

Financing of education: A missing dimension of migrant child education policy in China

Abstract

This paper reviews the social policy responses to the migrant child education problem in China during past decade and examines the policy implementation in various areas and regions. The paper discusses conflicts of policy implementation in local level of governments and pinpoints the missing finance dimension of current social policy regarding migrant child education. The paper suggests that the central government should take a leading role on financing of migrant child education. Policy alternatives and implications are discussed as well.

Keywords

Migrant children, education policy, education finance

Challenges of migrant child education in China

This paper reviews the social policy responses to the migrant child education problem in China during past decade and examines the policy implementation in various areas and regions. The first section of the paper describes the education problem among migrant child population in China.

The migrant child education is a critical social problem because of the continued growth of large migrant population and its effects on urbanization process in China. The 5th National Census data indicated in November of 2000 that the total migrant population was more than 100 million. Among them, more than 14 million are children ages of 0-14, accounting for 13.7% of the total migrant population, which indicates the continuing large education demand from the migrant population.

With majority of migrant children are in their early school years, this paper focus on migrant child education at the primary school level. According to the Compulsory Education Law, which was issued in 1986, all children between 6 and 15 years of age were entitled to nine years of compulsory education, including 6-year primary school and 3-year middle school (People's Congress of China, 1986). Since the late 1980s, one of the primary goals of Chinese education development has focused on universalizing 9-year compulsory education around the country as a whole, particularly in rural and economically under-developed regions.

The migrant child education problem at the primary school level is mainly framed by China's household registration system and a decentralized education financing system. As a result of the

decentralization reform of education financing and administration, local governments became the primary resource of compulsory education. Literally, “local” means the place where people registered as permanent residents. The educational resources and school equipment standards are a function of the local economy which substantially differs between regions. Because of no local urban household registration, migrant children have been encountering difficulties in equal access to high quality schools in urban areas. Institutional barriers have been woven with economic barriers among migrant families.

In contemporary Chinese society, migrant status is a major indicator of social position. The household registration system in China divides the population into two types of residents: rural or urban residents. The household registration is one of major mechanisms for controlling population mobility between rural and urban areas (Cheng & Selden, 1994). With the social and economic reforms in China from the late 1970s, strong push-and-pull forces from both the rural and urban sides have driven a great deal of population migration from the rural areas to urban centers (Seeborg, Jin, & Zhu, 2000; Liang, 2001). Meanwhile, the power of the household registration system in controlling population mobility has become weaker. Rural residents are allowed to migrate to urban centers and temporarily reside there. As a result, there is an increasing migrant population in Chinese cities. According to the 5th National Census data, the total migrant population exceeds 100 million in 2000. Furthermore, since the early 1990s, one of vital changes of migration pattern is from individual to family migration; increasingly migrants come to urban areas with their families, including young children (Zhou, 2003; Duan & Liang, 2003, 2004). However, this geographical migration does not lead to change of resident identification (Chan, 1994). Migrant workers and their families remain being rural residents

although they actually work and reside in cities. As rural residents, they are excluded from many social welfare benefits, which their urban counterparts enjoy, including state subsidized medical care, pension, housing and education for their children. Migrant workers generally take low-paid, no-benefits jobs, which are viewed inferior for urban residents. The interplay of social inferiority and low economic status leads to exclusion, that is, migrant workers and their families are marginalized as outsiders (Pan, 2004).

Migrant status is a major barrier for migrant children entering public schools in cities (Shi, 2002). The Chinese Compulsory Education Law entitles all children between the ages of 6 to 15 to a nine-year compulsory education. Local governments are primarily in charge of allocating education resources and administrating local public schools. Resource allocation is based on the number of children who are registered as permanent residents within the local governments' jurisdiction. Because migrant children are registered as rural residents, there are no educational dollars allocated for them from the government in host cities. Meanwhile, once children move to urban areas, it is hard to meet their educational needs by rural local governments in the place of their origin. Hence, a large gap exists between the educational needs of migrant children and the available resources for them in cities.

