

Research on the Evolution Process of Balanced Development of Compulsory Education in China

Yujiao Wang¹, Sirisak Laochankham^{1,*}, Wei Yang²

¹College of Local Administration, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand

²International College, Khon Kaen University, Khon Kaen, Thailand

*Corresponding Author.

Abstract: Compulsory education is an important part of China's educational endeavors, and whether its development is balanced or not, and how effective the reforms are, will have a direct impact on the construction and development of the national education system. The balanced development of China's compulsory education has gone through 20 years, experiencing the process from non-equilibrium to the gradual pursuit of equilibrium. In this study, 75 development texts were analyzed by word frequency analysis using Nvivo14 software. From the course of change, it can be seen that the balanced development of compulsory education has been affected by the deep structural influences of multiple factors, such as the level of socio-economic development, politics, and cultural background. Analyzing the development goals of the balanced development of compulsory education at different stages is of great significance for promoting the strategy of quality and balanced development of compulsory education in China at the new stage.

Keywords: Compulsory Education; Balanced Development; Evolution Process; Implementation Analysis; Objectives

1. Introduction

The concept of "educational balance" mentioned in this study is defined by the China government itself, but it is not defined internationally. Due to the differences in research methods and concerns, concepts such as "education balance" and "compulsory education balance" are hardly used directly in the official texts of international education policies and related academic research results. The research results of international scholars mainly focus on "educational equity" or

"equality of educational opportunities", and they mainly carry out research on educational equity based on the inequality of real society [1]. In China, the goal of balanced development of compulsory education is educational equity, which is the basis for achieving educational equity [2]. All references to "Balanced Development of Compulsory Education" in this study are abbreviated as "BDCE". Compulsory education is abbreviated as "CE".

China's policy of balanced development of compulsory education (BDCE) has gone through a gradual development process, and the policy of BDCE at each stage reflects the level of socio-economic development and the political and cultural background of the stage and corresponds to the problems to be solved in the process of the development of compulsory education (CE) at the stage and serves the goal of education at the stage [3]. This study will use Nvivo14 software to conduct word frequency analysis on 75 policy texts to identify high-frequency words in the policy texts, to sort out the 20-year evolution of the BDCE, and to focus on the goals and tasks at different stages of development, which is of great significance for the promotion of the strategy of the high-quality balanced development of China's compulsory education in the new stage.

2. The Evolution Process of the Policy

In this study, Nvivo14 was used to analyze the word frequency of 75 policy texts, and finally a word cloud map was generated, as shown in Figure 1. It can be seen from the cloud picture of the word: after putting forward "balanced development" in 2002, in 2012, key words such as "county-oriented, two exemptions and one subsidy, BDCE in urban and rural areas, narrowing the school gap, special post teachers, three supports and one support, left-behind

children and children moving with them" were put forward; The key words in the period from 2013 to 2016 are basically the same as the policy objectives in the previous stage, but the content is more specific, focusing on "building rural teachers, improving the quality of education, coordinating the allocation of urban and rural educational resources, and building standardized schools". In 2017, a major breakthrough was made in the key words of the policy text. The proposal of "high-quality and balanced development" opened a new chapter for the BDCE in China. The key words of the policy text mainly involved "comprehensively improving the quality of compulsory education, the level of education and teaching, the balance of compulsory education, the all-round growth of students and optimizing the educational environment". After in-depth analysis of 75 policy documents, the researcher found that the policy documents at all stages covered the core issues such as education equity, education quality, education funds, all-round development, balanced development, and the construction of teachers. These keywords fully reflect that the policy texts in each stage are consistent with the strategic objectives of China's compulsory education development.



Figure 1. Word Cloud

The advancement of China's policy of BDCE has been gradual, and the evolution process has the following characteristics in annual distribution: broad coverage, consistency, and occasional fluctuations [4]. The evolution of the policy of BDCE is divided into three stages, each of which reflects the level of socio-economic development and the political and cultural context of the stage, all of which correspond to the problems that are mainly solved by the development of CE at this stage and serve the educational goals of this stage [5]. The first stage, 2001-2013. In this stage, the

main content of education policy includes promoting the balanced development of urban and rural areas in CE, realizing the balanced allocation of resources, and regulating the behavior of school running. In its policy on the development of CE, the State emphasizes that within the county, it must ensure a balanced allocation of resources for CE and achieve a balance between urban and rural areas and between schools.

