

Analysis and Advice About the Effect of Education Voucher System on Migrant Children's Compulsory Education

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Abstract: Education problem faced by migrant children has become a hot topic of society. Among all solutions, education voucher system can help migrant children overcome challenges of entering school during compulsory education, improve educational quality, and safeguard educational equality. Analyzing migrant children's financial need on education and education voucher system at existing pilot sites is then an efficient way to improve education voucher system and solve migrant children's educational problems. People should increase education vouchers' face value properly, use past experiences to increase pilot sites, and establish other relevant policies as support to education voucher system, thus promoting educational justice.

1. Introduction

With the increase of the intranational migrants in China, the problem of compulsory education for migrant children is becoming increasingly prominent. Restricted by the limitation of educational resources, the migrant children often can't enjoy high-quality educational resources, even can't receive compulsory education due to the poor economic conditions. Among the solutions put forward by many scholars, compared with other system level reforms, the educational voucher system is easier to implement and has a positive impact on migrant children's education in the short term. However, although scholars have done researches on the compulsory education and the education voucher system of the migrant children respectively, there are relatively few researches on the cross field of both topics.

This study can make up for the lack of academic research in this field to a certain extent and provide suggestions for future application of the education voucher system in the compulsory education of migrant children. Through this study, I hope to improve the education situation of the migrant children and provide more well-educated citizens for the future development of China. At the same time, I also hope to provide a new way for the education voucher system to promote education equity and social equity in China.

2. Literature Review

Education voucher is a token in the field of education. In 1955, Milton Friedman proposed to use the voucher system to promote benign competition between American schools and improve the quality of education. Many researchers in and out of China have made an overall analysis of the education voucher system. Some essays analyze the implementation of the education voucher system around the world, summarizing the significance, development, and pilot projects in various countries. There are also some essays about the effectiveness of educational vouchers in specific regions, such as those written by Chinese scholars Zhou Yixin[1] and Shen Youlu[2].

There are many theories behind education voucher system, such as the new liberalism theory, the public management theory, and the education equity theory. In the research about the theory of education voucher, the balance between fairness and efficiency is one of the most controversial topics. Literature research on this topic can be roughly divided into three categories. The first category advocates efficiency, and a prominent advocator is Milton Friedman. The second category

prioritizes fairness. In China, for instance, some scholars advocate the improvement and design of the education voucher system to achieve the goal of education equity [3]. The third kind of literature focuses on both efficiency and fairness. Han Yanli, Wang Xinshuang and other scholars discuss the importance of balancing efficiency and fairness when circumstances change due to national conditions, education stage and other standards.

Different education stages have different education vouchers.

Targeted at educational issues in preschool education development, one author evaluates the universal application of educational vouchers in preschool education, and verifies the operability of a theory through Georgia pre-K program[4]. In China, Wei Xia, Fang Junjun and other scholars also proposed that the education voucher system can make children compete on the same starting line, reduce economic burden of poor families, and promote the efficiency of resource allocation.

Primary Education, or compulsory education, means that all school-age children and adolescents must receive a certain number of years of school education enforced by legislations, and the state, society and parents must guarantee it. After the introduction of education voucher system in China, some scholars try to use education voucher system to solve the education inequity in the compulsory education stage. Yang Hao, Yu Yunfeng[5], Tian Yuan[6] and other scholars have outlined the potential problems and possible solutions in the application of education vouchers to the field of compulsory education in China; Du Haiyan, Li Kejun[7], and other scholars take specific regions as examples to explore the feasibility and value of education voucher system on compulsory education.

Higher education- also called secondary education- is an important stage of training talents and professionals. Article "vouchers for higher education?" discusses the role of Education Voucher in compulsory and higher education stages. In China, scholars such as Zhao Yan, Huang Dan, and Wang Zhiwu[8] have made a comprehensive analysis on the purpose, feasibility and potential problems of implementing education voucher system in the higher education system, aiming to consider the effect of education voucher on China's higher education from various aspects.

In the education voucher system for different objects, there is one kind of education voucher focuses on solving the education problems of migrant children. Liu Yupan and other scholars value the mobility of "education voucher" and list it as one of the solutions to educational problems migrant children face. Dai Xiang[9], Li Zhiyou [10], Xu zhanchun[11], and other scholars have also analyzed the application and potential problems of the education voucher system in the education of migrant children in their articles. In addition to the general description, some scholars have conducted in-depth research on a certain stage of education. For example, Quan Xiaoxiao[12], Li Qiucui and other scholars focused on analyzing the significance and Prospect of "education voucher" in the compulsory education stage of migrant children.

