

The Analysis of the Situation of Migrant Students in China

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Abstract. Due to the household registration system (Hukou) acting as an institutional barrier, migrant children face a lot of challenges in China. They are prevented from gaining local education resources, such as library, computer lab and gym. This led to the formation of low-quality migrant schools to respond to strong schooling demand. So migrant children face more difficulties than urban students. They get poorer performances and are more vulnerable than urban children. Analyzing the situation of migrant children can help policy makers improve existing policies to enhance the quality of education for them. By summarizing several literatures, this paper found that except Hukou system, imperial examination in the history also caused the poor performance of migrant children. Besides, on society and family level, social work such as media publicity and in depth investigation into migrant family is recommended. In terms of government, more money from the government is needed to increase the quantity and quality in educational resources and institutions. Schools can organize activities to promote the integration of migrate children and apply advance teaching method to improve the academic achievement. Based on the current situation, several proposals are proposed to help migrant children in the final section.

Keywords: migrant students, education, government, society, family.

1. Introduction

Since 1978, China has seen a tremendous trend of urbanization, which has caused a substantial influx of migrant workers from rural regions seeking better employment opportunities in urban areas [1]. Under this condition, there is a special marginalized group called migrant children. They relocate from their rural homes to a metropolis, following at least one of their parents [1]. However, migrant children's education right is not well protected and ensured because of the existence of household registration system, which distributes resources among rural and urban places. Children from migrant households are often unable to attend local public schools [2]. According to the estimation by NGO New Citizen Program in 2021, the population of migrant children in China keeps increasing, reaching 130 million in 2020, which might have a significant influence on Chinese educational equality [3]. Therefore, the paper will examine the situation of Chinese migrant children in three aspects: historical background of migration, current situation of migrant students (government, school, society, students, and family perspective) and proposal of current problems.

2. History and Development

All kinds of aspects of gaps between rural areas and urban areas essentially affect education development in contemporary society for a long time. Firstly, the planning of the city and country in ancient times differentiates from it in modern society. For example, in old Changsha (China), the city size is much smaller and narrower than it is in modern Changsha [4]. The size of the city in ancient times often causes huge distinctions in the population between the country and the city. Based on relevant statistics, during the Qing Dynasty, the percentage of urban residents of the whole population in one province usually is around 10% [5]. To be more specific, in 1784, there were 26,917 urban populations and 234,656 rural populations in the contemporary Zhejiang province (except the

statistics from the ancient Yuhang county), which means that the urban residents occupy 10.3% of the whole population [6]. Although sometimes, due to certain special factors, such as war and migration, the whole population structure would have subtle changes, historically, it still can be stated that the rural population significantly exceeds the urban population in ancient China.

Furthermore, China's ancient society applies imperial examination to select talents for over 1200 years, and the educational system under the imperial examination is disadvantageous to rural residents [7]. It is common that intelligentsia and well-known families invest enormous financial resources and other resources for cultivating a student to join the imperial examination in ancient times. For example, there were 69 students who passed the imperial examination and achieved good grades from Su family (a famous family from Zhejiang in ancient times) [8]. A great deal of similar situations also happened in other "big" families in the whole of China's history. Accordingly, the above evidence could indirectly present the difficulty of imperial examination.

As mentioned above, the difference in population settlement between the country and the city is fairly huge. The concentrated resources in city areas represent that numerous rural residents in ancient China are not able to receive a good education. The kind of severe inequality and inequity in educational resources and educational attainment for rural residents further expand the gap between them and urban residents. Also, partly owing to the comparatively advanced transportation system, privilege policies and consumption capacity in urban areas, the gap in economic development between the country and the city expands progressively [9]. Moreover, the economic situations in diverse provinces are not the same, so, for certain behindhand areas, the gaps in individual and regional development are more complicated and troublesome to narrow.

By summarizing the above information, it can be concluded that the educational problem is an issue inherited from the history for rural students. Inequality and inequity in education lead to rural residents being far behind the urban student, which generates a great negative influence on education development in modern society.

