



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Influence of Socioeconomic Background on Marginalized Students' Access to China Private University Education and Strategies for Addressing

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ABSTRACT

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This paper explores the social, structural, contextual, and organizational challenges limiting the private higher education opportunity for disadvantaged learners in China. With a heuristic qualitative systematic review, it emphasizes how funding issues, early education prejudice, cultural prejudice, and institutional constraint contribute to the marginalization of undesirable private universities. Largely unaffordable tuition fees coupled with low access to financial aid sources lock out low-income and rural students, and a defective early childhood education system weakened competency. Moreover, prejudices against private universities and cultural representativeness deepen some psychopathological disturbances like loneliness and realization of the Minerva syndrome. Political and financial setbacks equally curtail resource-deficient private universities' capacity to support marginalized groups. In view of these challenges, the study suggests that government should tighten financial aid, reform early childhood education, and promote cultural diversity and relations between institutions and government. This study provides actionable policy recommendations to promote equity and inclusion for marginalized students in China's private higher education system.

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INTRODUCTION

China's education system is characterized by a dual structure comprising public and private institutions, each playing distinct roles. State universities have always performed well and have enjoyed the greatest proportions of financial subsidies along with the least regulatory freedom. Nevertheless, in view of the growing economy and the increasing demand for higher education, market-oriented reform launched in the 1990s provided the basis for the establishment of private universities. These institutions were meant to fulfill the intention of education for the learners who could not get admission to any of the public universities, since there was restricted physical space to accommodate them. While public universities focus on research and theoretical education, private universities provide members of the community with vocational and technical education according to the labor market demand (Yu & Ertl, 2010).

However, despite their more creative strategies in funding, private universities are perceived as second-tier institutions designed to serve students who cannot gain admission into public universities. These schools can readily admit students from the lower classes, such as the rural and poor, since they are flexible institutions, but the same classes struggle financially. Tuition fees are on average high, while there are very few scholarships and/or opportunities to gain loans. Therefore, private higher education is financially out of reach for many (Li & Morgan, 2011). Besides, marginalized students encounter systemic challenges rooted in early education inequities and the

gaokao examination, which heavily favors urban students with better schooling resources (Liu, 2020).

Cultural and psychological challenges further exacerbate these barriers. First, learners from humble beginnings are exposed to cultural prejudice, minority or no existence, and mental strain from distress, melancholy, and perceived fraudulence. For ethnic minorities, these weaknesses are even more definite and are indicative of the structural and cultural forms of discrimination. Even though private universities are capable of providing opportunities for these students' enrollment, they encounter many problems, such as lack of resources as well as low status, which hampers their efforts to accommodate these students adequately. Thus, this research will seek to identify these versatile issues and recommend practical solutions to enhance the access, equity, and diversity of private higher learning institutions in China.

1.1 Background of the study

China's transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one in the 1990s brought profound changes to its education system. Due to high demand in education, transcending the absorptive capacity of public universities, the option of private universities was developed. These institutions mainly provide vocational and technical courses that would enable students to meet the challenges in the new world employment sector. In today's context, private universities work on a very important agenda of broadening the enrollment of post-secondary education, especially for learners who are not offered any chance to attend any of the public universities (Yu & Ertl, 2010).

However, the rise of private universities has also highlighted deep-seated inequalities in access to education. Scholarship financing, therefore, is a key deterrent for marginalized students, especially those from rural or low-income backgrounds. Thus, the tuition in private universities is known to be much higher than in state universities because there are considerably fewer well-developed sponsorship programs, such as scholarships or government-based loans, available for students at such universities. This has remained a tall order for many rural families, given the fact that, even as they struggle to raise tuition fees for private higher education, they are also forced to allocate part of their earnings towards accommodation in urban areas (Li & Morgan, 2011).

Systemic inequities further compound these challenges. Rural-to-urban education inequalities undermine productive schools, and increase pre-Gaokao test performance gaps, thus making marginalized students less competitive in examinations. Being the major criterion for entering a university in China, gaokao has an advantage for urban students with better learning resources. This systematic exclusion does not only limit opportunities public university but also locks out students into the system of private higher education (Liu, 2020). In addition, cultural and institutional influences also play a part in all this. Institutionalized negative culture and cultural exclusion of these students are usually manifested by low academic performance are since these students are ridiculed, and they feel and are isolated. Psychological challenges, including anxiety, depression, and loneliness, are also prevalent among these groups, particularly ethnic minorities. Lack of funding and cultural beliefs that learners from private universities are substandard, are barriers to proper handling of these concerns by private university institutions. This background underscores the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to enhance equity and inclusion in China's private higher education sector.

