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Reassessing the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education

Abstract The balanced development of compulsory education has been given due and lengthy coverage in the “Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)” which, to some extent, reflects the needs of our time and the demands of the general public. However, detailed analyses reveal that many aspects remain to be improved. The authors hold that the balanced development of compulsory education should be people-oriented and a fundamental right of modern citizens. The paper makes a preliminary research on the question of balance in compulsory education, discussing participants, potential to achieve balance, and how to evaluate the ongoing development towards balance.

Keywords compulsory education, balanced development, educational program guidelines, evaluation

Introduction

Since the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, educational development has been a constant policy interest. Compared with other major developing countries, China ranks in the upper middle in terms of basic educational development, a remarkable achievement. By the 2000s, nine year compulsory education had been rolled out to most of China except for some regions in the far west. The illiteracy rate for youth and adults has greatly decreased. In 2004, the State Council promulgated the “National Breakthrough Plan on Two Basics in Western China (2004–2007)” (State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2004). Following a four year campaign, China has

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basically realized nine year compulsory education. For the general population, illiteracy had been eliminated by the end of 2007. The gross enrollment rate for Chinese primary schools (Grade 1 to Grade 6) and junior high schools (Grade 7 to Grade 9) reached 105.7% and 98.5% respectively, and the ratio of admission to junior high schools from primary schools and the ratio of progression from junior to senior high school reached 99.7% and 83.4% respectively by the end of 2008 (Shen, 2011b, p. 60).

Despite this, there are still significant regional, urban-rural and inter-school disparities in the development of compulsory education. In the eastern provinces and cities of China, conditions are significantly better than in central and western China in terms of teaching resources, teaching quality, and opportunities for students to enroll in higher education. Moreover, some indicators such as per student expenditure have shown worrying tendencies including a “collapse of central China.” Disparities between eastern, central and western China are concrete manifestations of inter-provincial gaps, related to local socioeconomic development levels and varying degrees of local government focus on compulsory education investment. In general, the more economically developed the region, the higher the quality of compulsory education. Since China’s compulsory education is mainly supported by county governments, economically developed provinces, cities and counties with higher financial investment capabilities are generally in a stronger position. However, some provinces counter this trend, putting less stress on financial investment in education. Guangdong is a province in this category: Investment in education is low, and there is a prodigious gap in levels of economic development.

In addition to the gap between eastern, central and western China, and an inter-provincial disparity, the largest gap is the intra-provincial one, between cities and counties. A paper by Wang (2002) shows the gap between cities and counties within provinces generates over 50% of the country’s educational disparity. The study has found that differences in compulsory education expenditure are largely caused by intra-provincial discrepancies, resulting in a contribution of 60% to 63% of the difference in entire compulsory education expenditure, only one third of which is due to inter-provincial overall economic development strength. The study has also found that the Theil index of per student appropriation expenditure in primary schools is 0.261 with 0.174 of the intra-provincial Theil index and 0.087 of inter-provincial Theil index, therefore, contribution rate of inequality in the province is 66.75%, that is to say, the intra-provincial gap is greater than inter-provincial gap (pp. 152–160). Cheng’s (2008) study has found that Theil index of per student appropriation expenditure in education in an investigated western province is 0.13 from 2003 to 2006, and inequality within the county accounts for 50%. Shen (2011a) measured the important core indicators of national inter-provincial and intra-provincial urban

and rural areas on human, financial and material resources in ordinary primary school, junior high school and senior high school in four years between 2003 to 2006, and found that the configuration of these resources has the tendency to enlarge, showing an obvious “Matthew effect” (p. 1).

Per student expenditure can be as great as ten times higher in cities compared with counties of the same province. According to the “National Educational Inspection Report 2005,” there was a great per student public expenditure in budget gap of compulsory education among counties in 2004 and the gap among counties in two-thirds of the provinces had a difference of more than ten times, of which the phenomenon is particularly serious in junior high schools (Yang, 2006, p. 167).

