Chapter 13

SCHOOLING OF RURAL-TO-URBAN MIGRANT CHILDREN IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Currently, there are over 27 million rural-to-urban migrant children in China who have migrated from rural villages to urban areas with their parent(s) or relatives without attaining permanent urban residency for the restricted household registration (“Hukou”) system. The educational issues among migrant children in urban areas have attracted more and more attention from the government and society. This chapter is organized into four sections to review the history, special issues and situation, challenges and recommendations for the schooling of rural migrant children in China. The first section describes the historical aspects of migrant children’s schooling, including original development, official documents promulgated for education of migrant children, the progress of compulsory education and the efficiency of schooling for migrant children since the 1990s. The second section aims to present some special issues and situations regarding migrant children’s schooling, which comprises several aspects, such as mobility, family environment, schooling situations of migrant children in public schools and characteristics and conditions of migrant children schools (MCS). The third section summarizes barriers and challenges in the schooling of migrant children by using the existing literature and official reports to describe the inequality of educational opportunity, the challenges of educational placement and the challenges of educational advancement. The final section discusses some practical and policy recommendations to improve the schooling of migrant children, which include reforming the household registration system; implementing policies on educational advancement; strengthening the acceptance of public schools; advancing the schooling enrollment management system; and enhancing regulatory oversight and supports for MCS, thus eliminating stigma and improving parenting skills.

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1. HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF MIGRANT CHILDREN’S SCHOOLING IN CHINA

1.1. Background

With the development of economic reform and urbanization, growing amounts of rural peasants have come to urban areas to seek employment. The term “rural-to-urban migrants” used in this chapter refers to those individuals who move from rural to urban areas for jobs and work or live in urban areas without permanent urban household registration (i.e., “hukou”) (Li et al., 2006). The Hukou system, which was a means of controlling population flows into urban areas (Goodkind & West, 2002), was established in 1958 to determine where one can live and what benefits one is entitled to (Liang, & Chen, 2007). When rural migrants move to the city without local hukou at urban destinations, they are not entitled to the same benefits as local residents (Goodkind & West, 2002). The rural-to-urban migrants may experience various kinds of stigmatization at their place of destination (Li et al., 2007), including unequal schooling opportunities for their children. According to the national survey in 2011, there were about 230 million migrants in China, with an increase of 147 million compared with the 1% National Population Sample Survey in 2005 (National Bureau of Statistics of China [NBSC], 2006). 80% of the population were rural-to-urban migrants (National population and family planning commission of P.R. China [NPFPC], 2012).

With the growing number of people participating in the migration process, and as migrants extend the duration of their stays in the cities, they may be more likely to bring other family members, including their children, to live with them, which contributes to the large number of rural-to-urban migrant children as well (Liang, & Chen, 2007). The term “rural-to-urban migrant children” used in this chapter refers children under the age of 14 who live with their rural-to-urban migrant parents in the urban destination (Duan, & Liang, 2004). With the rapid growth in the number of rural-to-urban migrant children in cities who are not entitled to the same schooling benefits as local children, the schooling of those children has become an increasingly serious social issue in contemporary Chinese society. This poses great challenges for the educational system in China, especially for that of a 9-year compulsory education.

1.2. The Three Stages of Development in Migrant Children’s Schooling

According to the transition of the Chinese education policy towards migrant children and the characteristics of migrant children’s schooling situations in the past decades, the development process of migrant education was divided into three developmental stages in this chapter.

1.2.1. First stage——Emergence and Challenges (Before 2001)

The issue of school-age migrant children’s schooling has been emerging since the 1990s, when the issue was first reported by the China Education Newspaper on January 21st, 1995 (Li, 1995) and later started to attract increasing attention from the Central government and policy-makers. The China Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China started to investigate the schooling of migrant children in 1995, and issued a policy document entitled
“The Regulation of Schooling issue of School-age Migrant Children in Cities and Towns (for Trial Implementation)” in 1996. Based on the result of the trial implementation, the China Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the China Ministry of Public Security, issued a document entitled “Provisional Measures on Migrant Children’s Schooling” in 1998. According to the two policies, a “blocking” management strategy was employed at this initial phase to prevent migrant children from receiving public education in cities due to the limited public educational resources. Moreover, no responsibility was definitely given to the local urban government to solve the school enrollment issue of the migrant children population (Han, 2007). With those policies issued by the central government, the number of migrants grew rapidly around the same time, which resulted in the increasing demand for the unmet schooling issues among migrant children.

With the rapid increase in the number of rural-to-urban migrant workers and their children in 2000, the issue of migrant children’s schooling in urban areas became increasingly serious. The 5th Chinese censuses data in 2000 indicated that there are about 8.8 million school-age migrant children in China, accounting for approximately 63% of all the migrant children under 14 years old (Duan, & Liang, 2004). According to the 5th Chinese censuses, the schooling among those children in this phase showed the following characteristics (NBSC, 2001; Duan, & Liang, 2004):

First, the situation of the school-age migrant children’s schooling was worse than the average level of school-age children in China. It was reported that 96.1% of school-age migrant children were enrolled in school while the average enrollment rate is 96.6% for all school-age children in China. The rate of drop-outs and enrollment deprivation among migrant children was 4.8%, which was higher than that of all the children in China (3.3%). It was estimated that 420,000 migrant children dropped out or stopped their schooling (NBSC, 2001; Duan, & Liang, 2004).

