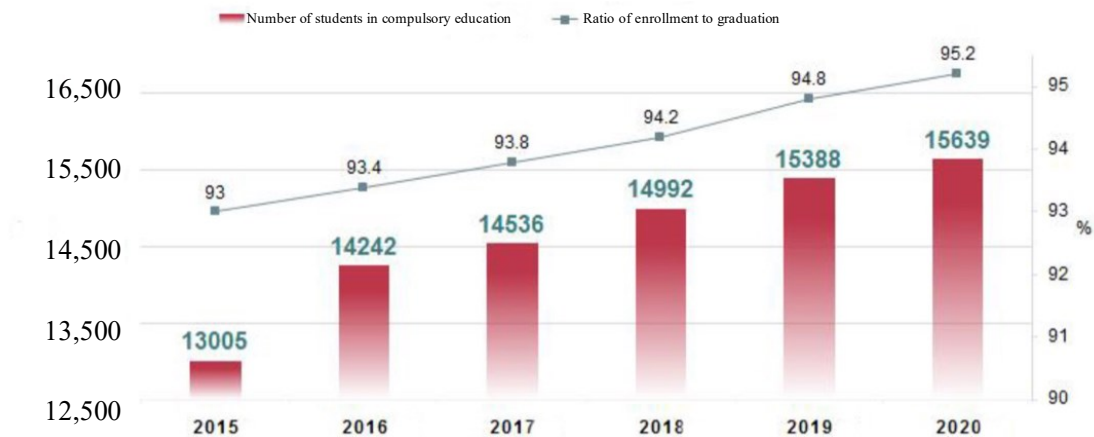
Figure 1: Urban versus rural incomes [1].

Moreover, the education of LBC, especially those who live in rural areas, and NLBC obtained are quite different in a number of aspects, such as quality, diversity and result. This essay analyzes the difference in education by focusing on the data of different education levels and the shortcomings the current policies that failed to fix the problem have. Also, this paper proposes the feasible approaches in the last part in order to call people's attention to such children and help to solve the problem of inequality.

2. The Present Educational Situation in Rural Area Compare to that in Metropolis

2.1. The Situation of Elementary Education (Obligatory Education)

After the policy of compulsory education published, the situation of the missing of basic (primary school and junior high school) education had improved, especially in rural areas (Figure 2). However, even after such a policy, there are still some children who do not have the opportunity to attend elementary school. According to a research in 2016, over 13% of LBC quit school by their eighth year of school, while only 8.6% of those who were raised by their parents in rural villages chose to drop out [6]. As a result, we can see that although the percentage of students in rural areas who finished the compulsory education increased, a lot of the LBC still cannot even gain the free and basic education.



Number of students in compulsory education and ratio of enrollment to graduation

Figure 2: Number of students in compulsory education and ratio of enrollment to graduation.

2.2. The Situation of High School Education

According to the data of the sixth national census, the net enrollment of entering senior high school of LBC was only 23.1%, while the net enrollment among the students in urban areas and NLBC reached 59.4% [7]. High school becomes the financial responsibility of families; although nowadays the government has already subsidized for the high school students, 60% of rural students still choose to quit because of the costs [8].

2.3. The Situation of Higher Education (Include University, Master, PHD and Study Overseas)

Usually, in the developed areas, such as Beijing and Shanghai, the education atmosphere is better, with better teachers, more opportunities to enter university through other approaches and so on. By contrast, in the rural areas, due to the poverty and lack of admission advisors, Gaokao becomes the only way for students to enter university, while in the competition with urban students in Gaokao, the students in rural areas, especially the LBC, are in a weak position. According to the reach done by Hongbin et Al., the opportunity of students in rural areas to enter college is eleven times lower than that of urban area students. Take the data collected in 2003 as an example. Of the students in the schools of the 211 project, only 43% are from rural areas, and only 2% enter the top two universities [9]. Although after 2013, the publication of the policy of falling down the standard of matriculating students from rural areas and minorities, the situation has improved, but it still has now. Something even worth is that now a lot of wealthy families choose to send their children, who take the education in the developed areas during their high school, to take the Gaokao (the standard test for university) in the areas that can be benefited from this policy by using their social network and financial support, which creates an even more worth and intensive competition situation for the LBC and other rural area students.

It is obvious that the number of students who study abroad from rich families in urban areas exceeds those from rural areas and LBC, but the data can be more surprising than we thought. Based on the research done by the ministry of education in China in 2017, 88.97% of students who study overseas are self-funded, meaning from a wealthy family, and unlike the major choice of study in America and Europe with higher costs, the government-funded students most study in the Belt and Road countries with lower living costs [10]. As a result, we can see that in such a boom of studying abroad, the students who could get the opportunities are mainly from the elite and rich families, and it is still a distant dream of LBC and other rural area students.

