

# ***Research on Educational Equity for Migrant Children in China***

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**Abstract:** The educational inequality has always been a practical problem hindering the educational development. Educational inequality is associated to social inequality and it is an important prerequisite for a country's political stability, economic prosperity, and social development. In the context of urbanization, the education of migrant children has aroused widespread concern in society. Due to the restrictions of household registration and the lack of relevant laws and regulations, migrant children face many difficulties and injustices in every link of education. This paper specifically discusses the unfairness of migrant children in the process of enrollment and further education and proposes ways to help migrant children get rid of the difficulties they face in education from the aspects of household registration reform and the formulation of relevant laws. In conclusion, revising the household registration system, improving laws and regulations, clarifying government responsibilities, and reducing the developmental gap between urban and rural areas can be feasible means to improve the plight of migrant children in education.

**Keywords:** migrant children, education equity, educational guarantees, social security

## **1. Introduction**

With the acceleration of urbanization and the increasing trend of migrant families, the number of migrant children in China continues to expand, however, due to household registration restrictions and insufficient educational resources, the educational equity of migrant children is often difficult to guarantee. Migrant children face problems in many aspects, such as unfair admission conditions and unfair educational outcomes, which undoubtedly violate the concept of fairness at the beginning and the end of compulsory education. These problems not only hinder the development of education but are also detrimental to social stability. Exploring ways to solve the dilemma of migrant children's education is of great significance to promoting educational development. Starting from the unfair treatment of migrant children in school enrollment and further education, this paper discusses the difficulties faced by migrant children in education and the impact of these difficulties, analyzes the causes of this phenomenon, and proposes methods to ensure the fairness of migrant children's education, so as to provide some ideas for the government to solve the educational dilemma of migrant children.

## **2. The Context in Which the Problem of Migrant Children's Education Arises**

China's economic system, social structure, and urbanization have developed significantly ever since China's opening up and reform. From static population control to the emergence of a mobile population society, the level and quality of China's modernization development have been continuously improved. Demographic and socio-economic structural changes have given birth to the transformation of rural China to urban and rural China, and urbanization and large-scale population migration have changed the distribution of population between urban and rural areas. Migrant workers are a group with certain urban resources compared to rural residents. Compared to city dwellers, migrant workers are an informal urban group excluded from city dwellers [1]. Thus, although they also live in cities, their children, known as migrant children, are not entitled to the same educational privileges as urban children. Because of their own mobility, most of China's migrant children will lead to many educational inequities such as education mismatch, household registration restrictions, and insufficient educational resources, which will lead to a series of problems in enrollment and further education, resulting in a vicious circle [2].

## **3. The Educational Equity Dilemma Faced by Migrant Children**

### **3.1. Unfair Starting Point for Education**

An equitable starting point in education refers to equal rights to education and equal access to school so that students from ordinary social backgrounds have the opportunity to enter schools of the same quality [3]. The inequality of migrant children at the starting point of education is mainly revealed in the aspect of enrollment, which is also the focus and difficulty of ensuring the equity of education of migrant children. In order to protect the interests of urban indigenous peoples, the government sets a higher entry threshold for students who are not in the scope of responsibility when applying for admission. Although the state abolished the policy of charging additional fees for non-registered students in 2010, many cities have set stricter enrollment conditions for migrant children in order to prevent the crowding out of educational resources. Many areas clearly stipulate that parents are required to provide many documents for migrant children to enroll in public schools in the place of arrival, which greatly increases the difficulty of migrant children to enroll in school and increases the non-economic cost of migrant children's schooling [4].

### **3.2. Inequities in the Educational Process**

Fairness in the educational process requires education to effectively exclude undue interference from external forces and prevent these forces from distorting the fairness of the educational process. Excluding the undue influence of external forces on the educational process means that students should not obtain or be deprived of educational resources and development opportunities due to the external conditions attached to them, and educational resources are only enjoyed equitably for every student according to the logic of education itself [5]. Due to the existing teaching system and the lack of specific understanding of migrant children, the equality of the educational process of migrant children is often difficult to guarantee. In order to promote the enrollment rate, some schools often set up elite classes to gather outstanding students to teach and give them more abundant teachers. Migrant children generally come from rural areas where the economy is relatively backward and educational resources are relatively poor, and at the same time, the parents generally have a low level of education, which makes the achievements of migrant children lag behind at the beginning and it is difficult for them to enjoy better teaching resources. Additionally, due to the large differences in textbooks in different regions, migrant children need to spend a certain amount of time and experience adapting to the new textbooks after following their parents to study in the new city, which also poses

a lot of challenges for them. At the same time, a large difference exists in the cognitive level of urban children and rural children. At present, the compilation of textbooks is mainly based on the cognition of urban children, therefore, the textbooks often appear unfamiliar to rural children, but even if the content is designed from the perspective of rural children, it will appear unfamiliar to urban children, which undoubtedly increases the learning difficulty of migrant children [6].

### **3.3. Inequality of Educational Outcomes**

The final education result is also an important reflection of whether education is fair, in China, the method of testing education results is the entrance examination. To ensure equitable educational outcomes, migrant children must be guaranteed the same access to examinations as urban children. However, according to the existing household registration system, migrant children in many areas cannot get the opportunity to take the local college entrance examination, and after the end of the compulsory education stage, they must return to the place of household registration for the college entrance examination.