1.2 Research objectives

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the barriers and challenges that marginalized students face in accessing and thriving within private universities in China, focusing on systemic, socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors. To achieve this objective, the following secondary objectives have been identified.

- To determine how economic barriers, such as tuition fees, limited financial aid, and housing costs, restrict access for economically disadvantaged students.
- To determine how psychological challenges and cultural biases hinder marginalized students' academic performance and social integration.
- To determine the structural and resource constraints in private universities that limit their ability to provide inclusive education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The factors that confine the opportunity of minority students to access private higher education in China have also been established in previous literature in terms of socioeconomic, cultural, and system. Researchers have previously explored how individual, community, and structural factors help maintain such differences. The public-private research that Yu & Ertl (2010) investigated to compare the privatized and public university sectors demonstrates that the private university provision increased access opportunities but bridged it for rural and low-stake students because of costly tuition fees and actually existing and inadequate opportunities for financial assistance. Their study depicted how private institutions, instead of reducing educational disparities, actually foster them.

2.2 Socioeconomic barriers to access

Dong and Wan (2012) explored the impact of rising tuition fees, which they argued had rendered private universities financially inaccessible to students from rural areas. Analyzing the situation, the authors stated that the lack of adequate government-guaranteed loans or scholarships added to financing woes and restricted the poor families' enrollment at universities. In the same way, Hannum and Meiyuan (2006) also researched geographic inequalities, finding that rural students seldom received adequate preparatory education. This differential had the effect of decreasing their competitiveness in passing the gaokao, the critical university entrance exam, or the College Entrance Examination.

Yeung (2013) tried to understand the implications of higher education expansion and found that it was really beneficial to the urban and rich strata. As before, laboring students as well as the rural students remained extremely disadvantaged by systemized discrimination in the distribution of resources as well as inadequate preparation for education. Gruijters (2022) studied trends in educational stratification during China's transformation, revealing that intergenerational inequalities persisted as family income and parental education levels significantly influenced higher education opportunities. Education injustice for marginalized groups was also highlighted by Wei et al. (2022), who discovered that family social capital was paramount in influencing a group's chances of gaining admission into elite universities.

2.3 Cultural and psychological barriers

Cultural and psychological aspects also played their part in determining the plight that marginalized students had to endure. In their institutional interactions, these students felt isolated and incompetent, as Yang (2023) pointed out. Another reason for this feeling was the actual absence of minorities in the rules and policies of the university. Liu (2020) also pointed out the marginalization of private universities as if they were substandard facilities compared to public university institutions. Not only did students' self-esteem suffer because of this societal bias, but there was also a restriction of institutional change to increase equity pursuits. Yu and Ertl (2010) further noted that barriers to cultural responsiveness persisted, in large part because most private colleges and universities have yet to address how marginalized populations fit into their classrooms and communities. Wang (2023) discovered that institutions that promote a culturally responsible environment and the availability of specific assistance programs enhanced learners' experiences of the marginalized group. However, such initiatives were proactive and could only be implemented where institutional commitment and resources could be obtained, and these were seldom available in private universities.

2.4 Systemic inequalities in early education

In a similar context, Hannum and Meiyuan (2006) have given a good account of geographic disparities and how early educational opportunities were systematically deprived of rural students. Many of these students studied in poorly equipped schools that had poor facilities, and most of them could not afford good teachers to prepare them for the gaokao. Yeung (2013) also supported these findings, asserting that early education was characterized by systemic deficits that guaranteed rural students continued unfair dismissal from education despite the emerging higher education regime. Xu (2023) analyzed the distribution of educational inequities between the urban and the rural by defining how

the rural families lost the game of capital to the urban families and provided the children an educational capital as a result of their social and cultural capital. These gaps were widened by policies that benefited urban schools, leaving rural students in a worse position. Gruijters (2022) noted that these problems were being aggravated by intergenerational transmission, since children from low-income families did not have what it took to escape educational poverty.

