

Enhancing the Implementation of Education Policies for Migrant Children in China

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Abstract: Since the era of reform and opening-up, policies concerning the education of children of migrants have continuously evolved and improved. However, several issues exist in the execution of these policies: additive implementation of policies, ambiguous positioning in policy execution, slow reform of the household registration system, and an imperfect policy supervision mechanism. This paper analyzes these issues from multiple dimensions through literature review and qualitative analysis, and delving into the underlying causes of the problems during policy implementation. Furthermore, based on these causes, a series of recommendations for improvement are proposed, which firstly need to adjust the distribution of interests and enhance the clarity of policy objectives and effectiveness tracking. It also requires the establishment of an efficient supervision system to promote the reform process of the household registration system. In addition, the feasibility of the policy can be increased by strengthening the publicity and promotion of the policy. These recommendations can ensure the effective implementation of education policies concerning children of the migrant population, thereby safeguarding the educational rights of children of migrants.

Keywords: Migrant children, Educational policy, Policy changes, Policy implementation, Policy reflection.

1. Introduction

As China's economy rapidly develops and the process of urbanization accelerates, the issue of educating children of migrants has become a hot topic of concern for both the government and society. From "borrowing a place to study" to "two main principles" and then to "two integrations," the policies regarding the education of children of migrants have continuously evolved in terms of conceptualization, basis, and planning measures. However, according to factual investigations, there is a gap between the planning and implementation of these policies, as they are not effectively realized in everyday life [1]. Many issues still need to be considered and addressed in the practical implementation process.

The focus of this article is on the challenges encountered in the practical implementation of educational policies for the children of migrants and strategies to promote their enforcement. By addressing the educational issues faced by children in transient populations, this research aims to enhance the grounding of relevant policies, to strengthen educational equity for migrant children, and to reduce the discrepancy between policy theoretical formulation and practical application [2]. Through qualitative analysis and case studies, this paper reflects on the educational policies for the

children of migrants and proposes a series of improvement measures to ensure effective execution of policies and to facilitate the achievement of educational equity.

2. Challenges in Policy Implementation

2.1. Additional Implementation of Policies

Because China is very large and there are large differences in economy and development between provinces, so in the process of implementing central policies, the additiveness of the policy leads to the deviation of the relevant policy in its implementation [3]. Local governments may make supplementary adjustments to policies according to their own actual conditions or interests, which will affect the expression of the original policy and make it impossible to achieve the original goal.

Take Beijing as an example, on the basis of the central government's policy on migrant children, Beijing requires families with migrant children to provide "five certificates", including certification of parental identity, certification of parental employment, certification of parental marriage and childbirth, certification of family residence in Beijing, and certification issued by the household registration location that there are no guardianship conditions in the locality, which involves a total of 28 relevant documents [3]. The policy was first proposed in 2004, and regular verification became stricter after 2014, with the verification authority changed from the original street to a joint verification mechanism for documents established by districts and counties. While this enriched the review process, it also increased the threshold for migrant children to enter public schools. Although the policy has now been reduced to "four certificates", the year by year decline in the number of non-Beijing students in recent years also illustrates that the policy has affected student's right to education and is not conducive to the implementation of relevant policies.

2.2. Ambiguous Positioning in Policy Implementation

The specific responsibilities of the main body of policy implementation, that is, the relevant responsible departments, are still vague. There is a lack of clear division of labor between inflow and outflow areas, and local governments have insufficient or lagging implementation of policies. All these will lead to the incomplete implementation of the policy, and the degree of implementation will be greatly reduced, resulting in the migrant children not enjoying the implementation of the relevant policy.

2.3. Slow Reform of the Household Registration System

China's household registration system has remained unchanged over the past few decades, and the college entrance examination (Gaokao) system based on the household registration system has also been in constant use, that is, students can only take the college entrance examination (Gaokao) in the place of their household registration. This requires students who study in high school in their enrollment place to return to their household registration area to register and take the Gaokao prior to the exam. But, the fact that different regions use different examination papers for Gaokao prevents students from fully utilizing their abilities and learning achievements. This college entrance examination system creates obstacles to the enrollment and advancement of migrant children in different places, as well as an important institutional obstacle to the implementation of relevant education policies.

