

Exploration of the Current Situation of Basic Education in Rural Villages of Poor Counties and New Rural Construction in China in the New Era

Yuecheng Zhou

School of Foreign Languages, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China

Email: zzw020@163.com

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Abstract

Rural basic education is an important part of China's basic education system, which plays an important role in improving the quality of the rural population, promoting the economic and social development of the countryside, and is of great significance to the construction of new rural areas. Since the reform and opening up, China's rural basic education has made great achievements, but there are still many problems. This paper takes the situation of rural basic education in Zijin County, Heyuan City, as an example, and on the basis of a comprehensive analysis of the above problems, puts forward the development countermeasures to improve the status quo of rural basic education in the region, and also hopes to provide feasible references for the development of China's rural basic education.

Keywords

Rural Areas, Basic Education, Current Situation, Development, Countermeasures

1. Introduction

Rural basic education is an important part of China's basic education system; it plays an important role in improving the quality of the rural population and in promoting the economic and social development of the countryside, and functions as a pioneering, fundamental and overall important role in building a harmonious society and a moderately prosperous society in all respects. Since this century, China's rural basic education has made great achievements, but there are

still many problems. This paper takes the situation of rural basic education in Zijin County, Heyuan City, a poverty-stricken county in Guangdong Province, as an example, discusses the development of rural basic education, and puts forward development countermeasures to improve the status quo of rural basic education in the region, with a view to benefiting the current development of rural basic education.

2. Achievements in the Development of Rural Basic Education in Zijin County

Zijin County, located in the east-central part of Guangdong Province and the southeast of Heyuan City, is a traditional agricultural county and one of the key poverty-stricken counties in the country. Since the beginning of this century, thanks to the industrial transfer from the Pearl River Delta (PRD) region, Zijin County has experienced a rapid economic development, and its comprehensive strength has continued to grow. Along with the growth of economic strength, Zijin County's investment in basic education in the countryside has been increasing and has achieved considerable success as well.

2.1. The Construction of Rural Basic Education Facilities Has Improved Considerably

Since the reform and opening up, with the economic development of the Zijin county, the local government began to pay attention to the construction of rural school infrastructure. According to "Implementation Opinions on the Dangerous Building Renovation Project for Rural Primary and Secondary Schools" issued by the Ministry of Education, the National Development and Reform Commission, and the Ministry of Finance, Starting from 2002, Zijin County started the project of reconstructing dangerous buildings of the rural school, including primary and middle school dangerous buildings throughout the county, redecorated the school buildings that can be used, and demolished and rebuilt the ones that can't be used any more. Besides, additional school buildings have been built in many rural schools to ensure normal teaching and living conditions for teachers and students. At the same time, in order to follow the spirit of "fitness for all", Zijin County carries out the construction of sports grounds in rural schools, basically every school has a basketball court, a number of open-air badminton courts, table tennis tables, and some junior high schools have constructed a plastic running track, which provides students with a good place to play sports.

2.2. The Overall Quality of the Rural Basic Education Teaching Force Has Improved Considerably

Before the 1990s, there existed a large number of private teachers in the rural areas of Zijin County, whose personal quality and knowledge level varied. Since then, according to opinions on Further Improving and Strengthening the Work of Private School Teachers issued by the State Education Commission, the State Plan-

ning Commission, the Ministry of Personnel, and the Ministry of Finance (Jiaoren [1992] No. 41 Document), as well as the county government's attention to the construction of the rural teaching force, some private teachers with lower teaching standards have been gradually eliminated at the end of the 20th century. At the same time, like rural teachers all over the country, the Zijin County government has continuously improved and perfected the mechanism for guaranteeing the income of teachers in rural areas, and their incomes have continued to rise, with comprehensive guarantees in terms of pension insurance and medical insurance. Now, after more than a decade of continuous replenishment and optimal combination, the overall quality of Zijin County's rural teaching force has been greatly improved.

2.3. Nine-Year Compulsory Education Has Been Made Universal, and the Number of Illiterate and Semi-Illiterate People Has Been Greatly Reduced

In recent years, due to the implementation of the family planning policy and the change in farmers' concept of childbearing, there are many fewer children and teenagers in Zijin County's rural areas than in the past, and coupled with the improvement of living conditions and the emphasis on the concept of education, parents in rural areas have generally demanded that their children complete nine years of compulsory education. According to the statistics from the education administration department of Zijin County at the beginning of the school year in the autumn of 2018, the gross enrolment rate of primary stage education in rural areas of the county is about 99.9%, and the gross enrolment rate of junior high school is about 93.6%. According to the Implementation Plan for Controlling Dropouts and Ensuring School Attendance in Compulsory Education in Zijin County, the nine-year compulsory education retention rate will be maintained above 96% in 2024, and the retention rate for children of families with financial difficulties will reach 100%. This shows the prevalence of school-age children in rural areas of Zijin County.