To sum up, I believe that there are several deficiencies in previous literature related to the application of education voucher system in the education of migrant children. First of all, there are only few articles about the feasibility of the application of education voucher system in China. Few scholars have analyzed and improved the existing education voucher pilot in China, which leads to lack of literature on the practical employment of the education voucher system in the Chinese society, unable to play a further guiding role. In addition, in previous studies of Chinese scholars, there is a lack of evaluation of the impact of the education voucher system on the education of migrant children.

Based on the shortcomings mentioned above, researchers should carry out continuous research. Scholars should strengthen the evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of the policies in China's existing education voucher pilot areas through field research, data collation, interviews and other methods, so as to sum up the points worthy of reference and need to be improved, and apply them in more Chinese regions. In the aspect of migrant children's education, researchers can focus on the feasibility, advantages and problems of education voucher system, and then draw effective conclusions through analysis towards existing education voucher pilot areas, financial needs of migrant children, and relevant policies.

3. Analysis

3.1 Migrant Children need government's financial support on education

In order to understand the education expenditure of compulsory education of migrant children, I investigate the education situation and demand of migrant children in compulsory education based on the overall situation of migrant children in Beijing and the interview survey of individual cases.

According to the new compulsory education enrollment policy issued in 2020 in 16 municipal districts of Beijing, for families who do not hold the household registration in the municipal district, family members usually need to work and live in the municipal district, rent at the same address within the municipal district and live in the same place, register on the housing rental supervision platform, and have a stable employment in the municipal district for many years to make their children have the qualification to enter local public schools. Moreover, in the policy, it is usually specially emphasized to check the residence of some families with poor living conditions, such as aisle rooms, garage rooms, etc. If their residences do not meet requirement, children in their family will not be able to enter the school normally. Severe enrollment standards make it more difficult for migrant children to enter schools in Beijing. Therefore, many migrant children, especially those from low-income families, cannot get the qualification of compulsory education in public schools, so they can only choose to enter private schools with high tuition fees, return to their hometown, or study at home.

According to my understanding, there are at least one hundred private compulsory education schools in Beijing, some of which are established only for migrant children. I have tutored several migrant children who are in primary school. After a private school resumes classes in April 2020, it requires each child to pay 1000 yuan of tuition per month to have online classes. Since during the epidemic period, adults in migrant families were basically unemployed, the family could hardly afford such high tuition for three children in it, so those migrant children nearly drop school.

Here is another example. Dandelion middle school is a private school that undertakes compulsory education. It provides three-year courses in junior high school, and its students are qualified to take the entrance examination of senior high school in Beijing. The enrollment target of dandelion middle school is all migrant and nonmigrant primary school graduates who conform to the national policy, so many migrant children apply for the school. The school has perfect curriculum design, complete educational resources and pays attention to the development of students in many aspects, but the tuition fee is relatively high. According to the new enrollment policy issued in mid-May 2020, students need to pay 5800 yuan of tuition and miscellaneous fees and 500 yuan of accommodation, bedding and bathing fees (for dormitories) to get enrolled. There are also other fees, such as 275 yuan for paying in school uniform at the beginning of the first semester and 20 yuan for three meals a day and two extra meals (milk in the morning and main food in the afternoon). Even though the admission statement states that the government will subsidize 875 yuan (equivalent to education voucher) for each student this year and that the school will provide installment payment, 30% - 100% range of grants and other help to families with financial difficulties (not clearly defined), such help is not for all students, nor is it sufficient to reduce the family economic pressure, although these aids can be useful to some extent.

To sum up, many migrant children need to study in private schools with high tuition fees. There is a great financial pressure on family education, and some families need the help of the government, especially through the education voucher system. For migrant children of poor family background, the education financial allocation brought by the education voucher system can help them better complete their studies and receive compulsory education, which is of great benefit.

3.2 The education voucher system's Chinese pilot sites has certain effect

China has carried out education voucher pilot projects in Zhejiang Province and other regions and has carried out pilot education voucher system for compulsory education of migrant children in Anhui Province and parts of Guangdong Province. I will now explore the advantages and existing problems of the education voucher system through the analysis of the existing pilot area's education

voucher systems and their influence, so as to provide suggestions for the promotion and improvement of China's future education voucher system.

