

Research on the Balanced Development Strategy of Urban and Rural Preschool Education Based on “Internet Plus”

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ABSTRACT

In education, “Internet plus” provides a new opportunity to improve the quality of education and promote educational equity. Promoting the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education with the help of Internet technology has become an important topic. Based on the latest data and field survey, this paper compares the teachers, school condition, and teaching quality of urban and rural preschool education in Internet plus, analyzes the main problems faced by preschool education and the reasons and presents the balanced development strategy of urban and rural preschool education in Internet plus. The research results show that preschool education in Internet plus provides rich educational resources and more opportunities to learn for rural kindergartens and provides parents with more ways to know their children’s situation. “Internet plus” has promoted education equity and improved education quality for urban and rural preschool education. The research results provide a theoretical basis for the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education in Internet plus.

KEYWORDS

Balanced Development, Faculty, Internet Plus, Preschool Education

Preschool education refers to the education for children aged 3-6, which is a very important part in the process of children’s growth. At this stage, children’s brains develop rapidly and have strong acceptance, so preschool education plays a vital role in children’s growth and development (Perez-Ferra et al., 2020). Preschool education not only plays a fundamental role in the education system, but it also plays a fundamental role in economic and social development. As preschool education has a great impact on the development of individuals, families, and countries, improving the quality of preschool education has become a global trend, and a major focus of this is the balanced development of preschool education. At the same time, the balanced development of preschool education is also an objective requirement for promoting rural revitalization, balancing urban and rural development, and promoting social equity and justice. In tandem with the vigorous development of the education industry, the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education has become an important measure to achieve educational equity and promote social harmony (Wen, 2022). However, due to the influence of geographical, economic, and cultural factors, there is a big gap between urban and rural preschool education development in China. How to solve the problem of insufficient and unbalanced

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development of preschool education in urban and rural areas has been a topic of discussion in academic circles (Zheng et al., 2021).

With the rapid development of Internet technology, all walks of life in China are entering the “Internet plus” era, and the education industry is no exception. Internet has broken the limitation of time and space under the traditional education mode and constructed a virtual education time and space, which has brought opportunities for optimizing the allocation of educational resources, changing educational methods, improving the quality of rural teaching and student comprehension, and promoting the balanced and high-quality development of urban and rural preschool education. Due to the technical support and rich educational resources of the Internet, “Internet plus” urban and rural preschool education has the advantages of openness, sharing, and cooperation. “Internet plus” education promotes the communication between teachers and students in urban and rural areas by breaking the barriers of time and space, integrates and shares high-quality educational resources, and transmits high-quality educational resources to remote areas, thus narrowing the educational gap between urban and rural areas. At the same time, parents can learn more about their children’s education in kindergarten, which promotes home-school cooperation (Hong et al., 2022). In addition, “Internet plus” can provide more learning opportunities and resources for children and stimulate their learning interest and potential. The balanced development of urban and rural preschool education in “Internet plus” is an important strategic move, which is of great significance for improving the overall education level in China. It is necessary to actively promote the application of “Internet plus” in preschool education and make contributions to educational equity (Su et al., 2020).

The rapid development of Internet technology provides a new opportunity for the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education. The combination of Internet and education, and the promotion of educational equity through informationization, have become an important means to solve the problem of educational imbalance. This paper takes the preschool education in Internet plus as the research object and compares the teachers’ strengths, school conditions, investment in education funds, and teaching quality between urban and rural preschool education in China through investigation and research. Then, it expounds the main problems faced by urban and rural preschool education in China at present and analyzes the reasons for the uneven development of urban and rural preschool education from the perspective of educational funds investment, educational resources sharing, and teachers. Combined with the “Internet plus Education” model, this paper puts forward the balanced development strategy of urban and rural preschool education in Internet plus to promote the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education in China (Rao et al., 2021; Su et al., 2021).