Second, a large proportion of school-age migrant children are facing the problem of delayed school enrollment. According to Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China, children should receive compulsory education at the age group of 6-14, but the results of the 5th Chinese censuses data in 2000 (see Table 1) showed that 46% of 6-year-old migrant children couldn’t start to receive education. In addition, 18.6% of the 14-year-old migrant children were still receiving primary school education, when the children were expected to have received middle school education by the age of 12.

Third, a high rate of migrant children dropped out and didn’t attend the school anymore. It was reported that 15.4% of the 14-year-old migrant children stopped their schooling according to the 5th Chinese censuses. The “child labor” problem was serious among those drop-out migrant children.

Fourth, a great number of MCS have emerged since the 1990s, even though they had poor and inferior teaching conditions. In response to the rapid increasing demand for the schooling of school-age migrant children in urban areas, some temporary schools were founded specifically for migrant children (i.e. ‘migrant children schools’) (Li et al., 2010). For example, the first MCS in Beijing was established by migrant workers around 1993 (Han, 2001). Since then, the number of MCS has increased rapidly. A sudden growth occurred in 1997 and MCS were booming at that time. By the end of 2000, at least 200 migrant schools had been established in Beijing, enrolling more than 40,000 migrant children (Han, 2001). According to a study among 50 migrant schools in Beijing (Han, 2001), there were 18 schools (36%) with 100 to 200 migrant children enrolled, while there were 11 schools (22%) with a
larger size of migrant children (about 200 to 300 migrant children). Great differences were found among those migrant schools. The smallest school had 16 migrant children enrolled, while the largest had 1976 students enrolled. Only a few schools had less than 50 or more than 1000 students. It should be noted that, among those 50 schools, only 6 schools had junior high school, and only one school provided senior high school. Altogether, even though there were many MCS providing education for migrant children, most of them enrolled small numbers of migrant children and could not offer high school education for those children. Moreover, these schools were usually unlicensed and had no permanent locations, and the teaching conditions were inferior compared to those of the local public schools (Li et al., 2010; Han, 2001).

1.2.2. Second Stage——Exploratory and Dynamic Changes (From 2001 to 2009)

A profound and remarkable educational policy transformation has been carried out in China since 2001. Before 2001, the Chinese government imposed restrictions on compulsory education of rural-to-urban migrant children and limited school-age migrant children’s access to public school education in urban destinations. However, the policy towards migrant children’s education has tremendously changed since 2001. An explicit policy of “relying primarily on urban destinations as well as relying primarily on public schools” was developed. The policy regulated that it was the urban government’s responsibility to solve the schooling issue of migrant children, which was a crucial breakthrough in schooling development issues among the population (Han, 2007). Nevertheless, the situations of migrant children’s schooling from 2001-2003 remained serious due to the poor implementation of the “two relying on” policy. An investigation among migrant children in 9 cities of China in 2002 (see Table 1) showed that the migrant children’s schooling issue had the following characteristics (Research group of the investigation on the temporary migrant children in 9 cities, 2003).

First, the rate of drop-outs and the lack of attendance among migrant children in schools were even higher than that of the 5th Chinese censuses in 2000. The investigation results showed that only 90.7% of school-age migrant children received school education. Migrant children had a high rate of drop-outs and never attending schools during the stage of compulsory education, accounting for 9.3% of all school-age migrant children, while that of the 5th Chinese censuses was only 4.8%.

Second, the situations of delayed enrollment in primary school were still very serious among the population. The investigation results showed that 46.9% 6-years-old migrant children were not receiving school education, which was similar to that of the 5th Chinese censuses.

Third, the proportions of migrant children in public schools and MCS are different across the provinces. According to the survey among migrant children in 9 cities of China, the private schools and MCS in the eastern region or large cities had a comparatively high rate of migrant children enrollment. Contrarily, public schools in the western regions and small cities were more open to migrant children. These different patterns were correlated with the availability of educational resources and facilities and the practical needs of the schooling of migrant children’s across regions.
### Table 1. Population and proportion of migrant children in schooling-related items in existing data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surveys</th>
<th>Migrant Children (6-14)</th>
<th>Studying in school (%)</th>
<th>Drop-outs &amp; enrollment deprivation</th>
<th>Delayed age for enrollment</th>
<th>Delayed age for graduation</th>
<th>Stop schooling after age 14</th>
<th>In public school</th>
<th>In private/migrant school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>8800,0000 (63%)</td>
<td>96.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>8160,0000 (62.11%)</td>
<td>95.7%</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
<td>19.31%</td>
<td>7.38%</td>
<td>1.26%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>98.2%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**
- <sup>a</sup>The 5<sup>th</sup> Chinese censuses data (2000).
- <sup>b</sup>The investigation on the temporary migrant children in 9 cities (2002).
- <sup>c</sup>1% National Population Sample Survey (2005).
- <sup>d</sup>Data from National Birth Control Committee (2009).
Fourth, the proportion of migrant children who drop out of school or discontinue their education during the stage of compulsory education is growing gradually with their increasing age. In comparison to boys, girls are more likely to be deprived of education. These findings indicate that it is far from easy to fully guarantee the schooling rights and impartialities of migrant children. At the same time, ways to help the migrant children successfully receive compulsory education is still an important issue.

