

# *Research on the Phenomenon of Educational Migration in China*

Yuxiang Ji<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Teachers Education College, Nanjing University of Information Science and Technology, Nanjing, Jiangsu, 210044, China

a. 202183400047@nuist.edu.cn

\*corresponding author

**Abstract:** In recent years, China's educational migration project has narrowed the gap in educational resources between regions and successfully reduced the incidence of poverty. However, students who participate in educational migration need to leave their original learning and living environment, and in such a context, they often face cultural adaptation issues. As migrants, the new living environment can make them feel unfamiliar and even require them to give up traditional living habits; as students, a decrease in the frequency of interaction with family can have a negative impact on their physical and mental development, and ethnic minority students may also face communication difficulties due to language barriers. Educational migrant students, educational migrant receiving schools, and relocation areas are the three main bodies of the educational migrant project. This paper uses qualitative analysis to analyze the cultural adaptation, psychological education, and human resource loss issues in relocation areas, and proposes targeted suggestions on how to better integrate these three bodies with the educational migrant project. Schools that receive educational migrants need to actively take measures to ensure teaching effectiveness, such as strengthening infrastructure construction, improving students' cultural adaptability, conducting psychological counseling courses, and encouraging some vocational education graduates to return to their hometowns for employment to solve the problem of human resource loss.

**Keywords:** educational migration, acculturation, educational equity

## 1. Introduction

After entering the 21st century, China has launched large-scale poverty alleviation projects aimed at helping poverty-stricken areas improve their development levels and lift themselves out of poverty. In the process of carrying out poverty alleviation projects, education is an issue that cannot be ignored. Due to the unfavorable natural environment for development and other reasons, the level of economic development in impoverished areas is low, and many residents' income cannot even ensure food and clothing. This means that impoverished areas do not have sufficient funds to build schools, often with rudimentary buildings, inadequate teaching effectiveness, and even the inability to recruit teachers, which leads to a shortage of educational resources in impoverished areas. The lack of educational resources can lead to the inability of local residents to improve their overall quality and better achieve the development and construction of their hometowns, resulting in a vicious cycle of poverty and intergenerational transmission. So, in order to fundamentally eliminate poverty, it is necessary to

provide students in poverty-stricken areas with opportunities to receive good education. Against this backdrop, the government led educational migration project has begun. By relocating students from underdeveloped areas to areas with developed educational resources for enrollment, students from underdeveloped areas can access better educational resources and learning environments. Educational migration has indeed achieved leapfrog development in education in impoverished areas, promoting fair distribution of educational resources. As the positive role of educational migration becomes increasingly evident, the government is also paying more attention to the role of education in poverty alleviation work, and educational migration has become a widely concerned social phenomenon.

Although the current educational migration project has achieved some success, there are still many problems in ensuring the effectiveness of educational migration: how can minority students adapt to a unified teaching model? How to avoid the lack of family education? How to achieve sustainable development of educational migration projects? The exploration of these issues is of great significance for a more comprehensive and in-depth implementation of the education migration project. This article first summarizes the current situation presented in typical cases of educational migration through case analysis. Based on the current situation of educational migration, the positive role of educational migration is analyzed by using the qualitative research method. Finally, this article provides a detailed analysis of the problems existing in educational migration and proposes targeted measures and suggestions.

## **2. Representative Cases of Educational Migration**

### **2.1. Baoting Li and Miao Autonomous County, Hainan Province**

The exploration of a new poverty alleviation model of “education+migration” in Baoting County, Hainan Province has been a huge success. Hainan Province is located at the southernmost point of China and is a multi-ethnic province. Baoting Li and Miao Autonomous County is located in the inland of Hainan Province, with ethnic minorities accounting for over 60% of the county’s population. It is also one of the five national level poverty-stricken counties in Hainan Province [1]. Baoting County has adjusted the layout and structure of primary and secondary schools by abolishing and merging schools with inadequate facilities, transferring students and teachers from rural areas to urban areas, achieving the concentration of educational resources and providing students with a better learning environment. The implementation of this plan provides a reference for poverty reduction and balanced development of urban-rural education in ethnic minority autonomous counties.

