

Bridging Gaps in Educational Equity: A Conceptual Framework for Teacher Rotation Systems and Balanced Development in Primary Education

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Abstract: *This study constructs a fair mechanism model for the urban primary school teacher rotation system (TRS) grounded in distributive justice, the capability approach, resource allocation, and policy implementation, thereby revealing four principal pathways: The first involves the redistribution of high-quality teachers and the establishment of an inter-school collaboration network; the second pertains to the enhancement of the sense of fairness regarding "teacher capital" among students, parents, and teachers; the third relates to the conversion of this sense of fairness into student development and overall quality enhancement; and the fourth describes the positive feedback loop of resources, innovation, and governance facilitated by continuous rotation. The study emphasizes the mediating role of organizational resilience and home-school co-construction as well as the moderating effect of local implementation and teacher participation. The method theoretically incorporates the structural and psychological fairness elements; in practice, it supports policies on different incentives, participatory governance and multidimensional assessment. This paper finally looks at future paths such digital tools and cross-national adaptation to verify and improve the model and provides an operational framework for promoting balanced development of education by means of empirical techniques including structural equation modeling, mixed method case comparison and longitudinal tracking.*

Keywords: Teacher Rotation, Educational Equity, Resource Allocation, Policy Implementation, Compulsory Education

1. Introduction

In recent years, the Chinese government has prioritized the balanced development of compulsory education as a fundamental aspect of its educational strategy (Zheng et al., 2024). It has consistently advanced educational equity by addressing the urban-rural divide and structural issues within urban areas through initiatives such as the "double reduction" policy (Xue & Li, 2023) and the action plan for High-quality Balanced Compulsory Education (Wang et al., 2020). Infrastructure and administrative reforms have notably enhanced educational conditions in urban and rural areas (Yu et al., 2024); however, the stratification of educational resources due to the siphon effect of famous schools in cities has intensified, leading to social issues such as "school selection anxiety" and inflated prices for housing in school districts (Zheng et al., 2024). The Teacher Rotation System (TRS) serves as a significant mechanism for addressing resource inequality and promoting educational equity (Zhang, 2024). The

system aims to attain compensatory justice for underprivileged schools by disrupting the spatial concentration of high-quality teachers, thereby advancing education from a focus on "resource balance" to "quality justice".

The effects of TRS exhibit considerable regional heterogeneity in practice (Zhang, 2024). Group schooling in Shanghai and other regions has demonstrated short-term effectiveness (Ye, 2025); however, numerous areas have encountered issues such as symbolic rotation, teacher resistance, and fragmented policy implementation (Liao et al., 2019). Existing studies primarily concentrate on policy compliance, such as rotation rates, or macro indicators, such as hardware configurations. However, there is a deficiency in the in-depth exploration of how TRS can facilitate balanced educational development through the redistribution of human capital, as well as the mediating variables and situational factors that influence this process (Zhang, 2024). Theoretical absence has resulted in two dilemmas in policy optimization: first, the simplification of rotation to resource allocation at the technical level, which neglects the underlying institutional conflicts and social cognitive tensions; second, the challenge of utilizing foreign experience to develop a theoretically sound framework that is adaptable to local contexts.

It is essential to develop a systematic dynamic theoretical model that incorporates educational equity, resource allocation, policy implementation, and other multidisciplinary perspectives (Jia et al., 2024). This model aims to elucidate the causal pathways and boundary conditions of the teacher rotation system in facilitating the balanced development of urban compulsory education. This study examines three fundamental issues through an analysis of the policy transmission chain involving teacher rotation, human capital flow, educational equity perception, and quality balance. (1) In what ways can high-quality educators foster educational equilibrium via inter-school collaboration and the dissemination of teaching innovations? (2) What role do factors like teacher subjectivity, school organizational resilience, and parental trust play in influencing policy effectiveness as mediating or moderating variables? (3) How can the transition from "administrative compliance" to "quality justice" be accomplished through institutional incentives and cultural adaptation?