With the increasing implementation of policies, the schooling issue of migrant children had been greatly improved during the period between 2003-2009, when the Chinese central government had set out to recognize the importance of migrant children’s schooling in depth and change the management principle of migrant children’s compulsory education from controlling to serving, admitting that migrant children have a right to compulsory education (Lv, 2008). The “two relying on” policy was seriously implemented and the local municipal governments were requested to take some effective measures to help solve migrant children’s schooling issues, such as appropriating a large sum of the budget, especially for migrant children’s schooling, lowering the public school entrance threshold and simplifying the public school entrance process (Lv, 2008). Meanwhile, several policies and guidelines were issued to promote the schooling of rural-to-urban migrant children in this period. The Office of the State Council issued a “notification about providing employment management and service for rural-to-urban migrants” and forwarded “guidelines about the promotion of the compulsory education among migrant children” which was issued by the Ministry of Education in 2003. Two years later, the State Council required the local government to systematically solve the difficulties of migrant children’s schooling in a document composed of “Some guidelines on promoting the construction of the new rural socialist”. Then the State Council issued two additional documents in 2006 (i.e., “the determination of CPC central committee on several important issues regarding constructing socialist harmonious society” and “several guidelines on solving problems for rural-to-urban migrants”), taken as significant measures to promote equal education and give priority to the development of education. In 2007, seven central governmental agencies (including the Central Organization Department and the Ministry of Education etc.) jointly promulgated a document of “Notification on implementing a central spirit of being active in caring for rural, left-behind children and migrant children”, aiming to solve problems for left-behind children and migrant children effectively and scientifically (Gong, Hu, & Yin, 2012).

Under the improved social environment and government policy, the situation of school-age migrant children’s schooling was getting better compared those of 2003, even though the number of school-age migrant children still maintained rapid growth during this period. According to the 1% National Population Sample Survey in China in 2005 (see Table 1), the number of rural-to-urban migrant children under 14 years old was about 13.14 million, among which 62.11% were school-age migrant children (8.16 million), which was quite similar with the 5th Chinese censuses in 2000. But the rate of migrant children who never entered or dropped out of school was 3.33% (0.57% and 2.76% respectively), a little lower than it was in the 5th Chinese censuses (4.8%) (Duan & Yang, 2008; Wang, Duan, & Yang, 2010). The rate of discontinued schooling after primary education was 1.26%, meaning that a total of 4.59% of school-age migrant children didn’t complete the whole compulsory education process. These findings indicated that there was still a long way to go regarding the schooling issue among migrant children.
Despite this progress, many difficulties and challenges still existed. First, a significant difference was found in the schooling situation of migrant children across provinces and regions with different migrating distances. Specifically, the rate of migrant children who could not receive compulsory education as required varied from a minimum of 1.48% to a maximum of 16.0% across the provinces, with the rate in Tibet Autonomous Region, Xinjiang province, Qinghai and Yunnan province higher than that in Beijing and Shanghai. It is noteworthy that inter-provincial migrant children report a higher rate of unfinished education than migrant children floating within counties or provinces (Duan & Yang, 2008; Wang, Duan, & Yang, 2010).

Second, migrant children are likely to be migrating long-term, rather than short-term. According to the 1% National Population Sample Survey in 2005, a large proportion (1/3) of school-age migrant children reported a migration duration of at least 6 years. This indicated that a long-term plan should be designed to meet the potential education needs of this great number of migrant children.

Third, even though the compulsory education law guarantees nine years of “free” compulsory education to all children between ages 6 and 14, such free education was only available to the school-aged children registered in the household registration system. The migrant children, as unregistered residents, were not entitled to access local educational facilities unless they paid an extra fee for their education (Kwong, 2004). The "Provisional measure on implementing compulsory education for school-aged migrant children in Beijing" was issued in 2004, which bans public school from charging migrant children extra fee. Meanwhile, it requires the government of local counties to be the main executor of this measure. However, migrant children still face many difficulties during the pursuit for their education in public schools. Most migrant children were rejected by multiple schools when they applied for school enrollment (Research group of the investigation on the temporary migrant children in 9 cities, 2003), since there are some strict criterions that migrant families have to meet, such as providing five proofs (i.e. temporary residence permit, actual residency proof, work proof, original Hukou proof and family Hukou proof). The migrant children whose families could not provide those documents may face numerous difficulties when they apply to public schools.

Fourth, some problems still exist for migrant children who want to continue beyond compulsory education. A study based on the data of the 1% National Population Sample Survey found that: up to 8.67% of older migrant children did not complete their compulsory education (Duan & Huang, 2012), which was about twice of those school-age migrant children (4.59%), and only half of older migrant children (aged from 15-17) were in school. Another study found that, among 3407 migrant children in Shenzhen and Guangzhou, only 10.74% of them entered ordinary high schools and 0.97% entered key high schools in the city (Shen & Zhou, 2006). As they were getting older, migrant children were more prone to take jobs. Among those employed migrant children, about 15.6% have not completed their compulsory education (Duan & Huang, 2012).