Modern China's government applies a novel examination system, National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), and basically, China's education mainly revolves around NCEE to develop. For most Chinese students, taking NCEE and achieving a high grade in NCEE are the most two crucial things for their study career. Government promotes nine years of compulsory education to the whole country and establishes new schools in the rural areas. Thus, rural students are able to enjoy improved educational resources to take the NCEE, and it is true that increasingly rural students could enter outstanding universities. However, according to statistics, on average, only 8% of children from rural areas would eventually join NCEE in China's modern society, compared with 70% of urban students [10]. Long-standing inadequate resources and a lack of educational awareness from families enable rural residents to believe that they cannot compete with urban students in NCEE.

With rapid urbanization, urban areas' need for cheap labor tremendously increases, which also attracts rural labor. Rural residents have interests in urban policy support, personal economic improvement and advanced education for their children, so some of them choose to migrate from country to city. Considering the exorbitant expenses for migrant families to live in the city, the government issues relevant policies to guarantee basic welfare for them. Whereas, due to the huge distinction in fundamental academic performance, growth environment (educational and financial resources) and other objective conditions between rural children and urban children, conflicts constantly happen between individual students and families, finally causing severe social and educational problems.

3. Problems

3.1. Society

In China, the allocation of resources is based on the hukou, not the current residence. So it is not only difficult for migrants to enjoy the resources of the city, but also hard for their children to access urban education resources.

The restriction of education resources to migrant students makes them feel difficult in mentally integrating into urban society through education [11]. This is because migrant workers with low level of education have jobs with minimum hourly wages, such as manual laborers. Children living in these families aware the huge gap between prosperous cities and their poverty-stricken families, which make them feel interior and rarely make friends with urban children [11].

From the viewpoint of their neighborhood, migrant children living in migrant settlements on the periphery of the city are restricted from interacting with urban peers because there is a small room for them to socialize together. Therefore, there are few opportunities for urban and rural children to interact, which hinder the integration of migrant children into urban society [11].

Secondly, education resources are distributed unequally in the city and countryside area. As the number of migrant students increases, there is a gradual decline of students in rural schools, but a shortage of schools and in cities. However, the funds for education do not flow with them, so it cannot relieve the situation of scarcity of educational resources, which does not meet the needs of all migrant children to receive an education nearby [12].

3.2. Government

The central government has implemented strategies for migrant children in terms of local schooling issue. In 2020, the central government approved the Long-term Educational Reform and Development (2010-2020) Plan, which specified that local governments are obligatory for guaranteeing the right of education for migrant students [13]. However, it seems that the local government's actions might not always be consistent with the central government's targets. As an illustration, the Shenzhen government enacted a "5+1" policy in 2005, which specified that kids wanting to join public schools in Shenzhen needed five credentials and more than a year of residency, which were quite challenging for migrant workers to attain [14]. It can be argued that the central government fails to provide adequate funding to local governments, which affects the policy implementation. As the household registration system is set up in order to regulate migration and stable society. Given this, the central government may be hesitant to offer adequate financing.

Since local public schools do not have such capacity to receive an increasing number of students, the authorities also implemented measures to advance the standards of migrant schools, which are set up to meet the strong demand of migrant students' schooling issue [15]. Over two-thirds of unregulated schools in Beijing were closed between 2003 and 2013 while the amount of migrant schools with licenses climbed gradually [16]. On the one hand, authorized migrant schools have better facilities, better-trained teachers, and more adequate educational resources. On the other hand, if the school is closed down, it's possible that migrant students' education won't be ensured [17]. Even if they are transferred to other schools, it will take them time and effort to adjust to new environment, which will have an unfavorable effect on their intellectual and educational growth.

3.3. School

Migrant schools are frequently thought of as being of inferior quality due to a lack of funds and permission. In terms of poor facilities, a few migrant schools are rented constructions, closed warehouses, or closed warehouses erected in erected harsh environment with inadequate and illumination. A few of them lack toilets, playgrounds, and perhaps even a supply of drinking water. They often come with insufficient seats and tables, as well as essential teaching tools [18]. Migrant students can scarcely benefit from advanced teaching techniques while studying in such a subpar atmosphere, and their physical safety and health cannot be guaranteed. In addition, poor teaching environment will also discourage highly skilled teachers to come to the schools, which will further lead to the problem of low-quality teachers.