This study presents an integrative theoretical framework that addresses the explanatory gap between TRS as a policy tool and its social, organizational, and behavioral outcomes. Additionally, it offers an empirical foundation and operational guidance for local governments to enhance rotation strategies. This study will introduce a dynamic incentive mechanism, a multi-subject collaborative governance model, and a contextualized empirical method, repositioning TRS as the central mechanism in the evolution of the educational equity ecosystem. It advances the educational governance paradigm from static allocation to institutional-cultural co-evolution. This study offers a transferable theoretical framework for the localization of international education policies within the Chinese context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 China's policies on balanced education development

After decades of exploration, China's education equity policy has formed an administrative-led top-down model (Ye, 2024). The main process is shown in Table 1. Although the policy has promoted the narrowing of the urban-rural gap (more than 80% of counties and districts will achieve "basic balance" in 2020), the problems of resource agglomeration and quality stratification within cities are still prominent (Pan & Yin, 2024). For example, "famous schools siphoning" has led to excessive concentration of high-quality teacher resources, and

standardized indicators (such as teacher-student ratio) are difficult to capture the process and subjectivity of education equity (OECD, 2022).

Table 1: China's Education Policy Development

Phase	Policy	Main measures and characteristics
Getting Started (1986–2005)	Compulsory Education Law	Establish nine-year compulsory education as a universal standard and create a foundational framework for the system (Sun, 2022).
Institutional strengthening (2006–2015)	Revision of the Compulsory Education Law and the “County-based” fiscal system	Advancing fiscal equilibrium between urban and rural areas and facilitating resource redistribution among schools (Cai et al., 2021)
Deepening reform (2016–Now)	Teacher Rotation Policy (2022), “Double Reduction” Policy (2021)	Emphasize internal equity within urban settings and reformulate the teacher mobility framework (Wang, 2022).

The Chinese model exhibits efficient resource coordination; however, it is susceptible to rigid execution and superficial balance. International evidence indicates that achieving sustainable educational equity cannot rely solely on administrative measures; it must also incorporate teachers' cultural identities, local feedback systems, and collaborative governance between homes and schools (Cai et al., 2021; Sun, 2022; Wang, 2022).

2.2 The implementation logic and effectiveness of the teacher rotation system

The Teacher Rotation System (TRS) seeks to disrupt the concentration of resources in prestigious schools by facilitating the cross-school mobility of high-quality educators, thereby promoting a structural rebalancing of regional educational resources (Liao et al., 2019; Zhang, 2024). The system integrates obligatory requirements with adaptable incentives, including the establishment of a rotation cycle and the facilitation of professional title advancement, to enhance teacher resource sharing, improve teaching quality, and foster inter-school collaboration (refers to figure 1). The rotation results in certain regions, including Jinshui District in Zhengzhou, have begun to manifest, enhancing the teaching quality of underperforming schools and fostering the professional development of educators (Zefu & Viseshsiri, 2024). In certain regions, the policy's effectiveness is constrained by inadequate incentives, challenges in formal implementation, and teachers' apprehensions (Li et al., 2025). Institutional effectiveness relies on the integration of top-level design with grassroots execution, necessitating further investigation into adaptability mechanisms and dynamic incentive strategies.

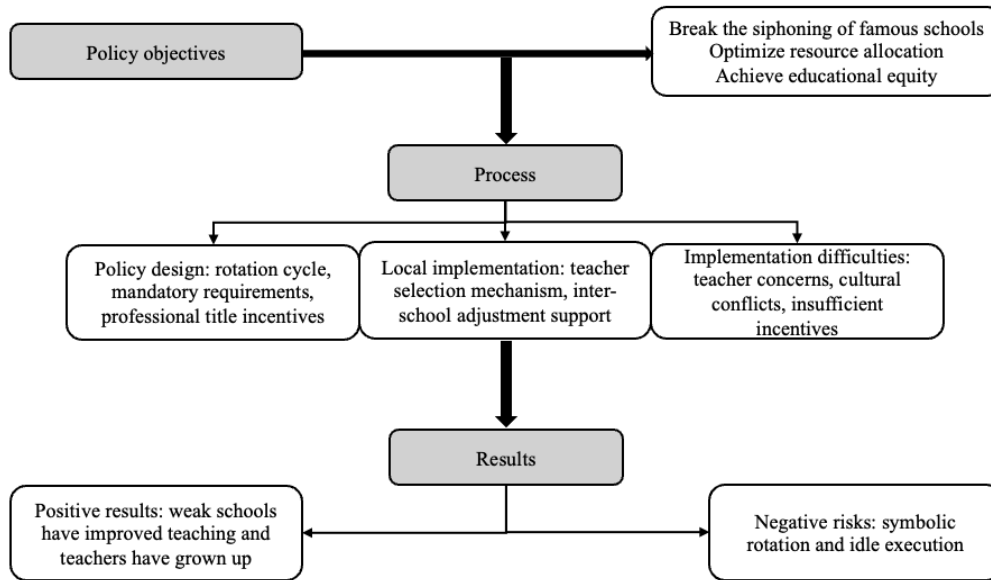


Figure 1: The implementation logic and effectiveness of the teacher rotation system