Fifth, even though the new policy initiated by the Beijing Municipal Education Commission (BMEC) in 2007 required local governments to offer free classrooms for migrant children schools to reduce the discrepancy between them and the local children, only registered MCS which accounted for 24% of the existing migrant children schools, would benefit from the new policy (People’s Daily Online, 2007).
Despite the challenges mentioned above, it is noteworthy that an improvement in enrollment deprivation and drop-outs was found from 2005 to 2009 (about a total decrease of 2.55%); there are 98.2% migrant children aged 7-14 studying in school, with 68.8% of them enrolling in public schools, 25.1% in formal private schools and 6.1% in MCS (see table 1) (National Birth Control Committee, 2009). The data indicates that some policies or measures were effective during the development process of schooling for migrant children.

1.2.3. Third Stage —— Improvement (2010 - present)

Even though some significant achievements have been made in the previous stages, new challenges still occur and require timely and effective measures. On the one hand, the number of school-age migrant children is still growing rapidly. According to the 6th Chinese censuses data in 2010, the migrant population reached another peak, which represented a 81.03% increase compared with the 5th Chinese censuses data in 2000. The population of migrant children grew to about 38 million in 2010 (Zhao, 2012), which may have resulted in a shortage of existing education resources and effective policies to meet the increased demand for the schooling of migrant children (NBSC, 2011). On the other hand, a relatively long time is still needed to actually implement equal compulsory education in China. The National Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and Development Program (2010-2020) proposed that the issue of rural-to-urban migrant children receiving compulsory education equally should be solved from a strategic perspective. In order to consolidate and enhance the level of nine-year compulsory education, the Chinese government should persist toward the principle of “relying primarily on the government management of destinations, relied primarily on full-time public primary and secondary schools”, in order to ensure that rural-to-urban migrant children have the same rights and access to compulsory education as the urban children. The government should conduct an investigation and develop effective regulations so that migrant children’s educational advancement in urban destinations could be guaranteed, post compulsory education. As the National Medium and Long-term Educational Reform and Development Program described, the Chinese government should consolidate the current achievement of compulsory education. Furthermore, a new issue on granting migrant children permission to take high school or university entrance examinations in urban areas is also discussed.

The rapid increase in the number of migrant children, as well as the new educational goal on the schooling issues of migrant children proposed by the Chinese government, should be paid further attention by educators, policy-makers and the public.

2. Specific Issues and Situations Regarding the Schooling of Migrant Children

2.1. Mobility

There is a series of global research focused on the association between migration and the schooling process of migrant children in order to examine whether mobility would influence migrant children’s schooling. Straits (1987) summarized the consequences of moving from a rural culture to an urban culture based on various theories and empirical studies and presented
that school progress might be impeded when children move to more advantaged environments because migrant children were likely to be less advantaged than local children in terms of prior experiences and education. Moreover, geographic mobility occurs in rural-to-urban migration and in the migration process in the city. Migrant families may continue changing their places of residence in the city, thus increasing the frequency of school changes (Duan, 2004; Han, 2001; Heckmann, 2008; Swanson & Schneider, 1999). As our survey among migrant children (grade 4 to grade 6) in Beijing showed, 39.3% of migrant children had transferred schools at least once in the city. Among those transferred children, 31.02% of them had transferred twice and 21.11% had transferred at least three times. Frequently transferring schools could be caused by various factors, such as policy restriction, low social and economic status and the unstable employment of migrant parents. The impacts of geographic mobility on various measures of student achievement have been documented in many previous studies (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Hagan, MacMillan, & Wheaton, 1996; Ingersoll, Scamman, & Eckerling, 1989). For example, some studies found that 41.5% of migrant children who moved frequently achieved a medium level of academic performance, while 36.5% of them reported poor academic performance (Zhang, Gong & Yao, 2011; Feng, 2008). In addition, some studies suggested that a high frequency of transferring schools might impact the mental health of migrant children, as well as their relationships with teachers or classmates (Zhang, Gong & Xiao, 2011; Zhao, 2006; Lin, Fang, Liu & Lan, 2009). These findings demonstrated that frequent mobility may have potentially negative effects on the academic performance of migrant children.

2.2. Family Environment

Evidence from previous studies demonstrated that the schooling of migrant children might be associated with several family factors. First, it is generally recognized that the social and economic status (SES) of migrant families is an important factor that might influence the obtainment of educational opportunities for migrant children in the city. Some studies showed that generally low SES would greatly restrict migrant children’s access to the same education resources as urban children (Zhao, 2012). Other research found that the family status, including parents’ educational level, incomes and residence environment for their children, was directly associated with the determination of school types that they chose for their children (Gill Crozier, 1997). Previous studies also showed that parents with higher educational levels, fewer children, better social networking and higher SES may prefer to choose an advanced education (public schools) for their children (Chen & Fang, 2007; Wang, 2009; Yuan & Hou, 2012; Zhang, Gong, & Rao, 2011). In addition, existing studies also demonstrated that a disadvantaged family environment, which reflected the poor living and study conditions at home (i.e. small rooms, noisy surroundings), had a negative influence on the academic performance of migrant children (Li et al., 2010; Li, 2005; Zhou & Wu, 2008). Taken together, those findings indicated that the family SES had vital effects on the possibility of enrolling migrant children in well-conditioned schools.