In addition, long term investment to key and model schools has led to larger inter-school gaps, as the investment into the best four or five schools in every county has taken over a relatively large proportion in local education. This huge inter-school gap has led to a strong school selection phenomenon as well as the skyrocketing housing prices in school districts. Many families have paid a huge extra cost for improving their children’s educational options.

China has mainly solved the problems of “accessibility of education” and “difficulty of receiving education” in the first decade of the 21st century and plans to solve the problem of “receiving good education” by 2020, by resolving the inter-regional and inter-school gap. To solve the major education issues such as the imbalance of compulsory education in the second decade of the 21st century, the Chinese government introduced an “Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2010 July) to guide development and reform in the next decade, in which promotion of the balanced development of compulsory education is one of the key elements.

The plan mainly covers aspects of the current demands for balanced development of compulsory education, having a relatively detailed discussion of the objectives, tasks, safeguard measures and implementation procedures, etc., except several of the statements. For example, the plan states that “coordinated urban and rural development shall be realized first in counties before it is promoted in broader scope” (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2010 July, pp. 14–15). If we blindly disregard the economic development gap among cities and counties within a province instead of achieving a balance within each county in a province before achieving the balanced development of compulsory education among cities and counties within a province, then we risk lacking transfer payments to comparatively economic undeveloped counties in the implementation of provincial integrated management of compulsory education expenditure, resulting in a growing gap between provincial urban and rural development of compulsory education and between cities and counties.

With such a possibility, how can we achieve the balanced development of compulsory education? As county governments are mainly responsible for the current financial investment in compulsory education, putting responsibility at the county level makes it seem as though provincial and central governments are reluctant to pay for the balanced development of compulsory education.

The Interpretation of the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education

On the balance of compulsory education, a representative piece of Chinese research is from Zhai (2008). At the macro-level, it is described as the balance between educational supply and demand; in medium-level analysis, it is the balance of educational resources; in micro-level analysis, it is the balance of school education processes including the balance of internal curriculum educational resource allocation, the balance of educational result and educational evaluation (p. 1).

The viewpoint of Yang (2009, November 10), deputy director of the Basic Education Department in China's Ministry of Education, represents the definition of "balanced development of compulsory education" by the Chinese authority. From the authors' points of view, the balance of compulsory education "mainly refers to the following aspects: firstly, urban-rural balance; secondly inter-regional balance; thirdly, approximate balance among schools in school operating conditions, school level, teaching quality, and educational quality of compulsory education. All school-aged children receive compulsory education equally and lawfully and are entitled with equitable opportunities for compulsory education. The approximate balance of educational need and supply is the concept of balanced development of compulsory education that we think of (para. 3)."

Furthermore, the authors believe that the balanced development of compulsory education can be divided into four stages and four dimensions. At the first stage, this is the approximate balance to obtain the opportunity (opportunity of receiving education or going to school in a narrow sense) of schooling (accessibility of receiving education), which has generally been achieved (except for some ethnic minorities and especially disadvantaged groups). The second stage is the approximate balance of basic school conditions, but there is still a big gap in this regard at present. The third stage is the approximately balanced configuration of teacher and principal resources, which is far from the ideal equilibrium though it is proceeding. The fourth stage is the approximate balance of compulsory education such as standardized tests, eleven-plus and other test scores and the opportunity of going to school of a higher grade, in which the

balance of grades cannot be fully achieved allowing a reasonable gap. The four dimensions are: at the lowest level, the approximate urban-rural and inter-school balance within a county. At the medium-level, balance is approximate inter-regional balance among cities and counties within a province. The higher-level is approximate inter-provincial balance, and the highest level is approximate balanced opportunities of receiving compulsory education and balanced educational resources of safeguarding the successful completion of their studies regardless of students' ethnic, region, gender and family background and approximately balanced education quality and opportunities of entering school of a higher grade.

At the present stage, balanced development of compulsory education in China has remained in the first dimension of the second stage, which entails making efforts to solve the urban-rural and inter-school balanced development within a county, especially to focus on resolving the balanced investment of resources, including urban-rural and inter-school balanced investment of per student education expenditure in budget and basic school conditions, and urban-rural configuration of teachers with a city or county in a province.

