

Opportunities and Challenges Faced in the Development of Rural Family Education in the New Era

Lei Shi¹, Xuejing Lu²

1.José Rizal University, Manila 1006, Philippines 2.Education and Sports Bureau of Haigang District, Qinhuangdao 066000,China

Abstract: The enactment of a series of educational policies and regulations signifies the entry of China's basic education into a new era. This paper explores new opportunities for the development of rural family education following the implementation of national policies and rural strategies. It also identifies the new challenges faced by rural family education in this new era, combining regional practices, and proposes strategies to address these challenges, aiming to assist in the development of family education in rural areas.

Keywords: New Era; Rural; Family Education; Opportunities and Challenges

1. Challenges Faced by Rural Family Education

1.1. The State Elevates Family Education to the Level of National will through Legislation

On October 23, 2021, the National People's Congress passed the "Family Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China", which was officially implemented on January 1, 2022. On January 1, 2022, the Family Education Promotion Law of the People's Republic of China was officially implemented. This law establishes the overall goals of family education; clarifies the principal status of families in carrying out family education; It strengthens the overarching theme of collaborative upbringing by families, schools, and communities; establishes a comprehensive mechanism for the promotion and development of family education, supported by national and local governments, related educational and scientific research departments, coordination among relevant social organizations and institutions, and constraints of applicable legal and regulatory provisions, along with oversight by corresponding functional departments. Additionally, it directs the focus towards areas such as patriotism education, moral and legal education, life skills education, health education, life education, and labor education as main threads, and recommends methods for the involvement of guardians within family education. The law, along with standards and guidelines developed by national, local governments, and educational research departments, lays a solid foundation for the top-down and macro-to-micro implementation of family education, further establishing a complete system for its implementation and providing substantial resources.

In rural areas, the law establishes the principal functions of village committees in the implementation of family education and their supervisory responsibilities over guardians within their jurisdiction. Taking into account the actual situation of rural areas, a series of service policies have been established, including the registration and assistance for left-behind and disadvantaged minors, providing learning and life support, and promoting entrepreneurship and employment support. For remote areas with weak capabilities in implementing family education and scarce educational resources, an information platform for family education has been established, relying on online courses, hotline services, and communication software. These measures lay the foundation for promoting the development of family education in rural areas.

1.2 Significant Improvement in the Overall Appearance of Rural Areas

Since the implementation of the Rural Revitalization Strategy, the appearance of rural areas has undergone drastic changes. A search of related reports on the "Learning Power" learning platform revealed that, as of September 2021, more than 530,000 villages have completed the reform of the rural collective economic system. The speed of China's rural economic development has been rapid, with the per capita income of rural residents and the urbanization rate climbing annually. The process of informatization has also accelerated, providing a material foundation for the development of rural family education. The increase in family income and the improvement in living conditions have inevitably led to a rise in the demand for family education and the ability to purchase services^[2]. In recent years, the infrastructure in rural

areas, such as cultural squares, sports venues, village libraries, digital information platforms, smart communities, and schools for parents, has been increasingly perfected. The continuous improvement of the living environment has also drawn a large number of families to participate, further providing the hard resources needed for the conduct of family education. With the spread of digital and smart devices in rural areas and the establishment of related communication media, there has been a noticeable increase in various lectures and training organized online and offline at the village grassroots level. Pushes of information in various fields including scientific knowledge, legal awareness, and policy facts. The continuous advancement of spiritual civilization construction is complemented by the incremental introduction and ongoing execution of various activities in rural areas, such as the selection of star-rated families, good daughters-in-law, and the promotion of good family traditions, these activities have also met the soft needs for the conduct of family education.

1.3 The “Double Reduction” Policy Leading to a New Pattern of Healthy Educational Development

In July 2021, Chinese government issued the “Opinions on Further Reducing the Homework and After-school Tutoring Burden for Students at the Compulsory Education Stage”. The “Double Reduction” policy has eliminated the main stubborn problems that have hindered the healthy growth of students in recent years. Firstly, it optimized the assignment of homework by schools, eliminating “internal worries”. Secondly, it regulated or abolished those utilitarian after-school tutoring institutions, removing the “external threats”. This has revitalized basic education, which had been obscured in recent years, and has created a vast space for the implementation of family education. On a micro level, the return of normal growth time and space for students can better pave a smooth path for the implementation of family education and provide a broad stage, as well as better maintain harmonious relationships between parents and children and stimulate the students’ innate potential. On a macro level, this lightened load has completely overturned the traditional utilitarian concepts that mainly pursue academic performance, scores, ranking, and examinations. It has greatly eased and eliminated the cognitive conflicts that arise from the pursuit of grades among schools, parents, and students, and has broken the long-standing default standards and concepts of talent in the entire society^[3].