3. Problems in Rural Basic Education in Zijin County

Although Zijin County rural basic education has achieved good results in the development of many years, but there are still certain problems.

3.1. There Are Still Quite a Few Gaps between School Conditions and Urban Areas

In recent years, Zijin County has invested a lot of money to improve the infrastructure of rural schools, but as a whole, there are still a lot of gaps between the conditions of rural schools in Zijin County and urban areas such as Zijin County and Heyuan City. According to the author's field research in July 2023, the county Shangyi Town Maotian Primary School, Jidong Primary School and other remote rural primary schools, have only one or two computers and a printer in the office without any photocopier; there is no multimedia teaching equipment in the class-

room, and the school does not have a special art room and music room, the number of sports equipment is limited, the after-school life of the students is relatively monotonous and boring. In the county Yirong Middle School, Longwu Middle School and other rural junior high school visits found that these schools, computer room, chemistry laboratory, physics laboratory is generally only one, which is unable to meet the teaching needs of the appropriate subjects, and most of the computers in the computer room due to the age of the computer has not been able to use, students only once a week on the computer class but often need to be two or three students to share a computer.

3.2. The Age Structure of Rural Primary School Teachers Is Unreasonable, There Are Not Enough Professional Teachers, and the Overall Quality of Rural Teachers Is Not Yet High

Due to the backward economic and social development of Zijin County rural areas, living conditions and teaching environment are more difficult, so it is more difficult to introduce outstanding young teachers, teaching in rural primary schools, mostly older, conservative middle-aged teachers, which to a certain extent restricts the development of rural education. As there are generally fewer teachers in rural schools in Zijin County, many teachers have to teach other subjects in addition to their own specialised subjects. For example, language teachers have to give students physical education or music lessons, and this unreasonable phenomenon has been a norm in rural schools in Zijin County. At the same time, in recent years, although the construction of rural teachers in the capital county has been greatly improved, but the overall quality of teachers is still not high, which is manifested in two specific points: First, the teachers in rural areas have a low level of qualifications; second, at the end of the last century, a part of the private teachers through the simple induction examination or through the relationship to stay in the teaching profession in Zijin County. They do not have a high level of qualifications, did not receive a formal teacher education.

3.3. The Phenomenon of Junior High School Students Dropping out of School Needs Attention

Despite the fact that the conditions of basic education in the countryside have improved considerably, due to a variety of subjective and objective factors, the dropout rate of students in rural junior high schools in Zijin County has remained high, making it difficult to complete the nine-year compulsory education. According to the author's field research in July 2023, taking Feng'an Middle School in Zijin County as an example, when the first grade started in autumn 2015, there were 316 students, and 298 students were left when the school started in spring 2016; the second grade was reduced from 285 to 253; the third grade was reduced from 264 to 202. It can be found that the higher the grade level, the higher the number of dropouts. It is understood that such a dropout phenomenon also exists in junior high schools in other townships in Zijin County.

3.4. The Level of Education Management Is Not Enough

Education management refers to the process by which government departments effectively plan, organize, coordinate and control education-related resources such as human, financial and material resources in order to achieve education development goals (Lian, 2009: p. 218.) China's current education management is "county-based", affected by geographical, transport and other factors, Zijin County has not been able to effectively manage the county's rural basic education, the management level is low. According to the author's field research in July 2023, this is mainly manifested in two aspects: first, the funding can not be put into practice, and the lack of supervision. For example, a secondary school in the county at the beginning of this year to the higher authorities to apply for a sum of 80,000 yuan of funding, the financial disclosure column is written for the purchase of physics and chemistry laboratory equipment. But it is understood that the school only purchased a small amount of experimental equipment, and the remaining money is used for the school wall renovation, and the township and county government departments did not take any measures on this behaviour. Secondly, there is a lack of necessary inspection and supervision of education and teaching work. For example, the government's evaluation mechanism for rural schools is not perfect, resulting in a lack of competition among rural schools to improve the quality of education in their own schools. In addition, there is arbitrariness in the appraisal of rural teachers' titles. When appraising titles, regardless of a teacher's overall quality and teaching level, as long as he or she meets the requirements for academic qualifications, position and number of years in the profession, he or she can be appraised for the appropriate level of title. Since titles and salaries are directly linked, this creates income inequity within the rural teaching force and affects their sense of identity at work.