Despite the research on the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education achieving a lot of results, the research on the application of Internet plus in the field of preschool education is still relatively insufficient. Although the model of the Internet to promote the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education and the advantages of the Internet in educational resources have been briefly proposed, there is still a lack of in-depth research on applying the Internet in preschool education. In view of this background and expectation, this study aims to explore the strategy of promoting the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education under “Internet plus.” Through a questionnaire survey of 10 municipal kindergartens and rural kindergartens in Datong City, Shanxi Province, with teachers as the main target respondents, and peer-to-peer interviews with the funding department (Education Bureau), we analyzed the teaching quality and financial investment of each school. In order to solve the current problem of imbalance between urban and rural preschool education, this study proposes an Internet plus preschool teaching model, aiming to promote the equitable development of preschool education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In China, the development of preschool education is led by the government and is mainly driven by policies (Hou, 2016). In 2010, the Outline for National Medium-and Long-term Education Reform

and Development (2010-2020) and The State Council statements on the development status of preschool education were issued. Since 2011, the three-year Action Plan for Preschool Education has been formulated and implemented across the country to promote the standardized and high-quality development of preschool education. Due to the development of society and the promotion of policies, preschool education, as the foundation of basic education in China, has undergone great changes. For example, the penetration rate of preschool education has increased significantly. In 2018, the gross enrollment rate of preschool education was 81.7%, 25.1% higher than that in 2010. The growth rate of preschool children and the gross school enrollment rate of poor children in preschool education (especially in the remote areas and poor areas in the central and western regions) is also relatively high (He et al., 2018). Preschool education resources have increased exponentially. Comparing the data of preschool education in 2018 and 2010, it is found that in 2018, the total number of students in preschool education in China increased by 77.29%, the number of classes increased by 72.81%, the number of full-time preschool teachers increased by 125.60%, and the number of child-care workers increased by 467.79%. Financial investment in preschool education has increased substantially (Jiang et al., 2022).

The research on the balanced development of preschool education in urban and rural areas has achieved some research results. Rao et al. (2022) carried out theoretical research on the unbalanced development of preschool education in urban and rural areas, paid attention to the influence of government policies on the balanced development of preschool education in urban and rural areas from the perspective of financial investment, teacher training, and international communication. They concluded that the government increased its investment in preschool education in rural areas, and the hardware facilities of rural kindergartens have been significantly improved, but there is still a big gap between urban and rural preschool education teachers, education quality, and management level. They put forward a method of promoting the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education through distance education, online resource sharing, digital libraries, and other practices. Yang and Rao (2021) studied the application of "Internet plus" in the field of education. They took an online course platform in a university as the research object and provided an intelligent and digital management model for kindergartens, enabling teachers to better understand the learning situation of children and improve the teaching quality. At the same time, parents can also keep abreast of their children's performance in the kindergarten through mobile apps and other means to promote common education between families and kindergartens. "Internet plus" also provides rich learning resources for children, such as online courses and interactive games, which stimulates children's interest and enthusiasm in learning.

Iryna et al. (2023) studied the influence of online education on urban students and middle school students from rural low-income families. It is found that there is no statistically significant difference in knowledge acquisition between students from disadvantaged groups who have not received formal education and those who have received formal education after learning through MOOC (Massive open online course). At the same time, MOOC can educate disadvantaged groups and promote education equity. Wang et al. (2020) studied the present situation of preschool education in urban and rural areas and concluded that there is a huge gap between urban and rural preschool education. In cities, the government has invested heavily in preschool education, with a large number of kindergartens, strong teachers, and advanced educational facilities. However, in rural areas, due to economic limitations, the government's investment in preschool education is insufficient, the number of kindergartens is scarce, the teachers are weak, and the educational facilities are less developed. This gap not only affects the opportunities for rural children to receive quality education but also aggravates the development imbalance between urban and rural areas. Köse et al. (2021) studied the distribution difference of preschool education resources between urban and rural areas and found that there are many kindergartens in cities with strong teachers and advanced teaching facilities, while kindergartens in rural areas are facing problems such as insufficient numbers, weak teachers, and less developed teaching facilities. This difference not only affects the educational opportunities of children in rural

areas but also restricts the development of education in China. Therefore, investment in preschool education in rural areas should be increased to improve the quantity and quality of kindergartens in rural areas and provide better preschool education opportunities for children in rural areas.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