### **2.2. The Solution to Children’s Education Issues in the Ningxia Ecological Migration Project**

Since 2011, the education department of Ningxia Autonomous Region in China has implemented the “Education migration” strategy, effectively addressing the school attendance issues of eligible children among 350000 ecological migrants [2]. Among them, “education migrants from outside the region” mainly recruit students to vocational schools through joint enrollment between the East and the West. Students from Ningxia Autonomous Region can go to coastal areas to receive vocational education and settle down locally after graduation. This educational migration approach can provide both skilled labor for coastal areas and employment opportunities for the western region.

## **3. Ways of Educating Migration**

In the 21st century, with the large-scale implementation of China’s poverty alleviation projects, the government has also attached increasing importance to the role of education in poverty alleviation work, resulting in two government-led educational migration methods.

The first way is for students to receive general education in different places: in some areas of western China, due to relatively backward economic development or poor ecological environment, educational resources in these areas are also relatively scarce. By integrating educational resources and transferring students from these regions to areas with higher levels of development for education, the government can provide students with better educational resources and learning environments.

The second method is the joint recruitment of vocational education students between the East and the West. Currently, China's industrialization process is in the transition stage from initial development to maturity, during which the demand for technical talents in the Chinese labor market is very high. In this way, the Yangtze River Delta region will directly recruit students from underdeveloped areas in the western region, and these students will go to the Yangtze River Delta region to receive vocational education and obtain stable employment.

The ultimate goal of both methods is the same: to narrow the educational resource gap caused by uneven development between regions, improve the education level and comprehensive abilities of young students in underdeveloped areas, and thus block the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

#### **4. The Practical Significance of Educating Migrants**

By analyzing the implementation status and methods of education migration policies in provinces such as Hainan and Ningxia, this paper believes that education migration has many positive impacts on the long-term development of individual students and migration destinations, which are reflected in the following two aspects.

##### **4.1. Promoting Educational Equity**

Since the 1970s, with the deepening of reform and opening up, the level of modernization in China has been continuously improving, especially in the eastern coastal areas, which have attracted a large number of talents. However, the imbalance in development between the east and west has also brought about an imbalance in educational resources.

By analyzing the implementation of the "educational migration" in recent years, this paper finds that educational migration is beneficial for promoting educational equity. For students receiving general education, whether it is relocating students from underdeveloped areas to areas with developed educational resources for enrollment or merging smaller schools to obtain a more comprehensive training system, children from underdeveloped areas and urban children have equal access to education opportunities and high-quality educational resources. This to some extent promotes the balanced development of education among regions, which is conducive to achieving educational equity.

##### **4.2. Fundamental Poverty Eradication**

The reasons for the formation of impoverished areas in China are historical issues, often related to natural environments that are not conducive to economic development, such as the mountainous environment in western China where transportation is difficult to develop, and the ecological problems faced by land desertification in the north. These unfavorable natural environments for development can cause intergenerational transmission of poverty, thereby forming a vicious cycle of poverty. A higher level of education can effectively alleviate intergenerational transmission of poverty [2]. Recruiting students from underdeveloped areas to receive vocational education in developed areas can improve their education level, enhance their employability, and effectively and fundamentally eliminate the occurrence of long-term poverty.

## **5. The Problems of Educational Migration**

### **5.1. Cultural Adaptation of Ethnic Minority Students**

Nowadays, the key development counties for poverty alleviation in China are still concentrated in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities and border areas. In areas where educational migration is implemented, the proportion of ethnic minority students is also high. Although educational migration has many positive impacts, there are still many problems in promoting the “Educational Migration Plan” in ethnic minority areas. Firstly, transferring minority students from underdeveloped areas to cities for unified education can lead to maladaptation in their living habits, language, and behavior. Because the vast majority of teachers in schools that receive education for immigrant students are from the Han ethnic group, bilingual education is not widely available; In the daily teaching of schools, there is also little content about ethnic minority culture. Secondly, some ideological concepts of ethnic minority students in underdeveloped areas need to be guided and corrected. For example, some Tibetan students do not have sufficient understanding of modern education models, and they are likely to leave school and choose temple education due to poor academic performance [3].