The Balanced Development of Compulsory Education: The Object of Balance

The Object of Balanced Development of Compulsory Education

In the discussion on balance or equity of compulsory education, scholars tend to examine four stakeholder parties. These are: children who receive compulsory education; adults and families who benefit from paying for compulsory education; political units which make compulsory education decisions such as school districts and local government; and teachers and other staff who are employed in the system (Wang, 2009, November 10). The role of children is naturally examined, because they spend considerable time in the compulsory education system, and many people think that children's compulsory education experience should be fairly allocated. In talking about school finance related to the balance or equity, if taxpayers bear part of the burden to support compulsory education, then they are the objects of fair attention regarding balanced or equal compulsory education. District educational management departments under the state are also the objects of fair attention regarding balanced or equal compulsory education. In addition, it is important to discuss sampled special interest groups, such as those from low-income families, as well as minorities and students with disabilities. There is also a focus on low wealth and low income taxpayers (Berne & Stiefel, 1999, pp. 10–12).

Four Parties and the Corresponding Principle of Balanced Development of Compulsory Education

An Object of Education: Principles of Students' Horizontal and Vertical Equity

- Principles of Horizontal Equity and Equal Treatment

Horizontal equity specifically refers to the idea that all other aspects equal, students should receive the same treatment. First, as long as they are students, they should have equal opportunities of receiving education, that is, equal educational opportunities. Everyone should enjoy the same right to education no matter his or her nationality, ethnicity, gender, or place of birth. As Minister of Education Yuan Guiren said, “educational equity should be the basis of social equity and the starting point of a fair life. Its basic requirement is to guarantee for every citizen the right to education and the key to equity of chances” (Xinhua News Agency, 2010, February 28, para. 4). Second, the achievement of this equal right needs an approximately equal investment of indemnificatory resources, including such allocation resources as policy, institution and law. That is, students should have approximately equal teaching and school conditions, teachers and parents should have approximately equal care and concern for their students and children, and the resource allocation policy should treat all students equally, giving them equal resource investment protection. A strictly legal consideration of the government’s regulations regarding compulsory education being a fundamental right of citizens is insufficient to ensure that citizens actually enjoy this right or that the government really fulfills its duty. The concept that a person has equal legal rights to something and that a person has a right of effective use to protect his or her interests, or to pursue his or her objectives are fundamentally different. Indeed, the value of equal legal rights should be reflected in which aspects people use rather than gauged by what they say about their possession of these rights. What is most important is that the government should provide adequate resources to guarantee fair realization of rights (Berne & Stiefel, 1978).

- Vertical Equity and the Principle of Compensation

Vertical equity specifically refers to the concept that students in different situations should be given different treatment. As with horizontal equity, those employing the term vertical equity will ask how to define students “in different situations.” This concept is often vaguely or clearly used to define different groups of students, distinguishing students by the quality of input needed in order to achieve a particular level of output. Taking the differences between children

into account, especially differences between physically disabled and non-disabled children, different treatment of their inequities should be provided. This applies to legitimate different aspects of children, especially aspects of physical disability or school district resources expenses. When addressing this issue, Berne and Stiefel (1978) regarded non-disabled students from Grade 7 to Grade 12 as base number 1 (a normal or standard student), and converted students with different physical disabilities into standard student number with different weights (a Grade 6 disabled student equated to six standard students).

As the lowest level beneficiaries in the balanced development of compulsory education, the government should provide with compensation. However, Rawls' difference principle is insufficient in compensating and correcting this injustice. That is, when talking about the compensation of "the most disadvantaged group," it is likely to lead to the situation that if we offer average compensation to the 10% lowest income population, 5% of the lowest income population will not have been fundamentally improved. Therefore, Rawls' compensation for groups should be improved to compensation for individuals. That is, as Dworkin (2002/2003) says, to offer every citizen equal concern and provide every citizen in a disadvantageous position with modest compensation, which means that assigning rights to use public property such as basic educational resources to individual, the system can develop suitable incentive and fair effects of fundamental resource allocation.

