

## Migrant Students' Compulsory Education in China: Problems and Strategies: Take X City for Example

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### Abstract

As more and more Chinese farmers are moving to bigger cities, the education problems of migrant students become more and more severe in China. Based on the analysis on the current situation of compulsory education of migrant students in X City, and comparing with the successful solutions of migrant education problems in the United States, this paper offers some possible suggestions to schools in X City on solving the compulsory education problems of migrant students.

**Key words:** Migrant students; Compulsory education; Problems, strategies

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### INTRODUCTION

With the development of economy and the urbanization in China, more and more farmers are leaving their hometowns and burst into big cities, and become an essential part to construct Chinese modern society and its economy. Because of the quick increase in the number of migrant farmers, the number of migrant students increases relatively fast too. According to the Statistic Bulletin of

Chinese National Education Career Development (2013), there were 12.7717 million migrant students who were enrolled in compulsory education, which takes up 9.3% of the total number of students in the stage of compulsory education. Among them, there are 9.3085 million migrant students in primary schools, and 3.4631 million in middle schools (*Statistical Bulletin of National Education Career Development*, 1, 2014). With the increasing number of migrant students, their education problems become more and more severe, which slows down the Chinese urbanization process, and becomes one of the most urgent educational issues to be solved.

Considering this, Chinese government has issued a series of policies, and has gained remarkable achievements: The ratio of migrant students studying in public schools reached 80.4%, and the ratio of national fiscal expenditure of education supplying for migrant students' education arrived at 83.5%. It means that the pattern of "two-oriented", that is "public schools oriented" and "inflow government oriented" has already been established (Shen, Pan, & Jie, 2014). However, the education problems of migrant students still exist. As the capital city of A Province, X City attracts much more migrant students than any other cities in A Province. Through studying the current compulsory education of migrant students, this paper puts forward some improvement measures for the existing problems.

### 1. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION OF MIGRANT STUDENTS

#### 1.1 Large Number of Migrant Students

According to the Statistic Bulletin of X City Education Development in recent years, the number of migrant students in compulsory schools is increasing

continuously. Education Bureau of X City said: "There were 355,000 migrant students in compulsory schools, taking up 33% of the total number of students in X City. Compared with the year of 2012, the number of migrant students has increased by 1.5%." (Anonymous, 2015) Meanwhile, among the 6 central districts of X City, half of students in compulsory education are migrant students (Liu, 2014).

### **1.2 High Enrollment Rate in Public Schools**

In 2014, X City Investigation Team of National Bureau of Statistics conducted a survey. They found that 40% migrant students were enrolled into the schools in the cities that their parents (also called migrant farmers) were working in; and almost 80% migrant students who were in the stage of compulsory education were recruited into public schools (Anonymous, 2015). This means that the education access issue has been basically solved, and that X City has already established the pattern of "Two-oriented".

### **1.3 More Importance From Migrant Families Attached to Migrant Education**

It is widely believed that urban education is much better than rural education, so migrant farmers are willing to bear the higher educational fees to get their children better urban education; some of them even would like to fund the construction of private migrant students' schools (Ding, 2013). What's more, with increasing living experience in X City, migrant farmers pay more and more attention to education equity of their children. They begin to appeal for more care and help to migrant students' education. Migrant families also wish the teachers treat their children equally to the local students, and they also wish local students help their children to fit into urban education. It can be seen that migrant farmers are attaching more and more importance to migrant education.

### **1.4 Continuous Improvement of Migrant Students' Educational Policies**

Since migrant education problems turned up, X City Bureau of Education has made and revised several policies with other relative official departments, like "Suggestions on Accomplishing the Work on Migrant Students' Compulsory Education" (hereafter referred to as "Suggestions"). Based on the basic requirements of "live and work stably and legally", "Suggestions" follows the principle of "Government taking the responsibility, making concerted efforts, relying mainly on public schools and being lawful and standardized", aiming to legally guaranteeing migrant students' right to obtain compulsory education. These policies also explain clearly what documents needed for migrant student's transferring and recruiting, like Residence Status and Social Insurance Approval and so on. From above these, the process of transacting migrant students' transferring and recruiting becomes explicit and clear.

## **2. THE EXISTING PROBLEMS OF MIGRANT STUDENTS' COMPULSORY EDUCATION**

As the capital city of A Province as well as the pilot project of advancing education balanced development between urban and rural areas, X City has been facing much more serious migrant education problems than any other cities in A Province. Although X City government has carried out a series of policies, this kind of issue still exists.