2.5 Institutional limitations and reforms

The challenges faced by private universities in supporting marginalized students stemmed from institutional constraints. In the work of Li and Morgan (2011), the institutional and cultural factors that influence educational equity were investigated, and the authors concluded that due to small funding and cultural prejudices, private universities were incapable of conservative equity activity. They found out that systematic changes, expansion of government funding, and soon, were required to overcome such constraints. Wei et al. (2022) examined the Independent Freshmen Admission (IFA) system, a reform designed to diversify admissions criteria beyond test scores. Although there was a notion that such a policy might improve access for disadvantaged students, the potential of this policy was not expanded without further systemic transformations. Dong and Wan (2012) and Xu (2023) pointed out that current financial aid schemes have not been sufficient, and there is a review needed on existing anti-inequality policies in scale and foundation.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study employs a systematic review methodology to synthesize and analyze qualitative research findings on the socioeconomic and systemic challenges faced by minority learners pursuing private university education in China. The research design was tailored to identify and critically examine pertinent themes within existing literature, providing a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The systematic review process and data analysis techniques are detailed below.

3.2 Study approach

The study used a systematic qualitative review approach to review factors that favored the enrollment of marginalized students in private universities in China. This design was suitable because it made it possible to analyze evidence derived from primary research that already existed. Systematic reviews are widely regarded as effective for summarizing complex issues by employing explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to minimize researcher bias (Tawfik et al., 2019). For instance, the qualitative reviews are known for the ambition to include evidence from as many sources as possible, to capture the complexity of the topic of research (Ahn et al., 2018).

This study focused on barriers related to socioeconomic status, institutional limitations, and cultural factors, relying on past studies as secondary data sources. The selected studies included tuition costs (Dong and Wan, 2012), systemic inequality (Xu, 2023), and generational education division of labor (Gruijters, 2022). The qualitative systematic review design was appropriate given the availability of heterogeneous evidence addressing these themes.

3.3 Systematic review process

A structured, step-by-step approach was followed in conducting the systematic review:

Step 1: Research question development

The SPIDER (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, and Design, Evaluation, and Research type) tool was applied to develop a well-defined research question: What are the socioeconomic and systemic barriers to marginalized students accessing private universities in China? The SPIDER framework ensured a clear focus on qualitative evidence relevant to the research objectives.

Step 2: Preliminary research

Preliminary searches were conducted in academic databases, including Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus, using keywords such as "*marginalized students*," "*China*," "*private universities*," and "*educational barriers*." Inclusion criteria included peer-reviewed articles published in English between 2001 and 2023 that focused on barriers in private higher education access in China.

Exclusion criteria omitted studies unrelated to marginalized populations or those based on reviews rather than primary data.

Step 3: Search strategy

Systematic search was performed using a combination of keywords like “PRIVATE UNIVERSITY ACCESS IN CHINA AND SOCIOECONOMIC BENEFITS.” The search produced articles that centered on institutional, cultural, and systemic barriers (Hannum & Meiyang, 2006; Li & Morgan, 2010; Yang, 2023).

Step 4: Screening of titles and abstracts

Articles were screened based on relevance to the research question and adherence to the inclusion criteria. Duplicate studies and irrelevant papers were excluded. The Cochrane guidance recommends multiple reviewers for screening; however, given resource limitations, the researcher independently verified the eligibility of each study.

Step 5: Data extraction

This step involved collecting data from full-text articles downloaded from the databases in a structured excel sheet.

3.4 Data analysis

The data was analyzed by a qualitative content analysis method. In this method, data is summarized into themes and categories, which makes it easy to look for patterns across studies (Graneheim et al., 2017). As systematic reviews are predicated upon the use of deduction, this investigation was informed by previous theorization on educational inequity (Armat et al., 2018). Subthemes were derived from the data, including financial constraints (Dong & Wan, 2012), discrimination in early childhood education (Hannum and Meiyang, 2006), and cultural capital in education (Xu in press). This approach made it possible to synthesize data identified, depicting the interrelated sociopathic factors influencing institutional culture and resulting in marginalized learners’ difficulties.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 1 below represents a summary of the articles identified for inclusion in the review. The extraction data includes relevant data such as author and year of publication, country of the population studied, study design, sample characteristics, and main findings.

