



# The Causes and Solution of the Dilemma in County High Senior Schools from the Perspective of Access to Higher Education Opportunities

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**Abstract.** Influenced by urbanization and hierarchical school system, the gap between the education level of the urban area in the center and the county around it due to the imbalance of education resources is widening. This paper takes the Qinyang County No. 1 Senior High School in Henan Province as an example to discuss about the problems of education in rural townships caused by the imbalance of educational resources. Through interviews, it is found that the difficulties faced by education in the county mainly include the outflow of high-quality educational resources and inadequate allocation of educational resources. However, under unfavorable conditions, the senior high school of Qinyang No. 1 High School has continued to achieve the first place in the college entrance examination and the enrollment rate has been slowly increasing, which is mainly due to the efforts of the school, teachers and students. Based on the analysis, this paper proposes a solution to the dilemma of tilting educational resources to county-level high schools and give special care to students from worker or peasant family in obtaining higher education opportunities. Thus, it provides ideas for the problem of unequal opportunities in higher education.

**Keywords:** the dilemma in county high senior schools, access to higher education opportunities, secondary education, educational equity.

## 1 Introduction

Educational opportunity equity is an important part of educational equity. In contemporary China, higher education has not been fully popularized. In order to obtain better educational resources, the vast majority of Chinese students need to pass the college entrance examination. However, restricted by the level of social and economic development, there are significant regional differences in higher education opportunities. From the perspective of each province in China, the distribution of higher education opportunities is uneven in each province. The top 5 and bottom 5 regions in terms of quality higher education enrollment opportunities in 2018, with the top 5 regions being Beijing, Tianjin, Ningxia, Shanghai and Qinghai, and the bottom 5 regions being Hunan, Guangxi, Hainan, Guangdong and Yunnan [1]. The average enrollment rate

(7.20%) of the school-age population of high-quality higher education in the top 5 regions is more than four times that of Henan Province (1.63%), indicating that there is a large gap between provinces in China's high-quality higher education opportunities, and it is difficult for Henan students to obtain high-quality high-level education opportunities.

In addition, within a province, due to the influence of urbanization and hierarchical school management system, high-quality students, high-quality teachers and other educational resources gradually converged on the central city, making the gap between the education level of the central city and the surrounding counties increasingly large [2]. The development of the county senior high school is facing difficulties. Taking Zhengzhou Foreign Language School and Qinyang No.1 Senior High School as an example, Zhengzhou Foreign Language School is known as the best senior high school in Henan Province, located in Zhengzhou, the capital city of Henan Province. In 2020, the number of students admitted to Tsinghua University and Peking University is as high as 73. In contrast, Qinyang No.1 Senior High School in Henan, a county-level city with poor educational resources, had six students admitted to Tsinghua University and Peking University in 2020, and only one in the rest of the year. Therefore, due to the difficulty of higher education admission in the hell mode of Henan Province and the environmental factors in the county with underdeveloped educational resources, the development of Qinyang No.1 Senior High School is plagued with difficulties [3].

Therefore, Taking Qinyang No. 1 Senior High School as an example, this article aims to explore the difficulties faced by the county from the perspective of access to higher education opportunities through interviews, and at the same time find out the reasons why Qinyang No. 1 Senior High School continues to achieve slow growth in the rate of entrance examination under unfavorable conditions. Finally, it tries to propose ways to solve the difficulties of county-level high schools from the perspective of national education policies. And provide ideas for the problem of unequal opportunities in higher education.

## 2 Methodology

In order to gain a better understanding of the formation mechanism of the current educational predicament in county-level senior high schools and the effective breakthrough measures implemented in recent years, this study takes Qinyang No.1 Senior High School in Qinyang county, Henan Province as a case. A total of 10 interviewees including school leaders, teachers, and students were selected for semi-structured interviews [4]. The coding of the interviewees is as Table 1 and Table 2 shown.

**Table 1.** School leaders and teachers basic information coding

Name	Age	Position	Length of Service
L1	55 years old	Headmaster	14 years
L2	55 years old	Grade Director	8 years

T1	34 years old	Key class head teacher & Chinese teacher	7 years
T2	37 years old	Key class English teacher	10 years
T3	35 years old	Key class History teacher	5 years
T4	38 years old	Ordinary class teacher	15 years

**Table 2.** Student basic information coding

Name	Graduation Year	Household Address Attribute	High School Class Nature	Higher Education Institution Level
S1	2021	Agricultural household registration,	Key class	211 project universities
S2	2021	Agricultural household registration,	Key class	985 project universities
S3	2021	Non-agricultural household registration	Ordinary class	First-tier University
S4	2021	Non-agricultural household registration,	Key class	211 project universities

For school leaders and teachers, the interviews focused on issues related to the causes of distress in the county senior high school and the local and government response. For students, the interview mainly focuses on how the three factors of pre-endowed background, key senior high school and personal expectation play a role in the process of obtaining higher education opportunities.

### 3 Results

#### 3.1 The Cause of County Senior High School's Dilemma

Through the interview, it is found that the development dilemma of Qinyang No.1 Senior High School is mainly caused by the flow of educational resources to the central city and the insufficient allocation of educational resources.