Second, parenting styles also have some potential effects on migrant children’s schooling. Parenting styles describe the way parents react and respond to their child's emotions. Migrating parents who have relatively low educational levels and high stresses in urban life are likely to present poor reactions and responses to their children, which has a
detrimental influence on the schooling process and academic performance of migrant children (Zheng, 2006; Liu, Fu & Fang, 2010; Feng, 2008; Zhou & Wu, 2008). Cumulative evidence showed that, compared with local students, a larger proportion of migrant children reported negative parenting styles in their family, including severe punishments, excessive interference and refusal. These negative parenting styles were found to be significantly and positively related with disadvantaged schooling processes, such as learning difficulties and poor adaptability (Liu, Fu & Fan, 2010; Zhou, Wang & Hu, 2011).

Third, parent-child relationships and parental involvements could not be ignored during the migrant children’ schooling process either. A majority of migrant children’s parents are living a stressful life and have limited interaction time with their children; therefore they are unable to provide enough support and supervision for their children’s academic studies (Li et. al, 2010; Zhu, 2011). For instance, Han (2001) found that more than 11.9% of migrant children’s parents reported that they have little time to supervise and take an interest in their children’s schooling. Lei (2007) presented that almost 53% of migrant children fail to finish their homework because of limited parental support.

Finally, the parental expectation of children’s education is no less important than other factors. Several studies found that a number of migrant parents show low expectations toward their children’s education (Zhou, 2001; Li et al., 2010; Lu, 2007). Even though about 88% of migrant children reported that they wish to continue higher education after compulsory education, with more than half of them hoping to attain bachelors or masters degrees (Zhao, 2012), most parents would encourage their children to continue their education after compulsory education because they could not afford the costly school fees. Instead, parents would likely persuade their children to get a job and earn money for their family.

2.3. The Schooling Situations of Migrant Children in Public Schools

Since most of the migrant children were not enrolled in the local education system, the national government notified a formal document which seriously advised the local government to improve the education of rural-to-urban migrant children without any extra charge. However, the local government has enough flexibility to implement their work, and some local governments still show discrimination against migrant children. Some schools even refuse to provide school enrollment to migrant children by creating excuses, while some charge migrant families a great deal of money for other nominal reasons (Li, 2007). Nevertheless, gaining school enrollment does not mean everything. Some migrant children, who are lucky enough to enter public schools or formal private schools, are treated as transient students (refer to students whose school records are kept in rural areas but they study in urban areas). Most of the transient students study in the same classes with local children while only 2.8% study in the classes specially established for migrant children. Transient students can attain temporary, but not permanent, school records in their schools, which prevents them from continuing their education in urban areas after their compulsory education is complete.

It is a general phenomenon that migrant children who are studying in public schools are likely to experience discrimination. Experiencing discrimination would not only negatively impact migrant children’s social abilities and academic performance; it would also influence the migrant parents’ decision of sending their children to public schools (Duan & Liang,
2005; Zhou, Qu & Zhang, 2005; Li et al., 2010). On the one hand, migrant children in public schools are easy targets for social discrimination, as well as unfair treatment and serious punishments from their teachers (Li, 2004). On the other hand, migrant children also face peer discrimination from local students, including being looked down upon and bullied. The existing evidence shows that 58.9% of migrant children dislike or even hate local children because they are frequently bullied or looked down upon by local students (Zhang, 2008).

2.4. Characteristics and Conditions of MCS

2.4.1. Teaching Quality

Teaching quality varies among public schools, formal private schools and MCS, which potentially influences the education quality for migrant children. Teachers who are employed in public schools and formal private schools are likely to receive higher or better education as well as formal training, in order to possess the qualifications for teaching. However, when compared with either public or private schools, the teaching quality in MCS is still worth noting. Teachers in MCS usually have relatively low educational levels and they didn’t receive a formal teaching certification. Most teachers in those schools are the founders’ relatives or friends and they don’t have any teaching experience or formal qualifications for teaching, while only a few teachers have teaching experience, but are retired (China Popin, 2003).

2.4.2. Poor Facilities in MCS

MCS are limited in facilities, environments and resources. Most of those schools, which are not well-equipped, earned a label of “shanty schools” because many of them are housed in makeshift sheds (Kwong, 2004). Most MCS do not have playgrounds for students. Only a small proportion of MCS have some simple and outdated sports equipment. Consequently, most migrant children do not have extracurricular activities unless they go to outside schools where their security could not be guaranteed. Also, the daily life facilities in MCS are too limited and poor to meet the basic needs of migrant children. (1) Some MCS do not build toilets for students. It is very inconvenient and unsafe for students because they have to use public toilets outside their schools. (2) The lighting is poor and air circulation is inadequate in most MCS; many migrant children have to study in dim and overcrowded classrooms without windows. (3) Many migrant children have to endure the terrible coldness of winter and the scalding heat of summer because there are no heaters or air conditionings in their classrooms. Additionally, most of the MCS have a shortage of educational resource; multimedia devices, libraries, experimental equipment are not easily attained by MCS. Thus, more places, equipment and resources need to be established in MCS in order to improve the study environment for migrant children.