### **2.1 Short Supply of Academic Degree**

With the fast development of urbanization, the student number in X City is increasing hypernormally. W District has always been one of the districts that attract migrant students most in X City. From 2004 to 2013, it helped 120,000 migrant students. The number of migrant students takes up 60% of the total number in this district, and 90% public primary schools have enrolled migrant students (Song, 2014).

However, with poor construction on educational equipments, the supply contradictions between educational needs and educational resources are quite serious. Schools in central and other districts are badly short of academic degree, and they even cannot bear this situation. According to X City Bureau of Education, there are totally 25,000 students more than the number that the public primary schools in central areas and other districts can actually bear with. If this problem cannot be solved, the increasing number of primary graduates will further bring challenges to middle school, like oversized class size, poor education quality, and difficult school management.

### **2.2 Insufficient Educational Expenditure**

Although Central government would support incentive funds for those who played an active role in the work of migrant students' compulsory education; and the accumulative total of funding that central government supported from 2008-2014 had reached 34.051 billion RMB (Liu, 2015). However, government has not made policies on the educational allowance distribution which is still distributed in the schools of their hometown, even after migrant students move to big cities. With more and more migrant students moving into X City and the implementation of free compulsory education, the schools in central areas of X City have been undertaking so much pressure on appropriation expenditure. As a result, migrant students' educational needs cannot be satisfied, and to some extent, the education quality of local students has been hindered (Liu & Wang, 2013).

### **2.3 Difficult Educational Merging of Migrant Students**

There are huge differences in teaching materials, instruction methods and learning environments between

urban schools and rural schools, and differences in academic records, learning styles and education backgrounds between urban students and rural students, too. These bring migrant students much pressure and easily bring them self-abased psychology. Besides, the psychological distance between migrant students and local city students is not good for migrant students to merge into urban education. Migrant students will be marginalized gradually. Finally, they may get psychological diseases and even may breed criminal psychology to revenge on society (Ding, 2013).

#### **2.4 Insufficient Family Education**

The low participation in migrant students' education is not good for improving their academic achievements or cultivating their behavioral habits. However, the survey X City Investigation Team of National Bureau of Statistics conducted among 115 parents shows that both the working hours and educational level of migrant parents influence their participation in migrant students' education. On one hand, 68.5% of them got middle school education, 23.7% got certificates of high school or higher vocational education, and only 7.8% were college/university degree holders. On the other hand, most of them worked on architectural ornament, catering and logistics (Anonymous, 2015). Because of their own education level, they cannot tutor their children in appropriate ways; moreover, their working hour was too long to take care of their children and to communicate with school officials and teachers, so that migrant parents cannot help children to solve the life and study problems for migrant students.

#### **2.5 Time-Constrained Admission Time of Migrant Students**

The Government of X City has been making and revising admission policy for migrant students. These policies require migrant parents to prepare several kinds of documents, and after verifying the documents, educational administration department will arrange migrant students to be enrolled or transferred according to the principle of "Nearby-school enrollment and overall arrangement". Meanwhile, the policies require the admission work should only be done during May and June of each year. If migrant students miss the time, they will have to wait until next May and June. Right because of the uncertainty of migration and because migrant parents might not show their concern with these policies, the parents usually cannot prepare these documents on time, not to say in advance. So there are quite number of migrant students who have to stay at their hometown or stay home for another year, just because they cannot prepare the necessary documents or miss the right time. Hence, they have to drop out and be delayed for schooling.

### **3. STRATEGIES ON SOLVING THE COMPULSORY EDUCATION PROBLEMS FOR MIGRANT STUDENTS**

It is very important to guarantee equal access to compulsory education for migrant students, and Chinese government will fully bring migrant students' compulsory education into whole consideration. Through comparing with the experience and measures of solving migrant students' education problems in the United States, this paper offers some advice on Chinese migrant students' compulsory education.

#### **3.1 Coordinate With Each District and Guarantee Admission and Graduation**

In light of the migrant uncertainty of migrant parents and migrant students, X City, as the inflow area should first make overall plans regarding the school layout of all the districts in advance. On one hand, it should fully excavate the potential of public schools; on the other hand, it should build or reconstruct public schools as well as private schools, and try to enlarge the schooling scales to enroll migrant students as many as possible. Second, X City government should encourage all the districts to collect information of migrant students, including their hometown and other background, to predict their possible migration in the following one or two years, and to establish the early warning mechanism of migration (Guo, 2012). Third, the outflow areas should improve their schooling condition, including teacher quality, teaching environment so that they can attract and maintain students, making them not move to other cities. Thus, it would help to reduce the pressure for inflow areas.