To bridge the gap, urban public schools have started to open the door to migrant children on condition that migrant parents pay extra fees, that is, the temporary studying fee (*Jie du fei*). The requirement of extra fees is to supplement educational resources for migrant children for which city governments do not fund. In 2002, the Office of National Working Committee on Children and Women under the State Council, China National Children's Center and United Nation

Children Fund conducted a survey about migrant children's demographic, health, education, and child rights protection in nine Chinese cities (abbreviated to the nine-city survey later). Findings of the survey demonstrate that migrant children enrolled mainly in public schools. Public schools have been the major educational institutions to provide the compulsory education for migrant children. Among the migrant children who receive schooling, on average, about four-fifths of them attend public schools (Zhang & Zhao, 2003). However, in large city, such as Beijing, the migrant children enrollment in public schools is lower than in small cities.

Extra fees are relatively expensive for many migrant families who are engaged in lower-income likelihoods (Han, 2001; Li, 2003). For example, in the capital city, Beijing, public schools used to charge 1,200 *yuan* (\$145) a year for each migrant child who wanted to attend public primary school; junior high schools charged 2,000 *yuan* (\$240) (Xinhuanet, 2004). A study conducted in Beijing surveyed nearly 2000 migrant children who were enrolled in non-public schools and found that about 15% of migrant families have monthly household income higher than 1,000 *yuan*; a quarter of migrant families have income ranging from 800 to 1,000 *yuan* a month; the rest have income less than 800 *yuan* or even less than 500 *yuan*, accounting for 20.2%, and 16.1% respectively (Han, 2001). It is reasonable to believe that financial hardship is a crucial obstacle that blocks children from migrant families attending urban public schools.

Major migrant child education policy

The second section of the paper reviews the most important legislations, regulations, and administrative policies addressing the migrant child education problem. The review shows a gradual change of migrant child education policy from exclusive to inclusive perspective.

Fundamentally, the Compulsory Education Law, which was issued in 1986, was the fundamental law for guiding the development of primary and secondary education in China. According to this Law, all children between 6 and 15 years of age were entitled to nine years of compulsory education, including 6-year primary school and 3-year middle school.

With regards to migrant child education in particular, there are a series of educational policies developed since mid-1990s. Two critical policy documents in relation to migrant child education are the Interim Measure of School Education for Temporary Migrant Children (*Liudong ertong shaonian jiuxue zanxing banfa*) (Abbreviated as “the 1998 Measure”), and the Notice of Improve Education of Children of Rural Migrant Workers (*Guowuyuan guanyu jinyibu zuohao jincheng wugong jiuye nongmingong zinv jiaoyu gongzuo de yijian de tongzhi*) (Abbreviated as the 2003 Notice).

In 1998, the State Education Committee and the Public Security Department jointly issued the Interim Measure of School Education for Temporary Migrant Children (*Liudong ertong shaonian jiuxue zanxing banfa*). The 1998 Measure confirms two significant guidelines for migrant child education. One is governments of destination cities are primarily responsible for the education of migrant children. The other is urban public schools are primarily responsible for accommodating migrant child educational needs. However, the 1998 Measure emphasizes the population migration control from a governmental administrative perspective. According to the 1998 Measure, migrant children should go back to their original places of household registration to receive compulsory education if there is a guardian available. If not, the migrant child may

apply to schools in their host jurisdiction if their parents have lived in Beijing for more than six months and already received temporary residence cards. Meanwhile, the local government, in the original household registered places of migrant children, should strictly control migrants with school-age children from taking their children to other places.

Since 1998 local governments started to develop local measures to implement policies concerning migrant children, based on the Compulsory Education Law and the 1998 Measure. In 2003, the State Council issued the Notice of Improve Education of Children of Rural Migrant Workers (*Guowuyuan guanyu jinyibu zuohao jincheng wugong jiuye nongmingong zinv jiaoyu gongzuo de yijian de tongzhi*). The 2003 Notice has inherited the two essential guidelines of migrant child education that the primary responsibilities are concentrated on governments of destination cities and urban public schools. Meanwhile, the 2003 Notice made critical changes in its policy documents comparing to the 1998 Measure, suggesting a change from an exclusive to inclusive perspective in migrant child education (Zhou, 2005).