In addition, the absence legislation on the household registration system for children of migrants also renders the guarantee of education of migrant children legally unsupported, which further increases the difficulty for them to receive education in other places [4].

2.4. Imperfect Policy Supervision Mechanism

At present, China lacks effective supervision of the implementation of various functional departments of local governments, which has resulted in insufficient policy implementation and even alienation of some policy implementation. Moreover, the indicator of "current social integration" has not been included in the evaluation index system of education policy. The absence of attention to the sense of alienation, loneliness and other psychological problems exhibited by some students has also become a major hidden danger on the road to policy implementation.

3. Analysis of Challenges

3.1. Interest Dimension

In the process of policy implementation, policy implementers will pursue the maximization of their own interests, and there is often inconsistency between this pursuit of interests and the original intention of policymakers, so it is necessary to include interests in the basic scope of policy implementation considerations. The conflict of interests primarily manifests among the central government, local governments, and public schools. Each party's tendency to prioritize its own interests inevitably leads to conflicts of interests.

Firstly, between the central government and local governments, the central government formulates policies to protect the educational rights of children of migrants and transmits these policies to local governments for enforcement. However, it fails to provide the necessary financial support, leading to a lack of motivation on the part of the local governments. Local governments deem it unreasonable to bear all the responsibilities for the implementation of measures without financial support from the central government. Consequently, local governments may adopt additional implementation measures to protect their own interests, such as by strengthening enrollment requirements to weaken the effectiveness of the policies [5].

On the other hand, there are also a conflict of interest between local governments and public schools. While local governments formulate specific implementation measures based on central government policy requirements, schools are ctual implementers and most directly affected by these policies. Under pressure from local governments, public schools are compelled to admit many children of migrants, which is detrimental to the interests of the public schools themselves,, thus forcing the public schools into the game of interests. The increased in the proportion of children of migrants admitted can lower the educational quality of the schools to some extent and pose challenges to the work of the teachers. Moreover, some public schools are facing the loss of high-quality students, as many children of migrants return to their place of household registration to take the college entrance examination after completing their education [6]. The most direct manifestation of schools is the decline in the overall school's academic performance, which reduce the evaluation of the school's quality in society and damages the reputation of schools, hindering the school's long-term development. In response, public schools propose countermeasures, such as setting higher admission thresholds, reducing the proportion of children of migrants admitted, and lightening the educational burden.

Overall, there is a conflict of goals and interests among the three parties, which poses one of the challenges faced by the policies for the education of children of migrants (Figure 1).

