



Literacy Challenges in Rural China

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Abstract: This article discusses the obstacles encountered in the process of literacy in rural China. Although China's overall literacy rate is high, there is a huge literacy rate gap between urban and rural areas. On this basis, this article explores the factors affecting the literacy rate in rural China, and concludes that the main factors are financial status, gender differences, health challenges, and policy interventions.

Keywords: rural China, literacy rate, literacy challenges

1. Introduction

China is located in eastern Asia, and it is the most populous developing country in the world. China has a large rural population, accounting for 40% of the total population (UNESCO 2020). According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), China's GDP is 15.52 trillion US dollars, of which rural areas contribute 0.7 trillion US dollars. China's gross national income is 16057 U.S. dollars per capita in purchasing power parity. The country's HDI is 0.762, which is a high number (numbers between 0.7 and 0.8 are classified as high).

The Chinese literacy standard is to master 4000-6000 Chinese characters and use them proficiently (Ministry of Education, 1993). The adult literacy rate is 96.8% (95.2% for women and 98.5% for men), which shows that China's literacy rate is very high. The gap in literacy levels between urban and rural areas is obvious, with only 87.13% of people in rural areas literate (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). There are more than 80 million illiterate people in China, 90% of which are from rural areas (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Therefore, this article will focus on the challenges facing Chinese rural literacy.

2. Factors that affect literacy in rural China

2.1 Financial situation

The income gap between urban and rural residents is large, and the income of urban residents is about 2.5 times that of rural residents (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Inequality in income has also indirectly caused the rural population to pay a higher price for literacy. According to a study by Park et al. (2002), rural households spend 14% of their annual income on education, and huge expenditures lead rural people to believe that they have no right to literacy. 11% of Chinese children living in rural areas drop out of school (National Bureau of Statistics 2020). In addition, the impact of poverty on literacy levels will continue to the next generation. Studies have shown that this leads to the persistence of illiteracy and poverty (Xing et al, 2019). In addition, the lack of funds in rural areas means many challenges. For example, lack of material resources such as textbooks, inaccessible dormitories, inconvenient transportation, and the inability of local authorities to provide acceptable wages to attract educated teachers to rural areas. (Fan and Xie, 2014).

2.2 Gender differences

Connelly and Zheng (2003) believe that gender literacy gaps are mainly concentrated in rural areas. The traditional view in rural China is that boys are first and the lowest in family hierarchy is women (Hu and Scott, 2016). Therefore, literacy is useless for girls (Lin and Pei, 2016). Because of this perception, women account for 71% of the illiterate population in rural areas (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The ratio of males to females in rural areas is 122:85, which is a serious imbalance (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

2.3 Health challenges

Malnutrition is a serious obstacle to literacy in rural China (Hannum and Liu, 2014). Malnutrition can cause serious damage to children's development (such as inattention and memory loss), which causes some rural children to lose literacy or die of disease (Lee and Frongillo, 2001).

2.4 Policy intervention

National policy intervention has played a key role in promoting rural literacy. China implemented the Compulsory Education Law as an education reform in 1986 and achieved this goal in 2011 (Wu, 2012). Since implementation, the rural enrollment rate has increased significantly. In 1987, only 49% of citizens aged 15-24 in rural areas received a junior high school education, compared with 94% in 2015 (Yang and Guo, 2020). In addition, the one-child policy reduces discrimination against girls (Lee, 2014). However, due to weak rural supervision, this policy has not been fully implemented in rural areas (Greenhalgh, 2008).

3. Implications

Education and literacy rates are powerful solutions to rural poverty (Liu, 2020). Sen (1999) attributed poverty to loss of ability. In addition, literary ability is closely related to people's future development in employment, quality of life, and empowerment (Cree et al., 2012).

4. Conclusion

There are some literacy challenges in rural areas, such as financial difficulties, gender inequality, and health problems. These challenges need to be addressed through national policies and the rural population must cooperate in order to solve them. The improvement of rural literacy rates will lead to rural employment, economic growth, and the development of the country as a whole.

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