

# Ensure Fairness on Education Management of School among Official Teachers and Unofficial Teachers in China

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## Abstract

Teaching has become a target career for many people; however, there is a treatment gap between official and unofficial teachers in China. This article aims to examine the specific problem of unfairness between official and unofficial teachers in Chinese schools and analyse the causes of this problem. Four themes were found with respect to the unfairness between unofficial and official teachers: lack of recognition, high work pressure, unavailability of social benefits and inability to attain higher positions. At the same time, the study proposes some positive coping strategies to eliminate or reduce the unfairness between official and unofficial teachers in schools based on the ethics of educational management. Through these strategies, this article hopes to guide educational administrators in their practice to eliminate or reduce the dilemma of unfairness among unofficial teachers.

**Keywords:** Education Management, School, Official Teachers, Unofficial Teachers

## Introduction

Teaching is a great career that many want to pursue as a teacher and a childhood aspiration. In China, however, there is an apparent social phenomenon that more and more people choosing to attend the government's official teachers' recruitment exams to become official teachers in educational institutions. Shockingly, the ratio of applicants to applicants for the most popular positions reached 1000:1 (Sohu, 2023). Despite the immense pressure and unique competition to take the official teachers' recruitment exam, the rush is on, and there are still vast numbers of people every year. It is worth mentioning that many of those who take the exam are already unofficial teachers in an educational institution, may be becoming an official teacher makes them feel more stable and happier (Di et al., 2019).

The unofficial teachers have followed the increasing education scale in China because traditional staffing of teachers with government titles has fallen well short of the number of teachers needed in schools. To address the educational needs of schools, including universities and primary and secondary schools, they have begun to increase the number of unofficial teachers (Chen, 2023). Since 2000, there has been a significant increase in the

number of unofficial teachers in China yearly (Guo, 2021). So that there are two distinct groups of teachers in China today, namely official teachers and unofficial teachers (Zhao et al., 2019). Generally, official teachers refer to the staff of government-affiliated institutions, also known as tenured teachers. This group of teachers is staffed by the government and commonly cannot be dismissed by their institution unless there are sufficiently strong reasons, for example, serious misconduct or incompetence. Even then, there is a highly complex process for dismissing them (IXL Learning, 2023). Unofficial teachers are also understood as non-tenured teachers who are often the temporary staff of educational institutions with limited rights under the contract they signed with the school district (Carvalho et al., 2018).

Some statistics show that about 40.32% of educational institutions employ unofficial teachers; among them, there are some schools with more than 20% of unofficial teachers in the post (Lv, 2022), and some schools have more unofficial teachers than official teachers (Yu, 2022). The total number of teachers in China has reached 17,929,700, so unofficial teachers have become a large group. This group is characterised by a large number, a high proportion and a low level of remuneration (Ji, 2022). In other words, the unofficial teachers are being treated unfairly. The social phenomenon of people's quest to become official teachers also shows that teaching has become a target career for many people, and there is a gap between official and unofficial teachers.

### **Problem Statement**

For all educational institutions, teachers are the foundation for teaching and learning activities (Guo, 2021). Both official and unofficial teachers contribute equally to education and do almost indistinguishable work in schools. Even in terms of teaching and work, unofficial teachers may have a higher task than official teachers (Zeng, 2022). However, there are significant differences between official and unofficial teachers regarding financial income, political treatment and social recognition (Liu et al., 2011).

In 2018, the Chinese government attempted to get more unofficial teachers on staff by increasing the number of official teachers (State Council, PRC., 2018). However, it did not propose a specific solution for solving and distributing the problem. It is clear that placing more official positions in the school is not an easy step to take. In addition, the Chinese government has tried to improve the motivation of unofficial teachers and create a fairer educational environment by increasing their salaries (General Office of the State Council, PRC., 2018). Although most schools have ensured that unofficial teachers are paid on time according to their wages, they are still treated less favourably than official teachers (Yu, 2022). Therefore, while education administrators in China are trying to address the unfairness of unofficial teachers, this phenomenon has yet to be changed.

