

Expanding Excellence and Enhancing Quality in Basic Education: Key Paths and Practical Strategies for Building an Educational Power

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Abstract: This study focuses on the implementation strategies for expanding high-quality education and enhancing educational quality in basic education, regarding it as a core path for building a powerful education nation. By analyzing policy support, popularization levels, and regional effectiveness, this study summarizes the achievements attained. Meanwhile, it points out challenges such as uneven allocation of educational resources, urban-rural gaps, difficulties in digital transformation, unfair distribution of high-quality resources, and predicaments in teacher team development. Furthermore, it proposes strategies including optimizing resource allocation, promoting urban-rural integration, advancing digitalization, balancing high-quality resources, and building a high-quality teacher team. These strategies aim to facilitate the dual improvement of educational equity and quality, thereby laying a foundation for the strategy of building a powerful education nation.

Keywords: Basic education; Expanding high-quality education and enhancing quality; Building a powerful education nation

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1. Introduction

In the construction of a modern, socialist, powerful nation, basic education serves as the foundation of a powerful education nation, and its high-quality development has become a core issue of the national strategy. The 2025 Government Work Report proposes to “further implement the project of expanding high-quality education and enhancing quality in basic education”, requiring the promotion of high-quality and balanced development of compulsory education, the expansion of enrollment quota supply for senior high school education, and the gradual implementation of free preschool education^[1]. This not only continues the goal of “a fair and high-quality basic education system” in the Outline for Building a Powerful Education Nation (2024–2035)^[2-4] but also responds to the public’s demand for “access to high-quality education”. At present, China’s basic education has entered a transition period from “basic balance” to “high-quality balance”, and the introduction of relevant

policies is intended to resolve structural contradictions such as uneven resource distribution.

From the perspective of the times, China's fiscal expenditure on education has accounted for more than 4% of GDP for 12 consecutive years, providing a material foundation for educational development. However, contradictions between the declining birthrate, urbanization, and the upgrading of educational demands have become prominent. Meanwhile, expanding high-quality education and enhancing quality in basic education are crucial for bridging the urban-rural educational gap and breaking the inter-generational transmission of poverty^[5].

From an academic perspective, its theoretical logic covers Marxist views on educational equity, human capital theory, and educational ecology theory, which determine that basic education needs to transition from "minimum-guarantee balance" to "high-quality-guarantee balance"^[6-10]. Nowadays, the work of expanding high-quality education and enhancing quality in basic education has shifted towards the coordinated development of "quantity-quality-equity", facing both challenges and opportunities. This article sorts out the current situation, challenges, and paths from policy and academic dimensions, providing references for the construction of a powerful education nation.

2. Current situation of expanding high-quality education and enhancing the quality of basic education

In recent years, China has achieved remarkable results in expanding high-quality educational resources and improving educational quality in basic education. The government has increased investment in education, promoted the balanced allocation of educational resources, enabling more students to enjoy high-quality education. At the same time, it has deepened educational reform, continuously innovated educational methods and contents to adapt to social development needs, comprehensively improving the level of basic education and laying a solid foundation for cultivating high-quality talents.

2.1. Gradual improvement of policy guidance and institutional guarantee system

At the national level, a policy support system covering all stages of basic education has been established. Since 2023, documents such as the Opinions on Building a High-Quality and Balanced Basic Public Education Service System and the Action Plan for Expanding High-Quality Education and Enhancing Quality in Basic Education in the New Era have been successively issued, clarifying the goal of "high-quality and inclusive preschool education, high-quality and balanced compulsory education, high-quality and characteristic senior high school education, and high-quality and integrated special education" by 2027, and deploying eight major actions. The Outline for Building a Powerful Education Nation (2024–2035) incorporates the "fair and high-quality basic education system" into the "eight major systems", and the financial guarantee mechanism has been continuously strengthened. All localities have actively implemented national policies. For example, Zhejiang Province has focused on regional, urban-rural, and inter-school gaps since 2018. In 2020, it issued guidelines on the construction of urban-rural compulsory education communities, classifying them into three categories, and the innovative practices in various regions have achieved remarkable results. After Shiliang School in Tiantai County cooperated with Chicheng Middle School in the urban area, students' academic performance has improved, and the number of students has increased. In 2023, Tiantai County was included in the list of national counties for high-quality and balanced development of compulsory education^[11-14].

