Live Broadcast Classroom: A Feasible Solution for Chinese Rural Weak Education

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ABSTRACT

Inequity between urban and rural education prevalently exists in China. A Lack of qualified teachers is the main reason for disadvantaged education in rural areas. In order to solve this problem, Live Broadcast Classroom was adopted for use in grade 5 English classes. 90 students and 3 teachers of 3 classes from two primary schools in Yunnan Province were selected as participants. As for methodology, quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Results showed it was feasible to use Live Broadcast Classroom in solving the inequity problem in micro-level education (i.e., classroom): the gap between students’ scores and attitudes towards English between urban and rural classes was narrowed. Challenges still exist and some suggestions are put forward in the end.

KEYWORDS

Education Equity, English Learning, Interaction Design, Live Broadcast Classroom

INTRODUCTION

Background

Education inequity is an urgent issue all over the world. A considerable number of empirical studies have shown that education inequity will enlarge the income gap in a society, impairing economic development in turn (Lopez, Thomas, & Wang, 1998) and eventually depreciate overall achievements in a society (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010).

In China, education inequity mainly exists between rural and urban areas. Although the full implementation of the compulsory education policy has made most of children get access to education, contradictions still exist between the demand and the supply of quality education. To promote the equity of education has become the priority in the compulsory education in China according to “further deepen reform and make balance of compulsory education”, a policy of the State Council (Liu, 2012).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education inequity exists widely in China due to the lack of qualified teachers in rural areas. Technology and network may bring about new solution, of which Live Broadcast Classroom (hereafter...
referred to as LBC) is able to provide fast, convenient and live classroom activities performed by quality teachers in urban schools to the classrooms in remote rural schools. The following section will review the literature of education inequity and LBC.

Definition of Education Equity

Education equity was first coined by American philosopher John Rawls. Rawls argued that equal opportunity in an education system has three principles: first, providing equal education support for those who are qualified for education; second, providing ultimate education for everyone; third, providing special education support for disadvantaged groups (Rawls, 1971). Based on these three principles, Farrell further put forward three main equity forms to school education, including opportunity equity, input equity and result equity (Rawls, 1971; Farrell, 1999). Besides, Farrell and other scholars pointed out that education equity has several different dimensions, for example, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender and geographic location (Farrell, 1999; Farrell, 1997; Coleman, 1966; Husén, 1974).

As for the categories of education equity, there are three levels: the macro level, medium level and micro level. Macro equity is mainly reflected in policy and education institutions associated with education rights, opportunity, scale, and structure. Education equity at the medium level includes equity among different areas, schools, and groups, such as school equipment and areas. At the micro level, education equity lies in the equity of curriculum, instruction and evaluation, which influence students’ performance in a classroom (Zhai, 2008). The first two levels of equity involve the educational policy and resource allocation, which are able to influence and be embodied by the micro level equity in a specific classroom.

In general, these different levels of equity are able to cover whole educational processes: input equity such as education opportunity and resource allocation, process equity in teaching and learning, as well as the output equity of students’ learning performance and enrollment.

Inequity of Basic Education in China

In China, the gap between rural and urban schools is the main problem of great importance in basic education inequity because of the unequal input condition in terms of economic discrimination and urban-rural segregation policy (Cheng, 2009).

Firstly, there is a huge gap in average funds for students in K-12 schools between the urban and rural areas (Zhai, 2008). Secondly, both the quantity and quality of urban teachers is better than rural teachers. The study showed that, in 2005, the ratio of teachers with associate’s degrees or above is 78.01% in Chinese urban primary schools, 31% higher than that in rural areas; the ratio of that in urban secondary schools is 62.44%, 38% higher than rural areas (Yuan, 2013).

In rural schools, due to a serious shortage of teachers, teachers have to be responsible for different disciplines beyond what they have learned. For example, some teachers without a background in music are teaching music, the same with others such as information technology, sports, English, and arts in rural schools. What’s more, some teachers in rural schools are not formally hired by schools. According to the statistics (Zhai, 2008), there are 499,000 non-contracted teachers concentrated in rural primary schools in China, 75.9% of which are distributed in the central and western China. These teachers, with poor allowance, barely devote themselves to education. Finally, due to the disadvantageous location and economic conditions, it is hard for rural schools to attract talent to work there. If possible, teachers in rural schools would look for any way to leave for urban areas. That eventually intensifies the backward situation in rural education (Zhai & Sun, 2012).

The input inequity of Urban-rural school condition has put rural children in a disadvantaged situation from the starting point. The data shows that about 80% of the rural school-age population doesn’t have a chance to participate in the College Entrance Examination, because of the poor quality of high school education in rural areas. The more serious inequity lies in the enrollment in higher education. In 2003, the gross enrollment ratio of Beijing higher education for local students is 49%,
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