

Original Paper

A Study on the Differences in Professional Development Among Urban and Rural Primary School Teachers and Strategies for Promoting Balanced Development

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the differences in professional development among urban and rural primary school teachers. It analyzes the manifestations of these differences from aspects such as teacher structure, professional competence, and development resources, and delves into the underlying causes, including economic factors, policy orientations, and social perceptions. Based on this analysis, the paper proposes strategies to promote balanced professional development among urban and rural primary school teachers, such as optimizing teacher allocation, strengthening training and exchange programs, and improving policy safeguards. The aim is to narrow the educational gap between urban and rural areas and advance educational equity.

Keywords

Rural and urban primary school teachers, professional development disparities, balanced development strategies

1. Introduction

Educational equity is a crucial foundation of social equity, and teachers, as the core resource of education, directly influence educational quality through their professional development levels. In China, the uneven development of rural and urban primary education is particularly pronounced, with significant disparities in professional development between rural and urban primary school teachers. These disparities are not only reflected in the quantity and quality of teachers but also encompass multiple aspects such as teacher training and career development opportunities. Studying the disparities in professional development among urban and rural primary school teachers and exploring balanced development strategies is of great significance for narrowing the urban-rural education gap and

achieving educational equity.

2. Manifestations of Disparities in Professional Development Among Urban and Rural Primary School Teachers

2.1 Disparities in Teacher Structure

2.1.1 Age Structure

The aging of the rural primary school teacher workforce is a serious issue. Taking a certain region as an example, the proportion of teachers aged 45 and above in rural primary schools is nearly 50%, while this proportion is only 29.80% in urban primary schools. The loss of middle-aged and young backbone teachers has left the rural primary school teacher workforce lacking vitality, making it difficult to adapt to the demands of modern educational development.

2.1.2 Educational Attainment Structure

The educational attainment levels of urban primary school teachers are generally higher than those of rural primary school teachers. The proportion of teachers with a bachelor's degree in urban primary schools reaches 47.02%, while in rural primary schools it is only 17.03%. The lack of highly educated teachers has led to rural primary schools lagging behind in terms of innovative teaching methods and curriculum development.

2.1.3 Professional Title Structure

The professional title structure of rural primary school teachers is generally low. The proportion of “senior primary school teachers” in urban primary schools is lower than in rural primary schools. However, due to limited professional title quotas in urban schools, some outstanding teachers are unable to obtain promotions, which affects their work enthusiasm. While rural primary schools have a higher number of senior teachers, their overall teaching standards and professional competence still need improvement.

2.2 Differences in Professional Competence

2.2.1 Professional Knowledge

Rural primary school teachers face challenges in updating their subject knowledge. Surveys indicate that over 80% of rural primary school teachers feel their current subject knowledge is outdated, compared to 85.43% in urban primary schools. This highlights the greater challenges rural teachers face in terms of knowledge accumulation and updating.

2.2.2 Professional Skills

In terms of professional skills, rural primary school teachers are relatively weaker in classroom management, subject teaching, and educational research capabilities. For example, in classroom management, over a quarter of rural primary school teachers believe that the currently advocated effective classrooms or student-centered classrooms make management difficult, while this proportion is one-fifth in urban primary schools.

2.3 Differences in Development Resources

2.3.1 Training Resources

Urban elementary school teachers have more opportunities to participate in professional training, and the content of such training is more diverse and comprehensive. Urban schools can organize teachers to attend various seminars, training courses, and academic exchange activities, while rural elementary schools, due to constraints such as funding and teacher resources, have fewer training opportunities for teachers, and the content of such training is relatively limited.

2.3.2 Research and Development Resources

Urban primary schools have more comprehensive research and development systems and resources. Urban schools can engage in inter-school research and development cooperation and invite experts and scholars for guidance, while rural primary schools have fewer research and development activities, lack external exchanges and cooperation, and thus struggle to improve their research and development capabilities.

3. Analysis of the Causes of Professional Development Disparities Between Urban and Rural Elementary School Teachers

The formation of professional development disparities between urban and rural elementary school teachers is the result of the interplay of multiple factors. A thorough analysis of these causes can provide scientific basis for developing targeted strategies to promote balanced development. The following analysis examines these causes from four dimensions: economic, policy, social perceptions, and teacher-related factors.