Table 1: Summary of articles included in the review

Author/Year	Country of Population Studied	Study Design	Sample Characteristics	Main Findings
Yu & Ertl (2010)	China	Qualitative Study	Private and public university students	Private universities expanded access but excluded marginalized groups due to financial barriers.
Dong & Wan (2012)	China	Mixed-Methods Study	Rural students, low-income families	High tuition and lack of financial aid severely limited private university access for rural students.
Hannum & Meiyang (2006)	China	Longitudinal Study	Rural vs. urban students	Systemic disparities in early education disadvantaged rural students in the gaokao competition.
Liu (2020)	China	Qualitative Analysis	Marginalized students	Highlighted the stigma and cultural biases against private universities, impacting marginalized students.
Yeung (2013)	China	Quantitative Study	Urban and rural populations	Higher education expansion primarily benefited urban and

				affluent students, exacerbating inequalities.
Gruijters (2022)	China	Comparative Analysis	Analysis Low-income families	Persistent intergenerational inequalities due to socioeconomic and educational stratification.
Wei et al. (2022)	China	Policy Evaluation	Marginalized groups, policy stakeholders	Found limited impact of the Independent Freshman Admission (IFA) policy without systemic reforms.
Xu (2023)	China	Bourdiesian Analysis	Urban and rural families	Urban families' social and cultural capital exacerbated disparities for rural students.
Yang (2023)	China	Ethnographic Study	Marginalized university students	Marginalized students faced alienation due to lack of representation and cultural inclusivity.
Wang (2023)	China	Students in inclusive programs	Students in inclusive programs	Culturally responsive environments improved marginalized students' experiences.

Changes in tuition fees for Chinese university students (1997 = 100).

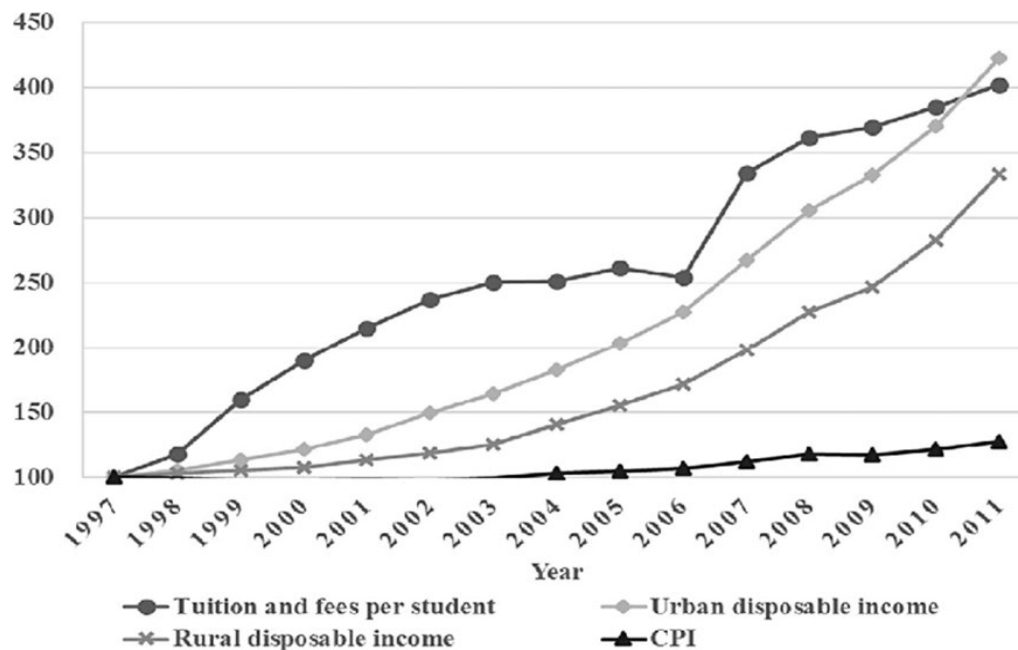


Figure 1: Uploaded by Duoduo Xu

The figure above shows how high the cost of education in China affects poor families in the sense that they are reluctant to take up private universities. Tuition fees have skyrocketed, increasing 25-fold since 1989, and by 2011, the average tuition exceeded the growth rate of rural disposable income, consuming over 20% of GDP per capita. The total cost for raising a child through to a university level in terms of cost of living from primary to university is equivalent to 4.2 years income of an urban household and 13.6 years income of a rural household. This financial burden is especially a burden as much as low-income earners are concerned and are further made to struggle when they have to afford tertiary education, especially in private universities where the costs are even higher. While improvement has been made in the development of policies and practices to support the disadvantaged's access to compulsory education, family income and background continue to determine access to superior education, and this is a worry in relation to equity and social mobility.