4. Causes of Problems of Rural Basic Education in Zijin County, Heyuan City

4.1. Zijin County's Level of Economic Development Lags behind, and Its Financial Investment in Rural Basic Education Is Not High

As one of the national key poverty-stricken counties, Zijin County's economic development is slow, and the government's financial revenue is not high. Financial constraints will inevitably affect the government's lack of investment in all types of public utilities, especially for rural basic education especially education funding is seriously insufficient, leading to rural school conditions can not be compared with urban schools, which is naturally difficult to attract young and talented teachers to teach. It can be said that the backwardness of regional economic development is an important factor in the poor quality of rural basic education.

4.2. The Influence of Social and Family Factors

Due to the long-term closure and backwardness of Zijin County's mountainous

areas and poor living conditions, local farmers have formed the value orientation of “the children of poor families should go to work as early as they can” and “studying can’t provide food for living”. Under the influence of these traditional thoughts, and coupled with their own low cultural level, many farmers fail to recognise the importance of education, and lack of vision for their children’s learning. At the same time, with the expansion of colleges and universities, the employment rate of college graduates is not optimistic, resulting in some farmers believe that education “investment” is not cost-effective, naturally do not pay attention to the issue of children’s education. In addition, in Zijin County, there are indeed peasant households with few labourers, low economic incomes and a very difficult life, who, because they cannot afford to send their children to school, let them return home early to work in agriculture or go out to work in private enterprises.

4.3. The Government’s Education Concept Is Outdated

Zijin County’s government departments, under the influence of the idea of hierarchical school running and hierarchical management, believe that the development of rural basic education is only a matter for the education department and the school itself, and the government does not have to intervene or should not intervene, so they do not pay attention to rural basic education, do not manage it effectively, and also lack long-term planning for the development goals of rural basic education. These government officials ignore the role of rural basic education in promoting the economic and social development of rural areas, and also ignore the long-term benefits of rural basic education development, so they do not focus on education management, and are unable to form advanced education management concepts, and management methods and management tools are unable to adapt to the needs of education development, resulting in the county government’s low level of management of rural basic education.

5. Countermeasures to Improve the Development of Rural Basic Education in Zijin County

5.1. Increase the Investment in Education and Improve the Conditions of Schools

In order to improve the conditions of rural schools in Zijin County and develop basic education, it is necessary to increase the investment in education. In the current mechanism, the county government is mainly responsible for investing in basic education in the countryside, but Zijin County’s financial constraints can’t fulfil this responsibility, and it is difficult to change the status quo of basic education in the countryside. Therefore, the education investment mechanism should be constructed with the financial expenditure of the provincial and municipal governments as the main focus, and the investment of education funds should be focused on the rural basic education which is inherently insufficient and develops slowly afterwards. At the same time, Zijin County government departments can raise funds for education in a variety of ways, for example, they can encourage

outstanding out-of-town sages to contribute money and effort to rural basic education, and they can also contact the Pearl River Delta authorities, enterprises and institutions to provide counterpart assistance to rural schools in the county.

5.2. We Should Strengthen Teacher Training and Enhance the Quality of Education

Education is the hope for national revitalization, and teachers bear the responsibility for revitalizing education. In order to improve basic education in the countryside, we can start mainly from the following two aspects: first, optimizing the age structure of rural teachers and improving the overall quality of rural teachers. Appropriately eliminating some of the older, unqualified rural teachers and encouraging them to retire early has the advantage of freeing up the establishment so that more young teachers can join the rural teaching force, thus achieving the goal of optimizing the age structure of rural teachers. At the same time, improve the salary of rural teachers, for those new teachers with high academic qualifications and excellent overall quality, with favorable conditions to encourage them to go to the countryside, in order to improve the overall quality of rural teachers. Secondly, strengthen the training of rural teachers to improve the level of education and teaching. Townships and county-level education departments should organize training for rural teachers in the county frequently, and the training should be targeted, divided into subject-specific professional knowledge, teaching methods, advanced teaching concepts and other special training (Wang, 2008: p. 27). In addition, it is necessary to organize exchanges of learning for representatives of teachers from rural schools to primary and secondary schools in the county and urban areas every term, so that they can share their experience with their colleagues when they return to their own schools.