The principle of fairness in educational management requires that educational administrators should not distinguish between official teachers and unofficial teachers in practice due to the different ways in which they are employed. Suppose unofficial teachers are not rewarded for their work equal to their responsibilities. In this case, this affects the quality of education and creates many ethical dilemmas. The primary responsibility for resolving this dilemma lies with the educational administrators. Therefore, how formulating more fair policies and how can implement the relevant procedures is the key to ensuring fairness between official and unofficial teachers, and it is also an essential matter that education management policymakers and school administrators must seriously consider and endeavour to put into.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To explore the meaning of unfairness by unofficial teachers in practice.
2. To analyse the reasons for the ethical dilemma of unfairness among unofficial teachers.
3. To explain the significance of ethics in ensuring equity for official and unofficial teachers through evidence and data.
4. To guide educational administrators to ensure fairness between official and unofficial teachers.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is unfairness for unofficial teachers?
2. What causes unfairness between official teachers and unofficial teachers?
3. Why do educational administrators need to address this ethical dilemma in practice?
4. How can educational administrators ensure fairness between official and unofficial teachers in practice educational institutions?

### **Unfairness Between Unofficial And Official Teachers**

Unofficial and official teachers have similar duties and tasks as teachers in the same school but do not have the same identities and benefits. A survey found that almost all unofficial teachers are unhappy with their work and life situation, and 60% want to change it (Yang, 2016). This also shows that unofficial teachers are always in an unfair situation, including a lack of recognition of their identity as teachers, high levels of work and life stress, low incomes and benefits, inadequate social security, and the psychological dilemma of unfairness caused by these issues.

#### **Theme 1: Lack of Recognition for Their Identity as a Teacher**

The employment of official teachers requires government approval and is a recognition of teachers' identities by the education department. However, in recent years, the continuing reform of China's political and educational systems has led to fewer and fewer staff of government-affiliated institutions and more temporary staffing of public institutions (Lv et al., 2018). At the same time, unofficial teachers have long been regarded as temporary staff within the schools, and they are also named "outsiders within the education system" because they are distinct from official teachers (Gao et al., 2018). Therefore, the low position of the unofficial teachers' identity, in general, is a problem compared to that of the official teachers. It is indisputable that unofficial teachers are individuals in society first and that they cannot work and live without a community. Only through interaction with students, colleagues, leaders and other stakeholders can unofficial teachers gain a sense of self-identity. However, unofficial teachers are often discriminated against due to their identity and are perceived as a group of teachers who are not teaching well or are not well qualified. This has led to a psychological state of discrimination against unofficial teachers in many schools (Zeng, 2022). The persistent unfairness has also led unofficial teachers to believe that they are inferior and lack recognition of their identity as a teacher (Li, 2016). Unofficial teachers' struggles with self-identity can also contribute to a lack of well-being, fulfilment and honour, leading to concerns about their careers.

Two main factors lead to the lack of recognition as teachers by unofficial teachers. Firstly, unofficial teachers are subject to high work pressure, low income and poor protection of their rights. Unofficial teachers are employed temporarily in schools rather than in a government-

employed. The school determines their offers and salaries (Huang, 2019), and they often do not have access to teacher rights. Second, unofficial teachers must take on many heavy and varied school tasks. In other words, the work for unofficial teachers is random (Kanno, 2011), requiring them to change roles at any time, depending on the school administrators.

### **Themes 2: Higher Work Pressure and Lower Wages**

Unofficial teachers face the most basic and important issues of higher work pressure and lower wages. The income that does not correspond to the workload directly affects unofficial teachers' happiness and achievement. A survey shows that unofficial teachers generally have lower salaries than official teachers in the same school, even though unofficial teachers and official teachers bear no difference in educational activity (Yang, 2016). This means that the issue of unequal wages for the same task is a common phenomenon among teachers in schools. It has become a fact that the wage gap between unofficial teachers and official teachers has widened (Qian et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2023), and the gap has been further enlarged.

In addition, official teachers are staff of government-affiliated institutions and are paid entirely by the government. Besides the basic salary, they also receive many extra financial benefits. As the title or position of an official teacher rises and the number of years worked grows, their basic salary will also increase. They do not have to worry about being paid wages or being dismissed from their job. By contrast, unofficial teachers are generally lower in salary and face the risk of not being paid on time and in full. Moreover, unofficial teachers are at risk of being dismissed due to their work (Qian et al., 2015). In order to ensure that their employment is not dismissed, they often have to offer to take on more duties in the school and spend more time on tasks such as lesson planning, home visits and marking assignments (Zeng, 2022). Also, unofficial teachers are unable to get a title promotion and cannot receive an increase in their basic salary.