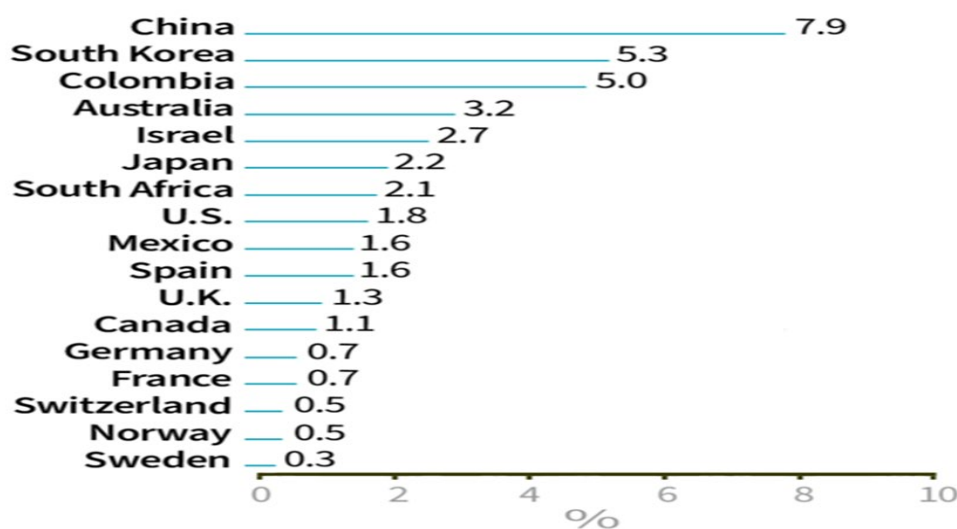


Figure 2: Percent of household expenditure spent on education by country. Dezhuang Hu, Hongbin Li, Tang Li, Lingsheng Meng, and Binh Thai Nguyen (2023). The Burden of Education Costs in China: A Struggle for All, but Heavier for Lower-Income Families. SSRN working paper. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4558282

China's households let an even greater percentage of their income be spent on education, with an average yearly spending of 17.1%, a figure that is higher than developed countries like the United States, Japan, or Korea. Within this total, in-school expenditure is even higher, being 73% of the total, poorer families devote 56.8% of their income to schools, spending less in absolute terms than the richer ones. This creates a heavy financial burden, especially for low-income and rural households, exacerbating economic inequality. While this investment reflects the value placed on education, it also highlights disparities in access and raises concerns about affordability, potentially limiting opportunities for many families. As much as this investment is an appreciation for the value of education, it also raises equity and issues of cost and accessibility that may in turn serve to lock out many families from opportunities.

4.1 Findings in detail

4.1.1 Socioeconomic barriers

Yu and Ertl (2010) investigated private university development in China in the background of the restricted enrollment scale of public universities. These universities played the role of lowering the barriers to high education, but served affluent urban students mainly since the triple-digit tuition costs made it financially unmanageable for low-income families. Dong and Wan (2012) expanded on this, emphasizing that tuition and other costs like accommodation rendered private education inaccessible to rural students. Since there were no effective financial assistance programs such as scholarships and state-supported credits available, these communities remained excluded, forming a vicious circle. Gruijters (2022) described and compared the continuity and change of generational social immobility and cultural reproduction. His study revealed that family income and parents' educational levels significantly influenced students' chances of pursuing higher education, including private universities. Marginalized students were at a consistent disadvantage because they lacked the financial stability and social capital required to overcome these barriers. Consequently, a study done by Yeung in 2013 that looked into higher education expansion in China found out that this expansion was not universal as it only favored the rich urban dwellers. This adjusted for gender inequality, but what was clear was that, despite increased enrollment, inequalities in the system persisted, meaning that education enrollments and attainment remain systematically stratified by socio-economic status.