#### Outflow of Educational Resources

The outflow of educational resources mainly refers to the flow of high-quality students and teachers outside the county. Qinyang county is located at the edge of economically developed areas. Under the influence of transportation development and urbanization, the "siphon effect" of central cities and developed areas on resources leads to a large loss of local talents [5]. Both T1 and T3 mention that because of the poor economic level of County Qinyang, which is only an hour and a half's drive from Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan Province, many excellent Qinyang high school teachers would be attracted to schools in Zhengzhou and other surrounding prefecture-level cities. In addition, many local publicly-funded normal students will choose to pay liquidated damages to teach in other developed cities, as mentioned in T2. Qinyang

county's low economic level leads to the weak attractiveness of excellent teachers, resulting in the reluctance of high-quality teachers to come and the failure of existing teacher resources to stay. Except for the teacher factor, Qinyang county also has an outflow of high-quality students. S3 mentioned that his friend passed the entrance examination of Zhengzhou Foreign Language school and chose to study out of the county since junior high school. Attracted by the high-quality educational resources and high enrollment rate of schools in the surrounding developed areas, as well as the great convenience brought by the intercity railway, many parents send their children to study in the surrounding areas as possible, resulting in the loss of high-quality local students.

### **Insufficient Allocation of Educational Resources**

The insufficient allocation of educational resources is highlighted in Qinyang No.1 Senior High School as two aspects: the difficult conditions for running schools to meet the teaching needs and the shortage of funds.

From the perspective of school conditions, the first is the low student-teacher ratio and the lack of quality teachers. The student-teacher ratio of Qinyang No.1 Senior High School is about 18.54:1, which is much higher than the national average high school student - teacher ratio of 12.66:1 in 2023[6]. Due to the insufficient number and low quality of teachers in the school, the allocation of teachers in the new semester is usually in accordance with the sequence of grades from the highest to the lowest, the needs of the priority classes and the regular classes, and the qualifications of the teachers, with priority given to fulfilling the needs of the teachers in the priority classes and regular classes in the third year of the senior high school. Then the teaching needs of priority classes in other grades are satisfied, and finally the teaching needs of regular classes in other grades are evenly distributed. What's more, facing the requirement of 12 subject combinations in the new college entrance examination, the quantity and quality of teachers in Qinyang No.1 Senior High School can only provide five subject combinations for students, which also restricts the development of students to a certain extent. The second is the lack of education informatization conditions. Compared with schools in other developed areas, Qinyang No.1 Senior High School's multimedia teaching equipment is backward and intelligent equipment is insufficient, which further widen the digital divide in the process of education modernization.

From the perspective of fund shortage, as a county-level public school, Qinyang No.1 Senior High School has less funding for running a school. The high-quality off-campus educational resources purchased by the school are difficult to be popularized in the whole school, and can only be used by key classes.

### **3.2 Measures to Deal with Dilemma**

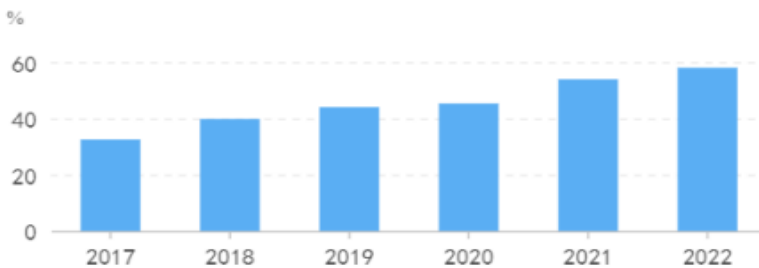
As for the predicament in the county senior high school, a series of difficulties brought by economic factors, such as the shortage of teachers and insufficient teaching resources, are difficult to solve in a short time. However, the source of students is a variable that can be easily controlled because it is rooted in the county. And in the vicious circle of "collapse in the county, student loss, poor college entrance examination results,

people lose confidence and student loss again”, student source factor is its core variable [7]. Therefore, the local government and Qinyang No.1 Senior High School leaders decided to take "student source" as a breakthrough to carry out measures. Specifically, the local government implemented a policy directive banning cross-district enrollment in 2021, helping to regulate the distribution of educational opportunities between regions. Allowing cross-regional "pinching" enrollment is the most direct policy incentive for county senior high school collapse. Cutting off this behavior from the policy level should be the most immediate policy intervention to revive the county senior high school in the short term.

The leaders of Qinyang No.1 Senior High School took the measure of opening the private middle school of Qinyang No.1 Senior High School (called T middle school). Influenced by the joint school running, there is a more coherent and safe channel from T middle school to Qinyang No.1 Senior High School. On the one hand, this initiative can achieve earlier training of students and improve the quality of Qinyang No.1 Senior High School students. On the other hand, private middle schools can absorb more funds and provide more financial support for Qinyang No.1 Senior High School. It is in the joint efforts of government policies and school initiatives that the quality of students in Qinyang No.1 Senior High School is guaranteed, thus preventing the further deterioration of the predicament in the county senior high school.