### **5.2. The Lack of Family Education and the Generation of Psychological Problems**

Separation from parents can have a negative impact on the physical and mental development of adolescents, which is also an issue that cannot be ignored in educational migration [4]. Most students participating in the educational migration program leave their hometown alone to study in boarding schools. They need to face a new learning environment alone, and the psychological pressure caused by leaving their parents can make them feel nervous. If not detected and treated in a timely manner, it can even lead to symptoms of depression and aversion to learning, making it difficult for them to effectively learn in school [5]. At the same time, good family education is an important influencing factor for young people to shape correct values. The lack of family education may lead to poor living habits among educated immigrant students, which cannot be corrected in a timely manner.

### **5.3. Human Resource Loss and Difficulties Faced**

Educational migration provides many students in underdeveloped areas with opportunities to access high-quality educational resources, but it also leads to population loss in the areas where educational immigrants migrate. Students receiving general education need to leave their hometown and go to areas with abundant educational resources to enroll, and most students receiving vocational education will directly stay in coastal areas for employment. Although this has provided employment opportunities for students in underdeveloped areas, it has also resulted in the loss of a large amount of young labor force in the relocation areas. In the long run, it will cause population aging and left behind problems in the relocation area. If there are not enough personnel to engage in the positions required for social operation, the education migration destination will not be able to develop and may even affect the efficiency of social operation.

Meanwhile, with the large-scale development of rural education migration and the loss of human resources, rural schools are also facing serious crises. The issue of human resource loss in relocation areas not only leads to the loss of excellent student resources in rural schools, but also affects the quantity and quality of rural teachers. Being able to stick to rural teachers is the cornerstone of the development of rural schools, but after the process of integrating educational resources into urban areas, the problem of teachers in rural schools is becoming increasingly serious. Rural primary school teachers have shown a predominantly middle-aged and elderly age structure [6]. These situations all reflect two issues: the shortage of teacher resources in rural schools and the serious imbalance in the distribution of teachers between urban and rural areas.

## **6. Suggestions**

### **6.1. Strengthen the Construction of Migrant Receiving Schools**

#### **6.1.1. Respect the Culture of Ethnic Minorities**

Many ethnic minority students among educational immigrants have significant differences in their ideological concepts and lifestyles compared to ordinary Han Chinese students. These differences may stem from the religious beliefs or unique living environments of ethnic minorities. When designing student development plans for immigrant receiving schools, it is necessary to respect cultural differences and the excellent traditional culture of ethnic minorities. Schools can design specialized teaching sessions to popularize different cultural customs among ethnic groups, and develop bilingual education in Chinese and minority languages, guiding students to correctly view cultural differences and respect different excellent cultural traditions. This can help students from different ethnic groups better integrate into the new learning environment.

#### **6.1.2. Ensuring the Normal Life of Students**

Most areas where educational migration is carried out are relatively poor, and many families have low-income levels that cannot afford their children's tuition and living expenses. The government and schools need to establish a learning assistance mechanism to assist impoverished students who are working hard to complete their studies smoothly. The student assistance mechanism can solve the problem of food and clothing for impoverished students and ensure their normal lives. On this basis, appropriate expansion of the school's infrastructure should also be carried out. With the enrollment of immigrant students, it will put pressure on the existing infrastructure of the school, such as exceeding the rated number of diners in the cafeteria, resulting in inability to eat in a timely manner, and insufficient beds in the dormitory. The appropriate expansion of the school's infrastructure can not only ensure the quality of life for students, but also avoid them spending too much time on trivial matters, ensuring sufficient learning time for students.