4.1.2 Systemic inequities

Hannum & Meiyuan (2006) discussed the systemic biases embedded in China's early education system, focusing on urban-rural disparities. They also established that rural students were required to attend under-resourced schools with less qualified teachers to enable them to propel themselves in the gaokao. Having acted as the primary university entrance examination for years, the gaokao

was already known to be biased in favor of urban students, who have access to better education in general. Liu (2020) supported these findings, pointing out that the lack of resources only reproduced exclusion, not only in public universities but also in private ones, in which excluded students already have financial problems. Building upon the above analysis, Xu (2023) expands this analysis using Bourdieusian concepts and systematically elucidating how social and cultural capital help maintain systemic oppression. Families used their connections and understanding of how best their children could be placed in a different school, hence exacerbating the gulf between rural and urban learners. The study also showed that while the private universities tried to be as diverse as possible in their recruitment policies, they were still locked into a system that favored the early years of school education in urban areas, leaving the rural students ill-prepared and disadvantaged in their admissions.

4.1.3 Cultural and psychological barriers

Cultural and psychological challenges also emerged as significant barriers for marginalized students in private universities. Liu (2020) admitted that private universities in China opened with the label that they offer substandard education to those at public universities, a factor that reduces the morale of the learners attending private universities. This societal bias also contributed to cultural isolation, and low motivation among students contributes to the marginalized group. Yang (2023) explores the specific aspects of culture in private universities, revealing that learners, who come from rural areas and from low-income households encountered feelings of loneliness because of the lack of representation of their identity in the multiple cultural practices within the universities.

Yang's ethnographic study revealed that marginalized students frequently experienced impostor syndrome and psychological stress, including anxiety and depression, which further impeded their academic performance. But Wang (2023) showed that institutions creating culturally relevant contexts could enhance these learners' experiences greatly. This study pointed out that through special initiatives for targeted isolation counteraction, including mentoring and peer support, one can reduce feelings of loneliness among students. However, these initiatives entail the provision of great institutional support and funding, which many private universities cannot afford.

4.1.4 Institutional constraints

Other challenges in the context of private institutions are also attributable to the small financial and organizational resources of private universities. The study of Wei et al. (2022) examined the Independent Freshman Admission (IFA) policy, which was implemented in an effort to decrease dependence on examinations. While the policy showed promise, it was insufficient to address deeper systemic issues like early education disparities and financial inequities. Their discoveries highlighted that without broader systemic reforms, such policies could only have a marginal impact. Thus, Li & Morgan (2011) investigated the social realities of institutional funding barriers and prejudice related to private universities to explain that these conditions diminish the impact of diverse practices. Recommendations derived from their study were that more government funding should be provided to enhance private universities' positions to offer scholarships, upgrade physical facilities, and introduce equity programs. Xu (2023) also noted that available financial aid regimes were also insufficient to meet the holistic needs of marginalized learners, for instance, tuition, accommodation, and other miscellaneous fees.

4.1.5 Implementation of the study

This study employs a quantitative systematic review to review the literature on the problem under investigation and provides the reader with the best available research evidence to understand the challenges faced by marginalized students. By analyzing peer-reviewed articles, this research integrates insights on socioeconomic, systemic, cultural, and institutional challenges. The SPIDER framework ensures a focused evaluation of studies and qualitative content analysis methods help in identifying themes and patterns. These findings form the basis from which practical policies and institutional frameworks that seek to address vulnerability can be developed.

4.1.6 Recommendations

Thus, for an effective solution to the challenges facing marginalized students in ill admission to private universities in China, a complex intervention is required. First, the governments have to

increase more student financing, involvement, scholarships, and, grants of low-interest loans on one hand, and, the high tuition fees and cost of living the other more especially in rural areas and families with low incomes. This recommendation is consistent with Dong and Wan (2012) and Yu and Ertl (2010), who identified the research cost as the main push factor. Similarly, major education system reforms are also important for narrowing the resource disparity between developed regions and rural areas. Investment in the physical structures, training teachers, as well as delivering resources fairly in rural schools would assist the student to be more prepared to do their best in the gaokao, help as is the concern of Hannum & Meiyang (2006).

Privately funded universities also require effectively promoting cultural diversity through associations such as the mentorship program, the peer support system, and equal faculty and staff diversity training. Both Yang (2023) and Wang (2023) provided evidence indicating that cultural interventions enhance student experiences and minimize disconnection of marginalized students from schooling. Moreover, such policy changes to universities are needed to increase the enrollment policy diversity, including developments such as the enhancement of the Independent First-year student Admission (IFA). However, as Wei et al. (2022) pointed out, the main policies for achieving these goals have to be backed with other more extensive systemic changes.