2. Challenges Faced by Rural Family Education

2.1. Many Problems Still Exist in the Practice of Collaborative Education by Families, Schools, and Communities

The research interest in collaborative education involving families, schools, and communities has been quite high in recent years, and the significance of family education is undeniable. However, this type of collaboration, which requires systemic strength and anticipates participation and adjustment from multiple parties, has not yet formed a united force integrating theory and practice. At the societal level as a whole, there is not yet a consensus or significant public momentum, and among the many entities involved in national support and social collaboration, there is a lack of a leading figure. From the perspective of the most basic social participants, studies have indicated that under the “Double Reduction” policy, collaborative education among families, schools, and communities faces dilemmas of trust, communication, cooperation, and organization^[2]. Observations over the past two years reveal that these contradictions are notably more acute in rural areas than in cities, with ongoing issues such as slow shifts in overall mindset, delayed implementation of policies and regulations, and low collaborative capacity. In terms of regional collaboration, the collaborative consensus and understanding within the rural “township-village-school-family” implementation framework are evidently inferior to those within the urban “street-community-school-family” framework. Regarding the responsibilities of the main parties in collaboration, the division of labor is not yet clear, and the situation remains one where schools lead the way, families follow, and townships and villages merely observe.

2.2. The Scale of Professional Guidance Teams Does Not Yet Meet Comprehensive Needs

The quality and quantity of the family education guidance team are critical to the overall improvement of family education levels. If we consider the match between professional personnel and societal needs, current online references to Western standards suggest that China needs 2.5 million family education guidance personnel to meet the overall needs of family education, yet less than 20,000 people have obtained relevant qualifications or training certificates. According to the responsibilities outlined in the “Family Education Promotion Law of the People’s Republic of China” and the role of the family in education, each family should have at least one individual who is concerned

with family education and possesses certain relevant knowledge and abilities. From any perspective, the current number of family education guidance personnel in China is insufficient to meet the overall developmental needs of family education. Regarding the so-called “family education instructors”, public opinions such as “certifying organizations are inconsistent”, “the certification process is not difficult”, “fees are not low” and “the guidance role is minimal” lead us to question the “professionalism” of some individuals. If we compare family education guidance personnel to cells, then family education service organizations are like tissues, playing a crucial role in nurturing and training family education forces and linking the family education market.

2.3. The basic capacity of vast rural areas to respond to educational reforms is weak

On one hand, rural areas have not escaped the influence of long-standing historical environmental factors, and the underlying backwardness in family education concepts and levels has not significantly faded. The lack of an overarching educational perspective and systematic methods results in many family educations still acting as “grade chasers” and mere supplements to school education. The family education of the new era calls for the temporal and spatial extension across various academic fields, the three-dimensional construction of various organizational forms, and the intersection of knowledge, awareness, intention, and action. This sets high requirements for family capabilities, and it is clear that there is still a significant gap in the current capability levels of rural families. On the other hand, the tide of reform has swept across the country and begun to reshape the functional structure of families, impacting regional cultural identity and the personnel structure of educators in rural families. The high degree of shared information transmission, down to elementary school students, has become part of the mainstream observer group. In the tide of educational reform, the external comparison and feedback in parent-child interactions undeniably add to the acute conflicts in educational activities. The affectionate bonds under traditional education may become loosened, greatly increasing the resistance to the implementation of family education. The mobility of people also causes instability in the structure of family educators in rural areas. One or both parents may be unable to ensure continuous and stable family education activities due to labor migration, leaving behind children and grandparenting becoming a major problem in rural family education.