2.3 Research gap: lack of systematic mechanistic explanations and conceptual models to support current practice.

The existing literature demonstrates an unclear mechanism regarding the specific impact of teacher rotation on educational equity (Liao et al., 2019; Zhang, 2024). The role of intermediary factors, including teacher incentive methods, school leaders' adaptability, and community trust, remains inadequately explored. Existing research frequently characterizes cities as uniform entities, overlooks the intricate dynamics within urban areas, and fails to conduct temporal analyses regarding the long-term effects of teacher turnover (Yang et al., 2024).

Secondly, although research on the balanced development of teacher rotation and compulsory education has increased in recent years, the academic community's understanding of this policy tool still lacks systematic theoretical support and conceptual models (Liao et al., 2019; Ye et al., 2019). Current research emphasizes policy implementation and initial effect assessment, but it falls short in providing a comprehensive analysis of the internal dynamics of "institution-resource-fairness-development" and the evolving explanations of teachers' professional conduct, teaching culture, and pathways for enhancing educational quality (Chu et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2014). The research methods primarily rely on descriptive analysis, revealing a deficiency in comprehensive qualitative research at the micro-level. This includes an exploration of teachers' individual emotions, inter-school collaboration, management strategies, and the development of mediation, regulation, or path analysis models to systematically elucidate the transformation of rotation into educational balance (Li, 2019).

To address these research gaps, it is essential to integrate theories related to educational equity, resource allocation, and policy implementation. This integration should lead to the development of a dynamic, multi-level conceptual model that elucidates the mechanisms and pathways of teacher rotation across policy, institutional, and individual levels. Such an approach will enhance understanding of how teacher rotation contributes to the equitable development of compulsory education and offers theoretical support for policy optimization.

3. Theoretical Basis

This study addresses the theoretical gaps and shortcomings in the mechanisms of current research on teacher rotation systems by integrating core theories from pedagogy, public policy, and organizational management to construct a systematic conceptual framework.

Theory of Educational Equity

The theory of educational equity, based on Rawls (1971)'s "principle of difference" and Sen and Weiss (1999)'s "theory of feasible competence", focuses on the rational distribution of educational resources and prioritizes vulnerable groups to achieve equality in opportunities and outcomes. The teacher rotation system serves as a fundamental mechanism for the implementation of this concept. Rotation disrupts the monopoly of high-quality teachers and favors underperforming schools (Wu, 2020). This approach embodies Rawls's "difference principle," addressing historical injustices and reducing disparities between schools (Slee & Tait, 2022). Additionally, it aligns with Sen's emphasis on recognizing teachers' capabilities to enhance the potential of weaker students and expand their "feasible ability set".

Theory of educational resource allocation

Resource allocation theory posits that the distribution of educational resources should transition from a uniform approach to one that prioritizes "maximizing efficiency" and "demand orientation" (Glover & Levačić, 2020). This theory differentiates between material resources and symbolic resources that exert a "high leverage effect," such as teacher abilities (Darling-Hammond, 2017), which is crucial for enhancing quality in underperforming schools. Resource efficiency is contingent upon "situational adaptability," which involves aligning with demand (Hanushek, 1996), as well as the effect of reducing mismatches. Teacher rotation serves as a dynamic resource allocation method aimed at enhancing the connection between high-quality teachers and high-demand schools, thereby optimizing resource utilization efficiency. This approach is fundamental to the implementation of the demand-oriented principle.

Policy implementation theory

Policy implementation theory, as articulated by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), highlights the possible discrepancy between policy goals and actual results. Teachers encounter challenges during position rotations, influenced by top-down institutional contradictions, such as implicit support for certain schools, and bottom-up dynamics, which involve conflicts between teachers and parents (Giudici, 2021). The theory posits that execution is contingent upon the comprehension of the implementation and its associated conditions (Montjoy & O'Toole, 1979). Teacher rotation is influenced primarily by teachers' subjective identity, the school's execution capability, and the effectiveness of motivation. Consequently, the effectiveness of policy implementation serves as a crucial moderating variable linking policy design to actual outcomes.