### **Themes 3: Unavailability of Full Social Benefits**

Official teachers have a much higher sense of benefit to work than unofficial teachers because official teachers are registered active employees in government agencies and often enjoy a range of benefits such as many state-specific salary packages, performance pay, social security, and merit-based training qualifications (Zhao et al., 2019); however, unofficial teachers do not enjoy the full range of benefits as they are not government-appointed teachers. For example, physical health examinations, social insurance, medical insurance, end-of-year bonuses, and subsidies for various expenses are rarely included in the list of benefits granted to unofficial teachers. A survey of unofficial teachers found that 45.5% had social insurance and 31.8% had medical insurance, while the school paid few personal benefits. (Wang, 2018). Significant differences in benefits between official and unofficial teachers are due to the different employment systems and funding sources (Chen et al., 2023), leading to inequities in benefits and social security.

On the other hand, the rights and benefits of official teachers are not only in terms of salary and benefits but also in terms of job stability and tenure, social status and many other aspects. For example, unofficial teachers are entitled to regular statutory holidays and extra-long summer and winter holidays, unlike unofficial teachers (Qian et al., 2015).

**Themes 4: Unable to Obtain Higher Titles and Positions**

With the reform of education management, the difference between unofficial teachers and official teachers in terms of salaries, allowances and holiday benefits is gradually decreasing. However, unofficial teachers' lack of access to job titles and promotions has not improved (Zeng, 2022). Some surveys show that there is a significant difference between unofficial teachers and official teachers when it comes to job titles. They are also unable to access training, better teaching titles and subsequently higher incomes (Zeng, 2022; Wang, 2018). Statistics show that the number of unofficial teachers in one region who do not participate in title assessment is 91.4%, while the rate of official teachers is only 13.1% (Zhu, 2007).

Generally speaking, it is difficult for unofficial teachers working in schools to obtain the same status as official teachers, which further increases the inequality between official and unofficial teachers. Over time, educational administrators have developed a mindset that differentiates between official teachers and unofficial teachers in educational management, which further restricts the career development and career growth of unofficial teachers (Chen et al., 2023). Unofficial teachers also consciously classify themselves as a 'marginalised' vulnerable group and take it as a default to give more in their work, and are less interested in being awarded prizes and titles.

In summary, the inequitable situation of unofficial teachers requires a great deal of attention from education administrators. On the one hand, the persistence of the difference between official and unofficial teachers can lead to a differentiation in their moral and social status, work power, labour intensity, promotion space and unit identity. If unofficial teachers are subjected to long-term unfair situations will naturally generate unbalanced psychology and negative behaviour. (Xu et al., 2022). On the other hand, if unofficial teachers are not protected in terms of policy and identity, they may be marginalised in school and society. A positive teacher identity, which reflects teachers' affirmation of their objective selves, helps them unleash their subjectivity and creativity in teaching and learning (Guo, 2021). Unofficial teachers who remain in this predicament for extended periods will pose significant challenges to teaching and learning in schools and will impact the overall stability of education.

**The Significance of Fairness For Educational Management**

Unofficial teachers have alleviated the need for teaching resources in China's schools; however, in reality, unofficial teachers face an unfair situation with low professional recognition, low salaries, poor benefits and little social security. The inability of unofficial teachers to obtain fair recognition of their status and protection of their rights and interests has to some extent, affected the overall development of education for the better. Therefore, ensuring equity for unofficial teachers has become an important ethical issue for education administrators (Chen, 2023).