In terms of unqualified teachers, migrant schools tend to have a larger proportion of unqualified teachers who may not get a teaching certificate. Since migrant schools lacked government funding and license in the first few decades, many unqualified teachers rushed in for profit. According to Lu and Zhang, they did an assessment of the quality of teachers among 114 Beijing migrant schools [19].

The result showed that 69% of those are administered by teachers. Others are operated by persons who are not professionals, such as employees in construction, sanitation, farm, and a wide range of transactions and occupations, taking on the responsibility of operating schools. They are attracted by the profit of being temporary teachers rather than the passion and responsibility of the career [19].

3.4. Students

Academic performance, which is an essential part of students' quality, is one indicator to reflect the education achievement.

Many literatures provide description of comparison of academic performance between migrant students and urban students [3, 20]. Based on the data collected through questionnaires from 687 elementary and middle school students in Beijing, Ma et al. found that a greater proportion of urban children received excellent and good grades than migrant children, whereas more migrant children receive fair grades compared to urban children in terms of Chinese, mathematics, and English [17]. Migrant students lag behind urban peers in overall performance.

This situation is caused by many factors. Migrant children's poor learning foundation is the first factor that causes their poor performance. Based on the data collected in Beijing, preschool attendance was positively correlated with student's achievement, because preschool education can build a good foundation for future learning [20]. Besides, poor family condition hadn't allowed them to attend extracurricular tutorial class, which is considered as a good way to improve students' achievement in China [21].

Another important factor is the number of siblings, which was negatively related to migrant student achievement [20]. Parents who have more than one child find it tough to allocate their remaining energy to their older child's study after a busy work, as there is a younger child to take care of. As a result, achieving success without parental supervision is difficult for migrant children.

The critical determinant of children's education achievement is parental aspiration, which refers to realistic beliefs about a child's future educational achievement [3]. It can inspire children to get high performance because it encourages parents to motivate their children, even though their parents have a low level of education [17].

Except academic performance, migrant children's mental health is poorer than urban students [21]. They are more likely to have behavioral and emotional problems. Behavioral problems are externalizing mental health problems including defiance, impulsivity, disruptiveness, and aggression [22]. Emotional problems are internalizing mental health problems, which include anxiety, depression, withdrawal, and somatic complaints [22]. Based on the data collected by Gao and colleagues from 773 primary and secondary school migrant children and urban children in Beijing, migrant children reported more behavioral and emotional problems than local peers [22]. They were more likely to feel depressed and lonely.

The parent's education level is the first influential factor to be considered, which was associated negatively with children's behavioral and emotional outcomes [22]. Parents with higher education levels are not only concerned about their child's grades, but also about their children's emotional needs. They can find out the children's problems and disturbances in time and are capable of enlightening them to help them solve problems [22].

Furthermore, parents' marital status is also an essential factor regarding students' mental health [23]. Children whose parents were married had fewer emotional and behavioral problems than children with unmarried parents [23]. The conflicts between parents make children feel lonely and depressed, and these emotions make it difficult for them to focus on their study.

3.5. Family

Family has a strong impact on a child's physical and mental development. It is not surprising that poor family background and low family income contribute to their lower academic performance. Migrant parents with lower incomes cannot afford high tuition fees of private schools and find it difficult to pay the high "school choice fees" of public schools, and this prevent them from enrolling

their children in schools with better conditions. They can only reluctantly enroll them in migrant worker's children's schools [12].

Moreover, the lack of family education caused a lot of problems for migrant students [23]. In order to provide stable income for their families, migrant parents usually have more than one job. Since they rarely stay at home, the children hardly see them and have few opportunities to communicate. In addition, parents who possess low level of education might use scolding and reprimanding to educate their children instead of effective communication [11-12]. By doing so, the child will become more withdrawn and more introversion.

4. Proposals

Several proposals are proposed to address the previously mentioned issues through society, government, schools, teachers, and parents.

