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## Problems in the education for migrant children in China and the corresponding management strategies

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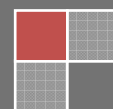
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### ABSTRACT

The migrant children's education in China is facing problems that need to address urgently, such as the high enrollment requirements but low quality education. This is due to the difficulties of the current management system in adapting to the trend of the population migration. To solve the problems, China shall reform the household registration (*Hukou*) system, improve the cooperative mechanism and educational finance management system for the migrant children's education, and plan and allocate the resources in scientifically sound ways.

### KEYWORDS

Migrant children; Education; Management; Strategy.



With the acceleration of China's urbanization since 1990s, a large number of surplus rural workers have been migrating to the cities. This creates a rapidly growing population of migrant people and meanwhile, migrant children. The so-called migrant children refers to the children aged between 0-14 years and who leave with parents their original residence places, migrate to and lived in other places for more than half a year. Vast majority of these children's parents are blue collar workers from rural places, less educated, and working on low wage and unsecured jobs. According to the 6<sup>th</sup> census data collected in 2010, there were about 220 million children of 0-14 years old, among which 22,910,000 were migrant children.<sup>[1]</sup> As the relevant administration agencies of China hardly can adapt to the situation of the migrant population, the migrant children's education currently is facing many challenges and have become an important social problem that need to address urgently.

## PROBLEMS OF THE MIGRANT CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

The central government has introduced a series of policies to address the problems of the compulsory education of migrant children. In 2001, the State Council issued the "Two-Prime" policy regulating that the compulsory education of migrant children should be primarily managed by the local government of in-migration and primarily through the full-time public primary and secondary schools. In 2006 the revised "Compulsory Education Law" clearly states that the local government must provide the migrant children with equal access to the compulsory education if they go to school at the places where their parents/guardians live or work. The "Two-Prime" policy along with other related laws to some extent has improved the schooling situation of migrant children. The enrollment requirements and fees have gradually decreased. And more and more migrant children have been enrolled to the urban public primary/secondary schools. According to the 6<sup>th</sup> census of 2010, the proportion of the 6-11-year-old migrant children who have an access to education is 96.48%, and the 12-14-year-old 98.29%, respectively.<sup>[2]</sup> The overall situation of the compulsory education of migrant children is good; vast majority of the school-age migrant children go to school and receive compulsory education. But on the other hand, the implementation of the "Two-Prime" policies has encountered enormous problems.

### High enrollment requirements

Migrant children still need to overcome extremely high requirements in order to enroll into the local public schools of the in-migration regions. This is because the midsize to large-size cities with concentrated migrant children currently are so short of public educational resources that they are not able to fulfill the educational needs of all migrant children. Therefore they set high bars for migrant children to enroll into the local schools. Additionally, vast majority of migrant children live in the poor suburb where there are fewer public schools but with higher enrollment requirements. Migrant children are required to provide temporary residence permits, proof of residence, household registration booklets, proof of social insurance, worker certificate, family-planning certificate, among many of other documents. Take the Beijing's public schools as an example, the migrant children who don't have a local hukou status but want to enroll in to the schools must provide "all-five" certificates. Those are the temporary residence permits, proof of residence in Beijing, household registration booklet, proof of child custody, and worker certificate of Beijing. Furthermore, schooling at the city's public schools means a tremendous amount of expense due to various charges such as the sponsorship fee, uniform fee, materials fee, interest group charges, extra-curricular activity fees, among other invisible fees. A considerable portion of migrant children are not able to go to the local schools either because of the unaffordable costs or inability of providing the required documents. Some public schools, especially the excellent key schools, firmly insist the possession of a local hukou status as one of their admission requirements, making it almost impossible for the non-hukou migrant children to enroll.

The preschool education, not included in the compulsory education system, is even the weaker part of the current Chinese education system. There have been more and more young migrant children in recent years. Nationwide every one of 10 young children aged 3-5 is a migrant child. The percentage of the young migrant children is even higher in the economically developed regions, reaching as high as 44.22% in Shanghai, 38.13% in Beijing, 30.13% in Zhejiang, respectively.<sup>[3]</sup> In recent years, the massive migration of young children happened to take place with a wave of birth outbreak. As a result, the big cities like Beijing and Shanghai are in a serious shortage of preschool educational resources. Many of the public kindergartens/preschools either directly reject or set a higher bar to exclude the young children who have no local Hukou status. For instance in Shanghai, the parents of the migrant children who want to enroll into the kindergartens has to undergo rigorously review and assessment in terms of housing conditions, working experience, length of insurance, the "Shanghai residence permit" status, as well as their education and professional grades. The parents must provide the proof of evidence for each of the above assessments. Unfortunately, many of the evidences are difficult for the rural workers who came from the bottom of society, to obtain and therefore, excluding their children from the public kindergartens. The sixth census of 2010 shows Shanghai had 453,000 children aged 3-5 years, among which 199,000 were young migrant children.<sup>[4]</sup> Shanghai government reported 125,000 children having no Shanghai Hukou in the kindergartens. These indicate that about 74,000 (or 37%) of young migrant children were not in the kindergartens.<sup>[5]</sup>