One way to examine social welfare policy is from a benefit-allocation framework (Gilbert & Terrell, 2005). In this paper, education is viewed as one of significant welfare benefits given in Chinese society education traditionally has been emphasized as the most important way to upward mobility and better life chance. A number of dimension of social policy are to consider the choices among principles determining what benefits are offered, to whom they are offered, how they are delivered, and how they are financed (Gilbert & Terrell, 2005). From the benefit-allocation framework, the 2003 Notice, as a social policy, addresses the above questions. The education for migration children is clarified as entitled right, therefore all migrant children in

appropriate school age should receive compulsory education. The 2003 Notice specifically refers to children of rural migrant workers, which is different from the term of migrant children in the 1998 Measure. The change of targeting to rural migrant worker reflect the realities that majority of migrant families who encounter financial difficulties and institutional barriers on their children's education are families migrated from rural areas.

For the question of how they are delivered, the 2003 Notice reinforced the principle of education delivery from the 1998 Measure that the urban public schools are major channel for educating rural migrant children in urban areas. Furthermore, it pointed out migrant children should be treated equally with non-migrant urban children using same academic standards and educational goals, which is a significant step to move toward a more inclusive policy of migrant child education.

Finally, considering the question of how migrant child education is financed. The 1998 Measure does not provide clear answer except in the item 11 that says public schools can charge extra fees for migrant families for accepting migrant children in their schools. The change of the 2003 Notice eliminate the requirement of extra fees for migrant children, meanwhile it states that municipal and education authorities should manage to finance migrant child education and give subsidies for children from poor migrant families. In terms of education fees, there should be equal treatment for migrant and non-migrant children.

The new 2003 Notice strive to more inclusive education policy for migrant children. The remaining question is how host cities finance migrant child education. The 2003 Notice lists

three major sources of financing of migrant child education. First of all, municipal financial departments subsidy public schools which accept a large number of migrant children. Second, partial of city education financial resources should be used for migrant child education. Last, donations from companies, organizations and individuals should be encouraged. It is pointed out that financial subsidies for public schools should be arranged by municipal financial departments.

The 2003 Notice leads migrant child education to a clear city government responsible, equal, inclusive policy. The remaining question is how the policy has been implemented in different cities and regions.

Migrant child education policy implementation

The third section of the paper examines the implementation of migrant child education policy in local levels of government focusing on enrolling migrant child in urban public schools. First of all, it is important to recognize the huge socioeconomic disparity and education development disparity in China. As discussed in the first section, the educational resources and school equipment standards are a function of the local economy, which substantially differs between regions. The decentralized system is based on a diversified revenue base at the county level and below. As a result, two of the prominent problems in Chinese compulsory education are the financial difficulties of poor and rural areas, and large financial disparities across areas and regions (Tsang & Ting, 2005; World Bank, 1999).

Statistics from 1999 show that national per-student total spending was 701 *RMB* (\$88) at the primary level, and 1,165 *RMB* (\$146) at middle school level. Per-student total spending in urban areas and rural areas were 1,062 *RMB* (\$133) and 576 *RMB*(\$72), respectively (Tsang & Ding, 2005). The ratio of per-student total spending at primary level between urban and rural areas was 1.84, and the ratio was 1.69 between urban areas and rural areas at middle school level (Tsang & Ding, 2005). Therefore, urban areas enjoyed a substantial advantage in terms of per-student total spending. In terms of financial resources, data show that at the primary level for the country as a whole 62.8% of the total spending was from government budgeted funds. Furthermore, urban areas have a stronger ability to mobilize more resources from government and non-government sources.

Given varied financial abilities in local level, there are various models of migrant child education policy. The following are two examples of municipal cities and provinces where a large number of migrant population are concentrated.

In Beijing, survey results show that about 96% of migrant children are attending public schools (Wang, 2008). In some public schools located in urban and rural joint areas in Beijing, migrant students account for one third to two third of the total student population. The biggest challenge identified through surveys with educational authorities and school principals is the financing of migrant children education in their schools. When children migrated to cities, education resources for their compulsory education do not come with them. However, under the 2003 Notice policy, the host city has to provide education and find financial resources for it.

In Beijing, the financing burden falls into the local, at the school district, level to manage the challenge. Schools accepting a large number of migrant children can get some financial subsidies from the municipal level government, however the subsidies are not calculated by the number of migrant students and the average per-student spending at the urban public school standard (Wang, 2008). Therefore, when the school put all financial resources, both for normal urban household registered students and rural migrant students, the per-student spending is hard to reach its normal standard. In other word, there is still a shortage of education resource in total. Further, a concern is that accepting migrant children without sufficient financial subsidies actually sacrifice normal urban students' education, overall school quality and standards.