3. Suggestions of Countermeasures

3.1. Analysis of the Failed Approaches in the Past

Nowadays, the total number of volunteer teachers in China is a huge number, exceeding 100 million until the end of 2018 [11]. There is no doubt that the emergence of such teachers contributes to the education and psychological benefits to the LBC, but they also lead to a lot of problems because of the frequent use of teachers. To be more specific, the motivation of volunteer teachers can be classified into two types, self-interest and passive. Researchers found out that both the motivation and results of the volunteer teachers can show whether they are altruistic and self-interested [12]. The passive volunteer teachers can refer to the college students who participate in the volunteer teaching program, both short-term and long-term, for credits. Always, the proactive teachers have more possibilities to stay in the rural area and have a better teaching performance, although they can only gain a low salary as well as living standards compared to the passive teachers, just as Wei showed

[13]. Next, this paper illustrates the harm that volunteer teaching, especially the passive and short-term ones, brings to LBC in two aspects: education and students' psychological health.

In education, the college students always lack the experience of teaching and professional training. Just as Dong said, such teachers do not know how to interact and cooperate with students [14], leading to the chaos in class and low efficiency. What is more, because of the shortage of teachers in rural areas, the students of different ages and grades need to share teachers together, a lot of college students lack the ability to manage and teach the students with different intellectual and recognition levels, disrupting the local teaching process [15]. As a result, besides the skilled and professional volunteer teachers, the short-term volunteer teaching cannot offer a help to the local education, what the worth is that they may disrupt and bring down the education situation there.

In the aspect of LBC's mental health, the first problem of the volunteer teaching program is the frequent change. Most undergraduate students who stop to take the program when they gain the credit, usually only take 6 to 10 days. Then the local school in rural areas needs to find other teachers. Such a high frequency change brings a huge feel of uncertainty to students, and the feeling can be the cause of some psychological problems for students, such as anxiety, depression and panic [16]. The second problem is that the majority of the volunteer teachers are not always strictly supervised. Without the monitor, the possibility of complaining and installing some negative ideas on students cannot be eliminated. After hearing the opinions for a long time, the students, especially those of young ages who are not mature enough and are easily affected by others' comments, will accept and agree with such ideas in a deep degree, feeling unsatisfied with their current life but unable to improve the situation. This feeling of powerlessness will plague LBC a lot and lead to some mental problems.

3.2. Possibly and Feasible Methods

In order to fix the problem of the high percentage of having mental problems, a possible approach is to set the periodically psychological survey and provide psychological counseling to the LBC. To be more specific, in finance, there are a lot of economical ways to research the mental situation of LBC, such as the Tree, Man and House test and some questionnaires. As a result, the cost is low, and such approaches are not time-consuming. The next step is that the local schools sent the results to the government and LBC's parents. Then, the government collects the data from schools and analyzes it. After such steps, the students can be classified into three categories, mental healthy, having light mental problems and having serious problems. For the students who are mentally healthy, they just need to participate in such general research periodically and the government can send some books to them, since reading enables people to release their pressure and provide psychological benefits [17]. For the LBC who have light mental problems but do not affect their daily life a lot, the government can hire some psychological counselors or psychological teachers in other schools and hospitals who are willing to provide some online psychological counseling to the LBC at their leisure or when they are not busy dealing with their patients. Such online communication can be taken for about once a week, which can both release the mental problems of the LBC and solve the problems of the low wage and the waste of time of psychologists, since the average annual wage of psychological counselors in China is only about 812,000 CYN [18]. For the LBC who gained serious mental illness that affects their life in a deep degree and even has the trend to suicide, the government can set up a new section, that mainly focuses on such children. The civil servants in this section will closely monitor the situation of the children and provide the professional and systematic treatment for them, which can also solve the problem of the intensive competition and shortage of the options to become civil servants.

The second approach is to offer some benefits or priorities to the volunteer teachers and set a specific rule for getting such priorities. For example, providing the same rights of ex-soldiers with the volunteer teacher who takes the volunteer teaching for more than five years, providing the teachers

who continually participate in the volunteer teaching program for more than ten years with the identity in some metropolis such as Beijing and Shanghai, and for the families who take such program for more than two generations and every person takes it for more than fifteen years, the government can arrange a house for the family, and the size and location of the house are based on the working performance and the specific working years. After the proposal of this approach, both the quality and quantity of long-term volunteer teachers can be increased. That is to say, this policy can incentive more people to participate in the volunteer teaching program, but because of the limited quantity of teachers needed, there must exist the competition, motivating and forcing the teachers, both those who have already gained the opportunity and are still applying, to improve their teaching skills and education level.