There has been rapid development of preschool education in China in recent years, and it is a long-term and arduous task to promote the balanced development of preschool education. With the implementation of a series of national policies, the number of preschool education schools in China has increased. However, there is still a gap between urban and rural preschool education in terms of teachers, school conditions, education quality, and funding, and the unbalanced situation of urban and rural preschool education has not changed (Infurna, 2020). In the field of preschool education, the teaching staff is undoubtedly the most critical factor, which constitutes the core of educational activities. Teachers' academic qualifications and professional titles reflect teachers' professional quality and overall quality to some extent, which directly affects the quality of education.

This paper selected 10 municipal kindergartens and rural kindergartens in Datong city, Shanxi Province as the research objects, and it conducts a questionnaire survey on the teachers in each school (Luo, 20127). The questionnaire includes gender, age, educational background, professional title, the number of Internet teaching platforms used, teachers' cognition of the influence of Internet technology on classroom teaching, and more. The efficiency of the questionnaire survey in each school reached 95%, and the overall reliability test value of the questionnaire was 0.94, which showed that the overall design of the questionnaire was scientific and reasonable, and the data source was highly reliable. On the basis of obtaining the questionnaire data, SPSS software was used to calculate the education, professional title, and basic teaching conditions of teachers in each school and make a comparative analysis.

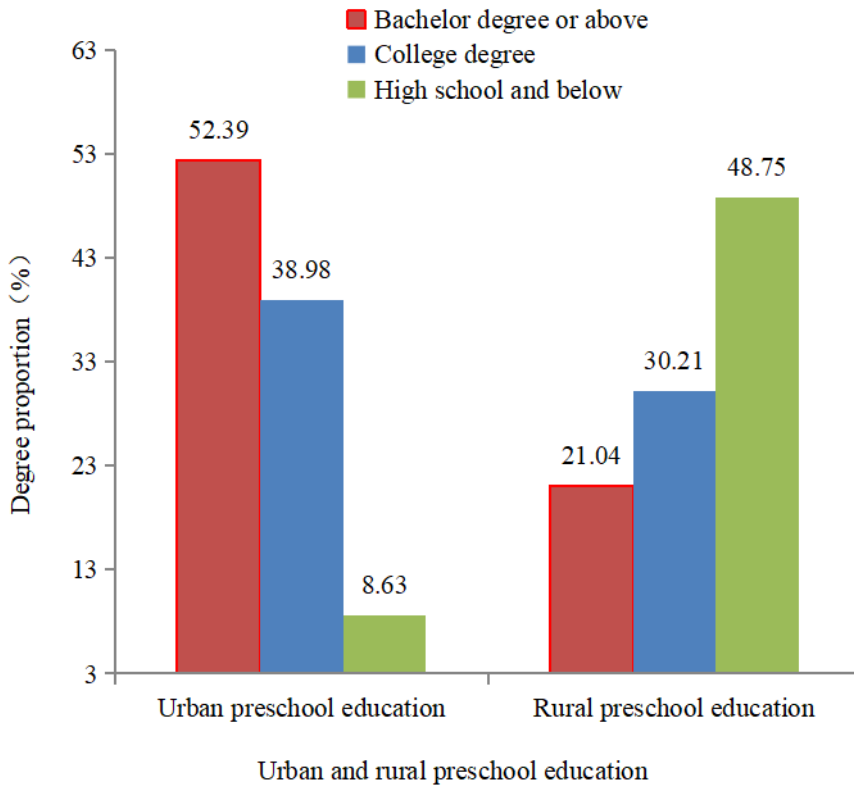
In order to analyze the teaching quality and funding input of each school, this paper conducted a peer-to-peer interview with the funding department (Education Bureau) of each kindergarten, and discussed the teaching quality of kindergartens, the use of Internet teaching platforms, funding input, information construction, and so on. Through interviews, this paper presents statistics on the teaching quality, funding investment, information hardware facilities, and the number of Internet platforms used in urban and rural kindergartens, and it analyzes the gap between urban and rural preschool education investment by comparison.