In the 21st century, China implements the policy of "giving priority to two aspects" in solving the problem of compulsory education for migrant children, but this policy has produced a paradox in financial distribution. That public schools undertake more responsibility to migrant children's education means that the input of public schools is increased. Additionally, regions of origins undertake more responsibility for migrant children's compulsory education. Therefore, the compulsory education funds for migrant children supported by the governments in the inflow areas have increased significantly. Since the inflow places are often economically developed areas, they often cannot be compensated by the central government. On the contrary, the government of the outflow area not only exempts the responsibility of compulsory education for the outflow children, but also gets the financial compensation from the central government for the rural areas or underdeveloped areas. In this way, the problem of unbalanced distribution of educational funds in inflow and outflow areas has arisen.

In order to solve this problem, many scholars focus on the education voucher system, that is, the public funds used for education are directly distributed to students or parents in the form of education vouchers, so that migrants can bring educational funds with them. With the mobility of education vouchers, the pressure of education funds in the inflow areas can be alleviated, and the education funds in the outflow places can also be directly invested in the compulsory education of migrant children.

In 2011, Anhui Province launched "the implementation plan of electronic education voucher for the children of migrant workers in Anhui Province". According to this scheme, starting from the first grade of compulsory education in the autumn of 2011, students in the compulsory education stage in Anhui Province will obtain E-education vouchers with the characteristics of household registration source when they register for e-student status. With the e-Voucher, students can go to the compulsory education school in the region of destination. After the implementation of the voucher, it is more convenient for children to go to school in other counties within Anhui province.

In September 2012, Zhongkai high tech Zone, as the first region in Guangdong Province to implement electronic education voucher, provided subsidies to migrant children who met certain standards to enter compulsory education private schools. Migrant children who enter private primary schools are subsidized by 300 yuan a year, and those who are enrolled in private junior high schools are subsidized by 400 yuan per person per year. After the initial success of the high-tech Zone, Huizhou announced that it would promote the "E-public education voucher" system in 2013. In 2013, Huizhou first granted subsidies to children from economically disadvantaged families in the city to enter kindergartens according to the standard of 1000 yuan per student per school year.

The policy of education voucher issued by Anhui Province and some areas of Guangdong Province conforms to the local political, economic and cultural conditions. Within the scope of implementation, education voucher system effectively alleviates the financial burden of migrant children and improves the well-being of migrant families.

However, the education voucher system also has some deficiencies, such as the low face value of the education voucher, it is difficult to meet the education funding needs of migrant children. At present, the government subsidies or education vouchers are no more than 1000 yuan. For migrant families, although the face value of the education voucher can offset part of the tuition fees, it cannot reduce the financial burden of the family fundamentally. Therefore, even if the education voucher system is implemented, it is difficult to have a great impact on the migrant children in private schools.

3.3 Relevant policies need to be improved

The implementation of education voucher system and its positive influence need to be guaranteed by the introduction and implementation of other relevant policies. For example, the government's cooperation mechanism, financial allocation mechanism, private school tuition

regulations and other relevant policies will all have certain impact on the effectiveness of the education voucher system.

For example, in 2015, the State Council further issued "the notice of the State Council on further improving the funding guarantee mechanism for urban and rural compulsory education" (hereinafter referred to as the "notice"). The notice unifies the policy of "two exemptions and one subsidy" for urban and rural compulsory education: "students in urban and rural compulsory education are exempted from tuition and miscellaneous fees, textbooks are provided free of charge, and living expenses are subsidized to boarding students from poor families ". The standard for students in private schools to be exempted from tuition and miscellaneous expenses shall be implemented in accordance with the benchmark quota of public funds per student determined by the central government. "

Starting from the spring semester of 2016, government will unify the benchmark quota of the shared funds of urban and rural compulsory education schools. The average primary school students in the central and western regions can get 600 yuan per student per year, and the ordinary junior middle school students can get 800 yuan per year. In the eastern region, the average primary school students can get 650 yuan per student and the ordinary junior middle school students can get 850 yuan per year. On this basis, the state has additional public funding subsidies for boarding schools, smaller rural schools, special education schools and disabled students in regular classes. But at the same time, government also abolished the central subsidy policy of exempting urban compulsory education from tuition and fees and compulsory education for migrant children.

Although this policy partly reduces the education funds of migrant children in compulsory education stage and the economic pressure of migrant families, it does not eliminate the issue completely. Many migrant children study in private schools, whose teachers' funds are not funded by the government, so they still need to ask for high tuition fees from students and their families. The cost is usually higher than the government subsidy, which still puts pressure on migrant families. Therefore, the policy of economic security mechanism of compulsory education needs to be further implemented.