4. Conclusion

Nowadays, improving the education situation of the LBC and other rural area students is still a huge challenge for the governments in the whole world. In China, because of the growing gap of wealth, the gap of education level and situation is also growing. But the problem can be fixed, based on the failure of past policies and data, the government can try to fix the problem by treating LBC with different psychological conditions with different approaches and providing some benefits and priorities to the teachers who participate in the long-term volunteer teaching programs. As a result, after having a better psychological condition, the phenomenon of quitting the school can decrease in a huge degree. Also, the priorities and benefits provided for the long-term volunteer teachers give them the opportunities and motivations to stay in the rural areas and participate in such a long-term teaching program. By having stable and professional teachers, the LBC can have higher study efficiency and better academic performance. Moreover, something needed to be noticed when publishing and using such policies is that the government should have a serious supervision and trace of the LBC, reasonably change the therapeutic method based on the specific condition of each student, and avoid the risk of the leaking of personal information, which may lead to an even worthier mental problem to LBC. Also, the government needs to set a clear standard of gaining the related benefits, and a rigorous selection system is also necessary, enable the LBC to enjoy the high-quality education.

References

- [1] Kroeber, A. R. (2020). *China's economy: What everyone needs to know*. Oxford University Press. pp.55.
- [2] UNICEF China 2018 Annual Report (PDF). UNICEF. 2019. <https://www.unicef.org/reports/annual-report-2018>
- [3] Zhou, M., Sun, X., Huang, L. et al. (2018) Parental migration and left-behind children's depressive symptoms: estimation based on a nationally-representative panel dataset. *Int J. Environ. Res Public Health* 16, E1069.
- [4] Huang J., Zhu D., Wen Z.f., Zhu X. The Difference in Mental Health between Left- behind Children and Non- left-behind Children: A Meta Analysis on SCL- 90 Questionnaire. *J. Hunan First Norm. Univ.* 2018;18:61-64+84.
- [5] Lempinen, L., Juntila, N., & Sourander, A. (2018). Loneliness and friendships among eight-year-old children: Time-trends over a 24-year period. [J] *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 59, 171-179.
- [6] Stanford Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. (2016). Caixin Media: China's Rural Youngsters Drop-Out of School at an Alarming Rate, Researchers Find. <https://reap.fsi.stanford.edu/news/caixin-media-chinas-rural-youngsters-drop-out-school-alarming-rate-researchers-find>
- [7] Duan, C., Lv, L., & Wang, Z. (2014). Research on left-behind children's home education and school education. *Peking University Education Review*, 12(3), 13-29. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1671-9468.2014.03.002>
- [8] Radley Tan. (2018) WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHINA'S RURAL-URBAN EDUCATION GAP. Borgenproject. <https://borgenproject.org/what-you-need-to-know-about-chinas-rural-urban-education-gap/>
- [9] Hongbin Li, Prashant Loyalka, Scott Rozelle, Binzhen Wu and Jieyu Xie. (2015). Unequal Access to College in China: How Far Have Poor, Rural Students Been Left Behind? *The China Quarterly*, 2015. doi:10.1017/S0305741015000314. https://fsi-live.s3.us-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/unequal_access_to_college_in_china_how_far_have_poor_rural_students_been_left_behind.pdf

- [10] Ministers of Education The People's Republic of China. Brief report on Chinese overseas students and international students in China 2017. April 1, 2018. http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/reports/201901/t20190115_367019.html
- [11] China Youth. (2018). Introduction to projects of voluntary services of college students in the "go west program". http://xibu.youth.cn/xmjs/201510/t20151015_7212132.htm
- [12] Luo J., Wang T. F. (2012). How to shoulder the mission: Continuous studies on volunteering—Taking college students' voluntary teaching program for example. *Sociological Studies*, 27(5), 94–118.
- [13] Wei N. (2013). Volunteer service development in China: Achievements, problems and prospects. *Chinese Public Administration*, 29(7), 64-67. <https://doi.org/10.3782/j.issn.1006-0863.2013.07.13>
- [14] Yuanyuan Dong. The latent problems and improvement strategies of college students' short-term support teaching. *Popular Science*, 2017(8): 1.
- [15] Luyuan Cui. The Issues and Ethical Dilemmas of College Volunteers in Short-term Voluntary Teaching Projects. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2023.
- [16] Gu Y., Gu S., Lei Y., Li H. From Uncertainty to Anxiety: How Uncertainty Fuels Anxiety in a Process Mediated by Intolerance of Uncertainty. *Neural Plast.* 2020 Nov 22;2020:8866386. doi: 10.1155/2020/8866386.
- [17] Mara Whiteside. Creating a Reading Routine for Mental Health. July 25, 2024. *Psychologytoday*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/read-like-a-psychologist/202407/creating-a-reading-routine-for-mental-health>
- [18] SalaryexplorerHome. Counseling Psychologist Average Salary in China 2024. *Salaryexplorer*. <https://www.salaryexplorer.com/average-salary-wage-comparison-china-counseling-psychologist-c44j12246>