Even though some potential disadvantages exist in MCS, the development and progresses made by those schools are undeniable. As the number of MCS increases, many schools compete to recruit more students through improving the arrangement and quality of their curriculums simultaneously. Various courses (i.e. language, mathematics, English, science,
society, painting, music, and physical education) are provided in MCS to attract migrant children. However, the quality of those courses may be limited because of the shortage of equipment and professional teachers. Some MCS do not have special equipment for conducting courses even though they promise to provide such courses (Han, 2001). Therefore, it is critical to improve the educational quality of MCS and provide more advantaged environments for Chinese migrant children (Zhou & Wu, 2008).

2.4.3. Relocation of MCS

The relocation of schools, migrant children and teachers in MCS occurs frequently, reflecting an unstable educational environment for migrant children in the city. MCS may have to relocate for several social reasons, such as urban construction, demolition and reconstruction. Han (2001) found that about 15% of MCS have experienced moving from one place to another, and some of them even changed locations annually (Han, 2001). Migrant children may transfer schools or move with their schools when they are relocated, which results in various problems, such as emotional adaptation problems and study difficulties (Heckmann, 2008; Duan, 2004; Han, 2001). Besides, migrant children may also migrate frequently in the urban areas when their parents change jobs or move to another house. An additionally noteworthy issue is the turnover of teachers; teachers quit or resign quite frequently in MCS because of the low incomes, high working pressures and poor conditions. Many teachers will quit when they get better jobs someplace else. An existing study found that, among 69 classes in MCS, 47.8% have changed teachers in one semester. A few classes have changed teachers seven times in one semester (Han, 2001). Migrant children have to adjust to new teachers, schools, and curricula, which may cause some related problems such as anxiety, depression, problematic behaviors and poor academic performance. Thus, the relocation of schools, migrant children and teachers may result in some detrimental outcomes to the lives and studies of migrant children.

2.4.4. Shutdowns of MCS

As far as we know, the number of MCS in Beijing in 2008 was 302, which was sharply reduced due to shutdowns or demolitions in recent years. According to the data provided by the Beijing Education Committee, there were 158 MCS in Beijing in 2011, and 59 of these schools were formally authorized while the others did not have school licenses. There were 30 MCS notified to shut down, and 24 schools were finally shut down in 2011. As a result of the shutdowns of MCS, about 140,000 migrant children were forced to transfer schools. Four MCS in the Chaoyang District in Beijing were also notified to shut down in 2012, with more than 3000 migrant children affected by the shutdown. The Beijing Education Committee announced the diversion program of affected students, promising that “no child will be out of school”. However, a follow-up study showed that (see figure 1), among the 500 affected migrant children, only 68 students (13.6%) were enrolled into public schools; 165 students (33%) left Beijing for their hometown to receive education; 265 students (53%) transferred to other MCS; and 0.4% of students had not decided where to go. Among those children who went back to schools in a hukou registered region, about 20 (12.5%) of them had to pay
sponsorship fees even though they were supposed to receive compulsory education in a *hukou* registered area free of charge.

![Pie chart showing distribution of school options for migrant children](image)

Figure 1. Locations of migrant children affected by school shutdowns.

### 3. The Challenges and Difficulties of Migrant Children’s Schooling

#### 3.1. Unequal Education Opportunities

Due to a series of regulations regarding schooling among migrant children announced by the Chinese government, most migrant children finally achieved education opportunities in urban areas. However, it is still far from easy to provide migrant children with the same education opportunities as urban children because some restrictions and limitations in policy still exist.

First, the educational opportunities of migrant children are strongly restricted by the *hukou* household registration system, which influences the financial allocation of education in urban destinations. According to the policy on educational appropriation in China, public schools were financially supported by the local government because the budget for education is supposed to sustain students with local household registration. The budget is not large enough to afford sufficient education services for the huge number of migrant children living in the local area (Tao, 2012; Liu, 2005; Feng, 2008). Without policy protection, a great number of migrant families were rejected from enrolling in public schools. Most migrant children were charged an additional fee for public school enrollment, such as an “education endorsement” or “temporary schooling statue fees” which their family couldn’t afford (Liang & Chen, 2007; Li et al., 2010).
Second, the differences in educational development between rural and urban areas may also restrict migrant children’s education in urban destinations. Generally, the educational condition in rural areas is relatively inferior, including poor teaching quality and facilities, and such differences force most migrant parents to bring their children to urban areas to seek better educational opportunities (Yuan, 2010). However, a great number of migrant children find it difficult to keep up with the education in public schools because of the different curricula used between urban and rural areas (Hong, Hu & Yin, 2012). Existing studies found that, compared to urban students, most migrant children showed inferior performances in academic and learning adaptability at schools in urban destinations. Meanwhile, public schools were not willing to accept migrant children with these disadvantaged learning circumstances (Zhou, 2008; Jia, 2011; Li et al., 2010). Thus, such inequality would inhibit the migrant children’s educational abilities and restrict their educational development in urban destinations.