In Zhejiang province, one of the most popular destination of migrant population, the provincial government implemented a series of program to help migrant child education according to the 2003 Notice guideline. One of significant feature of Zhejiang experience is how to define responsibly of government in different level and how to balance the development in various regions. Liu (2007) stresses migrant child education financial subsidy strategies developed by the Zhejiang provincial government. Given the various socioeconomic development level, the province was classified into five level of regions. For the least developed regions, the provincial government provides 100 percent financial transfer, for the best developed regions, the provincial government provides 20 percent financial transfer to support migrant child education. The other three level of regions will receive 70 percent, 50 percent, and 30 percent, respectively, financial transfer from provincial government (Liu, 2007). Besides the financing subsidies to public schools, governments at different level, particularly in the local level, also attempt to support low-income migrant families by reducing education fees or providing scholarship.

Through above literature review from a policy perspective, financing of education for migrant children has been emerged as the most heatedly debate topic on policy implementation since it is unclearly defined in current education policies. It led to a great disparity of implementation in reality among different areas and regions.

Comparing Beijing and Zhejiang cases, two findings are crucial to study migrant child education policy implementation. First of all, the financing dimension of the education policy has been the most frequently cited challenges in current policy design. Secondly, the higher the financing transfer level, the stronger the abilities to subsidy and balance the migrant child education needs. In Zhejiang case, the financing transfer level increased from local, city or county, level to the provincial level, the abilities to manage regional disparity becomes stronger. It suggests the need of reform the financing design of migrant child education policy.

Discussion and conclusion

Migrant child education is a national issue beyond the local government administrative and financing ability. It should take into account large regional disparities across areas and regions. Further, the paper suggests a leading role of the central government in financing of migrant child education by redistribution of compulsory education resources.

Although local governments take primary responsibilities for financing compulsory education in their jurisdiction, the central governments and province governments could provide specific targeted funds for use in migrant child education. For instance, the central government has taken

a leading role in providing financial assistance to poor areas, mainly in rural areas across the country. In that case, the provincial and county level governments are required to match the central fund for supporting compulsory education (Tsang & Ding, 2005). In the case of migrant child education, it is need of long-term policy design of financing migrant child education. Rather one-time, temporary subsidy for certain places or schools.

More fundamentally, the central government need develop the financing mechanism of redistribution of education finance resource to areas and regions where migrant children largely located. Under current Chinese compulsory education policy, the decentralized financing of compulsory education tied with the household registration system can not respond the need of migrant child education. Only the central government has the abilities to mobile and transfer education finance resource to follow the flow of migrant children and their education needs.

In summary, through a review of current social policies and an examination of policy implementation, the paper points out that financing of education is the critical missing dimension of current migrant child education policy in China. It suggests a leading role of the central government in financing migrant child education compulsory education although more researches are warranted for policy making.

Reference

- Chan, Kam-wing. (1994). *Cities with invisible walls*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chen, J. (2004). *Beijingshi liudong ertong jiaoyu wenti chuntan* [A preliminary analysis of Beijing migrant child education]. *Journal of Haidian Zoudu College, special issue*, 108-113.
- Cheng, Tie-jun & Selden, M. (1994). The origins and social consequences of China's hukou system. *The China Quarterly* 139, 644-668.
- Duan, C., & Liang, H. (2003). *Liudong ertong jiaoyu wenti zhuan ti yanjiu* [Special issue on migrant children education problem]. In L. Zhang, & Zhao, Shunyi (Ed.), *Survey report on the temporary migrant children in 9 cities of China* (pp. 133-160). Beijing: Office of the Women and Children Work Committee of the State Council & the China National Children's Center.
- Duan, C., & Liang, H. (2004). *Woguo liudong renkou zhuangkuang* [Migrant population in China]. *Population Research*, 28(1), 53-59.
- Han, J. (2001a). *Beijingshi liudong ertong yiwu jiaoyu zhuangkuang diaocha baogao* [A report of migrant child compulsory education survey in Beijing]. *Youth Studies*, 8, 1-7.
- Han, J. (2001b). *Beijingshi Beijingshi liudong ertong yiwu jiaoyu zhuangkuang diaocha baogao (xu)* [A report of migrant child compulsory education survey in Beijing (Cont.)]. *Youth Studies*, 9, 10-18.
- Liang, Z. (2001). The age of migration in China. *Population and Development Review*, 27(3): 499-524. Liu, Chengbin (2007). *Zai zhongying yu defang zhijian: Minggong zinv jiaoye zhengce de caozuohua—Zhejiang sheng weili* [Between the central and local