As Government at All Levels and Various Regions and Parents Paying for the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education: Wealth and Financial Neutrality, and Transfer Payment Principle, and Ability to Pay Principle

As China's "Compulsory Education Law" regulates that the county-level government is mainly responsible for compulsory education expenditure, there are great differences in education investment such as per student expenditure and in conditions for running schools, including teaching resources, between regions due to the imbalance of economic development. Especially developed areas and key schools have been already in a highly developed state, while backward areas and comparatively poor schools are at a very low level, difficult to achieve compulsory education in the inter-regional and urban-rural balance. To achieve genuine balanced development of compulsory education, such external factors as wealth or financial influence must be weeded out so that per student expenditure and conditions for running schools are not dependent on the level of local economic development or the level of financial expenditure. In other words, there is no correlation between per student expenditure and financial expenditure or GDP per capita, which is wealth and financial neutrality. For undeveloped areas and comparatively poor schools, financial transfer payment of provincial

governments and central government should be strengthened. This is especially true in those counties and cities that have had a low level of compulsory education for a long time, and should receive a higher level of central financial transfers.

Parents who share the cost of compulsory education need to consider their ability to pay. Even though the 2006's *Amendment to the Compulsory Education Law* policy of “two exemptions and one subsidy” (*liang mian yi bu*)—waiving miscellaneous fees and providing boarding allowances and free textbooks for the children of poor families—has been implemented, parents in poor families need special compensation because many systems such as rural boarding system have still resulted in the increase of schooling cost to poor families, which is not fair to these parents and students.

As The Actual Provider of School and Teachers in Compulsory Education: Principle of Equal Treatment

In the balanced and equitable development, and research of compulsory education, people neither pay too much attention to how teachers and schools treat students in education and the teaching process for a long time nor how parents assist teachers or schools in educating and treating students. Therefore, students' general perception of equal treatment in school is an important dimension of the balanced development of compulsory education. For example, fair treatment, teacher's favorites, respect, general staff treatment of students, whether or not teachers mislead students or engage in misconduct, equal classes, punishment and rewards, whether or not scores reflect effort, the fairness of marking tests, are all questions which should be considered. Parents' expectations for students, equal treatment of children in education at home, and right and just expectations on children should be important issues of fair treatment in the educational process.

What Is the Purpose of Balance in Compulsory Education?

In short, the object of attention regarding the balanced development of compulsory education should be the purpose of balance. Berne and Stiefel (as cited in Sherman & Poirier, 2007) discussed this from the perspective of school finance. They established the fair evaluation framework for school finances in 1984, identifying three dimensions: input, output and results (p. 22).

Opportunity in compulsory education and resource guarantees in the process are important objectives. Tables 1 and 2 list examples that can be applied to current educational balanced and fair development goals and objects.

Table 1 Objectives of Educational Balanced Development

Access/progression	Resources	Results
Rates/ratios of enrollment	Average class size	Achievement test scores
Rates/ratios of entry	Course availability	Graduation ratios
Rates/ratios of progression	Expenditure per pupil	Income
Rates/ratios of repetition	Pupil-teacher ratios	Occupational status
	Quality of school facilities	
	Quality of textbooks	
	Teacher education level	
	Teacher experience and certification	

Source: “Educational equity and public policy: Comparing results from 16 countries” (UIS Working Paper No. 16), by J. D. Sherman & J. M. Poirier, 2007. Montreal, Canada: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, p. 22.

Table 2 Various Potential Combinations of Goals and Objectives of Educational Balanced Development

Targets of equity concerns		Objects of equity		
		Access/progression	Resources	Results
Students’ characteristics	Gender			
	Socioeconomic status			
	Race/ethnicity			
	Disability status			
Regional characteristics	Type (e.g., province, municipality)			
	Urbanicity			
	Wealth			

Source: “Educational equity and public policy: comparing results from 16 countries” (UIS Working Paper No. 16), by J. D. Sherman & J. M. Poirier, 2007. Montreal, Canada: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, p. 23.