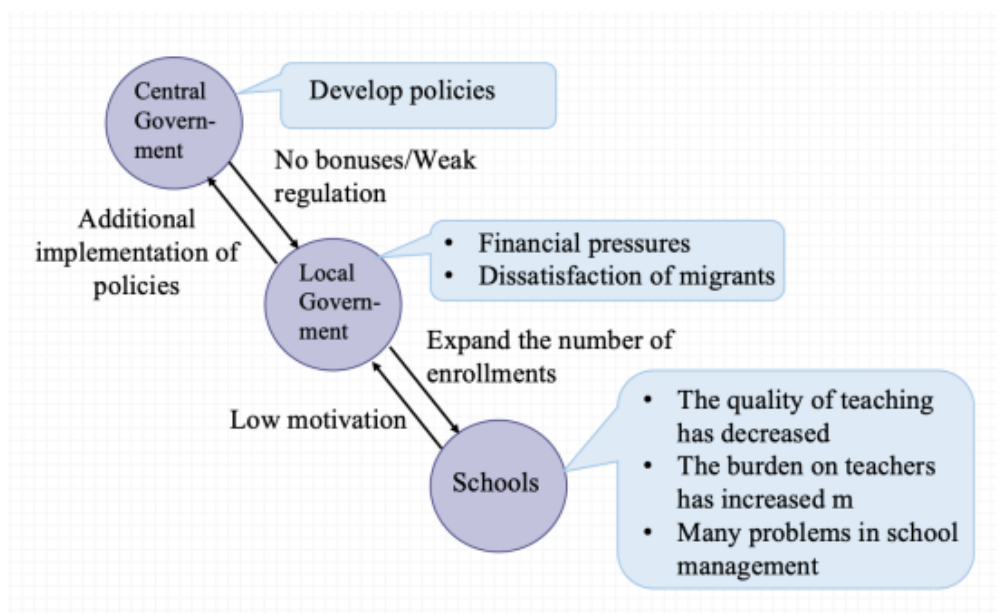


Figure 1: the conflict of goals and interests among the three parties

In the case of Beijing, the policy on the education of children of migrants is contrary to Beijing's goal of "strictly controlling the population". Under this contradiction, the Beijing municipal government prioritizes the adoption of population control politics that benefit its own interests, thus indirectly weakening the implementation of the policy for the education of the migrant children.

On the other hand, although the Beijing Municipal Government has sufficient resources to support the implementation of the relevant policies, the public schools in Beijing are generally characterized by insufficient educational space, insufficient teachers, high mobility and poor management, and thus are unable to actually accomplish the implementation of the policies.

3.2. Policy objectives dimension

The positioning of policy objectives is relatively vague. Given the variations in economic conditions, educational levels, and population numbers among different regions in China, the general policy objective is to provide direction and guidance for different regions without detailed descriptions of specific responsibilities. Instead, each region can formulate specific implementation methods according to its own actual conditions in conjunction with the policy directions and objectives designated by the central government [7]. For instance, the "Two Main Principles" policy merely indicates that "the main responsibility lies with the government of the receiving area and with public primary and middle schools," without providing detailed specifications for specific responsibilities, and only offers a general approach to solving problems. However, given Beijing's superior educational environment, abundant resources, and relatively low competition for student enrollment, many children of migrants give preference to studying in Beijing. In order to guarantee education quality and ensure equitable distribution of education resources, the Beijing government has introduced additional policies, such as the "Five Certificates", to raise admission thresholds.

Therefore, the generality of policy objectives will lead to the discretion of local governments in the implementation process, making local governments put their own interests first, which will lead to the weakening of policy implementation and the deviation from the original intention of policy implementation.

3.3. Institutional Dimension

The discretion of the implementer plays an important role in the implementation of the policy. Local governments have a certain degree of autonomy under the premise of conforming to the policies of the central government. The central government cannot compel local governments to implement a specific policy. Therefore, in the process of policy implementation, the implementers will adjust the degree and intensity of the implementation of relevant policies according to their own interests.

3.4. Socio-cultural contextual Dimension

The policy implementation is influenced by culture, traditions, customs, etc. The Confucian concept of "learning and excelling" has been widely spread among the Chinese people for thousands of years and has been deeply rooted in the thinking of the Chinese people. As a result, people pursue better educational opportunities, and also hope to achieve social class change and social status through learning. However, this perspective has become a stumbling block to the implementation of education policies for children of migrants in the current situation of unequal educational resources. The initial aim of formulating education policies for children of migrants is to ensure that they receive the same level of education as local children, thereby further promoting educational equity. However, the pursuit of high-quality educational resources, which is influenced by cultural subtleties, distorts the implementation of these policies.

On one hand, local governments and citizen in regions with superior educational resources may believe migrant children will rob the educational resources of the local residents, and thus impose stringent additional policies and causing a deviation in the implementation of education policies for children of migrants. On the other hand, some individuals may exploit the policy for their own interests. For example, individuals who do not genuinely need migrate their children may disguise their children as migrant children due to factors such as less competition in the college entrance examination and higher educational standards in the migration destination.

This not only occupies the quota intended for genuinely needy students but also increases local resistance to migrant children, thus hindering the policy implementation.

4. Recommendations for Improvement

4.1. Adjusting the Allocation of Interests

In terms of benefits, it is necessary to adjust the allocation of interests among participants. By strengthening the responsibilities of the central government in the implementation of relevant policies and clarifying the responsibilities of governments at all levels, the behavior of "the central government invites guests and the local government pays" should be avoided [8]. In addition, the central government should fundamentally establish a comprehensive and clear funding guarantee mechanism, while local governments should improve the coordination mechanism and policy supplement mechanism. Efforts should be made to maximize the effect of policy implementation on the basis of local governments taking the initiative to establish a linkage mechanism with the central government.