- governments: Education for children of rural migrant workers, A case of Zhejiang Province].
- Lv, S., & Zhang, Shouli. (2001). *Bianyuanhua de jichu jiaoyu--Liudong ertong jiaoyu xianzhuang yanjiu* [Marginalized basic education--An analysis regarding current situation of migrant child education]. *Beijing: Zhongguo longdongli ziyuan kaifa yanjiuhui* [China Labor Resource Development Association].
- Pan, Z. (2004). *Zhongguo chengshi liudong renkou de fazhan kunjing yu shehui fengxian: Shehui paichi yu bianyuanhua de shengchan yu zaishengchan* [China migrant population development problem and social risks: Social exclusion and marginalization]. *Zhanlue yu Guanli [Strategy and Administration]*, 1, 87-91.
- People's Daily Online. (August 17, 2004). *Beijing to ensure compulsory education for migrant children*. Retrieved May 1st, 2005, from http://english.people.com.cn/200408/17/eng20040817_153444.html
- People's Daily Online. (December 23, 2004). *Children's education becomes top concern for migrant workers*. Retrieved May 1st, 2005, from http://english.people.com.cn/200412/23/eng20041223_168348.html
- Seeborg, M. C., Zhenhu Jin, & Yiping Zhu. (2000). The new rural-urban labor mobility in China: Causes and implications. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 29, 39-56.
- Shen, J., & Huang, Yefang. (2003). The working and living space of the 'floating population' in China. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 44(1), 51-62.
- Shi, B. (2002). *Chengshi liudong ertong shaonian jiaoyu wenti zhengce fenxi* [A policy analysis of migrant children schooling problems in cities]. *Journal of China Youth College for Political Sciences*, 21(1), 31-35.

- Wang, Wei (2008). *Beijing liudong renkou zinv yiwu jiaoyu zhengce shishi fenxi* [Beijing migrant child compulsory education policy analysis]. *Zhongguo jiaoyu xuekan* [*China Education Journal*].
- Xinhua News Agency. (March 8, 2004). *Migrant children enjoying school, making friends in Beijing*. Retrieved May 1st, 2005, from <http://www.china.org.cn/english/culture/89576.htm>
- Xinhuanet. (December 19, 2004). *Beijing to build schools for migrant workers' children*. Retrieved May 1, 2005, from http://en-1.ce.cn/National/Education/200412/19/200419_2613908.shtml
- Xu, L. (2003). *Xianlun jiaoyu jingfei de fenpei* [A preliminary analysis regarding education resource allocation]. *Journal of Inner Mongolia Normal University (Educational Science)*, 16(1), 10-14.
- Zhang, Binxian. (2001). *Liudong renkou zinv jiaoyu yanjiu de xianzhuang yu qushi* [The current situation and future trend of migrant child education]. *Tsinghua University Research on Education*, 4, 4-9.
- Zhang, Li. (2001). *Strangers in the city: Reconfigurations of space, power and social networks within China's floating population*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Zhang, L., & Zhao, Shunyi (Ed.) (2003). *Survey report on the temporary migrant children in 9 cities of China*. Beijing: Office of the Women and Children Work Committee of the State Council & the China National Children's Center.
- Zhao, X., & Liang, Wei. (2002). *Jiejue liudong renkou zinv jiaoyu xuyao jianli duoyuan tizhi* [Migrant child education needs multiple systems]. *Education Science Studies*, 11, 50-51.

Zhou, Jia (2005). Nongminggong zinv yiwu jiaoyu zhengce wenben de yanbian [The change of policy documents on education for children of rural migrant workers]. *Zhongguo zhigong jiaoyu* [China worker education].

Zhou, H. (2003). *Liudong renkou de jiatinghua jiqi yingxiang yinsu* [Trend of family migration and its causes]. Paper presented at the *Diwuci renkou pucha quanguo taolunhui* [The national conference regarding the 5th national census], Beijing.

Zhou, H., & Chen, Ling. (2004). *Dui liudong ertong xuexiao zhi helixing de sikao yu jianyi* [Consideration and policy suggestion on the rationality of schools for