

# *Balance between Educational Equity and Efficiency in the Background of Massification and Marketization of China's Higher Education*

Jianing Liu

*Nanfang College, Guangzhou, China*

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**Abstract:** In the context of globalization, increasing the economic competitiveness of the country depends more and more on the educational outputs. In order to conform to the trend of globalization and better advance with the times, China's higher education has been continuously explored since the reform and opening up, especially in the past two decades and these changes and reforms are mainly in the trend of massification and marketization. With the trend of massification and marketization of higher education, the issue of equity and efficiency in education has attracted increasing attention from the public. How to balance educational equity and efficiency becoming a hot issue of concern in the Chinese educational context. In this essay, the writer will expound how does massification marketization and of higher education affecting the equity and efficiency of Chinese educational context.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Significance

In the 1950s and 1960s, the United States first carried out the massification of higher education under the pressure of various aspects. By the 1960s, the European continent, which had a relatively developed material foundation, took the lead in responding and formed the second wave of higher education massification[1]. In the wave of globalization, the marketization and expansion of higher education has gradually become an international trend. Affected by the global knowledge economy, China's higher education system has also undergone tremendous transforms. Under a series of changes and restructuring, China's higher education has become more open and international, and has gradually transitioned from elite education model to mass education model[2]. Since the reform and opening up in 1978 and the large-scale expansion of colleges and universities in 1999, the Chinese government has become more aware of the importance of rejuvenating and opening up the country through science and education. The reform of higher education is also to better adapt to the rapidly changing global environment[3]. With the massification of higher education, more and more people have the opportunity to receive higher education. Meanwhile, the funding needs of higher education are also rising, and it is a long-term issue to balance the supply and demand of educational

resources. In order to expand the supply of higher education resources to further meet the educational needs of more people, the government encourages private capital from all walks of life to invest in higher education[4]. The propose of education reforms consists of three aspects: global economic competiveness, global and local identity and educational equality and social justice. In this essay, I will focus on how the China's higher education reform influence educational equality and social justice in the Chinese society. The issue of equity and efficiency in education is a hot topic in the current social life and education in China[5]. Many scholars believe that the current development of education in China should be "efficiency first, balancing equity". The marketization and massification of higher education can improve the efficiency of education, while it also brings problems like unequal allocation of educational resources and any other. With the growing trend of popularity and marketization of higher education, a series of issues concerning the relationship between equity and efficiency have begun to be discussed[6].

## 1.2 Objectives of Essay

This essay will mainly deal with two problems:

How does the massification and marketization of higher education affecting equity of Chinese educational context?

How does the massification and marketization of higher education affecting efficiency of Chinese educational context?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The definition of Educational Equity and Efficiency

The term "equity", from the semantic level, is similar to the word "justice" and has a meaning of fair and reasonable; Equity is also closely related to the words "equality", but equity is not equality, it is more abstract, ethical and historic [7]. According to the above understanding of equity and efficiency, education equity and efficiency have their own points and connotations. The term educational efficiency is the ratio and comparison between educational input and educational output. What it wants to explain and reveal is how to maximize the benefits of education when the total amount of educational resources is given. While educational equity is a basic value and criterion of education. It is an essential part of social justice. It is a main means to achieve social justice and an extension of social justice in the field of education, and (Lv&Liu, 2011). What is educational equity? Plato elaborated it his book that: Educational equity should develop the unique abilities of everyone, in order to enable everyone can get development through education, the equal educational opportunities must be provided. Such opportunities should not be influenced by external factors such as race, economic status and family background. And he famous Swedish educator Torsten Husen also believes that educational equity mainly refers to equal educational opportunities, including equality of educational starting points, educational processes and educational outcomes[8].