### 3.3 Reasons for Steady Progress

Despite facing the pressure of Henan's extremely low college entrance examination enrollment rate and many unfavorable factors in county education, the enrollment rate of Qinyang No.1 Senior High School is still rising every year (Figure 1), although the increase is small. Through the interview, it is found that the reasons why Qinyang No.1 Senior High School can achieve these results are mainly attributed to the passionate education and strict management of the school, the hard work of the teachers and the hard work of the students.



**Fig. 1.** Qinyang No.1 Senior High School's first-tier university acceptance rate in the last six years

### **The school's Passionate Education and Strict Management**

Qinyang No.1 Senior High School is famous for its passionate education and strict management. The school adopts closed management, from 5:50 am to 11 pm, one day off per month. In addition, Qinyang No.1 Senior High School has a unique campus culture, which is mainly reflected in the school's passion education. Every day before class, students have to make an oath about hard work. Red banners and slogans can be seen everywhere on the campus to stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning. It is precisely under such campus atmosphere and strict management that students' learning enthusiasm and efficiency can be improved, which has become an important reason for Qinyang No.1 Senior High School students to achieve academic success in spite of unfavorable educational resources.

### **The Hard Work of Teachers**

When it comes to the topic of educational equity, T2 feels helpless about education in the county and believes that absolute equity in education does not exist. What Qinyang No.1 Senior High School teachers can do is to provide these children born in grassroots families with a better chance to fight for higher educational resources. It is this idea that motivates every Qinyang No.1 Senior High School teacher to work hard in teaching. As a class teacher, T1 gets up at 5:30 a.m. every morning and goes to school with students to participate in morning exercises and morning reading. During the winter vacation, he returns to school on the second day of the Chinese New Year together with senior three students. Qinyang No.1 Senior High School teachers are also very familiar with the situation of every student in the class. When the student's learning status is not right, the teachers will always find out in time, and point out and solve the problem by communication.

### **The Hard Struggle of the Students**

Many of the students in Qinyang No.1 Senior High School come from rural families. For these students, obtaining higher education opportunities through the National College Entrance Examination is the only way to achieve class leapfrog. Although these students do not have the objective advantage of predisposition, they are naturally motivated to work upward because of their bottom situation, which is manifested in their willingness to endure hardships and more persistent pursuit of academic success. S1, who was born in a rural family, said that whenever she did not do well in the exam, her deepest feeling was that she felt sorry for her parents' efforts. Compared with children from urban areas, rural students feel more moral guilt, so they have greater psychological urgency to study hard and get good grades in the future [8].

In terms of behavioral habits, campuses can be seen with all students running for lunch in order to allow more time for study. In addition, the classroom can also be filled with scenes of "voluntary standing". For example, due to the large number of students in the classroom, students in the back row will voluntarily stand up and take their textbooks outside the classroom to follow the lecture when they have trouble reading and listening in the classroom. And during the daily morning reading time, students will actively choose to stand to complete their morning reading in order to keep their minds

sharp. It is such "running" and "standing" that form a unique landscape in Qinyang No.1 Senior High School and also create the miracle of the county high school entrance examination.

## 4 Discussion

The county level has been the most important administrative unit in China since ancient times [9]. County is a key hub connecting urban and rural areas. The problem of education in counties is related to all aspects of China's social development, such as the intergenerational mobility of children from vulnerable groups and the coordinated development of urban and rural economies. Therefore, the revitalization of county senior high school not only needs to rely on the efforts of local governments and schools, but also needs to take precise policies from the national policy level.

Specifically speaking, first, the national government should give more attention to resource allocation, provide more teaching equipment and financial support to improve school conditions, and enhance the school capacity of county-level senior high schools. Secondly, the state should, through specialized institutional arrangements and according to the principle of "compensation", give additional protection and care to the workers and peasants who are disadvantaged in social and economic status in county-level senior high schools in terms of access to higher education and admission opportunities to elite universities. Through this specialized and biased system design, the mobility opportunities of workers and peasant children in the county can be improved. The opening and expansion of the county's senior high school entrance channel is helpful to fundamentally retain high-quality students and excellent teachers, so as to avoid falling into the vicious circle of difficulties in the county.

## 5 Conclusion

Using semi-structured interviews as the main research method, this article interviews the leaders, teachers and students of Qinyang No.1 Senior High School in Qinyang county, Henan Province, to understand the reasons for the current difficulties in Qinyang No.1 Senior High School, as well as the countermeasures taken by the local government and schools. It is also clear that the main reasons for the progress of Qinyang No.1 Senior High School are the strict management and passionate education of the school, the hard work of the teachers and the profound efforts of the students. However, this study still has some shortcomings, including the insufficient sample size due to time, and the lack of information in related literature. In addition, although the research of Qinyang No.1 Senior High School can be generalized to other county priority senior high schools in Henan Province as a case, it is not necessarily universal to non-county priority senior high schools and senior high schools in other provinces. In the follow-up study, the author will continue to expand the sample scope and quantity based on continuous learning in education, so as to obtain more general conclusions.

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