

A Study on the Causes and Countermeasures of the Imbalance in the Flow of Compulsory Education Teachers in Urban and Rural Areas in China

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Abstract—Under the back drop of a serious imbalance in the allocation of teachers between urban and rural schools, this study makes suggestions on how the gap between the two areas can be reduced. The flow of expert teachers from rural to urban schools is partly due to the great differences in the way in which the schools are managed. It is also associated with the failure of performance pay incentives in rural areas, the differences in quality of life and working conditions for rural teachers compared to urban ones. As a result, teachers move to urban areas to improve their wages and professional status. It is suggested that an education finance transfer payment is undertaken where the general transfer payment from central and provincial governments to counties help subsidize the salaries and living standards of rural teachers. Management of schools need to change from the local level to the provincial or national level.

Keywords—*Compulsory education; Teacher mobility; Transfer payment.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In China, the term "transfer payment" first appeared in the fiscal system reform of the tax system in 1994. As the national tax authorities categorizes central government and local income according to a uniform standard, it results in some provinces being in a 'financially rich' position and others in a 'financially poor' situation. To balance this, the rich provinces must subsidize the poor provinces. This transfer of money is known as a 'financial transfer payment' or "transfer payment". Some of the money transferred goes to paying teachers. In particular, there is an effort by the central and provincial governments to ensure that compulsory education is supported across the country, that is, both in urban and rural areas. But it is clear that rural schools often lack enough and suitably qualified and motivated teachers. This study makes suggestions on how the State can solve this problem.[1] Analysis of the current situation of compulsory education teacher mobility in China's urban and rural areas is thus undertaken.

A. Unbalanced Migration Between Urban and Rural Areas

Urban schools are highly resourced and resemble those found in highly developed countries, while rural schools lack resources and resemble those found in very poor countries. This results in a difference in terms of quality education, with

rural children disadvantaged. In China there is teacher migration. A small flow of expert teachers from the urban areas to the rural areas and a large flow of rural teachers to the urban areas. Teachers usually urbanise to gain promotions. Few teachers are willing to relocate to rural areas, despite official policy. The uneven flow of expert teachers widens the gap between urban and rural schools and negatively impacts on quality education. The movement of rural teachers can be traced as a number of steps. Teachers move from deep rural areas to local villages and then local towns. Teachers from villages and towns move to larger towns. Overall this results in a serious shortage of teachers in rural schools. Most of the migrating teachers are good young and middle-aged teachers. They usually have higher educational backgrounds and use their rural teaching posts as a springboard for secure an urban post, especially for schools located in the south. As a result, teachers in rural schools usually have lower or fewer academic qualifications and are older. Consequently, the overall quality of rural teachers is low, which, coupled with an aging problem means that a crisis is brewing in rural education.

B. The Impact of Performance Pay

The introduction of performance pay in 2009 has changed the way in which schools are managed. In large urban schools, teachers have clear responsibilities and special attention is paid to their performance. As such these teachers are highly motivated. In some rural schools, however, teachers' tend to work in teams with their tasks are intertwined, which makes individual performance difficult to measure. Worse is that teacher performance is not emphasized. Interesting is that even the expert teachers who moved to rural schools begin to underperform.[2] This may be due to the lack of a competitive teaching management model. As a result these teachers have lost their enthusiasm for teaching.

C. A Large Gap in Allowances

Although the difference in basic teachers' salaries between urban and rural schools is not great, the supplementary wage payments (such as subsidy and social security) for teachers in rural and remote areas is low, partly because of the weak financial capacity of local rural authorities. Expert urban teachers who move to remote mountain schools do so without their families. Thus, they do not qualify for special rural allowances. Often the living

conditions of such teachers, in terms of housing and transportation issues is low.

D. Poor Adaptation to the Environment

Expert teachers who have relocated to rural areas struggle to adapt to the new environment. They find that their previous teaching experience and training is completely inapplicable to the rural environment. Worse is that these teachers find themselves with rural colleagues who are weak teachers, who then struggle to help their urban colleagues adapt. In addition, the whole teaching context, work atmosphere and the huge difference in how rural teachers are managed means that these relocated teachers struggle to settle in and perform optimally. This situation is not sustainable, especially as such teachers are losing their enthusiasm for teaching.

II. REASONS FOR THE IMBALANCE OF THE FLOW OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION TEACHERS IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

A. Uneven Investment in Education

For a long time, in order to promote the development of education, China adopted the 'unbalanced development strategy'. Under this strategy, the state took the lead by increasing investment in cities and developed areas where compulsory education is dominant, while rural and underdeveloped areas that do not have universal compulsory education are still struggling to achieve universal "standards" due to a lack of financial resources. Some rural areas are even burdened with heavy "Pujia" debts. As the most important role player in the allocation of teachers, the government needs to take a stronger position in terms of taking responsibility for the consequences. For example, the "urban orientation" in terms of financial allocations, tilts the scale in favour of urban schools. [3] This results in rural schools having inadequate and substandard learning facilities, equipment and other items such as books, as well as a lack of network education resources. This leads to a widening gap between urban and rural schools and is one of the causes the urbanization of rural teachers.

B. The Personnel System Is Too Rigid

At this stage, the national personnel system relating to teachers employed in the compulsory education system is to "set up and fixed posts, school management and school use", but thereafter salary and career management reside with the school. Rural schools are characterized by teachers who do not return timeously to school after vacations. They also seldom participate in teaching competitions as the performance pay mechanism has lost its incentive role. This affects the transferred urban expert teachers as well.