For example, the central government holds regular meetings with local governments, and produces financial statements such as fiscal revenue and expenditure statements according to the actual situation, clarifies and refines the tasks of both parties, and ensures that the process is open, transparent, efficient, and evidence-based. Public schools should actively build their own teaching staff and maintain close contact with the government to ensure the promotion and implementation of relevant policies, and communicate with government departments promptly according to their actual conditions to ensure the sustainability and flexibility of policies.

4.2. Clarifying Goals and Strengthening Effect Tracking

At the policy content level, China should further clarify the objectives of the education policy for migrant children, adjust its specific content and limitations, and further refine and standardize the specific process. Only thus can coherence and fairness in policy implementation be ensured, while also guaranteeing that each region has the ability to make appropriate adjustments according to the actual situation.

In terms of institutions, it is necessary to establish an effective implementation monitoring mechanism to ensure the efficiency and fairness of policy implementation. Within the education system, it is necessary to strengthen the function of education supervision, establish a top-down supervision system, strengthen the supervision and evaluation of local governments and schools, ensure that they can perform their duties in accordance with policy requirements, and ensure the right to education and the quality of education for the children of migrants. Outside the education system, social forces are actively mobilized to carry out dynamic monitoring and to strengthen the tracking and evaluation of the effects of the implementation of the policy, so as to ensure that policies can be effectively implemented and achieve the desired results.

For example, the government can design a rigorous and scientific grading form, regularly conduct self-evaluation and mutual evaluation within the system. At the same time, a feedback mechanism for the educational demands of the children of migrants should be established to collect public opinions on a regular basis, hold meetings based on them, and publicize the results of the meetings. By means of internal and external mutual evaluation, the government can give full play to the principle of democracy in the formulation and adjustment of policies.

4.3. Reforming the Household Registration System

It is recommended that the reform of the household registration system be actively promoted in order to, prevent the children of migrants from being constrained by the "household registration+school registration" policy, and that relevant information on students be provided timely to guarantee the transfer needs of student [9]. At the same time, the state should speed up the process of formulating relevant laws to serve as the basis and guarantee for policy implementation, and to promote the effective implementation of policies.

4.4. Enhancing Publicity and Promotion

The Government needs to strengthen the publicity and promotion of the education policy for migrant children, so as to deepen the understanding and support of all sectors of society for the implementation and realization of the policy [10]. While traditional publicity methods are mainly offline publicity, online publicity, can be used to convey information, for example, such as Weibo, WeChat, Xiaohongshu, Douyin, and other social media platforms. In addition, a variety of publicity methods, such as interesting short films, videos, real cases, etc., and other specific methods, enable more convenient conveyance of the goals and significance of the policy to the public.

5. Conclusion

The education policy for children of migrants in China faces significant challenges in its implementation due to a combination of conflicting interests, unclear objectives, institutional barriers, and cultural influences. These challenges have resulted in a gap between policy planning and implementation, affecting the rights and opportunities of migrant children to receive an equitable education.

To address these challenges, this paper proposes several recommendations for improvement. Firstly, the allocation of interests among stakeholders should be adjusted to promote cooperation and coordination. Secondly, the objectives of the policies should be clarified and the effectiveness of implementation should be strengthened through tracking and evaluation. Thirdly, an effective monitoring mechanism should be established to ensure the efficiency and fairness of policy implementation. Fourthly, the household registration system should be reformed to remove barriers to education for migrant children. Fifthly, the government should enhance the publicity and promotion of the education policy for migrant children to gain wider support and understanding.

Certainly, there are some limitations in the analysis process of this paper. Firstly, the paper lacks empirical research and is unable to use interviews or questionnaires and other research methods to understand the insights of stakeholders. Secondly, the sources cited in this article are relatively narrow in scope, with insufficient reference to official press releases, policy documents and relevant books. Future research should focus on further exploring the implementation of education policies for migrant children, including the development of more effective policy implementation strategies, the establishment of more robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and the reform of the household registration system. Additionally, research should examine the impact of these policies on the educational outcomes and social integration of migrant children, as well as the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders involved in the implementation process.

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