4.1. Family

The government can increase the government budget from taxation, fines, sale of land use rights and income from central government adjustments and subsidies. Tax is divided into Direct tax and Indirect tax. Both enterprises and individuals have obligations to pay taxes which is also the main source of government finance. Then, the government can provide funds to school, the funds school received can be used for adding more advanced equipment for students and provide a better learning environment for students. In today's world, the Internet has become ubiquitous in all aspects. The government can spread the importance of educational equality through the internet and create an advertisement about migrant children and urban children growing together, learning together, and helping each other for the whole world [24]. For the government, reducing migrant schools and increasing public schools can ensure that teaching resources, teaching quality and teaching environment can be guaranteed. If it is necessary to have migrant schools, the government can also raise the threshold for running migrant schools. This can also ensure the quality of education for migrant children.

4.2. Schools and teachers

By setting up study group in schools, students with good academic performance can help and motivate students who have low academic performance [25]. Students in a study atmosphere which can not only improve the grades of everyone, but also makes the relationship between classmates more intimate, and will weak some barriers [25]. In addition, schools can set up mobile classes and arrange different subject teachers in the night self-learning. As a result, it is easy for students to ask teachers for advice when they have problems. Both migrant and urban students can achieve benefits and improve academic performance.

Since teachers' actions can motivate urban students to take care of migrant students, school teachers should organize a variety of activities in the class, such as welcoming parties and exchanging gifts [26]. These activities can cultivate the relationship between migrant students and urban students, as well as enhance their collective sense of honor. It is also important to promote the concept of equality for all in the class so that urban students are able to understand that it is not easy for rural children to go to schools. They can aware that migrant students are part of this class.

However, migrant students in the school may be easy to be bullied. In response to campus bullying, schools should conduct evaluation and education on bullying, and provide psychological education and construction for the bullies to guide them out of the psychological shadow of being bullied [27]. For bullying in the school, schools should give lectures on the dangers of campus bullying to educate students and block their thoughts on bullying.

However, there are some drawbacks of measurements. The first problem is that when a study group is established, some parents of students with good grades may have dissatisfaction. They believe that their children have no obligation to teach students with low grades, and this is the responsibility of

the teacher. Moreover, high-achieving students can learn better if the time spent teaching students with low achievement is spent on their own learning. Besides, setting up mobile classes may not have any effect if students embarrass to ask teachers questions. Therefore, it is necessary to have further solutions. For parents who have objections to the study groups, schools can give a speech explaining the benefits of the study groups [26]. If these parents are still dissatisfied, schools can set up study groups without these students. Furthermore, teachers can provide psychological training to these students to encourage them to ask more questions and be more patient and less blaming when explaining problems to them. Thus, students may be less afraid of teachers and more proactive in asking questions.

4.3. Schools and Teachers

Social work should guide parents to actively engage in discussions about their parenting experiences or difficulties, and provide opportunities for all parents to actively participate in discussions. Although the situation of each team member is different, related family education issues can resonate with them and facilitate in-depth communication. The power of cooperation enables parents to bravely share their feelings and experiences in groups, share common issues, learn scientific parenting knowledge, update educational concepts, and promote the improvement of family education issues [28]. Moreover, social workers should conduct in-depth visits and investigations targeting families with weak family educational awareness, understand their differences and needs, establish service target files, negotiate with such parents, provide door-to-door services and implement case intervention, and establish mutual trust relationships [28]. Afterwards, parents with weak awareness were invited to participate in the group activities to enhance their awareness of participating their children's family education. Starting from the community, Social media can be used to strengthen publicity and guidance, and family education materials and manuals in public places in the community, and provide free parental education for parents with weak awareness of family education [28]. This will deepen the concept of improving the availability of the family education.

5. Conclusion

The main research topic in this paper is the condition of Chinese students who are from countryside to cities. Firstly, historical study was conducted starting from the Qing Dynasty in China to understand the culture of ancient education, as well as the problems and limitations of ancient Chinese education. At the end of the first section, the education of migrant children has extended from ancient Chinese education to modern Chinese education. Then, the current situation of migrant children was analyzed from five aspects: government, school, society, families, and migrant students themselves. Many problems were raised from these aspects. Finally, some advice is provided in the proposal section to improve current situation of education of migrant students. It's not just about household registration issues. To solve the problems faced by migrant children from the above aspects, the situation of migrant children gets better with effort.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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