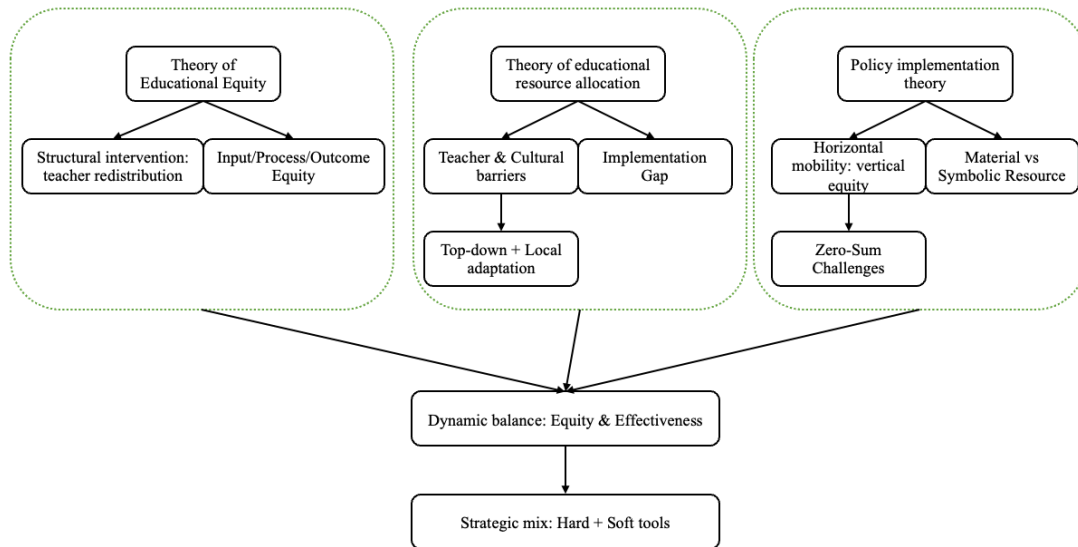


Figure 2: The combination of the three theories

The framework presented in Figure 2 synthesizes three theories: educational equity, resource allocation, and policy implementation. It systematically examines the impact of the teacher rotation system on the equitable development of compulsory education through the dual mechanisms of resource reallocation and equitable perception. The framework offers theoretical support for empirical research and functions as a significant reference tool for local policy formulation. The theory of educational equity establishes value orientation, the theory of resource allocation defines operational paths, and the theory of policy implementation reveals practical bottlenecks (Bess et al., 2023). Together, these three theories construct a comprehensive analytical perspective. This integration perspective emphasizes that the effectiveness of the rotation system relies not only on the "hard" resource redistribution mechanism but also on "soft" factors such as cultural identity and interest dynamics. This provides a multi-dimensional reference for enhancing policy execution and optimizing allocation strategies.

4. Methodology

This study employs a conceptual research method to systematically search and integrate core theoretical and empirical research on the teacher rotation system, resource allocation, and educational equity from databases such as Web of Science and CNKI. Subsequently, it utilizes an induction-deductive approach to examine the four dimensions of "teacher rotation," "resource allocation effect," "education fairness perception," and "balanced development level," along with their internal mechanisms. Finally, through cross-city multi-case comparisons, the study analyzes the evolution of the system effect and explores the model's applicability and optimization pathways in various cultural and technical contexts, thereby providing a scientific basis for future large-scale implementation and policy development.

5. Proposed Conceptual Framework

This study presents a conceptual model illustrated in Figure 3. The figure illustrates that the teacher rotation system influences the distribution of teacher resources, subsequently altering the fairness perception among students, and ultimately fostering balanced regional development in compulsory education. Two significant external moderating variables are

incorporated into the model: the effectiveness of policy implementation and stakeholder participation (including teachers, principals, and parents). These variables influence the final implementation of the system by either enhancing or diminishing the path effect.