2.2. Historic Leap in the Popularization Level of Education at All Stages

In terms of preschool education, the gross enrollment rate of three-year preschool education nationwide has reached 89.7%, and the coverage rate of inclusive resources has increased. Shandong Province has implemented relevant plans and projects. Since the “14th Five-Year Plan” period, it has built or renovated 1,339 kindergartens, added 320,000 public kindergarten seats, completed the renovation of 2,121 supporting kindergartens in urban residential areas, and the proportion of children in public kindergartens has reached 61%. The consolidation rate of compulsory education has reached 95.9%, and the goal of basic balance at the county level has been achieved, moving towards high-quality balance. Rongcheng City has promoted the alliance-based operation of urban and rural schools, narrowing the gap in comprehensive evaluation between urban and rural schools through the sharing of management experience, resource sharing, and teaching collaboration. The gross enrollment rate of senior high school education has reached 92.0%, and a pattern of diversified development has initially taken shape. After moving to a new campus, Licheng No. 2 Middle School in Jinan City has improved school-running conditions, developed characteristic education, and become a model of high-quality and characteristic development. Students’ works have won national awards, and the comprehensive practical activity subject has been selected as a provincial-level subject base.

2.3. Formation of diversified development models through regional practical exploration

All localities have launched measures based on their actual conditions. In the past three years, Guangdong Province has added approximately 3.86 million public enrollment quotas for basic education, alleviating the tension of enrollment quotas caused by urbanization. Jiangxi Province has optimized the allocation of compulsory education resources at the county level, solving the problems of “small and scattered” and “hollowing out” of rural schools. Hebei Province has connected with high-quality educational resources in Beijing and Tianjin, establishing district-level inter-school development communities. In terms of the characteristic development of senior high schools, Beijing has established research and cooperation groups for the characteristic development of senior high schools by subject fields. The first batch of member schools covers more than 50% of the senior high schools in the city, promoting the high-quality development of schools. In the field of educational evaluation reform, the Taigu District of Jinzhong City, Shanxi Province, has implemented a diversified and multi-dimensional developmental supervision and evaluation model, stimulating the internal driving force of schools. In November 2023, it was listed as a pilot unit for the second batch of projects of the new-era educational evaluation reform in Shanxi Province.

3. Current challenges facing the expansion of high-quality education and enhancement of quality in China’s basic education

Although China’s basic education has achieved remarkable results in expanding excellence and enhancing quality in recent years, it still faces a series of challenges. These challenges are not only related to the allocation and quality of educational resources but also have a profound impact on educational equity and the overall social development.

3.1. Dynamic resource allocation and structural contradictions

Changes in the population structure have reshaped the supply-demand relationship of basic education resources. The declining birthrate has led to an oversupply of preschool education seats, with 14,800 kindergartens

reduced nationwide in 2023. Compulsory education faces a shortage of enrollment quotas due to urbanization, and there are differences in population increase and decrease among regions. Some cities need to build new schools, while “empty schools” have emerged in rural areas, posing challenges to the accuracy and foresight of resource allocation. The structural imbalance of educational resources is significant. Rural schools have outdated hardware, weak teaching staff, and incomplete courses; urban schools face difficulties in solving the problems of tight enrollment quotas and large class sizes; and the enrollment of children of migrant workers is restricted, making it difficult to achieve educational equity.

3.2. Gap dilemma in urban-rural educational development

While educational urbanization promotes the development of urban education, it has impacted rural education. The migration of rural students to cities has led to a reduction in enrollment and the loss of resources in rural schools. Some schools have cut courses and merged classes, affecting teaching quality, increasing the educational burden of rural families, and shaking the foundation of rural education. The education problem of left-behind children in rural areas is prominent. Their number remains high for a long time. Due to the long-term lack of parental supervision and education, they have poor academic performance, and problems such as over-age enrollment and dropping out of school occur frequently. They are also prone to psychological disorders and school bullying, and schools and society have not yet formed a systematic intervention mechanism.

3.3. Practical obstacles to digital transformation

The unbalanced distribution of digital infrastructure has widened the digital divide. Although the Internet access rate in primary and secondary schools has achieved full coverage, schools in remote mountainous areas and rural areas have insufficient network bandwidth and outdated equipment. Some families with financial difficulties lack digital learning equipment, making it difficult to share digital educational resources in a universal way and widening the educational gap. The underlying support system for rural education is confronted with practical challenges. The issue of education for left-behind children in rural areas has become a key bottleneck restricting the high-quality development of rural education, with the scale of this group remaining persistently high. Due to the dual absence of parental companionship and family education, some left-behind children exhibit such characteristics as sub-optimal academic performance, insufficient school-age adaptability, and impaired academic continuity. Concurrently, they are plagued by problems, including weak psychological adjustment capabilities and elevated risk factors in their growth environment. At present, there remains a prominent supply gap in the systematic intervention mechanisms at both school and social levels.

3.4. Supply-demand contradiction of high-quality educational resources

High-quality educational resources are scarce and unevenly distributed. Developed eastern regions and core cities gather high-quality resources, while central and western regions and rural areas are in short supply. There are large differences in the quality of schools within cities, and the phenomenon of “school selection fever” is common. Parents bear high costs to obtain high-quality enrollment quotas, which affects the educational ecology. The public’s demand for basic education has changed, shifting from the pursuit of basic educational opportunities to a high-quality educational experience, and they have strict requirements for school courses, teaching, and culture. However, the supply of basic education is insufficient, and rural areas have more scarce educational resources under the urban-rural dual structure, widening the urban-rural educational gap.