Firstly, the balance of compulsory education comprises of the approximate balance of schooling opportunities by region, gender, nation, social status and physical condition. Secondly, it includes the approximate balance of various resource guarantees in the teaching process such as access to a set class size, set number of courses, set per student expenditure, the quantity and quality of teachers (student-teacher ratio, educational background of teachers, title and training conditions, gender and age, etc.), textbooks and other basic school conditions. Thirdly, it means that students should be able to attain approximately the same test scores, and that school and parents of students have their concerns about the educational process treated in a similar way. Finally, it means that

students should have approximately equal opportunities of entering higher grade education, and there should not be any great disparity because of race, nationality, gender, family wealth, physical ability or other differences. In addition, the balanced development of compulsory education has a minimum requirement of regions and groups. The first is urban-rural and inter-school balance within a county. Next is the approximate balance of provincial cities and counties. Third is inter-provincial approximate balance. Finally, regardless of their nationality, region, gender and family background, students should have approximately equal access to compulsory education and educational resources to ensure successful completion of their studies, and obtain approximately equal teaching quality and opportunities to enter higher schools.

How to Achieve Balanced Development of Compulsory Education?

Four Steps to Achieve the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education

Firstly, the first educational responsibility of the current government is to provide a basic minimum level of adequacy for compulsory public education. This can be measured not only by gross enrollment rates in all regions, but also by net enrollment rates, retention rates, and rates of admission into higher schools, the basic minimum requirements of adequacy of basic educational opportunity. In this regard, approximately equal enrollment opportunities for girls, minority children, children in border areas, children with physical disabilities, poor families and children in comparatively undeveloped areas, successful completion of their education, and the opportunity to enter higher education should be improved. At the very least, there should not be great disparity compared with other children. The achievement of balance involves increased finance, as the per student expenditure for targeted children should be twice that of other children. This cost may be three times or more, especially in the case of physically disabled and minority children. With this additional expenditure, schooling opportunities will be guaranteed so as to achieve approximately similar achievements to regular students.

Secondly, in the early stages of equality of opportunity, the government should increase guarantees to achieve equal resources allocation for equal education opportunities, including both equal newly-increased flow allocation of resources each year and more subsidies to regions and groups which have lagged far behind other regions and groups in the past, making up for previous imbalances. Then they have a fair competition with other leading regions or groups that start with approximately equal resource guarantees. They should pursue the

high-quality and approximately balanced compulsory education after both approximately balanced allocation of resources at the starting point and subsequent resources input, although it is hard to reach balance in the short term. The government should lay more emphasis on current balanced allocation of resources, and should establish the basic conditions for running schools around the country, regulating comparatively undeveloped areas to meet the basic requirements, and moreover, in the short term, the central government should increase financial transfer payments in comparatively underdeveloped areas so as to reach basic conditions and stand at the same developmental starting point as other areas.

Furthermore, an intra-regional and urban-rural reasonable flow of teaching resources, especially outstanding teachers and principals should be aimed for, as well as a balanced configuration of teaching resources. Obviously, on the basis of approximately equal school running conditions, even if the basic conditions needed to reach basic standards required by the government are not met; teachers and principals are the ones that determine whether a school stands or falls. Excellent principals with good educational philosophy, and qualified teachers, are likely to contribute to the rapid development of a school to become the model school in the region, and this has resulted in school selection. Therefore, if prominent teachers, including principals, form a reasonable flow mechanism between urban and rural areas in the city, among schools in the county, and among counties, then a balanced configuration of teaching resources can be formed within cities and counties. This increases the likelihood of generally balanced development of compulsory education quality within each region. As Wang Dinghua, deputy director of Basic Education Department in the Chinese Ministry of Education believes, the core of balanced development of compulsory education is the balance of teachers (Wang, 2009, November 10, para. 1). Many good measures have been taken regarding the flow of excellent teachers. Staffing problems concerning people can be solved, and the objectives and requirements of people can be considered. The gap of inter-school teachers can be effectively reduced through work shifts and reasonable exchange among teachers. Many regions have had an initial attempt in this regard across the country. Cities including Shenyang and Beijing are the first cities to have achieved a regular flow of teachers between urban and rural areas, leading to personnel connections, which have proved more effective than short-term exchange. Conferring of academic titles to city teachers requires them to have one year's experience working in rural areas or comparatively poorer schools, and this deserves credit. However, one year is not enough. The achievement of teachers from urban areas and high-quality schools working in rural areas and comparatively poor schools cannot play a significant role in the improvement there. To form a real long-term communication system, a period of three to five years will have a clearer effect.