### 2.2 The Relationship between Educational Equity and Efficiency

The issue of educational equity and efficiency is a hot topic in the current education field in China. Since the 1990s, it has attracted extensive attention and discussion and has formed three representative views (Liu &Lian, 2003). The first view is that education equity and efficiency are essentially unified, and equity is efficiency in education field; The second view emphasizes the opposition between educational equity and efficiency[9]. It believes that there is an inevitable

contradiction between equity and efficiency. And only one of the two can be chosen in the process of educational development; The third viewpoint tends to integrate the above two viewpoints. On the basis of emphasizing the inherent unity and difference between the two, it emphasizes the procedural and historical nature of the two, and advocates that the current development of education in China should be “efficiency first, balancing equity” (Peng&Lian, 2003).

The pursuit of equity is the essential stipulation and internal requirement of the socialist system and socialist education. The socialist education reform must adhere to the principle of equity. In the case that it is impossible to achieve absolute equity, the choice of education policy tends to achieve the equity of the interests of the majority[10]. However, in the case of very tight educational resources, it is necessary to adhere to the principle of “efficiency first, balancing equity”. Deng Xiaoping repeatedly pointed out: "As to the principle of socialism, the priority is to develop production, and the second is to achieve common prosperity." In fact, socialism must first emphasize the principle of efficiency, and secondly, the principle of equity. Although there will inevitably be fairness issues in the development of higher education, it can't be used as an excuse to let this phenomenon be allowed, and it should not exacerbate this unfair situation. While adhering to the principle of efficiency priority, it is necessary to promote educational equity through institutional arrangements and policy adjustments. Because “the inequalities reflected in most income and wealth inequalities can be effectively corrected in the current institutional structure” (Okun, 2015).

### 2.3 Reforms in China's Higher Education System

Under the influence of domestic and foreign factors, China's higher education experienced four reform periods: (1) Soviet Union influence, the Cultural Revolution and recovery period (1950s-1984); (2) Brewing period (1985-1992) (3) Exploration period (1992-1997); (4) Comprehensive promotion period (1998-2000). In this part, I will mainly focus on the last two periods (Jiang, 2010).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, with the development of economic globalization, China's higher education reforms and developments have focus more on promoting global economic competitiveness and social justice (Chen, 2002). In October 1992, the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party decided to implement the socialist market economy, and at the same time established the corresponding theoretical framework for in-depth education reform. In February 1993, the China Government issued the "Outline of China's Education Reform and Development." In order to coordinate the relationship between the central government and the local universities, this outline pointed out that it is necessary to implement decentralization at the institutional level, which makes universities have greater autonomy in administrative decision-making, such as enrollment, professional courses, administrative structure, investment, remuneration, international academic exchanges, and some other fields (Wang, 2010). Since 1993, the government has offered interest-free loans to some poor students (Chen, 2002). In order to continue and deepen the tuition system, colleges and universities have also adopted some scholarships, subsidies, living allowances and tuition reduction. This kind of market model is essentially the educational practice under the guidance of neo-liberal “consumer pays”. It promotes the marketization of higher education services, makes the higher education produce market benefits, and change the relationship between universities and students into a relationship between suppliers and customers. In 1997, the country began to adopt a two-way job selection policy. This policy fully emphasizes the value of human capital investment for economic development. This also shows that in the market economy, market demand begins to guide the diversification of educational practice. And since 1999, in order to better meet the educational needs of the public, China's higher education has undergone a

large-scale expansion.

All in all, in the process of China's higher education reform, popular education has gradually replaced elite education to ensure that people have a fairer right to education. Meanwhile, the operation of colleges and universities is more like an enterprise. Universities have more administrative powers, including freely developing enterprises and horizontal cooperation with enterprises to obtain funds to build campuses. Market forces have also had an impact on the curriculum and management of colleges and universities (Jiang, 2010).

### **3. Analytical Discussion**

#### **3.1 How can Massification and Marketization of Higher Education affect Educational Efficiency?**

At present, the enthusiasm for studying abroad in China continues to rise. With the improvement of people's consumption level, domestic higher education is difficult to meet the needs of high-level education. Therefore, more and more people choose to study abroad, which also takes away the huge RMB education market. It is detrimental to China's economic competitiveness. Therefore, the marketization of education can improve the efficiency of higher education and enable China to adapt to the development trend of the world economy, provide more kinds of educational choices to the public, and thus enhance the economic competitiveness of the country.