3.1 Economic Factors

The significant disparity in economic development between urban and rural areas is the fundamental cause of uneven investment in education. Urban areas are economically developed with diversified industrial structures, enabling them to provide ample financial support for education. These funds are not only used to improve school facilities, such as constructing modern teaching buildings and equipping them with advanced teaching equipment, but also to enhance teacher benefits, including higher salaries, comprehensive welfare systems, and favorable career development opportunities. For example, urban schools can offer more training opportunities and research funding support, attracting outstanding teachers and creating a virtuous cycle.

In contrast, rural areas have relatively underdeveloped economies, a single-industry structure, and limited fiscal revenue, leading to insufficient investment in education. Rural schools have poor educational conditions, outdated teaching facilities, and are unable to meet the demands of modern teaching. Additionally, teachers have low salaries, harsh living conditions, and limited career development opportunities, making it difficult to attract and retain outstanding teachers. This economic disadvantage poses significant challenges for rural teachers in terms of professional development, such as a lack of training resources and insufficient research support, further widening the gap with urban

teachers.

3.2 Policy Orientation

Education policies play a crucial guiding role in the allocation of urban and rural teacher resources. However, past education policies have, to some extent, failed to adequately address the needs of rural teachers, lacking targeted support measures for them. For example, in terms of title evaluation, rural schools, due to their weak faculty and limited research conditions, often place teachers at a disadvantage in title evaluations, with limited quotas and fewer opportunities. This places greater pressure on rural teachers in their professional development, affecting their motivation and stability.

Additionally, educational policies exhibit imbalances in resource allocation. Urban schools, benefiting from advantageous geographical locations and abundant social resources, often receive greater policy preferences and resource support. In contrast, rural schools, situated in remote areas with limited access to information, struggle to access equivalent educational resources. Such policy disparities further exacerbate the imbalance in professional development between urban and rural teachers.

3.3 Social Perceptions

The insufficient emphasis placed on rural education by society is a key factor contributing to the lack of appeal of the rural teaching profession. Many people generally perceive rural education as harsh and offering limited prospects, leading them to avoid teaching in rural areas. This perception is closely tied to factors such as the economic development level and social cultural environment of rural regions. Additionally, rural parents often have lower expectations for education and provide insufficient support for teachers' work, further complicating the professional development of rural educators. For example, rural parents may place greater emphasis on cultivating their children's practical skills while neglecting the development of their comprehensive qualities and innovative abilities, making it difficult for rural teachers to gain parental understanding and support during the teaching process.

Furthermore, there are misconceptions about the teaching profession in society. Some people perceive teaching as a stable but low-paying profession, lacking in appeal and challenge. This perception has, to some extent, influenced the career choices of talented individuals, particularly regarding rural teaching positions. Therefore, increasing society's attention to rural education and correcting misconceptions about the teaching profession are important pathways to enhancing the appeal of the rural teaching profession and promoting balanced professional development between urban and rural teachers.

3.4 Teacher-related Factors

Some rural teachers lack a strong sense of professional development and lack the motivation to actively learn and improve, which is another key factor contributing to the disparities in professional development between urban and rural teachers. Some rural teachers are content with the status quo and do not prioritize updating their knowledge or improving their teaching methods, leading to stagnation in their professional growth. They may believe that as long as they complete basic teaching tasks, there is no need for further interest or enthusiasm in educational research. This mindset results in a lack of initiative and proactivity in their professional development, making it difficult for them to adapt to the

demands of modern educational development.

Additionally, rural teachers face heavy workloads, with many taking on multiple roles, leaving them insufficient time and energy for professional development. In rural schools, due to limited teaching resources, teachers often must teach multiple subjects while also managing student affairs, communicating with parents, and performing other duties. This makes it difficult for them to allocate time and energy to professional learning and research activities, further limiting their professional development. For example, in a survey conducted in Rongcheng City, it was found that some rural schools have a severe shortage of teachers, who must not only handle teaching responsibilities but also manage students' daily care, resulting in an overwhelming workload. Under such circumstances, teachers find it challenging to focus on their own professional development.