Finally, as “the Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)” put forward, the highest aim is “to form a fair education which benefits all the people... to run every school with great effort and to teach every student....” This will result in “promoting quality education that puts people first.” Regardless of a student’s place of birth, nationality, gender or physical condition, every person should enjoy approximately equal opportunity of entering a school, achieving approximately equal educational quality such as entering a higher school via test scores, and achieving individual integrated development ultimately under the premise of balanced condition for running schools and equal allocation of teachers (Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, 2010 July).

Achievements of Balanced Development of Compulsory Education

The Ministry of Education promulgated in May 25, 2005, a paper entitled the “Opinion on Further Strengthening the Promotion of an Even Development of Compulsory Education,” followed by on-the-spot meeting in Chengdu in 2006 to promote the balanced development of compulsory education. It clearly required administrative departments at all levels to take balanced development of compulsory education as a major task after achieving “two basics,” namely, extending universal nine-year compulsory education among the school-aged population and literacy among those who are less than 20 years old. In recent years, many regions in China have taken the following measures in promoting the balanced development of compulsory education. First, the establishment of mechanism to guarantee compulsory educational appropriations effectively promotes the balanced development of compulsory education. Second, the central and local government established certain policies to reduce the gap in running school condition among the regions and schools. Third, these regions strengthen teachers’ construction of comparatively poor schools in rural and urban areas, making high-quality educational resources achieve a certain degree of balance initially (Yang, 2009, November 10). The authors believe that the government should increase their funding input in the following areas.

First, the government should formulate public funding standards for national compulsory education, and continue to increase investment in guarantee mechanism of funds in compulsory education. According to a notice jointly published in 2007 by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Education, entitled “Concerning the Adjustment and Improvement of Funds Guarantee Mechanism Reform of Compulsory Education in Rural Areas,” we can see that the government will allocate a further 47 billion yuan to support rural education in the three years until 2009. The total amount now devoted to rural education

has reached 265.2 billion yuan for the period between 2006 to 2010, up from 218.2 billion yuan (Ministry of Finance, Peoples Republic of China, 2007). Consider the number of students from 2008 to 2010 according to the decline of students in rural junior high schools and primary schools from 2003 to 2007 and combine the number of students from 2006 to 2007 (students in primary and secondary schools). From this aspect, the authors calculate that an additional 265.2 billion yuan has been distributed to rural students between 2006 and 2010 with an average subsidy of 624 yuan to 746 yuan per year. These funds include school maintenance and reconstruction fees, public funds, free textbook costs, boarding costs for students from economically needy families. Therefore, it can be seen except for the vast majority of school renovation costs and public funds, the remission of textbook fees and living allowances for parents are less than 300 yuan per student per year, which does not play a fundamental role in reducing financial burdens. It is thus clear that there is a great space for increasing rural compulsory education funds to reduce the fundamental burden on families in rural areas. For this reason, governments at all levels should perform their duties according to the law, continuously improving the compulsory education funding guarantee mechanism, especially in rural compulsory education, appropriately increasing the subsistence allowance standard for boarding students from rural poor families, improving running school conditions and the nutritional status of primary and secondary students in central and western regions, and optimizing the allocation of public educational resources.