C. Funds Are Often in Short Supply

The county-based compulsory education management system was implemented in 2001. The national government has is the main source of money for the compulsory education system. But there is an overall shortage of funds and weak financial management means that some areas default on

teachers' wages. The construction of school buildings and homes for the teachers is also poor, making such buildings dangerous. The central government implemented a fund guarantee mechanism for compulsory education in rural areas in 2006 but the funding of schools in remote areas has not been effectively solved.

D. Working Conditions Need to Be Improved

The age profile of rural teachers employed in compulsory education is that of an aging population. In addition, the ratio of expert teachers to substitute teachers is out of balance, with far too many substitute teachers. Educational resources in rural areas are also substandard and management/discipline of teachers is weak. This is despite schools trying to solve the problem. Expert teachers who relocate to rural areas find that their rural colleagues are less capable teachers. They also find the move hinders their professional development. Conditions in rural schools need to be drastically improved to attract excellent urban teachers.

III. PROMOTING STRATEGIES OF RATIONAL FLOW OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION TEACHERS IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS IN CHINA

A. Increase Transfer Payments

An important factor affecting the widening gap between the quality of education in rural areas to that of urban areas is the management of rural schools. It is argued here that central government needs to take more responsibility for such schools and invest more in them. This will involve improving the central fiscal transfer payment system, gradually reducing tax rebates and system subsidies to increase standardized transfer payments, in order to provide more funds for rural education in remote mountainous areas. A reasonable financial guarantee mechanism for compulsory education should be established between the central and local governments according to the financial needs of the different regions. Special attention should be paid to districts and counties with weak financial capacity. This should help to improve the conditions in rural schools, and strengthen modern educational facilities. The establishment of good working environment for rural teachers is conducive to the realization of the goal of "building a nest and attracting the Phoenix" and the ability to "keep" rural teachers.

B. Establish a Holistic Pay System

At present, the personnel system of "set up posts, manage posts and manage schools" has made the composition of teachers in urban and rural compulsory education schools rigid. Under the backdrop teacher migration, it is necessary to break down the barriers to teacher mobility and implement "no school registration management". The management system of "county management and school use" should be established to return management of teachers to the county level government. This will mean a change from managing teachers by unit to managing them within an overarching system. [4] In order to break the unit ownership and regional ownership of compulsory education teachers, it is necessary to unify the subject of teacher employment. In order to ensure the quality

of education, it is necessary to examine the pay incentive mechanisms, so as to create good working conditions for rural teachers. It is argued here that access to teachers' human capital (skills, resources, qualifications) should not belong to a certain school or region, but rather to the State. Specific schools or regions should only have the right of use but not 'ownership and possession'. Under the "county-oriented" management system, a system of appointing compulsory education teachers uniformly by the administrative departments of education at the county level should be implemented.[5] It is also very difficult to manage the flow of teachers, such that attaining a balanced allocation of teachers is hard. It is possible that a unified system of appointing teachers will help to merge need with the individual wishes of teachers. Appointments should be made based on rules and procedures so as to realize the rational allocation of human resources in the educational system.

C. Establish a Special Mismatch Allowance

Because of the different economic levels between rural and urban areas, county-level governments cannot afford to subsidize teachers. Therefore, it is necessary for provincial governments to set up special subsidies for financial transfer payments, so that county-level governments can subsidize rural teachers. It is recommended that a differential wage and allowance system based on geographical conditions and degree of hardship is implemented. In order to ensure a stable source of supplementary subsidies for teachers in compulsory education schools. This should help to retain and attract teachers to rural schools.

D. Establishing a Guarantee Mechanism for Grading Funds for Teacher Education

In order to narrow the gap between urban and rural teachers and promote the sustainable professional development of teachers, the government should build a financial system of teacher education with hierarchical management, sufficient funds and reasonable sharing of funds. It is necessary to increase and implement subsidy to reflect the excessive human cost to teachers due to different working environments. This should actual costs to teachers, such as transportation expenses, communication charges and other related costs that are associated with working in a poor rural environment. To the degree possible, local governments should also try to increase monies paid to rural teachers. Schools can be categorized according to 'hardship' with more money allocated to teachers if they work in schools with high levels of 'hardship'. Central government should provide finance for special training funds, along with policy guidance and innovation. Provincial and municipal governments should top up teacher salaries or allowances where necessary. All levels of governments should focus on special financial transfer payments to rural, remote and poor areas. We may consider allocating money to establish a special fund for teacher education. In addition, the government and schools should pay attention to the basic rotation of teachers and the selection of expert teachers. The combination of training and placement can provide a good working environment for the sustainable professional development of teachers across urban and rural areas. It can also assist in improving the quality of

the teaching staff holistically and build the profession at the same time.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Teachers play an important role in the compulsory education system and bear great social responsibility. In order to promote a balance between urban and rural teachers, the basic material, social, cultural and psychological needs of teachers must be met. As conditions in rural areas are harsh, it is necessary to financially compensate teachers who work in such schools. This will include upping teachers' wages, as well as improving their working and living conditions. As some county areas have limited financial means, both central and provincial governments should up their administrative powers and financial contributions. [6]The manner in which money is transferred to the compulsory education sector from central and provincial governments needs to include special transfer funds, and financial guarantees.

Teachers will always be mobile, and teachers need freedom of movement, but at the same time China needs to ensure that rural children access quality education. It is argued here that the key to the Regulation of Teacher Mobility lies in the system that reflects the rights and obligations of the individual teachers but also needs China's social and public interests. Specifically, it is necessary to regularly adjust when, where and how many teacher posts are created based on need. In order to balance gender ratios, age ratios and manage teachers properly, it is suggested that a unified system is implemented according to the duration of teachers' service, and teachers choose schools voluntarily. The government should organize and coordinate the implementation of financial compensation for teachers who take up rural posts. This needs to be managed at a central level as poor rural schools cannot raise the money required to do this.

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