4. Policy Advice and Suggestion

4.1 Increase the denomination of education voucher appropriately according to family's economic situation

At present, in the policies related to the education voucher system, especially for migrant children, government subsidies for children are very limited. As that many migrant children can only attend private schools instead of free public schools, education departments and governments at all levels need to appropriately increase the financial support for migrant children's education. This is to say, the denomination of education voucher, according to the local education funds, should be increased so as to reduce the economic pressure of migrant families.

Due to the limited education funds and different economic conditions of migrant families, the government get familiar with the economic status of each family through statistical surveys or household visits, and give subsidies of certain face value according to their respective economic status. In the case of increasing the denomination of education voucher and education funding, this method can maximize the efficiency of education funds investment, give subsidies to migrant children families efficiently and with clear target, so that migrant children can obtain higher quality education resources.

4.2 Increase number of pilot areas for the education voucher system

The level of economic development, culture, outflow and inflow of migrants in different parts of the country are different, so it is difficult to apply the same set of standards on all of them, including goal of education voucher, denomination, distribution methods, etc. Therefore, it is unrealistic to directly implement the education voucher system throughout the country.

As far as the current pilot projects in Guangdong and Anhui Province are concerned, it will be

more appropriate to gradually increase China's educational voucher system pilot projects in provinces or regions with similar development status (such as Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Yangtze River Delta, etc.). The benefits of this action are listed as follows.

First, it is relatively easy to manage the pilot provinces or regions with similar situations. It is difficult to count the migrant population because of their frequent change of residence, but the implementation of the education voucher system needs the specific information of migrant children's inflow and outflow regions. If the pilot area is more than one province or the whole China, it needs the cooperation of many provinces in China to establish a comprehensive and detailed database of migrant population or migrant children. At present, the establishment of such a database is relatively complex and still needs additional technical support, but it is relatively simple to establish a database of migrant population and migrant children within province, which can be directly in charge of the local provincial government. Moreover, it also facilitates the formulation of educational financial allocation plan and related policies. Each province can formulate its own education voucher system according to its own financial situation, existing policies, personnel flow and other factors. As far as the pilot projects are concerned, the establishment of the education voucher system for the migrant population in the province is feasible and practical. Each province can start from a few cities, and gradually expand to the whole province after observing, analyzing and improving the effect of new policies

Second, provincial pilot project is also conducive to retaining the labor force of provinces and supporting local education development. According to news reports, many migrant workers in Guangdong Province and Anhui Province benefited from the introduction of the education voucher system, so they decided to stay in the province to enable their children to continue to enjoy their education benefits. In this way, these provinces can retain a large number of young and middle-aged migrant population through education policies and provide more sufficient labor force for urban development. The education voucher system will also attract more children with difficulties entering school before the execution of education voucher system, increase enrollment rate and graduation rate of the province, and improve the overall literacy rate of local citizens.

In the process of implementation, government should retain the advantage of the liquidity of education voucher and gradually explore and improve it based on the experience of Guangdong Province and Anhui Province.

4.3 Education voucher system should be accompanied by other policy reforms simultaneously

As mentioned above, the financial assistance provided by education voucher system to migrant children's families, especially low-income migrant families, is relatively limited. If Chinese governments want to improve education equity and further solve the problem about migrant children's education, governments at all levels need to carry out the reform of other systems while implementing the education voucher system and introduce relevant policies to match the education voucher system.

In the long term, some institutional reforms are necessary to promote the education of migrant children. Many scholars have been calling for reform of the household registration system, gradually weakening the dual mode of urban and rural areas, so as to win more benefits and opportunities for the migrant population in the inflow areas. At the national level, various provinces are also continuously promoting the reform of higher education enrollment system, so that migrant children can successfully complete compulsory education and entrance examination (high school entrance examination, college entrance examination, etc.) in the inflow places, so as to ensure the stability and sustainability of their studies and better guarantee their right to education.

At the same time, the government can also reduce the cost of private education by supporting private education, increasing capital investment for private schools, and sharing the costs of teachers' employment and infrastructure maintenance, so as to indirectly reduce the schooling cost of migrant children. If the tuition fees and catering expenses of migrant children can be reduced, the education voucher system can more effectively share the remaining tuition fees of migrant children and alleviate the economic burden of their families. With the support of government, private

schools will be more valued by migrant children and their parents, attracting more students and providing necessary expenses for their school running. As a result, the average cost shared by each student will be appropriately reduced, which will indirectly achieve the purpose of the education voucher system.

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