In order to solve the current unbalanced situation of preschool education in urban and rural areas, this paper advocates for Internet plus preschool education. Through Internet technology, the limitation of time and space is gradually broken, which provides a platform for the open sharing of educational resources. Abundant online education resources have created conditions for preschool education in rural and remote areas with a lack of teaching facilities, shortage of excellent teachers, and underdeveloped curriculum (Ferri et al., 2020). As part the emergence of the Internet plus education model, Internet education platforms such as webcasting classes and online training have developed (Bezovski & Poorani, 2016). In this paper, the literature research method is adopted, and the main platforms used in preschool education are counted by searching the related literature of Internet education platforms in China National Knowledge Infrastructure.

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the comparison table of preschool education teachers' academic qualifications between urban and rural areas according to the data obtained through the questionnaire survey. From Figure 1, it can be seen that kindergarten teachers in urban areas have a bachelor's degree or above, while only 21.04% of those in rural areas do, which is quite different. Kindergarten teachers in urban areas are mainly undergraduates, while those in rural areas are mainly seniors in high school and below.

Figure 1. Table of Comparison of Education of Preschool Teachers in Urban and Rural Areas



Therefore, there is a significant gap in teacher education between urban and rural areas in China, and the teachers in rural areas lag far behind urban areas (Jiang et al., 2022). Figure 2 shows the comparison of professional titles of preschool teachers in urban and rural areas. It can be seen from Figure 2 that the number of kindergarten teachers in urban areas with senior professional titles is 31.39%, and most of them are intermediate professional titles. Only 10.85% of rural kindergarten teachers have senior titles, and almost one third of the teachers in cities have only junior titles. It can be seen that there is also a significant gap in the titles of preschool teachers between urban and rural areas in China (Hong et al., 2020).

Table 1 gives a comparison of the basic conditions of preschool education between urban and rural areas. From Table 1, we can see that the average asset value of teaching computers, multimedia classrooms, and teaching instruments and equipment in urban preschool education is much higher than the asset value of those in rural areas; the average computer used for teaching is five times as valuable in an urban area. At the same time, the survey also found that a considerable number of schools in rural areas only have some basic facilities that can meet daily teaching, and their quality and functions are not guaranteed. Even some schools' multimedia equipment is in a state of paralysis due to imperfect management and disrepair and has not been applied to teaching. It can be seen that there is a clear gap between the basic conditions of urban and rural preschool education in China (Morrissey et al., 2022).

According to the data obtained through interviews, Table 2 shows the comparison of urban and rural preschool education funds. From Table 2, it can be seen that the investment of the competent authorities in urban preschool education is about five times higher than that in rural areas. Therefore, there is a big gap in preschool education funds, which makes it difficult to improve teaching quality.

Figure 2. Table of Comparison of Professional Titles of Preschool Teachers in Urban and Rural Areas