Second, the government should formulate basic minimum standards of running school conditions in urban and rural areas at the compulsory education stage, and have an upper limit on the differences between regions. The central government should directly subsidize regional shortfalls for the regions that fall below the standard, rather than allow provincial governments to take full charge (for the central and western provinces), because provincial coordination still cannot solve the problem fundamentally. The 2010 “Government Work Report” pointed out that “on the basis of rational distribution, acceleration of the construction of junior high school buildings in central and western regions and safe engineering of national primary and secondary school buildings, the required standards of all school buildings, facilities and teachers should be met as soon as possible. Multimedia distance teaching equipments for classes in rural primary and secondary schools and quality education resources with children in rural and remote areas should be provided and shared. School construction of pre-school education and special education should be enhanced. Education support for minorities and regions inhabited by ethnic groups should be developed” (Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2010, para. 5).

Third, the government should strengthen staff development and improve

employment packages for rural teachers. The Government Work Report emphasized that it was necessary to “take a variety of measures to attract talented people to enter teaching, and encourage them to become lifelong teachers. The government should focus on strengthening the training of school teachers and principals in rural compulsory education, and encourage outstanding teachers to teach in rural poverty-stricken areas. The government should strengthen professional ethics education and enhance teachers’ sense of responsibility and mission in 2010 and future years” (Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2010, para. 8).

Because teachers are the first resources needed to develop education, the generally low level of China’s rural teaching body has become the major problem constraining educational quality in rural areas. Therefore, China should attract excellent teachers, train them, and encourage talented people to teach in poor rural areas, and adhere to strengthening professional ethics education (Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, 2010). Therefore, China should continue to increase the Specially Contracted Teachers Scheme, accelerate regular flow system construction of rural teachers, enhance treatment of rural teachers, attract excellent teachers to rural areas to improve the underdeveloped conditions of teachers’ quality in rural areas, and provide basic security conditions to achieve balanced development of compulsory education between urban and rural areas.

It is worth noticing that there is a dangerous ideological trend currently that the balanced development of compulsory education can be implemented with regard to difference, and guided by differences. This view is extremely dangerous, because although the vast majority of regions achieved an approximately equal education opportunity to some extent, under the influence of great disparity in stock of capital accumulated with the history and obvious flow of capital input, there is still a long way to go to achieve approximately equal basic running school conditions, let alone approximately equal teacher conditions or less disparity in education quality. The allocation of high-quality resources is like a snowball, so the Matthew effect, namely the disparities will become more significant. Although this view has some growing condition in few areas that have already reached the approximate balance of enrollment opportunity and basic running school condition, the approximately balanced quality of education cannot be achieved ultimately without balanced allocation of teachers guarantee. Under the circumstance, if this view was adopted by the government and becomes the guiding ideology of balanced development of compulsory education, there is no end in sight to achieve the balanced development of compulsory education. Once this view prevails, it will do harm to a generation, a nation or even a country.

How to Evaluate the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education?

In evaluating balanced development of compulsory education, an index of balance and fairness borrowed from the West, especially the European Union, can be used. Some of these indicators are suitable for China, given current conditions. The unclassified report on “Equity of the European Educational Systems: A Set of Indicators” released by the European Union in 2005 posited 29 indicators to measure balance in the European Union’s compulsory education system from the perspective of unequal educational background, unequal education process, education’s internal results and the external effects of education (Shen & Qiao, 2009). Currently, the balanced allocation of resources of compulsory education should be the focus of our discussion and future policy.

If compulsory education resources are analyzed from the three aspects: human resources, financial resources, and material resources, taking into consideration individual differences, group differences among individuals, and groups and sub-threshold values, we can try to construct a rough list of indicators for balanced and equitable development. Such a system will measure the allocation of resources in compulsory education along four dimensions, namely: human resources, financial resources, material resources and distribution system. The specifically various indicators of financial resources can also be measured along five dimensions: adequacy, horizontal equity, vertical equity, equal opportunity and financial neutrality. Various indicators of these dimensions can be measured by commonly used inequality measure methods such as range, standard deviation, ranging rate, coefficient of variation, Gini coefficient, Theil index or Macronaire index. As long as the differences of various indicators’ measure are according to internationally recognized standards, the configuration of indicators can be considered balanced. If the difference tends to drop, then the configuration of the indicator can be said to be moving towards balanced development.