#### **6.1.3. Ensure the Teaching Effectiveness of Receiving Schools for Educational Migrants**

Schools that receive educational immigrants need to carefully consider the number of classes and the allocation of teachers when assigning students to different classes. Firstly, after immigrant students enroll, the overall number of students will increase compared to before. When allocating classes, it is necessary to consider the teaching effectiveness of the teacher, and the number of classes can be appropriately increased to ensure that the number of students in each class is in an appropriate state. Secondly, each teacher has limited energy and needs to recruit new teachers when there are more students, which can ensure their physical health and teaching efficiency.

### **6.2. Emphasize Students' Psychological Education and Cooperative Education Between Schools and Families**

During the prevalence of novel coronavirus, adolescents with immigrant backgrounds are more likely to have psychological symptoms such as anxiety than those without immigrant backgrounds, which shows that the psychological problems of migrant students cannot be ignored. Educational immigrant students need to face a new learning environment alone [7]. Learning fatigue and other situations can accumulate mental stress in daily life, and the reduction of family companionship can also cause psychological stress for them. We need to alleviate the mental pressure of immigrant students and help them adapt more smoothly to the new living environment [8].

Firstly, schools that receive educational immigrants can conduct regular psychological counseling classes. In psychological counseling classes, teachers can teach students the correct methods to face problems and provide guidance for potential psychological problems that students may encounter. When problems are severe, teachers can guide students to seek medical attention in a timely manner. Secondly, leverage the supportive role of family education in school education [9]. Schools should strive to ensure the connection between parents and students, play the good role of family education, and encourage students to seek help from parents and teachers immediately after discovering problems.

### **6.3. Deeply Embedding the Poverty Alleviation System into the Talent Training System**

The educational immigrants recruited by the Middle East and West United Enrollment Program have provided educational opportunities and job positions for underdeveloped areas, and vocational education poverty alleviation methods have also achieved widespread results. Since China has a large demand for professional talents and the government is also encouraging the development of vocational education, there will be a large number of high-quality skilled talents who are precise, meticulous and well-grounded in the future [10].

By combining the talent cultivation system of vocational education with the assistance policies of educational immigrants in the relocation areas, solutions can be provided for the loss of human resources in the relocation areas. A sound incentive mechanism can motivate participants' work enthusiasm from aspects such as salary levels and job promotions. Through this incentive mechanism, some students can be encouraged to participate in the construction of their hometown after completing their skills learning [11].

## **7. Conclusion**

This paper summarizes two basic ways to achieve educational migration by analyzing typical cases of educational migration. The two educational migration methods, targeting general education and vocational education respectively, have had a positive impact on China's educational equity and poverty alleviation cause. The education migration project can alleviate the imbalanced distribution of educational resources, improve the comprehensive quality of education migrant students, and thus block the intergenerational transmission of poverty. This paper not only summarizes the positive effects of educational migration, but also analyzes the problems that exist in educational migration. Firstly, there is a special group among Chinese educational migrants: ethnic minority students. These students often come from ethnic minority autonomous regions and have unique cultural and lifestyle habits. Going to educational migration schools to receive unified education can face cultural adaptation issues. At the same time, the separation between ordinary students and their parents can also easily lead to psychological problems. This requires migrant receiving schools to take measures to help students adapt to different cultures, while emphasizing cooperative education between schools and families, and paying attention to students' mental health. Secondly, the relocation of educational migrants faces the problem of human resource loss. After educating migrant students that they have acquired certain vocational skills, the government can encourage some migrant students to build their hometowns and solve the problem of sustainable human resource development in the migrant relocation areas.

This paper first analyzes the cases of education migration in Hainan and Ningxia regions, and then summarizes the basic methods and practical significance of education migration. This paper clarifies the problems existing in educational migration and proposes targeted suggestions that are conducive to ensuring the actual effectiveness of educational immigration. It is beneficial for students, schools, and relocation areas to better integrate with educational immigrants.

Finally, this paper focuses more on how to achieve a closer integration between schools and “educational migrants”. However, the subjects involved in educational migration include not only schools but also the government and students. In the future, more detailed research can be conducted based on the different subjects of educational migration, and more targeted suggestions can be proposed to facilitate deeper research on this topic.

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