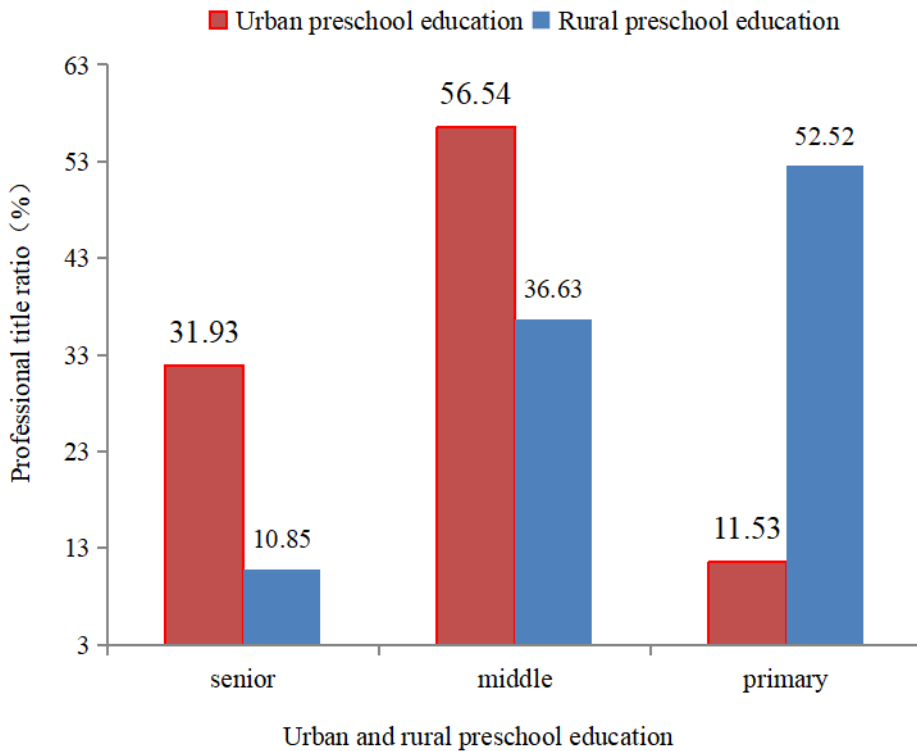


Table 1. Comparison of Basic Conditions of Preschool Education Between Urban and Rural Areas

Project	Urban preschool education	Rural preschool education
Number of computers for teaching per student (unit)	0.15	0.03
Network multimedia classroom per student(room)	0.02	0.01
Asset value of teaching instruments and equipment per student (10,000 yuan)	0.19	0.11

Table 2. Comparison of Urban and Rural Preschool Education Funds Investment

Project	Urban preschool education	Rural preschool education
Average education expenditure per kindergarten (10,000 yuan)	56.41	10.36

Table 3 shows the comparison of the number of Internet platforms used in urban and rural preschool education. It can be seen from Table 3 that the number of Internet platforms used in urban preschool education is basically three times that in rural areas, indicating that there are still some practical difficulties and problems with the use of Internet in rural preschool education.

Table 3. Comparison of the Number of Internet Platforms Used in Urban and Rural Preschool Education

Project	Urban preschool education	Rural preschool education
Number of Internet platforms used (units)	3.2	1.1

Table 3 shows a comparison of the number of Internet platforms used by urban and rural preschools. Specifically, urban preschools used an average of 3.2 Internet platforms, while rural preschools used an average of 1.1 Internet platforms. This reflects a gap between urban and rural preschools in the use of Internet technology. The fact that urban preschools generally apply more Internet platforms may imply that urban education resources are richer and technologically better equipped, while rural areas are relatively lacking in support and investment in this area. This data can help us understand the current situation of Internet technology utilization in urban and rural preschool education and provide reference for further exploration of urban-rural education gap and development.

Based on the literature investigation, Table 4 gives the main Internet education platforms in China. Since 2011, China’s Internet education platform has entered the curriculum, delivering high-quality educational resources to every place where it is needed so that every child can enjoy high-quality education. At the same time, the number of teachers can be increased and the quality can be improved, so as to promote the balance of teachers and help improve the uneven development of compulsory education in urban and rural areas. Providing live webcasts for schools in rural and underdeveloped areas where teachers are scarce through the Internet education platform, or presenting classroom teaching videos of excellent teachers to rural and remote schools by using audio and video playback equipment, can make up for the imbalance of curriculum structure caused by the shortage of teachers in schools to some extent. This can also solve the problem of teachers’ work enthusiasm decline caused by compulsory cross-regional and urban-rural exchanges between schools in traditional education (Subramaniam & Surendran, 2020). At the same time, under the aim of not affecting the normal teaching work, excellent teachers can improve the professional ability of teachers in rural and underdeveloped areas and improve teachers’ teaching level and quality through synchronous or asynchronous online education and training and online teaching and research. This can be done