Concerning the balanced allocation system of human, financial and material resources in compulsory education, this indicator is to test whether our macroscopic allocation of educational resources is fair or not. The core is whether the guiding principles and policies of income, distribution of financial resources and specific taxation or appropriation reflect adequacy, fairness and efficiency, what is more, it depends on whether in terms of human resources it will be beneficial for teachers’ education, gender and position to constitute a rationalized and fairness-oriented policy and fair measure of implementation. Specific indicators can be divided into: (1) measure of people’s perception towards overall fairness of allocation of educational resources system, of which it is specifically divided into the measure of the perception of the fairness of human, material and financial resources configuration; (2) measure of educational

resources income and distribution system fairness (relevant education taxes and appropriation of educational costs); (3) relevant political fairness of teacher resources constitution and configuration (including policies concerning teachers' development, mobility and so on, such as relevant funding policy, etc.; Shen, 2011a, pp. 63–65).

When constructing the balanced and fair measure framework of compulsory education system, we should follow a specific governing principle. That is, the indicator must be applied to all discussions that are under the context of various existing fair principles rather than one that can be applied to various equity theories. Among the relevant individuals and groups, the most important thing is to improve the situation of those disadvantaged individuals and groups who cannot change their social status now. In addition to the unbalanced measure of compulsory education results, the index system should also be very important for the advanced position of compulsory education system and the compulsory education process, which influences the measure of imbalanced. The fair indicator system must measure the perception of understanding of these unbalances, and provide standards so that citizens can determine the fairness of the current compulsory education system (Shen & Qiao, 2009).

Conclusion

“The Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)” put forward the goals and objectives, safeguard measures and implementation steps of the balanced development of compulsory education. However, how to better understand the balanced development of compulsory education still remains an issue for governments at all levels, especially for local governments in various regions which are more likely to overlook the real subject of balanced education. Under the current investment plan for compulsory education, counties and cities find it hard to achieve balanced development of compulsory education within their areas, let alone achieving inter-regional and even inter-provincial balanced development of compulsory education or the narrowing of differences in local economic development. Therefore, further understanding of the subject and specific content of balanced development of compulsory education, knowing what the government should do to promote it, and assessing the balance of this development at present and in future are important theoretical and practical issues.

Apparently, the subject and the scope of the balanced development of compulsory education currently stipulated in the plan are not enough, and thus it is difficult for the regions in mid China and western China to achieve

inter-school and urban-rural balance of compulsory education by solely depending on the county government. Therefore, the central government should provide a basic public education service for compulsory education for the general welfare at the national level, since compulsory education concerns every citizen in China, rather than any particular group in one county or province. Although compulsory education can be said to belong to various counties and cities or provinces in terms of the objects of education, the countryside is the biggest beneficiary party.

In conclusion, to fundamentally solve the problem of balanced development of compulsory education, paying for compulsory education should become the responsibility of provincial government and central government according to the main stage and dimension of the balanced development of compulsory education. What is more, the movement towards central government control can achieve the balanced development of compulsory education in a comprehensive sense and at a higher level. Moving the investment of compulsory education to the provincial level will effectively solve the issue of balanced development between counties and cities within provinces, but moving it to the central government will solve inter-provincial and urban-rural balanced development. After all, the greatest uncertainty regarding the understanding of the balanced development of compulsory education is that we have not recognized that governments of all levels are the main bodies of the balanced development of compulsory education and the holders of the greatest responsibility for its achievement. The central government, rather than county governments with relatively lower authority in terms of office and financial power, should play a more active role. If it is not possible to recognize the role that the central government should play and upgrade it as the main body of financial investment in compulsory education, it will be relatively more difficult to achieve the balanced development of compulsory education in the second decade of the 21st century.

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