3.2. Challenges in Educational Placement among Migrant Children

To provide equal, qualified education to migrant children, some cities like Beijing recently took action to shut down some MCS that were illegally operated. In this case, although the central government had initiated a series of specific regulations to admit migrant children into local public schools since 2001, a majority of migrant children in MCS faced challenges when attending schools in urban areas. To continue their education, most migrant children whose MCS had been shut down were sent back to their hometown or transferred to other schools. Several difficult reasons led migrant families to such disadvantaged situations.

First, both enrollment and admission to public school are restricted to migrant families. In order to obtain the qualifications to attend public schools, five or more certifications are usually required from migrant families, including a temporary residence permit, residential proof, a work permit, a certificate from their place of origin, and a household registration booklet, which were difficult for migrant families to obtain. According to existing surveys, up to 90% of migrant families are unable to provide all five admission documents, especially the temporary residence permit (Human Right Watch, 2006).

Second, the additional financial requirements to attend public schools in urban areas also present a challenge to the schooling of migrant children. Although public schools are encouraged to accept migrant children without charging their tuition fees, such benefits are only effective when they are enrolled in schools which are near their place of residence. In this situation, the extra fees, which are called “out-of-district fees”, are frequently requested from migrant families when they move to another public school that is not within the district of their temporary residence.

Third, for migrant children who have an established residency and are enrolled in local schools, the limited resource allocation in public schools becomes an essential problem that makes it difficult to adequately meet the needs of these children. Since most of the migrant families settled in the suburban areas, a large number of migrant children were placed in a public school located near that area. However, these public schools also need to sustain the high demand of schooling from local students. To satisfy the increased educational demand of all students, the educational resources in these schools were deficient and could not allocate funds, and some of them were found to be overloaded. For instance, Tao & Yang (2007)
found that, in the suburban area, migrant children accounted for more than 60% (even 80%) of students in public schools, and they exceeded the capacity of educational resources in these schools, resulting in shortages of classrooms, desks and chairs, computers, books, physical equipment, and experimental instruments. These resource shortages also further restrict the opportunities for migrant children to attend public schools. Many migrant children were not allowed to enroll in public schools due to limited space. According to a study conducted in Beijing, about 12.9% migrant children were unable to attend school due to the following reason: "there is no adequate school for migrant children" (Duan, 2005).

3.3. Challenges in Educational Advancement among Migrant Children

Although some migrant families successfully sent their children to local schools, these migrant children do not have permission to obtain education beyond compulsory education in urban areas for several reasons (Gong, Hu & Yin, 2012).

First, the majority of migrant children are unable to attend crucial examinations in urban areas for higher education, such as university admission examinations. Students were only allowed to take these examinations in the country side where their original hukou is registered (Feng, 2011). Those migrant children who intend to pursue higher educational opportunities need to return to their hometown and adopt different education curriculums, teaching styles and examination systems.

Second, due to the fact that most MCS are unlicensed, the educational performance of migrant children, such as their attendance and grades, may not be formally documented, which would restrict their access to high schools or college admission applications. According to some interviews with teachers in MCS, migrant children changed their school frequently without any legitimate record, and their school records in MCS may not be accepted by the formal education system (Li et al., 2010).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOLING AMONG MIGRANT CHILDREN IN CHINA

Along with the rapid increase in the number of migrant children in recent decades, the Chinese government has made considerable progress in guaranteeing their right to an education in urban areas, such as mandating the compulsory nine-year education, which regulated tuition-free education for migrant children provided by public schools. However, migrant children still face many challenges in their pursuit of education and further efforts are needed to ensure that quality education is made available to migrant children.

4.1. Reform on the Household Registration System

The “hukou” household registration system, which divides the population dichotomously into rural or urban registration, is the main reason migrant children are overlooked in the assignment of public education. While migrant workers have made great contributions to the
urban economic development, owing to the systematic limitations of the dual “hukou” registration system, their children were situated in unfair circumstances and weren’t given equal access to public education (Li et al., 2010; He & Li, 2007). Although the restriction on population mobilization has lessened in recent decades due to the increasing migrant population in urban areas, the reformation of this household registration system still remains obligatory and could significantly improve the educational rights of migrant children in urban destinations.

4.2. The Implementation of Policies to Permit the Educational Advancement of Migrant Children

Despite the difficulties experienced in thoroughly removing the restriction of the household registration system, the Chinese government should promote further legislations to authorize equal opportunities for migrant children to pursue advanced education in urban destinations (Gong, Hu & Yin, 2012). As an increasing number of migrant children finish their primary education in urban areas, the demand for receiving higher education among students becomes a crucial issue which cannot be neglected. In order to provide thorough, equal education to migrant children, policies should permit migrant children to access higher education, including high school and college, beyond the nine-year compulsory education (Li et al., 2010). To achieve this goal, the Chinese government has recently released an announcement allowing migrant children to participate in high school and university entrance examinations in urban areas, even if these children do not have the urban “hukou” registration. According to the newest educational regulation announced by the Ministry of Education in China, all local governments should devise their own policies and coordinate with related departments to arrange entrance examinations for migrant children who have no local “hukou” registration. However, such effort requires an effective cooperation between the urban and rural governments to establish a comprehensive educational management system for allocating sufficient exam certifications to migrant families (Wu, 2012; Xia, 2008).