Table 4. Main Internet Education Platforms in China

Internet education platform	Start using time (Year)
Dragonfly FM	2011
Cloud classroom of Netease	2012
VIPKID	2013
Tencent classroom	2013
Baidu chuanke	2014
Yuan tutoring	2014
Zuoyebang	2014
Ape search questions	2014
Himalayan FM	2014
Good future(TAL)	2015
iget	2015
Knowledge planet	2016
Zhihu Live	2016

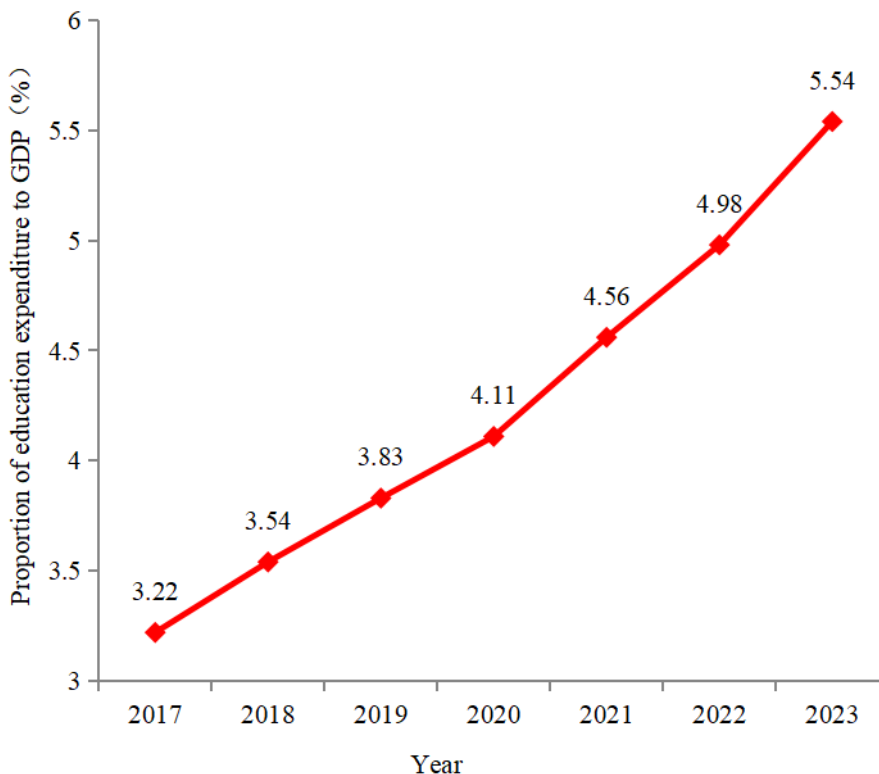
through the projects of “network classroom for famous teachers” and “network studio for famous teachers” (Chang et al., 2021).

DISCUSSION

Continuously developing Internet technology has penetrated into various fields. In the field of preschool education, the application of Internet technology is also increasingly extensive, which brings a new development direction for the imbalance of preschool education between urban and rural areas.

To support the increasing emphasis on preschool education in China, the development of “Internet plus Education” must have certain basic conditions, including hardware equipment, access to network broadband, the construction of school websites and related website teaching resources, and the daily maintenance of equipment and information training for teachers, all of which need the support of education funds (Ashurova, 2021). Figure 3 shows the ratio of education expenditure to GDP since 2017. It can be seen from Figure 3 that the investment in education funds in China is increasing every year. Educational resources and investment in educational funds are the key for Internet plus to promote the balanced development of preschool education in urban and rural areas. Preschool education, as the initial stage in the whole education system, is particularly critical for shaping students’ values. By actively promoting the construction of educational information infrastructure, the government has formulated the “Internet plus Education” construction scheme to ensure operation and maintenance funds, and it has encouraged schools to set up special funds for the daily maintenance and management of information equipment. In particular, they have strengthened financial support for economically underdeveloped rural and remote areas to improve their teaching conditions, optimize the allocation