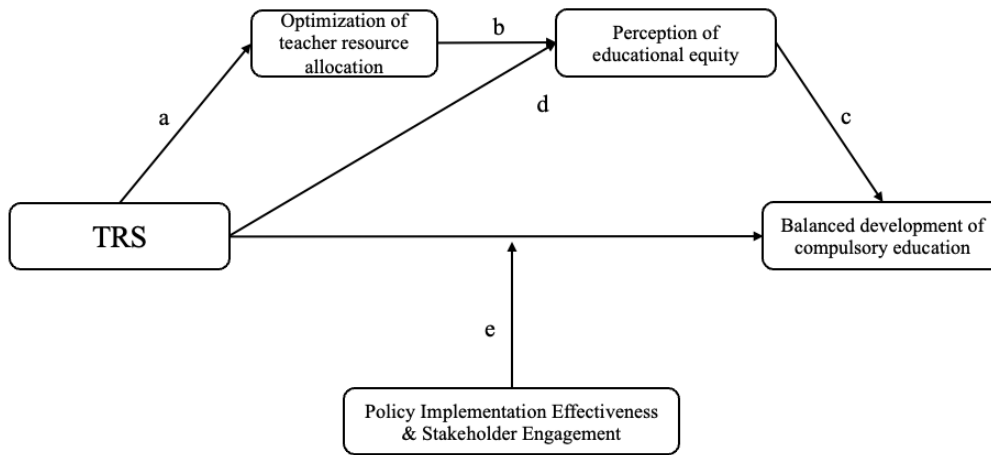


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework

Path a

The teacher rotation system facilitates the movement of high-quality educators within the region via institutional mechanisms, enabling the reallocation of teaching resources and serving as a structural pathway to educational equity (Wang, 2022). This approach highlights the system's direct impact on the redistribution of human resources.

Path b

The reallocation of teacher resources has enhanced the teaching quality in underperforming schools and improved students' educational experiences, which in turn has elevated the perceived equity of education among students, parents, and teachers (Rivers & Sanders, 2002). The perception of fairness is regarded as a fundamental psychological basis and a catalyst for the effectiveness of policies.

Path c

The widespread perception and recognition of educational equity can alleviate issues such as student mobility, school selection pressure, and competition for resources (Shields et al., 2017). The education system is expected to achieve greater structural stability and enhanced content, thereby fostering substantive and balanced development of regional compulsory education.

Path d

The perception of educational equity functions as a link between institutional promotion and development outcomes, elucidating why resource input does not consistently result in systematic improvements (Eden et al., 2024).

Path e

The effectiveness of policy implementation and stakeholder participation encompasses the promotion strength of the education bureau, management support measures, the willingness of teachers and schools to engage, and the feedback mechanisms in place (Viennet & Pont, 2017).

The aforementioned factors will substantially influence the effectiveness of the rotation system and modulate the relationship between the system and the outcomes.

5. Discussion

5.1 Teacher rotation system and optimization allocation of educational resources

The teacher rotation system primarily enhances the optimization of educational resources via two mechanisms: administrative intervention (mandatory mobilization, incentives) and indirect collaboration (interschool cooperation, knowledge transfer). This process particularly facilitates the movement of symbolic resources with a "high leverage effect," such as high-quality teachers, to underperforming schools (Zhang, 2024). This stage encounters challenges, including inadequate resource adaptability and limited cycles. The transformation of objective resource optimization into equitable perceptions among students, teachers, and parents is crucial for achieving social recognition and ensuring the sustainability of the system. According to the theory of educational equity (Rawls, 1971), fairness encompasses not only the availability of objective resources but also the subjective experiences and emotional identifications of individuals. The introduction of high-quality faculty and substantial improvements through rotation in underperforming schools enhances stakeholders' perceptions of fairness (Wang, 2022). Fair perception serves as a crucial intermediary pathway linking the structural action of resource allocation to the outcomes of equitable educational development, transitioning from external visibility to internal identification (Ye, 2025).

5.2 Educational resource allocation and equity in student educational opportunities

The effective distribution of educational resources significantly influences students' educational opportunities via the following mechanisms: The introduction of high-quality teachers clarifies symbolic resources, diminishing the stigmatization associated with underperforming schools and altering parental perceptions (Glover & Levačić, 2020). More critically, this initiative has enhanced students' self-efficacy, particularly among those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Ye, 2025). Secondly, the rotation system facilitates the restructuring of educational opportunities, mitigates spatial inequities associated with "school district housing" by dismantling the geographical monopoly of high-quality educators, and encourages underperforming schools to provide a broader range of courses, including science and technology innovation and the arts (Li, 2019; Wang, 2022). This approach aims to reduce the curriculum disparity with leading schools, thereby enhancing the diverse developmental pathways available to students. Challenges encountered in this process include strategic resistance from high-income families via "shadow education" and implicit biases in resource allocation, such as the assignment of rotation teachers to non-core positions (Hu & Zhou, 2024). These factors may compromise the effectiveness of resource optimization in achieving equitable opportunities.