3.5. In-depth dilemma in the construction of teaching staff

The unbalanced structure of the teaching staff affects educational quality. In some regions, the proportion of newly recruited female teachers is too high; there is a shortage of full-time teachers in subjects such as music and physical education; the distribution of teachers between urban and rural areas is uneven; rural schools have difficulty attracting and retaining excellent teachers; and the loss of core teachers is serious. There are defects in the teacher evaluation and incentive mechanism. The evaluation system focuses on quantitative indicators of teaching performance, ignoring contributions such as curriculum development, which restricts teaching innovation. The lack of salary competitiveness and narrow career promotion channels affects the stability and enthusiasm of teachers. The teacher training system is incomplete. Teachers in rural and remote areas have fewer training opportunities; the content of training is disconnected from actual needs; and there is a lack of support for continuous professional development, making it difficult for teachers to adapt to educational reforms and new curriculum standards.

4. Practical paths and innovative strategies for expanding high-quality education and enhancing quality in basic education

Basic education, the foundation for building an educational power, is transitioning from “basic balance” to “high-quality balance”. Facing profound population - structure changes, urban - rural education gaps, digital - transformation obstacles, supply - demand contradictions of high - quality resources, and teaching - staff construction dilemmas, it confronts unprecedented challenges. Meanwhile, it has development opportunities like strengthened policy support, deepened technological empowerment, and an improved governance system. Thus, exploring practical paths and innovative strategies for expanding excellence and enhancing quality in basic education is crucial.

4.1. Optimizing resource allocation to resolve structural contradictions

Build a national unified big data monitoring platform for school-age population and an enrollment quota early warning system, formulate standards for dynamic resource allocation, improve the inter-departmental coordination mechanism, regularly evaluate the carrying capacity of regional educational resources, and formulate differentiated adjustment plans. Taking the county level as the unit, scientifically plan the construction of compulsory education schools based on changes in the school-age population and the process of urbanization, promote the optimization of the layout of small rural schools, promote intensive school-running in areas with population outflow, and transform vacant school spaces into public facilities.

4.2. Strengthening urban-rural educational integration to narrow the urban-rural gap

Expand the enrollment quota resources for school-age population in cities, improve the facilities and management of boarding schools, ensure the quality of small rural schools, and strengthen the standardized construction of compulsory education schools. Promote the overall allocation and exchange of excellent principals and key teachers within the region, implement the “city-county dual appointment system”, and promote the flow of teacher resources. Establish personal files for left-behind children, carry out mental health education and counseling, and organize volunteers to provide one-on-one assistance^[4,5].

4.3. Promoting the digital transformation of education

Increase financial investment in digital infrastructure for schools in remote mountainous areas and rural areas,

improve network bandwidth, update equipment, and ensure the full coverage of digital educational resources. The government and schools provide subsidies or rental services for digital learning equipment to families with financial difficulties. Strengthen the training of teachers' digital skills and improve their ability to operate online teaching platforms. The training content covers curriculum design, multimedia use, student evaluation, and network security knowledge. Establish a digital educational resource database, encourage teachers to innovate teaching models, and build a digital educational evaluation system.

4.4. Promoting the balanced distribution of high-quality educational resources

Advocate for developed eastern regions and core cities to carry out targeted support for central and western regions in education, and transfer high-quality resources through teacher support, resource sharing, and joint school-running. Promote the “city-county integration” educational management system, reduce urban-rural educational differences through the trusteeship of famous schools, teacher rotation, and teaching and research collaboration. Encourage schools to develop characteristic courses, and support regions with conditions to establish “15-year consistent” education service complexes.

4.5. Building a high-quality teaching staff

Dynamically adjust the teacher-student ratio, ensure the offering of courses based on the class ratio and subject teaching hour requirements, raise the academic threshold for newly recruited teachers, and increase the proportion of teachers with postgraduate degrees in basic education. Reform the teacher evaluation system, attach importance to curriculum development, teaching innovation, and moral education. Optimize the salary system, expand promotion channels, increase training opportunities for teachers in rural and remote areas, ensure that the training content meets actual needs, and establish a support system for continuous professional development^[15].

5. Conclusion

The expansion of high-quality education and enhancement of quality in basic education require the coordinated promotion of policies, resources, and innovation. In the future, we should strengthen the overall planning responsibility of the government, establish a resource allocation mechanism, deepen the integration of digitalization and teaching, stimulate the vitality of schools, form a collaborative education ecology, accelerate the construction of a high-quality basic education system, lay a foundation for building a powerful education nation, improve the national quality, cultivate excellent talents, and contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Disclosure statement

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