**Themes 1: The concept of fairness**

Fairness is an ethical concept that refers not only to the equal and just application of rules but also to the priority given to the least advantaged (Hooker, 2005). It is important to stress that equity also considers individuals' differences and abilities and should be satisfied in proportion to their strengths (Broome, 1991). Thus, the concept of fairness in human social practice contains equality rules, fair practice, protection of the weaker and equal reward:

1. The rule of equality aims to eliminate discrimination, inequality and bias (Zhang, 2015; Bhugra, 2016) and adopt the most fundamental principles to ensure everyone is treated

- equally, with equal opportunities and dignity (Yu, 2017; Wang, 2021).
2. Just practices, including the just distribution of resources, opportunities and outcomes (Li, 2019), ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed and develop (Strauss, 2015).
  3. Prioritising the protection of the interests of vulnerable groups, including the protection of the lives, rights and interests of vulnerable groups, so that disadvantaged groups receive care and recognition (Zhao, 2017; Li, 2015).
  4. Receiving rewards commensurate with effort means that people doing the same work should be treated and paid equally (Zhao, 2017), regardless of gender, race, age or other characteristics (Kim, 2017).

### **Themes 2: Fairness in Educational Management**

According to the concept of fairness, fairness means that educational administrators set equal rules to ensure equality of benefits and opportunities for stakeholders in the practice of educational management. Fairness also means that educational administrators are able to treat all people justly, including students, teachers, staff and other stakeholders.

However, the preceding already discussion shows a significant unfairness between official and unofficial teachers in China. The unofficial teachers are disadvantaged (Li, 2016) and do more work but receive less in return (Qian et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2023). More importantly, the long-standing gap between official and unofficial teachers regarding salaries, allowances, benefits, positions, rights and so on has led to a disregard for fair values (Chen, 2023).

In summary, for educational administrators, the quality of fairness includes justice in the process of hiring teachers, equality in the opportunities offered to all teachers, and the same in wages and benefits. A fairer environment will enhance unofficial teachers' sense of access and identity and make them more proactive in their educational work (Chen et al., 2018). Furthermore, as an educational administrator in schools, adherence to ethical principles of fairness in the face of ethical dilemmas will lead to good outcomes (Swanepoel et al., 2016).

### **Recommendation and Solutions**

In China, teachers' wages are directly proportional to their identity, and the identity of official teachers also implies additional rights and benefits (Zhang, 2011). However, the current education management system restricts the benefits of unofficial teachers and does not reflect fairness (Zhao, 2020). This article found that breaking down the barriers of the traditional government-employed teacher system, strengthening the monitoring rules to ensure the equal salary policy is implemented, and improving the quality of fairness among managers of educational institutions are critical strategies to address this issue.

### **Theme 1: Reforming The Traditional System**

Unofficial teachers are a marginalised group in educational institutions (Gao et al., 2018), lacking recognition and protection of their rights. In 2016, the Chinese Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security publicly stated that it would begin to cancel the staffing system of teachers in public universities and public hospitals (Wang, 2016). However, removing staffing is not the same as abolishing official teachers but rather implies a reform of staffing in the traditional (Chen, 2023). In other words, it is not a complete overthrow of the official teachers' employment system (Xu et al., 2022).

It is clear that the system of employment of official teachers has played an essential role in stabilising the teaching staff and ensuring the quality and quantity of teachers. Still, it has also

led to the long-term marginalisation of unofficial teachers (Zhang, 2016). The strategy of recruiting teachers through examinations while ensuring fairness in recruiting official teachers has neglected the unofficial teachers who have been teaching for a long time. Therefore, the method of recruitment examinations for official teachers should be optimised (Pang et al., 2019). The traditional examination for recruiting official teachers should be retained, and the experience and performance of unofficial teachers should be included as additional points so that some unofficial teachers with solid teaching experience can be official teachers more easily (Zhao et al., 2019). This is not only to allow unofficial teachers to become official teachers but also to make the teacher force more stable.

On the other hand, for unofficial teachers who have been working in educational institutions for a long time, the objective of the reform of educational management should be to enable them to gain fairness (Chen, 2023). Therefore, it is necessary to explore the employment practices of unofficial teachers from the top level to develop a standardised system of employment, management and remuneration, to create a favourable working environment, the rule of law and public opinion for unofficial teachers, reduce identity discrimination in educational institutions of identity (Huang, 2019).

### **Themes 2: Implement The Policy of Equal Pay For Equal Work**

"Equal pay for equal work" is a modern value that defends fairness and opposes discrimination (Feng, 2011) and is a crucial method to ensure fair wages and benefits for both unofficial and official teachers. The practical implementation of this policy will ensure the fairness of unofficial and official teachers in terms of salaries, allowances, incentives and benefits (Lv, 2022).