The optimization of resource allocation serves as the primary objective of policies (Glover & Levačić, 2020); however, the critical factor determining the system's social recognition and sustainability lies in its ability to translate into perceived equitable improvements for students, teachers, and parents. The educational equity theory posits that fairness encompasses not only the availability of objective resources but also the subjective experiences and emotional identifications of individuals (Rawls, 1971). The introduction of excellent teachers in underperforming schools through rotation leads to significant improvements in teaching quality, resources, and overall atmosphere (Wu, 2020). This enhancement fosters a perception of fairness among students and parents, subsequently increasing their trust in the education system. Teachers' experiences of participation, satisfaction, and professional growth as policy

implementers and perceivers directly influence their assessment of institutional fairness (Kimball, 2002). Fair perception serves as a crucial intermediary pathway connecting teacher rotation and the associated resource optimization actions to equitable enhancement of educational opportunities. It transitions from "external visible" to "internal identification" and is essential for the effective transmission of policy effects to the realm of opportunity fairness.

5.3 Educational equity and balanced development of education quality

The transition from equitable perception to balanced educational quality relies on essential mechanisms at the student level (Chu et al., 2021), where input fairness facilitates output convergence, exemplified by the reduction of disparities in standardized test scores, and at the teacher level, through innovation diffusion and the establishment of professional communities, including the introduction of new teaching methods and cross-school collaboration in teaching and research (Peng et al., 2014; Wu, 2020). This process, however, encounters challenges related to performance evaluation conflicts and cultural adaptation. Fair perception is a critical variable influencing the stability and development of the education ecosystem (Wu, 2023). This approach notably alleviates parental anxiety regarding school selection, enhances teachers' professional satisfaction and commitment, and boosts societal confidence in the public education system (Wang, 2022). Consequently, it mitigates the trends of "marketization of education" and "intense competition in school selection," facilitating a shift in the education system towards public welfare and transitioning from structural equilibrium to quality equilibrium (Pan & Yin, 2024). Consequently, fair perception serves as the fundamental variable for policy to realize profound system benefits transformation.

6. Implications and Future Directions

This study develops a systematic conceptual model regarding the influence of the teacher rotation system on the equitable development of compulsory education. It examines the internal logic of "teacher rotation-resource allocation-fair perception-balanced development," highlighting the dynamic intermediary roles of resource allocation, fair perception, and institutional trust in the system's implementation. The research indicates that the coordinated development of structural and psychological fairness, along with the enhancement of symbolic resources and the establishment of dynamic interaction mechanisms, is essential for improving the effectiveness of rotation policies (Zhou et al., 2020). Policy recommendations include transitioning from extensive governance to refined governance, optimizing incentive mechanisms, enhancing policy transparency and public participation, improving supporting measures, and establishing a multi-dimensional, quality-oriented evaluation system (Wang, 2022).

Future research should enhance the empirical testing of theoretical models through cross-regional and cross-border comparisons, while also thoroughly investigating the long-term effects of individual psychological mechanisms and institutional factors related to teachers (Li, 2019; Yang et al., 2024). Combining structural equation models, case comparisons, and interviews is advisable for verifying model paths and internal mechanisms, as well as for analyzing the differentiated policy effects across various types of teachers and school stages. Simultaneously, it is essential to extend research to encompass technology empowerment and long-term spillover effects, develop a dynamic database for assessing system impact, and investigate the cost-benefit ratio of rotation from an interdisciplinary viewpoint, thereby improving the universality of research and policy implications.

7. Conclusion

The findings from this study suggest that China's mandatory education system might benefit from a more well-rounded approach if it adopted a teacher rotation system. This study constructs and analyzes a conceptual framework entitled "teacher rotation system - resource allocation optimization - educational fair perception - balanced development of education." The model seeks to address a gap in current research, highlighting that teacher rotation encompasses not merely the physical movement of teaching resources but also serves as a crucial factor in redefining the principles of educational equity and the mechanisms for generating quality. The research posits that achieving educational balance stems from the coordinated development of various entities, with the efficacy of policy execution and the recognition of micro entities being essential factors. The quality balance must transition from a quantitative alteration of resources to a qualitative transformation propelled by innovation, thereby establishing a virtuous cycle of resource flow-innovation diffusion.

This study outlines policy implications for transitioning the teacher rotation system from extensive execution to fine governance. Key recommendations include optimizing the incentive structure, enhancing policy transparency and participation, developing a supportive system, establishing a multi-dimensional assessment and accountability mechanism, and remaining vigilant against the technological trap that prioritizes digital indicators exclusively. The measures seek to facilitate the transition of educational resource sharing from physical rotation to system integration, thereby enhancing regional educational coordination and overall quality improvement.

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