## LOW QUALITY EDUCATION

Although some of migrant children managed to enroll into the city's public schools, majority of the schools are located in the suburb, have less qualified teachers, and offer lower quality education that are hardly comparable to that of the

schools in the center of city. The private schools with good conditions are elusive to the migrant children too due to their costly fees.

Other migrant children only can choose the migrant children's schools. As of October 2010, Beijing has 433,000 migrant children, 70% of which enrolled in the public schools and 30% in the migrant children's schools.<sup>[6]</sup> The migrant children's schools are opened by the city to provide education to the children of the migrant workers and are privately owned. These schools usually have poor facilities and possess less capacity of education and management. The overall quality of these schools is not high. First, most of the migrant children's schools are constrained by the tight budget. The schools rarely can obtain funding from the state and mainly rely on their own finance or the tuition fees. The founders of the schools are typically migrant workers, having a limited ability in fund raising. The tuition fees thus become the major source of the school's funding. Unfortunately, majority of the migrant families cannot afford high tuition fees. The tuition fees paid for the migrant children are in general not high. Most migrant children's schools therefore, are short of funding. The migrant children's schools are mostly located in the suburb without good public transportation but of low security. The schools have no secured or regular classrooms and are not well equipped. Many of the migrant children's schools even do not have a license (or legal status) because their conditions hardly meet the regional or national standards for education. According to the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics, Beijing in 2007 has 239 unlicensed migrant children's schools, making up 79% of the total 297 migrant children's schools.<sup>[7]</sup> Secondly, the teachers of the migrant children's school turn over frequently and their qualifications need to improve. A survey of 41 private migrant children's schools in Beijing by the Beijing Children's Legal Aid and Research Center shows only 14% of the teachers having a bachelor degree, 20% with a technical secondary, high school or lower degree, and 25% without a teacher's certificate, respectively.<sup>[8]</sup> The teachers have a very heavy workload, but with low wages and no social insurance and welfares. According to another survey of Beijing's 17 migrant children's school, the teachers of these schools teach 25 hours per week, in comparison with the only 15 hours/week of the teachers in the public schools. The average monthly wage of the teachers is only 982 yuan. About 74 percent of teachers are not satisfied with their pay. The satisfaction rate of the teachers with the workload, working environment, income, and school management are quite low. The average turnover rate of the teachers are as high as 1/3 each year.<sup>[9]</sup>

## MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FACTORS THAT CAUSE THE PROBLEMS OF MIGRANT CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

### The obstacle of hukou system

The present hukou-based management system manages and provides the welfares of education and health care, and a variety of public services such as compulsory education, social security, population policy, and financial investment, etc, all based on hukou. Only the people with a local hukou are entitled to enjoy the local education welfares. The migrant children having no hukou of the city therefore, can hardly enjoy the city's education welfares. In addition, the government administration at different levels is also based on hukou. The local government is obligated and responsible for the education of the children having local hukou, but not for the migrant children without local hukou. The performance review of the local government in most places, does not count the government's efforts in the non-hukou people including the migrant children. The resource allocation and social planning do not take the migrant children into account either. The local government often makes restrictive and discriminatory policies of education welfares toward migrant children. Furthermore, majority of the local governments do not include migrant children in their daily management activities. Presently, none of the public security offices except those in Beijing, Shenzhen, Wuxi, and Zhongshan, include migrant children below 16 years old in the management system when registering migrant population.

The regulation of hukou's migration is still imperfect. It essentially remains as the city-rural dual mode that strictly restricts the rural people moving to city. For example, only the people who hold a bachelor degree and have bought a house bigger than a certain size in a city are qualified for moving their hukous to the city. Unfortunately, the rural workers usually are poor or not well educated, and hardly able to move their children's hukous to the city. As a result, the migrant children's hukous are still kept in the countryside even though they have lived in the city for a long time after moving to the city with their parents. They are among the group of people whose hukous are separated with them.