Second stage, 2014-2016. The BDCE enters the stage of basic balance, and the task of this stage is to further promote balanced development, so the policy elements are roughly similar to those of the previous stage, only to the extent that they have been increased, such as increasing financial inputs.

The third stage is 2017-2021. CE enters the stage of high-quality and balanced development, and improving the quality of education becomes the goal of education in the new period, and the corresponding policy elements are shifted to the quality of education, the quality of students' academic performance, and the quality of school operation.

From 2012-2021, on the basis of achieving full universalization of CE in China, it took only about 10 years to achieve basic balanced development in countries, which became another new milestone in the history of China's CE development. Starting in 2022, the focus of China's CE work has shifted from "basic equalization" to "quality equalization", and it is estimated that by 2035, the vast majority of counties nationwide will achieve quality equalization of CE, and comprehensively resolve the urban-rural education quality gap between schools in the counties. Analysis of policy objectives

3. Analysis of Policy Objectives

The policy of BDCE is a guideline for action formulated by the Chinese Government at a particular time in history to promote the BDCE and is constantly evolving and innovating with the times. In order to promote the BDCE, the Government has formulated and implemented a series of policies that actively promote the BDCE in terms of both system and practice. To a certain extent, these policies reflect China's guiding ideology for the reform and development of CE at different historical periods and also reflect the key goals and directions of CE at various stages of

development. Monitoring and evaluation of the BDCE has been carried out at different historical periods, and policies have been adjusted in response to problems identified to ensure the rationality of the policies and to effectively guide and direct the BDCE. This study divides the evolution of China's policy of BDCE into the efficiency-first development stage and the balanced development stage according to the policy content and chronological order [6], and analyzes the social phenomena and problems triggered by the implementation of the policy in these two stages respectively.

3.1 Differentiated Development under Efficiency Priority: Establishment of CE System and Basic Universalization (1978-2000)

Since the unveiling of the prelude to reform and opening up in 1978, the reform of the education system had begun with the introduction of the Decision of the Government on the Reform of the Education System in 1985, in which the nine-year CE was proposed for the first time and a preliminary timetable for the universalization of CE in the sub-region was carried out. The official implementation of the CE Law in 1986 marked the formal establishment of the CE system. Due to the early stages of education reform and opening up, education resources remained relatively scarce, which was still the main problem facing society at the time. At this time, the core objective of policy implementation was to prioritize efficiency [7]. This was manifested in the graded school system, the development of the key school system, and the rise of private schools. In the context of scarce educational resources, education fees initially evolved gradually from passive revenue generation to active profit-making tools. Competition for scarce educational resources has undoubtedly given rise to the phenomenon of unorganized educational fees; the proliferation of fees under various names, such as fees for selective schools and classes, has seriously undermined the public welfare and fairness of CE.

During this period, the development strategy of prioritizing the efficiency of education has been remarkably successful. By 2000, the goal of universalizing nine-year CE was basically achieved. The number of population areas in

the country that had achieved "universal nine-year education" had reached 85%, the illiteracy rate among young adults had dropped to less than 5%, the elementary school enrollment rate had reached 99.1%, the rate of elementary school graduates going on to higher education had reached 94.9%, and the gross enrollment rate in junior middle school had reached 88.6% (Han, 2000). However, while we have universally completed the full promotion of nine-year CE, an education development model that overly pursues efficiency has already done damage to its public welfare and fairness; because the shortage of government financial resources has led to insufficient investment in education, which triggers an overburdening of citizens with education; in addition, the hierarchical management approach to CE has led to an expanding gap between urban and rural areas and between regions in CE. In addition, the hierarchical management of CE has led to a widening of the development gap between urban and rural areas and between regions; the key school system has led to a widening of the education gap between CE schools; and the irregular operation of the market has led to problems such as indiscriminate charging of fees by schools and the use of converted schools by local governments in order to abandon their responsibilities and compete for profits, which has put CE in a critical situation of growing imbalance, a steady decline in overall quality, and a serious lack of fairness. Returning to the fairness and public welfare of CE, highlighting its attributes as a pure public product, promoting the BDCE, and enabling every school-age child to enjoy quality education have become the most urgent needs for the development of CE in the new century.