## **4. Causes of a Series of Difficulties Faced by Migrant Children**

### **4.1. Restrictions on the Registered Permanent Residence**

The existence of the household registration system is the root cause of the unfair education of migrant children. The restrictions on household registration have imposed many restrictions on the enrollment and further education of migrant children, which has increased many economic and non-economic costs for migrant children's schooling.

### **4.2. Inefficiency of the Government**

Owing to the limits of the household registration system and the lack of relevant laws, the local government lacks a relevant basis and a clear scope of responsibility when solving the problem of the education of migrant children. The government is often inefficient in dealing with the education of migrant children, and even deliberately ignores the education of migrant children [4]. This undoubtedly makes it more difficult for migrant children to attend school.

## **5. Countermeasures to Address Equity in the Education of Migrant Children**

### **5.1. Reformation of the Household Registration System**

In the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, China's household registration system played a fairly effective role in population management, however, with the quick advancement of the economy, the household registration system has shown obvious drawbacks. The original household registration system divided citizens into two parts. Urban and rural residents enjoy different welfare benefits according to their household registration. Migrant citizens do not enjoy the same privileges as urban residents, including a range of educational resource allocation for their children [7]. Recently, China has issued relevant documents to reform the Hukou system, but the documents have significant less coverage of compulsory education for children of migrants and cannot completely solve the problem. Ensuring equal access to compulsory education opportunities for migrant children through household registration reform is not only very important for the families of migrant children themselves, but also for the continuous social progress and development, which shows the great theoretical and practical significance of studying the issue of supporting education reform of household registration reform. By improving the construction of the residence permit policy in household registration, migrant children can enroll in the nearest school through the residence

permit and enjoy educational resources equally, so that they have the same opportunity to receive compulsory education as urban children [8]. In this way, the plight of migrant children in terms of educational equity can be fundamentally improved.

### **5.2. A Clarification of the Responsibility of the Local Government**

Most of the parents of migrant children come from rural areas, and due to the current uneven economic and cultural development in China, rural migrant workers are often in a vulnerable position. On the economic front, due to the lack of knowledge and technology, migrant workers can only rely on physical strength to earn money to support their families and they live in poverty. In terms of politics, because migrant workers are more tired from their work, they are more concerned about their living conditions and have little interest in politics. In terms of culture, migrant workers as a whole have a low level of education and lack a broad vision and rich knowledge [9]. The shortcomings of migrant workers in many economic, political, social, and cultural aspects have led to their lack of ability and economic conditions to overcome the difficulties faced by their children in the process of further education and strive for better educational opportunities for their children. Besides, they also lack the awareness to express their desire in letting their children enjoy compulsory education on an equal footing. As a result, the educational needs of migrant children are constantly being neglected. And some migrant workers with a low level of education cannot even fully understand the cumbersome and complicated supporting materials required for further education. To improve the plight of migrant children in terms of educational equity, relevant regulations, laws, and administrative regulations should be promulgated to clarify the scope of government responsibility. Moreover, the local government must pay attention to the issue of education with migrant children and must not deliberately ignore it. This should also urge the local governments to streamline administration and delegate power, minimize supporting materials, simplify the procedures, and not add too much burden on migrant workers. At the same time, the government should take into account the overall social weakness of migrant worker families and actively help migrant workers solve the problem of their children's education, rather than constantly setting thresholds to increase the difficulties of migrant children in school enrollment.

### **5.3. A Promotion of the Integration of City and Countryside Education**

Due to the current China's developmental imbalance of urban and rural areas, rural education resources are relatively insufficient, therefore, migrant children often have a weak grasp of basic knowledge when receiving education in rural areas. After migrant children follow their parents to the city to study, they must not only quickly integrate into the new social environment but also quickly adapt to the sudden increase in learning difficulties, which is undoubtedly a big challenge for them. Better integrating urban and rural education system and minimizing the gap between urban and rural teaching levels can ensure that children who have migrated can receive a high-quality education from an early age, and they can adapt to the urban learning rhythm smoothly when they enter urban public schools. To better integrate the urban and rural teaching system, the process of digitalization must be first constructed and strengthened. Digitalization is an important developmental cornerstone for minimizing educational gaps between cities and countryside. Through information integration, it can better optimize the allocation of educational resources and capital, thereby accelerating the education development in rural schools and improving the teaching quality in rural areas [10].

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper analyzes the current difficulties encountered by migrant children in educational equity from three aspects: fairness at the outset of educational, fairness during the learning process, and

impartiality in the educational outcome. The author points out that the limitations of household registration and the local government's disregard for the educational needs of migrant children are the main reasons for their current difficulties. Based on the above analysis, in order to change the educational dilemma of migrant children, the existing household registration system must be first changed and the difficulties for migrant children in schools should be alleviated through residence permits and other means. At the same time, relevant laws and regulations should be formulated to clarify the responsibilities of the government. In addition, the government should prioritize the educational fairness for children who have migrated and ensure that they have the right to enjoy compulsory education. Moreover, the government also needs to consider the family particularity of migrant children and gives more help to them. Finally, even if migrant children can successfully enter public schools, they may face the dilemma of not adapting to the new environment. In situation like that, migrant children can be better assisted to get used to the new environment smoothly through better integrated education system between city and countryside and strengthened basic education. When analyzing the dilemma of educational equity of migrant children, this paper mainly focuses on the aspects of social impact for the time being while the impact of the migrant children's families is less discussed, so future research could focus more on the impact of family on the migrant children's education.

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