Finally, partnership between the government and private universities needs to be a priority given the fact that individual institutions are constrained in their resource envelopes. Increased government funding can enable private institutions to implement equity-focused initiatives, such as expanding financial aid, improving facilities, and offering psychological support programs. As Li and Morgan (2011) argued, such measures are vital for private universities to fulfill their potential as inclusive education providers. Taken together, these recommendations seek to enhance access, equity, and diversity at a private college in China that seeks to offer opportunities for success to marginalized students.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers marginalized students face in accessing private universities in China, highlighting systemic inequities, socioeconomic challenges, cultural stigmas, and institutional limitations. This section provides answers to the research questions by considering the articles reviewed, highlights the importance of the themes identified, relates the results to prior findings, and enumerates the limitations that can be found in the study as well as possible future research directions explored.

5.1 What are the primary socioeconomic barriers marginalized students encounter when accessing private universities in China?

The findings confirm that high tuition fees and associated living costs are the most significant barriers for marginalized students. Yu and Ertl (2010) pointed out that while private universities were established to increase access to university education, they tend to enroll more rich students due to these expensive charges. Also, Dong and Wan (2012) identified that the lack of government-supported loans or scholarships also removes low-income and rural students, because they cannot afford these expenses. These socioeconomic challenges reflect persistent inequalities, as Gruijters (2022) observed that intergenerational disparities in family income and educational attainment perpetuate limited access for marginalized groups. These findings are in line with more general research on education inequality and reveal the economic context as a worldwide problem of private universities (Altbach, 2011).

5.2 How do systemic issues, such as early education inequities and the gaokao examination, contribute to the exclusion of marginalized groups from higher education?

Systemic inequities in early education significantly disadvantage marginalized students in the gaokao, China's university entrance examination. In their study, Hannum and Meiyang (2006) indicated that, in general, these rural students are attending schools with fewer resources, and those resources are also inadequate to prepare them for the gaokao. Xu (2023) built on this by elaborating how urban families apply social and cultural capital to achieve educational assets, which compounds the rural students' disadvantages. These findings corroborate with Yeung (2013), who discovered that relative to expanding higher education in China, urban and affluent people were the primary beneficiaries of university enrollment. The systemic biases embedded in the gaokao system not only

limit access to public universities but also reduce the competitiveness of marginalized students in private institutions.

5.3 What psychological and cultural challenges do marginalized students face within private university environments, and how do these impact their educational experiences?

Cultural prejudices as well as psychological barriers impact marginalized students' learner experiences in private universities, as the outcomes suggest. Liu (2020) revealed that there is a lot of prejudice against private universities in society, and this reduces the morale of students attending private universities. From a review of literature, Yang (2023) proposed that marginalized students feel socially excluded, stressed, and phony due to campus ethnic billionaires. Wang (2023) noted that culturally responsive practices, such as mentorship and diversity initiatives, can alleviate these challenges, though many private universities lack the resources to implement them. The results of this study echo prior research done on diversity in international classrooms, claiming that ethnic diversity has to address both representation and affirmative measures for marginalized populations (Banks, 2006).

5.4 In what ways do private universities' resource limitations and societal perceptions hinder their ability to support marginalized students effectively?

The private university has limited ability and resources to fight the inequities as they are lit by the social gains. Wei et al. (2022) assessed the IFA system and showed that it is not effective unless supported by structural changes or greater funding. Li and Morgan (2011) argued that private universities' societal perception as inferior institutions further hinder their ability to attract resources or implement equity-focused initiatives. Such datasets shed light on the two constraints, namely, financial constraints, whereby private universities cannot afford to assist the marginalized students due to inadequate funds, and reputational constraints, whereby the universities cannot appeal to the broader market to get funds for assisting the marginalized students. This challenge is in conformity with international literature on private institutions in education equality, where it is equally demonstrated that government and institutional collaboration is crucial in closing equity gaps in resource access and distribution (Teixeira & Amaral, 2001).

5.5 What strategies and policies can be implemented to reduce barriers and promote inclusivity in China's private higher education sector?