4.3. Increasing the Capacity of Public Schools in Urban Areas

Despite a series of policies published by the Chinese government that would hold public schools in urban areas responsible for the education of migrant children, the major problem of insufficient educational resources in public schools still remained. In order to improve the adverse situation in public schools, more substantive support from society is needed, including financial support and administrating the status of student enrollment.

In order to improve the educational conditions that would allow public schools to admit a larger number of migrant children, there is no doubt that financial support from the government is the most effective and essential approach, which could be achieved in several ways (Gao, 2009). First, at the school level, it is suggested that the Chinese government could establish an appropriation specifically for public schools in order to enlarge classrooms and provide adequate teaching resources to ensure that migrant children receive a quality
education. Such financial support could also eliminate the possibility of additional charges to migrant children during school enrollment (Gong, Hu & Yin, 2012; Gao, 2009). Second, the financial support of education could be implemented on an individual level, via distributing an “educational voucher” to eligible migrant families in urban areas. The policy of an “educational voucher” was initiated in the US for financially supporting the education of disadvantaged children since the 1990s, which allocated the budget of education to each disadvantaged family in the form of a voucher to subsidize their education in urban areas (Liao, 2004). Such subsidization approaches have been applied successfully in other countries or regions, including the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Poland, Finland, Australia, the Netherlands, Taiwan and Hong Kong (Mao, 2007). Recently, an “educational voucher” was also utilized to improve disadvantaged children’s education in Hangzhou, China, which has shown initial success (Mao, 2007). Under this specific educational policy, the children in disadvantaged families would benefit from their schooling by receiving two kinds of “educational vouchers” from the local government, including 200 RMB financial support for primary school students (Grade 1 to 6) per year and 300 RMB for junior secondary school students (Grade 7 to 9) per year (Mao, 2007).

4.4. Improving the Administration of Students’ Enrollment Status

As a result of migrant children frequently transferring schools in urban areas, challenges to the traditional administration of student enrollment status in China have been created. Based on the current school enrollment management system, migrant children’s school experiences were recorded and maintained in each school they had attended. In this case, each migrant student may have multiple school records, which generates incoherent and incomplete school enrollment information and complicates the related school-transferring procedures for migrant children (Liu, 2005). In order to change this inadequate circumstance, the Chinese government should improve the recent administration of students’ enrollment status by utilizing internet technology; an approach that could not only break the limitations of educational records held in individual schools, but also sustain the coherence and completion of the records, which could simplify the procedure of transferring schools (Tang, 2009; Liu, 2005).

4.5. Enhancing the Regulatory Oversight and Support of MCS

The Chinese government and society should enhance the assistance and regulatory oversight of MCS in urban areas. Along with continuous urbanization, the number of migrant families will continually increase in urban areas. MCS could be a temporary solution for providing regular educational opportunities to migrant children who are unable to be enrolled in public schools (Li et al., 2010). However, because of the insufficient financial and political support, the majority of MCS are usually unlicensed and unregulated, and many of them are operated in inferior surroundings that are inadequate for schooling (Yao, 2009). The government should provide regulatory oversight and financial support to these schools to ensure that migrant children receive qualified education. The government should increase the
supervision of MCS by providing suggestions and assisting in the quality improvement of teachers and teaching, such as conducting some training in these schools (Duan & Liang, 2005). As the public advocated, some financial regulations could be promoted to support MCS in urban areas, including the establishment of specific funds for MCS and encouraging public or private educational firms or companies to invest in MCS (Xinhua, 2003). The government should fully utilize its resources and efforts to cooperate with the society in order to maximize the benefits MCSs provide for migrant children (Li et al., 2010).

4.6. Eliminating the Stigma against Migrant Children in Education

Discrimination towards migrant children from teachers and peers has become a critical barrier in the education of migrant children. Therefore, the government should promote some policies or regulations to eliminate the stigmatization against migrants in urban areas, especially in schools. In order to provide a receptive educational system with an acceptance of cultural diversity, a resilient and supportive campus atmosphere should be established for migrant children, which could be achieved through intervention programs for teachers and local students to improve their understanding of migrant children and advocate fair treatment. In addition, the government could utilize social workers and psychologists in these schools to provide support and counseling to migrant students to help them cope with the stress of being discriminated against and to promote their well-being in public schools. Such efforts could help migrant children integrate effectively into public schools as well as urban communities.

4.7. Enhancing Parenting Skills and Parental Involvement in Education

Even if migrant children receive sufficient support from schools, parents still play a critical role in their education. However, evidence suggests that most migrant parents have poor parenting skills and insufficient parental involvement in the education of their children (Li et al., 2010). In order to change such an adverse situation in migrant families, the efforts contributed by schools and communities are absolutely necessary. Parental programs could also be developed for migrant parents and held in schools to facilitate their parenting skills and enhance the parental involvement in their children’s education. In addition, school parental meetings could also be held frequently to promote the parental regulations in the education of migrant students. On the other hand, the local community should regularly conduct guidance programs for migrant families, which would not only provide the necessary training to supervise their children’s homework, but would also offer them the opportunity to share their educational experiences with each other.
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