Equal pay for equal work means that the employer should pay the same wages who do the same tasks and get the same performance (State Council, PRC., 1995). In other words, educational institutions need to pay both official and unofficial teachers the same amount of salary for the same work, for the same amount of time and the same performance. However, the legal of equal pay for equal work is only set out as a principle without specifying the details and how to ensure the implementation of this principle, which has led to the loss of its practical meaning (Zhao, 2020).

The government-led and monitored policy of equal pay and equal word is a critical way to address the unfairness between official and unofficial teachers (Jin et al., 2023; Zhao, 2020). Firstly, it is essential to set up a special fund for unofficial teachers and provide strong support for their wages and benefits (Zhao, 2020). This will enable unofficial teachers to share social and school development achievements. Secondly, legislation should ensure that official and unofficial teachers are subject to the same performance appraisal system, rewards and punishments and receive the same welfare benefits (Chen, 2023). At the same time, accountability of education administrators who fail to implement the relevant policies. Third, to establish a management system for unofficial teachers and to improve the economic, political, social and professional standing (Zhao, 2020).

### **Suggestion**

For unofficial teachers, the school is the primary workplace where they feel fairness. The management philosophy of school administrators has a direct impact on the development of unofficial teachers. Therefore, school administrators have an important responsibility to ensure that unofficial school teachers are given fair benefits (Huang, 2019).

Firstly, school administrators should establish a fair management idea in education management and treat unofficial teachers without discrimination. They should pay attention to protecting unofficial teachers' right to information and the right to voice in some decisions concerning and encourage them to make suggestions (Xu et al., 2023). Caring with educational managers and good interpersonal relationships can help enhance the motivation and initiative of unofficial teachers to better engage in their teaching work.

Secondly, school administrators should help unofficial teachers to make scientific and specific designs for their careers (Xu et al., 2023) and ensure that they have more opportunities to participate in the evaluation of teachers' titles and get a fair chance to compete (Zhao et al., 2019; Jin et al., 2023; Pang et al., 2023). In activities such as educational training, lecture competitions and cultural game, school administrators should involve both official and unofficial teachers in joint activities to ensure fairness between the two and enhance the unity of the school's teacher community (Cai, 2020).

Thirdly, school administrators should always pay attention to the needs of unofficial teachers and create a friendly working environment to enhance their recognition of their identity as teachers (Huang, 2019; Cai, 2020). Suppose the conditions of unofficial teachers are not addressed. In that case, their motivation to work will inevitably be affected, resulting in conflicts in the new labour relations, impacting the school's education activity.

Fourthly, school administrators must firmly implement government policies, such as equal pay for equal work (Chen, 2023), to ensure fairness in the benefits of unofficial and official teachers (Zhao et al., 2019). Also, all kinds of allowances should be given to unofficial teachers by the law (Cai, 2020).

Fifthly, unofficial teachers and official teachers should be the same way in the arrangement of teaching activities (Cai, 2020). Unofficial teachers should not be required to do more work or work unrelated to their teaching so that their work intensity and remuneration are balanced and their sense of discrimination at work is reduced.

## **Conclusion**

This article shows that, in China, the unfairness for unofficial teachers includes a lack of recognition of their identity as teachers, a mismatch between workload and reward, and an inability to access comprehensive benefits and higher titles or positions. Therefore, this article proposes that in the management practices of educational administrators, the injustice of unofficial teachers should be addressed from three aspects: institutional, regulatory and managerial. Specifically, firstly, the traditional employment system of unofficial teachers should be reformed to protect the fair rights and benefits of unofficial teachers from the root; secondly, the monitoring rules and accountability system should be strengthened to ensure the implementation of equal pay for equal work; thirdly, educational administrators in educational institutions should raise their concern for unofficial teachers in their practice. However, whether these measures effectively address unofficial teachers' unfair situation still needs further evaluation and improvement. Improving the treatment and benefits of unofficial teachers remains a difficult challenge, but establishing a fairer management system is essential. Therefore, in future research, the deeper level causes of inequity of unofficial teachers should be further explored from an empirical perspective, and more concrete and practically valuable strategies are proposed to build a more equitable education system



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