4. Strategies for Promoting Balanced Professional Development Among Urban and Rural Primary School Teachers

The imbalance in professional development among urban and rural primary school teachers is a prominent issue currently facing the education sector, severely impacting educational equity and the overall improvement of educational quality. To effectively address this issue and promote balanced professional development among urban and rural primary school teachers, efforts should be made in four areas: optimizing teacher allocation, strengthening training and exchange programs, improving policy safeguards, and enhancing social support. This will help establish a comprehensive, multi-level development strategy framework.

4.1 Optimizing Teacher Allocation

4.1.1 Implementing a Teacher Mobility System

Establishing a scientific, reasonable, and effective teacher mobility mechanism is a key measure to promote balanced teacher allocation between urban and rural areas. Encouraging outstanding urban teachers to teach in rural schools can bring advanced teaching concepts, rich teaching experience, and diverse teaching methods to rural schools, injecting new vitality into rural education. Meanwhile, sending rural teachers to urban schools for on-the-job training allows them to experience urban advanced educational models and management methods firsthand, broadening their horizons and enhancing their professional competence.

To ensure the effectiveness and stability of teacher mobility, the “2-3-4-5” dual-chain driven model can be referenced. “Two-way selection” ensures that urban and rural schools precisely match their needs and select suitable teachers for exchange; “Three-fund support” addresses the concerns of teachers participating in the program by establishing special funds, providing living allowances, and offering incentive grants, thereby motivating them to actively engage in their work; “Four-tier evaluation” establishes a comprehensive evaluation system covering schools, students, parents, and peers to objectively assess the performance of teachers participating in the program; The “Five-Star Certification” system awards star-rated certifications to outstanding volunteer teachers, granting them

honorary recognition and priority in career development, thereby enhancing their sense of professional achievement and belonging.

4.1.2 Strengthening the Recruitment of Rural Teachers

Increasing efforts to recruit rural teachers is the foundation for improving the structure of the rural teacher workforce. The government should implement a series of preferential policies, such as providing housing subsidies, relocation allowances, and prioritizing the enrollment of teachers' children in schools, to attract outstanding university graduates to teach in rural areas. These policies can reduce the concerns of university graduates about working in rural areas and enhance the appeal of rural teaching positions.

At the same time, the Rural Teacher Special Position Program and the Free Normal School Program should be implemented in depth. The Special Position Program recruits teachers with professional knowledge and a passion for education for rural schools. After completing their service period, some may choose to remain, injecting long-term stable teaching resources into rural schools. The Free Normal School Program cultivates teachers who are passionate about rural education and have a solid professional foundation from the outset. These normal school graduates directly teach in rural schools upon graduation, helping to improve the educational background and professional competence of the rural teacher workforce.

4.2 Strengthening Training and Exchange

4.2.1 Conducting Targeted Training

Conducting tiered and categorized training based on the different needs of urban and rural teachers is an important approach to maximizing training effectiveness. For rural teachers, who are relatively behind in terms of access to teaching resources and knowledge updates, training should focus on subject knowledge updates, improvements in teaching methods, and the application of information technology. Through specialized lectures, online course learning, and on-site observations, rural teachers can stay informed about the latest developments in their subjects, master modern teaching methods and technologies, and improve classroom teaching quality.

For urban teachers, who already have a solid foundation in teaching practice and educational research, the focus should be on enhancing their educational innovation capabilities and research standards. Urban teachers can be organized to participate in advanced training programs and academic seminars, encouraged to undertake educational research projects, and explore innovative educational models and methods to play a leading and 示范 role in urban education.

A combination of online and offline training methods can provide teachers with diverse learning channels. Online training offers flexible scheduling and abundant resources, allowing teachers to select learning content based on their own time and needs; offline training, on the other hand, emphasizes interactive communication and practical operations, fostering intellectual exchange and experience sharing among teachers through face-to-face training and discussions.

4.2.2 Promoting Inter-school Teaching and Research Collaboration

Establishing teaching and research communities between urban and rural schools provides an effective platform for urban and rural teachers to learn from one another and improve together. Urban schools have advantages in terms of teaching resources, faculty strength, and educational research, and should play a leading role in demonstrating best practices, sharing teaching and research resources and outcomes with rural schools.