3.2 Balanced Development: Change in the Concept of CE and High-quality Development (2000-present)

Against the backdrop of the popularization of nine-year CE, balanced development, and education quality have increasingly become the focus of widespread public attention. The Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education promulgated by the State Council in 2001 put forward the concept of "balanced development" for the first time, emphasizing that basic education should promote balanced development among regions,

urban and rural areas, and schools. Since then, balanced development has become the core policy for the development of CE in China, and in 2005, the Ministry of Education issued the Opinions on Further Promoting the BDCE, which became the first governmental document in China to comprehensively elaborate on the BDCE, and made clear the policy goal of "gradually realizing the BDCE". The new CE Law, revised and implemented in 2006, specifies that governments at all levels shall "promote the BDCE".

Since entering the twenty-first century, the value orientation of CE has gradually shifted from prioritizing efficiency to balancing education, and promoting the BDCE and upgrading the quality of education has become the core of the development of CE at this stage. The main manifestations of this are the provincial government's coordinated planning of CE; the county-level government's responsibility for the implementation of CE; the gradual formation of a CE school system; the abolition of the CE key school system; and the deepening of reforms for the BDCE [8].

Promoting the BDCE has become a central theme in the development of CE at this stage. The Government has launched a series of educational programs and projects to promote the balanced development of education between regions, within regions, and among groups throughout the country. Through the promotion of a series of projects for the BDCE, the gap in CE between urban and rural areas and between regions has been narrowed, the quality of education has been significantly improved, and the popularization rate of CE has continued to increase [9]. In 2013, the Ministry of Education began to launch the work of supervisory assessment and recognition of basic balanced counties (cities and districts) for the development of CE, and as of 2019, the whole country there have been 2,767 counties (cities and districts) recognized as basic balanced counties for CE development, accounting for 95.32% of the total, and 23 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) have passed the recognition as a whole [10].

The outstanding feature of the development of CE in this period is that balance replaces efficiency as the goal of CE development, and the BDCE has made great achievements, and the quality of education and the degree of

equalization have been continuously improved while achieving the full universalization of CE. Although the system of key schools has been abolished at the CE stage, substantial-high-quality schools still exist; the phenomena of choosing prestigious schools and charging indiscriminate fees are still prohibited; and public schools continue to prioritize efficiency by converting schools for profit, such as charging high tuition fees through the operation of private schools by prestigious schools and branches of key schools, and continuing to prioritize efficiency by engaging in competitive screening and profit-making is still commonplace. Urbanization has also brought a huge impact on the development of CE in the new era. Due to the increase in the urban migrant population, the basic pattern of CE is "crowded in the city and weak in the countryside", which also brings challenges for adhering to the fairness orientation and promoting the balanced development of urban and rural CE. How to deal with the game of balance and efficiency, and effectively promote the implementation of China's policy of BDCE is a problem that needs to be thought about and solved urgently.

4. Analysis of Policy Implementation

China's policy of balanced development of compulsory education has gradually shifted from a process that places great emphasis on prioritizing efficiency and quantitative expansion to one that emphasizes quality improvement, the following social phenomena and problems still exist.

1) Parents' demand for high-quality educational resources has increased, and the phenomenon of "choosing schools" has become prominent, resulting in a heavier financial burden for parents.

2) Uneven distribution of educational resources between urban and rural areas, increasing the gap between urban and rural education quality, and rural-urban migration.

3) The influx of people from rural areas into cities has led to the expansion of the urban population and social problems.

4) Urban infrastructure and public service resources are difficult to meet demand, exacerbating the burden of urban governance.

What is reflected behind these social phenomena and problems is the nature of the insufficient supply and unbalanced allocation

of educational resources, a product of the contradiction between the public's demand for educational resources and the current shortage and unbalanced distribution of educational resources in society. In recent years, although governments at all levels have made efforts to innovate policies for the BDCE and vigorously promote the BDCE in the region, in urban and rural areas, and between schools, there are still some existences that do not adapt to the requirements of the BDCE, and even impede the BDCE.

5. Conclusions

Policies at each stage reflect the level of socio-economic development and political and cultural background of the stage, and they all correspond to the problems mainly solved by the development of CE at this stage and serve the educational purpose of this stage. Policies for the BDCE need to be adjusted in a timely manner according to the changes in socio-political, economic, and cultural development, and the main basis for the adjustment is the monitoring of the policies and the systematic evaluation of the implementation and performance of the policies. The monitoring of the policy is not only an important basis for the continuation, improvement, or termination of the policy but also determines the fair distribution of educational benefits and influences the harmonious development of the cause of CE.

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