The market emphasizes competition, and competition means the survival of the fittest, and directly determines the allocation of funds, thereby improving the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education. These years, competition in China's higher education sector has intensified, and one of its motivations is the application of market mechanisms. These competitions can occur between universities, and can also between different sectors and different staff within the institution.

#### **3.2 How can Massification and Marketization of Higher Education Affect Educational Equity?**

On one hand, the massification and marketization of higher education contributes to educational equity. Traditional elite education advocates that higher education is the privilege of elites, while elites generally refer to groups with outstanding talents, or superior family's economic situation, or higher family status. The traditional elite education not only advocates that the entry of higher education is the privilege of elites, but also advocates that higher education is designed for the cultivation of elites, and is to educate church pastors, cultural masters, scientists and state officials. With the reform of the massification of higher education, the acceptance of higher education is no longer the privilege of the elite class, and more and more ordinary people can get to the universities easier. And with the development of massification, the society has increasing demand for higher education. In order to alleviate the shortage of resources for higher education, the government encourages all sectors of society to invest in higher education.

“Educational marketization” can be regarded as the application of principles and practices of “private domain” or “market” to run public education so that the services it provides are more adaptable and suitable for market needs. For the public, the management of public utilities and the public sectors is on the path of “marketization”, which means the improvement of service efficiency and quality and also more effective use of public funds. Education marketization can better meet the educational needs of different levels of people.

On the other hand, the massification and marketization of higher education will also lead to some inequities. As the marketization of education continues to advance, the educational opportunities and educational conditions that are acquired increasingly depend on the economic capabilities of

individuals or families. Rich families can put their children into private colleges, and children in the general family are more likely to go to the public colleges. Nowadays, the main source of funding for private higher education institutions in China is still tuition fee, which increases the cost and economic pressure of entering private schools, which also leads to a gap in educational choice between ordinary families and wealthy families. Meanwhile, many private higher education institutions and international colleges are now more advanced and international in terms of school facilities and teaching content, and the learning environment is better than the average higher education institutions. For example, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) and Beijing Normal University-Hong Kong Baptist University United International College (UIC), belonging to Sino-foreign cooperative education. These schools charge high tuition fees and provide students with an international quality education and opportunity to exchange overseas. However, due to the high tuition fee, people who can enter these schools are relatively fixed classes. Today, the marketization of higher education is difficult to avoid the uneven allocation of educational resources. Most of the educational resources are being held in the hands of minority people. This may aggravate the “Matthew effect” in education.

The issue of equity and efficiency in education is becoming more and more urgent as the marketization and popularization of education continue to advance. While we are committed to improving the efficiency of higher education, we must balance the principle of equitable allocation of educational resources. Equity and efficiency are like the two ends of a steelyard. Under the current national conditions in China, only by improving the efficiency of education can we achieve equity better. It is like making the cake bigger before we can allocate to more people.

#### 4. Conclusions

All in all, with the continuous development of globalization education reform, it is necessary for China's higher education to respond appropriately. The reform of higher education needs internal and external driving force. The increasing domestic demand for higher education and the requirements of global economic competitiveness for educational output jointly promote the massification and marketization reform of China's higher education. Meanwhile, how to balance equity and efficiency in education becoming more and more urgent to handle. While vigorously improving the efficiency of higher education through expanding the coverage of higher education and creating more educational resources, we must balance the issue of inequity in the process of reform. It is an eternal problem to balance equity and efficiency in education, but we still have to ensure the continuous improvement of education efficiency, because the two are not purely antagonistic, and they are consistent in the long run. Therefore, based on the China's current national conditions, we still have to insist the principle of “efficiency first, balancing equity”.

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