Joint teaching and research activities can be conducted through collaborative lesson planning, observing and evaluating lessons, and conducting research projects. During collaborative lesson planning, urban and rural teachers can exchange teaching ideas and methods, design more targeted and effective teaching plans based on the characteristics of rural and urban students, and improve their teaching through mutual learning of teaching techniques and classroom management methods. Research projects can guide urban and rural teachers to jointly explore hot and difficult issues in education and teaching, and enhance their educational research capabilities and professional competence through collaborative research.

4.3 Improving Policy Support

4.3.1 Improving the Treatment of Rural Teachers

Increasing investment in rural education is the fundamental guarantee for improving the treatment of rural teachers. The government should increase financial allocations and raise the salaries of rural teachers to gradually narrow the wage gap with urban teachers. At the same time, it should improve the working and living conditions of rural teachers, such as constructing temporary housing for teachers and upgrading school facilities, to create a better working environment for rural teachers.

Special allowances such as rural teacher subsidies and rural teacher grants should be established, with different standards based on factors like the geographical location and hardship level of rural schools, to enhance the appeal of the rural teaching profession. Rural teachers should be given priority in title evaluations and commendations, with specific title evaluation standards and preferential policies established for rural teachers to provide them with more promotion opportunities and development space, encouraging them to commit to rural education in the long term.

4.3.2 Establish a Comprehensive Policy Support System

The government should introduce a series of comprehensive and systematic policies to strengthen support for rural education. Develop a rural education development plan to clarify the goals and tasks for the professional development of rural teachers, providing a clear direction for rural education development.

Improve the teacher training system and ensure adequate funding for rural teacher training. Include rural teacher training funds in the fiscal budget to ensure sufficient and stable funding. At the same time, standardize training management and improve training quality to ensure that rural teachers receive high-quality, targeted training.

Establish a professional development incentive mechanism for teachers, such as teaching achievement

awards and research incentives, to encourage teachers to continuously improve their professional competence, actively participate in educational reforms and innovations, and contribute to the development of rural education.

4.4 Strengthen Social Support

4.4.1 Create a Positive Social Atmosphere

Strengthening publicity for rural education is an important means to enhance societal recognition and respect for rural teachers. Through media and online channels, widely publicize the exemplary deeds and dedication of rural teachers, enabling society to understand the importance of rural education and the hardships of rural teachers' work, and guide all sectors of society to pay attention to rural education, fostering a favorable social trend of respecting rural teachers and supporting rural education.

4.4.2 Encourage Social Participation

Encourage enterprises, social organizations, and individuals to support rural education through various means. Enterprises can improve the educational conditions of rural schools by donating funds, teaching equipment, and educational materials; social organizations can organize volunteer activities, such as sending college student teaching teams to rural schools or conducting teacher training programs; individuals can establish scholarships to support impoverished rural students in completing their education and motivate rural students to strive for academic excellence.

Additionally, universities and research institutions should be encouraged to collaborate with rural schools. Universities and research institutions can provide professional guidance and academic support to rural teachers, assist rural schools in conducting educational research projects, and enhance the educational research capabilities of rural schools. Through the joint efforts of all sectors of society, a favorable social environment for the professional development of rural teachers can be created, promoting balanced professional development between urban and rural primary school teachers.

5. Conclusion

The disparity in professional development between urban and rural primary school teachers is a significant issue in China's educational development. By analyzing the manifestations and causes of this disparity, we have proposed a series of strategies to promote balanced professional development between urban and rural primary school teachers. The implementation of these strategies requires the joint efforts of the government, schools, and all sectors of society. Only by optimizing teacher allocation, strengthening training and exchange, improving policy safeguards, and reinforcing social support can we gradually narrow the gap in professional development between urban and rural primary school teachers, achieve educational equity, and lay a solid foundation for the development of China's basic education. In the future, we need to further deepen our research on the professional development of urban and rural primary school teachers and continuously explore more effective strategies for balanced development to adapt to the needs of educational reform and social development.

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