#### **3.2 Perfect the Electronical Management System of Migrant Students**

When solving the educational problems of migrant students, U.S. established Migrant Student Information Network under Migrant Education Program. This system made detailed records of migrant students, including their curriculum, school records and their teachers' assessments (Anonymous, 2015). All of the information presents a clear and helpful piece of evidence to develop learning plans for migrant students. Given this, X City government should attach much importance to upgrade the electronical management system for migrant students. And if possible, add some more items for them, like their textbooks, education fees and attendance records. With these efforts, schools in inflow areas can get more learning information and learning experience of migrant students, and they can carry on the recruitment work and plan learning strategies for them more easily. What's more, it is also convenient for migrant parents to apply transferring. Parents can apply online and don't have to cost too much time and energy to get these documents. Thus, there will be less migrant students who have to stay out of school for one

whole year just because their parents miss the time for transferring and recruiting.

### 3.3 Establish Education Funds Supply System

In view of the huge pressure on inflow areas and the significant spare education equipment in outflow areas, China should learn from the United State to establish a funding system that allows educational funds to move along with migrant students (Gouwens, 2001). According to the number of migrant students in one school, the central finance will distribute relative ratio of educational funds to the very school. Meanwhile, the central government and local governments should offer more incentive support on those who accept a large amount of migrant students. In addition to the educational funds, the governments should give them more special subsidies. Moreover, X City government should improve the mechanism of raising funds, like introducing more social resources to solve the financial problems for migrant education together.

### 3.4 Strengthen Migrant Parents' Awareness and Ability of Family Education

California set up Migrant State Parent Advisory Council to bring migrant parents into migrant education planning, operation as well as evaluation, which helped a lot (The California Department of Education, 2015). According to the current situation in China, this paper suggests that on one hand, X City government builds an education committee of migrant parents to strengthen their sense of presence and responsibilities in migrant students' education. On the other hand, the government cultivates migrant parents' ability of family education. We can do it from the following aspects: First, inform the parents of the latest policies on migrant education, update their understanding and knowledge on these policies; second, hold lectures and meetings on family education to help migrant parents learn how to tutor their children appropriately, and build a harmonious family education environment; third, by making conversation between migrant families and local families, establish family assistance system to help migrant students merge into urban education, and help them live and study in a healthy way.

### 3.5 Take Migrant Education Into Annual Assessment

Currently, although we have basically solved the problems of migrant students' admission and enrollment, the education quality of migrant students still hasn't been guaranteed yet. X City government should take some strong forces to it. For example, it can take migrant education into annual assessment and put this work as one of the assessment criteria of schooling. X City government may also encourage social forces and parents committed to take part in this assessment. Thus, the

migrant education will come under multi-force supervision, which is certainly good for guaranteeing migrant education.

What's more, as the Minister of Ministry of Education, Mr. Yuan Guiren said, Aesthetic Education is to educate our souls, and it is an important way to improve the basic quality of human beings, schools and our society. To bring migrant students into urban education, schools in X City should take Aesthetic Education as an essential curriculum to introduce it into school education. Through Aesthetic Education, it will not only cultivate migrant students' aesthetic perception, but also help them to establish a closer communication and relationship with local students, so that they can adjust themselves much better in urban education and urban life.

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## CONCLUSION

With the process of urbanization in China, migrant education has been one of the hottest issues in China. Based on the Education Equity Theory, many experts have studied on this topic from three aspects, they are equity on educational opportunity, equity on the educational process and equity on educational result. Although migrant students have almost enjoyed the equal right on educational opportunity, the equity on the educational process has become more and more serious. According to the successful experience in migrant education in the United States, migrant education is not an issue separated from others, but intimately connected to the our country and our society. Just as the Social Support Network Theory says, because we are living in a social supporting network, we need to find and get support from each part of the network when we solve problems. This is how the U.S. did. The government took some useful measures to enable local governments and schools, and so on to take responsibilities of migrant education; the local governments encouraged schools, migrant families and social organizations to take part in migrant education; the schools made great efforts to get the support, say financial support from federal and local governments, and they also tried hard to attract migrant families and other social power to migrant education. Thus, this paper would like to encourage schools in X City to take an active part in migrant education and do focus on governments, migrant families, various social powers and community engagement in efforts to solve migrant education together.

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