Figure 3. Proportion of Education Expenditure to GDP

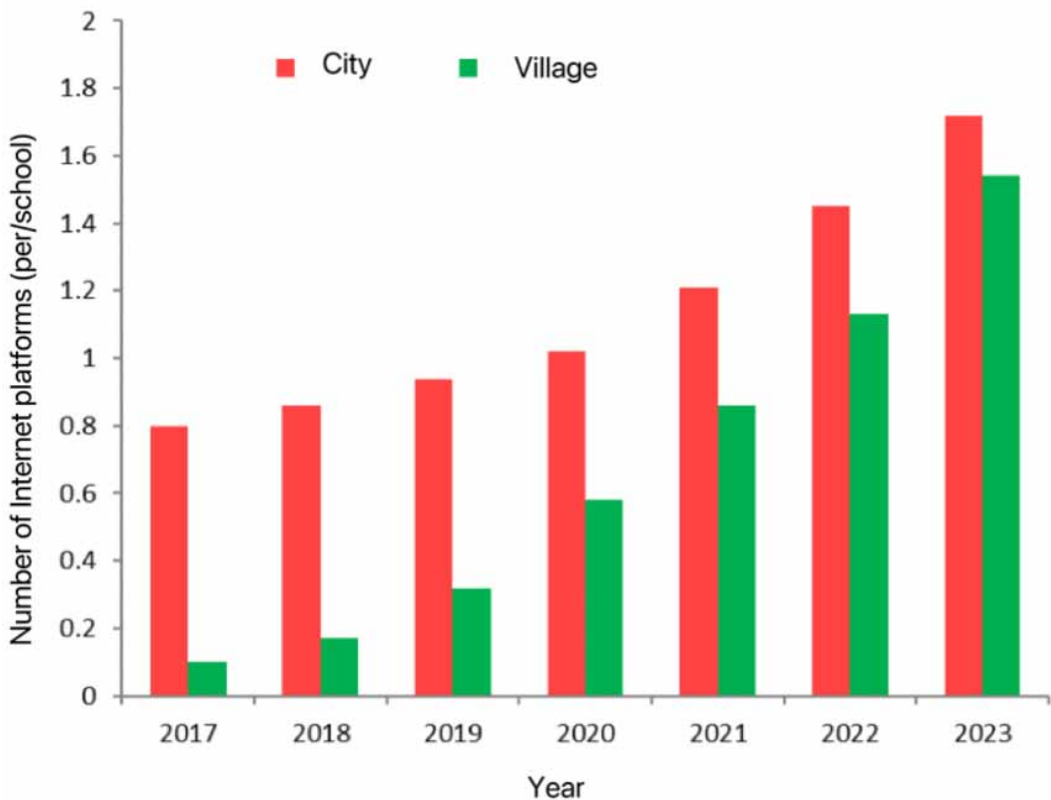


of educational resources, and ensure that these areas have the necessary educational information facilities and equipment, so that students in rural areas and remote mountainous areas can also enjoy the development achievements of educational modernization (Mikhailovna, 2020).

Optimizing the allocation structure of educational resources is an important way to improve the quality of education and to realize the rational utilization of educational resources and maximize benefits (Rahmatullah et al., 2021). According to the actual situation of different regions and schools, we should allocate educational resources reasonably so that every student can enjoy high-quality educational resources. At the same time, the training and management of teachers should be strengthened and teachers' teaching level and professionalism should be improved. In addition, the sharing and utilization of educational resources can be realized through information technology, so that more students can benefit. Figure 4 shows the usage of Internet platforms for urban and rural preschool education since 2017 (Vyas et al., 2021). It can be seen from Figure 4 that the number of Internet platforms for urban preschool education far exceeds that of rural areas, but with the rapid development of Internet plus education, the gap between urban and rural areas is gradually decreasing. This shows that, with the investment in rural education funds, the gap between urban and rural education resources is gradually decreasing. In the Internet age, we can use the network platform to watch lectures by famous teachers, attend online courses, and read e-books to obtain teaching resources; at the same time, we can also use social media to exchange ideas and share experiences with peers.