### Non-harmonized management system

China doesn't have a harmonized national policy system for migrant population including migrant children. There is a big gap in the education levels as well as difference in the education system, between the cities and rural areas, the developed areas and undeveloped regions. Majority of migrant children come from less educationally and economically developed rural places to the city of better education and economy. Nevertheless, a national social security system for children has not yet been established; nor does the policy of bridging the children's educational management between different regions. For the children moving with their parents from a rural place to city, the state has not introduced policy regulating how the governments the children have left behind and arrived at should share the responsibilities for their education. This often time lead to the situation that migrant children are not cared by either government and become so-called "marginalized people".

To solve the problems of the migrant children's education, it should not only improve the overall education itself, but also needs to register the migrant children's hukou status, and obtain financial support from government and aids from

the society. This will involve the education and many other departments of government such as police, finance, tax, and civil affair. Although the state brings the above departments into the scope of the migrant children's education, the specific responsibilities of each government department are not clearly defined by the state; and there is a lack of coordination mechanism. Consequently, the authority between departments becomes scattered and unclear. And eventually it will be difficult to implement and continue the migrant children's education. Also due to the lack of appropriate accountability mechanisms, it is difficult to pursue an action against the dereliction of responsibility of the departments.

### **Laggard financial management system for compulsory education**

China's financial system for the public compulsory education is presently not sound. Due to the insufficient funding support of compulsory education, it is difficult to allocate a reasonable amount of funds for the migrant children's education. The percentage of China's expenditures on education out of GDP was 3.65% in 2010, and 3.93% in 2011, respectively.<sup>[10]</sup> It has remained lower than the world's average level of 4.4% in 2000. It was increased to 4.28% late 2012, just about at the similar level of the developing countries' 4% average but much behind many other countries.<sup>[11]</sup>

Between governments their financial responsibilities for the migrant children's education are not clearly defined. Although the central government has introduced the policy that the government of in-migrants primarily takes the responsibilities, the policy does not clarify if the city or county government should bear the responsibilities. In addition, it is not clear what financial responsibilities the central and provincial governments should assume. Since their responsibilities are not clarified, each government tries to not take the responsibilities as possible as they can. It is the county governments that actually provide education to migrant children. They suffer from a heavy financial burden and acute imbalance of financial supply and demand. On the other hand, majority of migrant children live in the suburbs where the government can hardly provide the necessary financial support for the massive number of migrant children due to their even weaker financing capability.

A coordinating mechanism for the educational fund allocation between the in-migration and out-migration governments has not yet been established. China's compulsory education is implemented based on the schooling system of "grading schools, grading administrations", in which the local government allocated educational fund in accordance with the household number of students. The compulsory education policy specifies the financial responsibilities of the in-migration government for migrant children, but does not establish a coordinating mechanism to allow the out-migration government to transfer the educational fund to the in-migration government. As a result, the out-migration government still receives the education fund allocated to the migrant children who have left for city, while the in-migration government only continues to receive the educational fund for the number of students with local hukou. In other words, the in-migration government provides the education to migrant children, but do not receive their educational fund allocations. Therefore the in-migration government does not have a motivation to provide education to migrant children.

### **Resource allocation lagging behind**

The local governments often do not pay enough attention to the situation of the rapidly increasing number of migrant children and underestimate their demand for education. The educational resource allocation thus lacks of predictability. And the development of corresponding policies lags behind. The preschool education in particular needs to plan in advance. Only if the city gathers accurate information of young migrant children, such as the birth numbers, distribution and mobility, and plan ahead the kindergarten resources, will the demand for preschool be met. Judging from the fact that it is extremely difficult in enrolling in any of the kindergartens in the midsize to large size cities, the local government has not planned ahead or effectively. Some local governments have no idea of the number of migrant children of school age and seriously underestimate the migrant children's demand for education. For instance, in 2010 the Shanghai Education Commission stated in the "People's Daily" that Shanghai had 400,000 migrant children.<sup>[12]</sup> Nevertheless, the sixth census shows in 2010 the number of migrant children in the primary and secondary schools of Shanghai reached 800,000. What a big difference between these two data.<sup>[13]</sup>

## **MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR THE PROBLEMS OF THE MIGRANT CHILDREN'S EDUCATION**

### **Reform of the hukou system**

With the current dual-hukou system between city and rural areas, it is hard for the society and government not to treat the local and migrant children differently. Firstly It must reform the hukou system, in order to address the problems of the migrant children's education. The reform shall be carried out step by step in accordance with the China's realities.