5.3. Effective Measures Should Be Taken to Control the Dropout Phenomenon

The high dropout rate of rural students in Zijin County is not conducive to the economic and social development of the countryside and modern agriculture in the long run. Therefore, the government should take necessary measures to control the dropout phenomenon. Firstly, increase the publicity of compulsory education. Government departments should publicize the relevant provisions of the Compulsory Education Law through television, radio, newspapers, the Internet and other media, so that farmers in mountainous areas can raise their awareness of compulsory education to the level of law, and so that the Compulsory Education Law can really become a household word (Xiao, 2004: p. 16.) However, the most important thing is that the staff of the education departments of counties and townships should go deep into the villages and organize relevant seminars in the villages with the rural schools as the leading organizers, so as to change the farmers' views and attitudes towards basic education with easy-to-understand words, and to make the farmers deeply realize the significance of basic education for the destiny of the children, the future of the families and the economic and

social development of the rural areas, so as to enhance their awareness of sending their children to school, and to make the majority of rural children and adolescents receive proper education and to make the law known to all. This will enable the majority of rural children and adolescents to receive the education they deserve. Secondly, special care should be given to especially poor families. In poor mountainous areas like Zijin County, where labour shortages and extremely low income families are not uncommon, the government should give special care to the children of rural low-income households whose families receive less than 200 yuan a month. In addition to increasing their monthly minimum subsistence allowance, the government should also pay a certain amount of monthly living allowance to their children in school. With a guaranteed livelihood, parents will be more motivated to send their children to school, and students' desire to study will increase. Once again, attention should be paid to the education of left-behind children. Rural schools should pay more attention and care to the left-behind children, usually more communication with them, to understand their life, learning, interpersonal relationships and other aspects of the problem, in addition, and their parents to keep in touch with timely feedback on the students' school situation, what problems teachers and parents together to discuss solutions.

5.4. Change the Concept of Education and Improve the Management Skill

Zijin County government departments of rural basic education management level is low, so that the rural basic education business has no clear development direction, the teaching order is also more chaotic, so the county's basic education management level needs to be improved. First of all, it is necessary to change the backward concept of education. County government departments of rural basic education management awareness, should not remain in the "education is the education sector and school", but recognize the development of rural basic education for the construction of new rural areas, rural economic and social development of the important role of promoting the development of basic education to formulate a clear basic education development goals, and rationally co-ordinate, coordinate the resources of all parties to the Secondly, schools and teachers should be reformed. Secondly, the evaluation mechanism of schools and teachers should be reformed. Measuring the level of operation and quality of education in a rural school should focus on examining whether all students in that school are fully developed in terms of morality, intellectuality, physical fitness, aesthetics, and labour, and placing quality education in a systematic form in a prominent position in the teaching and learning process (Yu, 2008) With regard to the appraisal of teachers' merits and the evaluation of their titles, we should not have a preconceived idea that teachers with high academic qualifications and long-term teaching experience are necessarily better and should be given higher titles. Instead, we should examine whether their classrooms are lively and whether the students agree with their teaching standards, and take these factors as an important basis in the appraisal work of teachers. Furthermore, the responsibilities and authorities

of all parties should be clearly defined. In the process of promoting the development of rural basic education, government departments at all levels should give full play to their own enthusiasm and initiative, clarify the responsibilities and scope of management to be shared by their respective departments, and establish an effective monitoring and feedback mechanism between county and township levels of government, which is the key to improving the management of rural basic education.

The construction of a new socialist countryside is an inevitable requirement for the development of the times and the building of a harmonious society; it is a practical measure for the Party to solve the “three rural issues” in the new period, and an important element in the building of a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way. General Secretary Xi Jinping said that the key to prosperity lies in the countryside. Cultivating cultured and thoughtful farmers is an important part of building a new socialist countryside, the key to solving the “three rural” problem, and even more so the key to solving the problem of rural areas in poor counties. For this reason, accelerating the development of rural culture and education in poor areas, paying attention to rural basic education, popularizing and consolidating nine-year compulsory education in rural areas is of great significance to the cultivation of new contemporary farmers, the development of new socialist countryside and the construction of a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way. The current situation of rural basic education in Zijin County reflects the problems prevailing in poor counties, which has an important impact on the construction of a new socialist countryside and the improvement of the backwardness of rural areas in poor areas, and deserves sufficient attention and focus from the government and all sectors of society. The local county governments must keep abreast of the times and make the development of rural basic education a priority, investing more human, material and financial resources into the cause of rural basic education in order to promote the development of rural basic education. We firmly believe that as long as the whole society in poor counties works together and does its part for the development of rural basic education, the education in poor counties will be able to achieve healthy and sustainable development, thus making an important contribution to the construction of a new socialist countryside.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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