Internet technology provides more abundant and diverse teaching resources for kindergartens. Through the Internet education platform, teachers can easily obtain high-quality educational resources from all over the world, provide more colorful learning experiences for children, and also help

Figure 4. Use of Internet Platform for Preschool Education in Urban and Rural Areas



kindergartens to realize distance teaching, so that more children can receive high-quality preschool education. In order to promote the balanced development of preschool education in urban and rural areas, the government has increased its investment in hardware facilities of preschool education in rural areas, strengthened its support for the informatization construction of preschool education in rural areas, improved the quality and level of preschool education in rural areas, and promoted the application and development of “Internet plus” technology in preschool education in rural areas.

Internet technology can provide more resources and support for preschool education in rural areas and promote the balanced development of preschool education in urban and rural areas, but it also brings some challenges, such as network security issues and uneven educational resources. Therefore, we need to respond to these challenges actively while promoting the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education in Internet plus to ensure that both urban and rural areas can enjoy high-quality preschool education (Robatsch et al., 2021).

Through the Internet platform for remote teacher support, urban outstanding kindergarten teachers can support the teaching of rural schools through online live broadcasting or recording of lessons; through the Internet platform for the sharing of teaching resources, urban pre-primary education institutions can share high-quality teaching resources with rural schools; and through the development of online training and interactive learning, rural teachers are provided with professional learning opportunities to enhance their teaching standards. These practical cases fully demonstrate the importance of using Internet technology to narrow the gap between urban and rural education, improve the quality of teaching in rural preschools, achieve the interoperability and sharing of educational resources between urban and rural areas, and promote the fair and inclusive development of education through the strategy of “Internet Plus.”

CONCLUSION

Due to the rapid development of Internet technology, “Internet plus” provides a new opportunity to improve the quality of education and promote educational equity. Promoting the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education with the help of Internet technology has become an important topic in the current preschool education reform. In this paper, the urban and rural preschool education in “Internet plus” is taken as the research object, and through the digital technology of the Internet, the geographical restrictions are broken, so that high-quality educational resources can be more available and every child can enjoy a fair and high-quality education. At the same time, the application of artificial intelligence, big data, and other technologies makes teaching more personalized to meet the learning needs of each child. “Internet plus” has injected new vitality into the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education and made great contributions to the realization of educational equity. Through the bridge of the Internet, resourced can be shared resources to create a better future together.

Through measures such as optimizing resource allocation, strengthening teacher training, and establishing a resource sharing platform, the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education resources is realized. However, the balanced development of urban and rural preschool education is a long-term and complicated process, which can be improved from the following aspects: (a) deeply studying the application mode of Internet technology in urban and rural preschool education and exploring how to better use Internet technology to improve the quality of education; (b) strengthening the investment and support for Internet education in rural areas and improving the hardware facilities and software level of preschool education in rural areas; (c) studying how to ensure the fair application of Internet technology in urban and rural preschool education and avoiding the emergence of digital divide; (d) paying attention to network security, strengthening the protection of children’s privacy, and ensuring the smooth implementation of the balanced development strategy of urban and rural preschool education in Internet plus.

The direction of future research could be to invest in and support Internet education in rural areas, which, by upgrading the level of hardware facilities and promoting the widespread application of Internet technology, will help to narrow the gap between urban and rural education and ensure that every child can enjoy quality educational resources. In promoting the development of “Internet plus” urban and rural preschool education, we also need to pay attention to ensuring fair application, avoiding the creation of a digital divide, and guaranteeing the balance and fairness of preschool education resources in different regions. In addition, network security and the protection of children’s privacy are also issues that cannot be ignored, and it is necessary to strengthen attention to network security, enhance the protection of children’s privacy, ensure the safe application of information technology, and provide a guarantee for the sustainable development of urban and rural preschool education.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The article includes charts to support the results of this study.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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