Step One, Chinese government should change the hukou-based management system and establish residence-based management system. The education of igrant children is based on their actual residence and managed through the respective in-migration government. This allows the separation of education welfares from hukou. The government should adjust current compulsory education policy of "nearest schooling based on hukou" to "nearest schooling based on residence". It should abandon hukou restriction on enrollment, school advancing, tuition, etc., to give the children with or without the city's hukou equal opportunities for education. It also needs to reform other supporting systems for successful implementation of the residence-based schooling management system. First, the in-migration government should include migrant children in their daily information and huko management system. And the public security department shall lead to establish a harmonized national information system of migrants (including migrant children), and introduce national electronic

identification cards to store and dynamically manage the information of migrant children, such as fingerprints and photos. Secondly, a national electronic management system of student registration and student cards of compulsory education shall be established to facilitate the transfer of the migrant children's student registration across different regions. Next, the migrant children's education must be taken into account for the performance review of the local government and individual officials. The number of migrants including children should be considered one of the key elements in the assessment of the in-migration government's performance in the politics, economy, culture, and social development. The government planning, resource allocation and funding distribution shall be carried out in accordance with the actual number of the residential children in a particular area. Additionally, the children's development funds may be distributed by using credit cards, migrating with children and used in their residential places. Special funds may also be set up specifically for the compulsory education of migrant children in different regions. Mechanisms of operation and monitoring should be established with the special funds.

Step Two, the Chinese government should gradually lift the restrictions of transferring hukou from countryside to city, and eventually eliminate the hukou system. The problems of the migrant children's education would be readily solved if the migrant children's hukous can be easily transferred to the city that they live in.

### **Establishing and improving the cooperative mechanism for the migrant children's education**

Chinese government should establish cooperative mechanisms for the migrant children's education between different departments. The migrant children's education is a system project. At the national level it needs to establish a coordinating agency for the development of cross-department policies for migrant children and to the determination of the responsibilities of the local government divisions. At the regional level, the responsibilities and rights of the various departments involved in the education of the migrant children shall be further clarified and specified. And the cooperative mechanisms shall be constructed to coordinate the education department with other government departments like the public security, civil affairs, finance, tax, women's federations, etc.

The Chinese government should also establish mutual interacting mechanism to strengthen the communication, share information, and connect the management services between the in-migration and out-migration places. The out-migration party shall assist the in-migration counterpart by providing information and good services, while the in-migration party shall take the initiative to include the migrant children in its education information registration system and administration scope.

### **Improving the financial management system of the migrant children's education**

Chinese government should provide more funding to the compulsory education. It needs to increase the proportion of the spending in public education in the government's budget, and the proportion of compulsory education in the public education spending. A separate budgeting system for the migrant children's compulsory education shall be introduced to set aside an educational budget specific for migrant children by the central and local government, and thus ensure the funding for the migrant children's education.

The governments at all levels in China shall be clarified of their responsibilities of the financial support for the migrant children's education. Considering the fact that the county/district governments have insufficient financial resources, the municipal governments of the migrant children shall bear the primary financial responsibility as described by the policy. The out-migrant's government needs to transfer the funds allocated to the migrant children to the respective in-migrant government. The central and provincial governments also must take the responsibilities and provide financial support for the compulsory education of the migrant children. They need to set up special subsidies for the compulsory education of the migrant children, and allocate funds to local governments in accordance with the changing number of the migrant children. In addition, the central, provincial and municipal governments should also provide financial aids to the migrant children's schools.

The Chinese government should establish a standardized mobile payment system for the fund transfer. The government needs to introduce a nationally unified compulsory education credit card for transferring of the education funds. For the inter-provincial migrant children of school-age, the finance department of the central government should arrange the transfer of the education funds to the local government of in-migrants. While for the intra-provincial migrant children, the provincial government shall do so.

### **Planning and allocation of resources in scientifically sound ways**

The economic development gap between the different regions of China will continue to be present for a certain time period. The future will see the continuation of a large number of workers migrating from the under-developed areas to the developed areas, and from countryside to cities. Whole-family migration will become a normal way of migration. The number of migrant children in the future certainly will keep growing.

With this in mind, the developed areas and cities must clearly understand the current situation and accurately estimate the future situation, and make timely adjustment to the planning and allocation of the education resources. It needs to establish a resource allocation mechanism that services the resident population. The essential elements of the overall urban planning and education programs must include migrant children. The resources allocation and public educational institutions' capacity for migrant children should be increase in a bigger pace than the central city for the converging rural-urban areas and new towns with concentrated migrant children. In the areas with tight education budget, the local government needs to

support the migrant children's schools with favorable policies, plan and build a number of migrant children's schools, increase funding to the licensed migrant children's schools. These measures will provide the migrant children more access to schools. To ensure quality education of migrant children, it must provide more regulation and supervision, improve the review and approval processes as well as the management system, and develop rational standards of schools, for the migrant children's schools.

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