3. Countermeasures and Suggestions

3.1. Establish and Improve the Collaborative Organizational Structure

The foundation and most crucial part of collaborative family education in society must be grassroots collaboration, that is, the cooperation among schools, village committees, and families. The overall enhancement of their capabilities and levels will drive the overall improvement of societal awareness and action in family education. This requires that all grassroots entities be connected and activated. In terms of implementation and specifics, firstly, a unified collaborative organizational framework should be established, and responsibilities should be assigned and further refined to avoid isolated efforts and instead create a synergistic educational force. A supervision, collaboration, and feedback mechanism should be established with clear leadership and supervisory entities. This responsibility should be undertaken by the township governments and educational authorities, playing a bridge and link role, establishing connections between villages and schools. Then, through a series of activities, involve schools, villages, families, and relevant institutions, and social organizations and personnel, to form a consensus and understanding towards achieving unified goals. Schools should play a professional leading and activity coordinating role, acting as guides and adhesives for collaborative education, providing professional support for the family education venues and activities in villages, transmitting scientific and advanced educational concepts, and providing professional personnel. Village committees should avoid passive or bystander attitudes in the collaborative education process, earnestly fulfill their responsibilities under relevant laws and regulations, implement policy spirits, enhance the level of family education service facilities, discover, train, and inspire more collaborative personnel, improve family income-generating abilities and ensure family harmony. They should develop the ability to independently conduct community family education and actively coordinate with schools, families, relevant institutions, and social organizations to create a multi-dimensional development situation, serving as stabilizers and catalysts for collaborative education. Families should break down the mental barriers of long-term dependence on school education, enhance their family education capabilities, actively cooperate with schools, village committees, and related institutions and social organizations in conducting family education activities, and more actively engage surrounding

families to create a participatory atmosphere. At the same time, they should actively provide feedback, becoming the direct beneficiaries of family education.

3.2. Expand the Collaborative Team and Enhance the Capabilities of Related Personnel

The smooth progression of collaborative education among families, schools, and communities also faces the issue of an incomplete personnel system, with related responsible units lacking participation awareness and capability, and an insufficient number of existing personnel, most of whom rely solely on schools for support.

Currently, there is a strong call from the government and academic circles to strengthen the construction of the family education guidance team, which also indirectly reflects the undeniable fact of the insufficiency of collaborative education team members. Research has found that many micro-systems lack a leading figure, with many township responsible persons being relatively passive, and village committees often in a long-term vacuum, which is one of the important factors preventing the collaborative system from achieving synergy. According to the second article of the “Family Education Promotion Law of the People’s Republic of China” regarding the definition of family education, the family education guidance team should be a three-dimensional match of quality and quantity, as in “Among any group of three, there will be something I can learn”. The comprehensive development of children requires a full range of personnel to match and transmit knowledge, skills, awareness, and behavior, which is necessarily multidimensional. First, strengthen the weak links of townships and villages, it is key to guide the main responsible persons of townships and villages to play their due roles, establish related systems and boost their participation enthusiasm through incentives, performance evaluations, public opinion, etc., and guide them to actively play the role of community collaboration. Further enhance their participation ability through training, exchange, and visits. Secondly, conduct internal exploration and actively call retired teachers, industry experts, university graduates, and excellent student parents to join the ranks of the family education guidance team, stabilizing the internal support of the family education team, ensuring the long-term development of family education. Ensure external inflow, relevant functional departments should ensure personnel delivery, and townships and villages should attract and retain people effectively. The addition of external support is also an important means to rapidly improve the level of rural family education.

3.3. Enhance Rural Areas’ Basic Capability to Respond to Educational Reforms

First, break through the ideological barriers of rural families and reshape the concept of family education in rural areas. Form a new wave of thoughts favorable to the development of family education through a series of measures such as public opinion guidance, activity exchanges, and encouragement and supervision by schools and village committees, while efficiently activating rural resources favorable for conducting family education to ensure their full utilization. Establish long-term guarantee and supervision mechanisms to maintain and enhance development capabilities. Elevate the professional knowledge of main village leaders and student parents through a series of methods such as lectures, exchange meetings, and training classes. Identify differences between families and enhance family participation awareness through a series of observation and comparison activities organized by villages and schools. Enhance family education capabilities through face-to-face communication and guidance by advisory personnel with families. One important reason for the lag in rural family education levels compared to urban areas is the relative lag in economic development. Leveraging the momentum of rural revitalization to enhance the economic development capability of rural areas will bring more educational resources and a wider return and retention of the workforce, which will in turn continuously improve the conditions for the development of rural family education, both in terms of software and hardware. Clearly, governments at all levels, especially village grassroots organizations, must play a key role.

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Author Introduction:

Shi Lei (1985-), from Qinhuangdao, Hebei, is a doctoral candidate in education at José Rizal University, Philippines.

Lu Xuejing(1972-), from Qinhuangdao, Hebei, is an associate professor at the Education and Sports Bureau of Haigang District, Qinhuangdao City, China.