Based on the study results, the following recommendations on how to increase inclusiveness in private universities are provided. Offering more scholarships, state grants, and state-sponsored loans are the actions that will directly target the identified economic factors by Dong and Wan (2012) as well as Yu & Ertl (2010). Similarly, changes in early education, like enhancement of rural schools and teacher qualifications, are necessary to make changes in the gaokao system, as Hannum & Meiyuan (2006) pointed out. Yang (2023) and Wang (2023) highlighted that culturally sensitive policies in students' experiences include mentorship programs and fellow students' support. Finally, Wei et al. (2022) suggested improving the admission policies like the IFA system to address the opportunities and social and geographical gaps, although changes on a much larger scale are required for actual significant results.

5.6 Significance of the findings and implications

This work also reveals that educational equity in Chinese private universities is compounded by a variety of barriers. Leveraging deep yet horizontal investigations, the presented work unites financial, systemic, cultural, and institutional issues that explain education inequities. Through overcoming these barriers, it will be possible to enhance the condition and quality of learners in the context of social and economic disadvantages.

This research provides the following important findings for the research on educational equity in China's private universities;

- First, and perhaps most significantly, it offers an explanatory theoretical model of the complex nature of the minorities' learning difficulties, and synthesizes findings from various kinds of research to paint a picture of the situation.

- Second, it highlights the critical interplay between financial, systemic, cultural, and institutional factors, emphasizing the need for a coordinated approach to addressing educational disparities.
- Finally, the paper provides practical recommendations for policymakers and educators, including expanding financial aid programs, reforming early education systems, fostering cultural inclusivity, and enhancing institutional capacity.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of findings

In this investigation, the constraints in relation to class, system, culture, and institutions that accompanied the implementation of private higher learning for the excluded students in China were assessed. A systematic review with a qualitative approach pointed out relevant themes of linked concerns and goals for improved quality and diversity. Therefore, the study underscores how availability of funds, policies that exist in society, cultural perception, and institutional policies keep off disparities in private universities.

Socioeconomic barriers, particularly high tuition fees and living costs, disproportionately exclude low-income and rural students. Dong and Wan (2012) and Yu and Ertl (2010) also noted the absence of availabilities of financial instruments, including scholarships or government-guaranteed credits, as one of the major challenges. Addressing this issue through targeted financial support programs is essential. Systemic inequities rooted in early education exacerbate the problem. There are problems with early education that make the situation worse because of systematic injustices. In their studies, Hannum and Meiyan (2006) and Xu (2023) emphasize that rural students cannot effectively compete for university entrance due to their weakly performing schools, inadequate physical facilities, and the quantity and quality of teachers.

Many of these students also suffer from cultural stigmas and psychological problems that put them more off limits. Liu and Yang stated that students of private universities easily get prejudices from society about being inferior, and this makes them develop feelings of inferiority, anxiety, and impostors. As Wang (2023) showed, endeavors such as mentorship, peer support, and dedicated inclusiveness training would help enhance the situations of marginalized learners. This paper argues that institutional factors, sources of funding, and the culture and beliefs of society hinder private universities from appropriately assisting marginalized students. The study by Wei et al. (2022) showed that such strategies as the IFA system are still ineffective without system change and additional funding. Li & Morgan expressed concern about increasing government and institutional support towards innovation to overcome resource scarcities and to enhance inclusiveness in 2011. These findings serve as the first step in understanding the equity situation in China's private higher education sector and warrant more effective and extensive reforms for promoting equity in private higher education in China.

6.2 Limitations of the study

Despite its strengths, the study has some limitations. The use of secondary data from the literature might reduce the amount of comparison that can be made to the techniques employed and the scope of the studies conducted, not all articles offer the same methods of analysis, and/or they are not necessarily centered on private higher education in China. Moreover, the methodological approach of the qualitative systematic review might allocate important but subtle voices of marginalized students in the studied context. Future research should include primary data collection, such as interviews or surveys, to capture firsthand experiences of marginalized students in private universities. For instance, interviews with students from marginalized groups in private universities.

6.3 Recommendations for future research

Future studies should explore the long-term impact of financial aid programs and early education reforms on marginalized students' access to private universities. Further, research could be done to establish the relationship between culturally sensitive measures championed by organizations and the students' performance and well-being, especially the ethnic minorities. In the same bracket, comparative analysis across regions or countries could put into light the global benchmark and probably the ways of enhancing the provision of educational equity in private institutions. Finally,

more research needs to be conducted on how the use of technology and online learning can help reach out to geography and financial barriers, especially in the rural areas. By addressing these gaps, future research can build on the findings of this study to develop more effective strategies for enhancing access and inclusivity in China's private higher education sector.

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