The problems of urban-rural teachers exchange policy and reforms in China

Bao Chuanyou a*

College of Educational Administration, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China 10087

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Abstract

Urban and rural teachers exchange policy is a very important measure by China’s government to realize the balanced development of urban and rural compulsory education, whose goal largely depends on exchange teachers’ identification with it and their teaching effects. A case study on M county of Beijing shows that the gross degree of exchange teachers’ satisfaction with teachers exchange policy is very low. During carrying out this policy, many new problems are produced such as low standard of chosing exchange teachers; no right of free choice for exchange teachers and exchange schools, exchange teachers’ job assignments uncorrespondence with their professions, too long time of exchange and single exchange form, unreasonable evaluation subject or no unified evaluation standards and so on. It’s very necessary to better this policy in terms of the exchange teachers’ difficulties and demands in order to produce the effect and efficiency of this policy at the most extent.

Keywords: Compulsory education; urban and rural teachers’ exchange policy; exchange teachers; exchange schools.

1. Introduction

Related studies have shown that there is a big gap between urban and rural education in China, whether in hardware or in software, the level of urban schools are much higher than rural schools. But above all is the teachers’ quality gap(Yuan Zhenguo, 2005).[1] With the implementation of the newly revised ‘Compulsory Education Law’ in 2006, the balanced development of compulsory education has increasingly become a basic value orientation. A lot of useful attempts have been made to encourage teachers exchange between urban and rural schools and to promote urban-rural teachers’ balance in many districts all over the country. However, as far as the policy effects concerned, teachers exchange between urban and rural schools encountered a lot of new difficulties which greatly affected the implementation of the policy.

At present, there are a lot of policy studies on the exchange of teachers in China which are mostly from the concept and process of policy design, more concerned about the policy enforcement, very little attention to the effect of policy implementation. What’s more, previous studies were made more from the manager's view, and less on
teachers’ identification with exchange policy and their needs in exchange. So this study is done mainly from exchange teachers’ view.

2. Methods and Tools

2.1. Study objects

This study selects M county of Beijing as a case. The objects were mainly exchange teachers to mountainous and rural schools, and principals who accept exchange teachers.

2.2. Questionnaires and interviews

The questionnaire consists of four parts: the first part is teachers’ basic information; the second part is exchange teachers’ satisfaction survey. The third part is exchange teachers’ understanding of the problems arose from policy implementing, and the teachers’ demands for improvements. The fourth part is open-ended questions.

Interview objects include two groups, one group is urban teachers who are exchanged to rural schools, the other one is principals in exchange schools. To the first group, individual interviews and group interviews are used, and a total of 44 exchanged teachers are interviewed; To the second group individual interview is adopted for all principals in sample schools.

3. Main Findings

3.1. Exchange teachers’ overall satisfaction with the policy

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<th>Table 1 Points in Every Dimension</th>
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<td>Overall satisfaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average</td>
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<td>Standard deviation</td>
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From the table above, we know that exchange teachers’ overall satisfaction with exchange policy is low, and they are relatively dissatisfied with selection and encouragement, but relatively satisfied with appointment and evaluation. Among this points, encouragement score is the lowest.

From the analysis of word frequency in the interview data, we find that teachers’ relatively satisfaction (see Table 2) and relatively dissatisfaction mainly manifested in the below aspects (see Table 3).

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<tr>
<th>Table 2. the Exchange Teachers’ Satisfaction</th>
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<th>Table 3. the Exchange Teachers’ Dissatisfaction</th>
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### 3.2. Teachers’ difficulties in exchange

The questionnaire statistics show that many teachers encounter difficulties, so they conflict with exchange policy mentally. Of all the teacher questionnaires, 15 choose the answer “rural students are difficult to teach”; 27 choose “salary is low”; 64 choose the answer “traffic and living isn’t convenient”; 67 teachers choose the answer “I can't care for my families”; 48 choose “have bad effects on the job in the former school”; 18 choose “I can't adapt to living in mountain or rural areas”. These answers are basically same with interview data in exchange teachers’ dissatisfaction.

### 3.3. Teachers’ needs in exchange

#### 3.3.1. Teachers’ duty expectations in exchange school

Questionnaire data appears that 85.6 percent of teachers expect to be general teacher in exchange school, 11.3 percent hope to be head teacher, 2.1 percent want to be subject faculty leader, and only 1 percent wish to be grade leader.

#### 3.3.2. Teachers’ expectations of exchange time

It is formulated that teachers’ exchange time is 3 years in M city in Beijing. However, this study shows that 35 percent of teachers hope exchange time is half year or less, and 47 percent hope it is from half year to 1 year, but 16 percent hope it is from 1 to 3 years, only 2 percent want to exchange for more than 3 years.

#### 3.3.3. Teachers’ expectations of exchange forms

Among all the teacher questionnaires, 10.9 percent of them hope to teach in exchange school continually, and 8.7 percent expect to direct exchange school and communicate with it and hold faculty activities rather than regular teaching. However, 40.4 percent of teachers hope to teach in exchange school for a short time, 38 percent expect to go to exchange school at intervals and give them short—term guidance and communicate with other teachers, not regular teaching.

#### 3.3.4. Teachers’ expectations of repay after exchange

According to the interviews, we set up 4 options as follows: professional promoting, taking part in training and advanced study, salary rise, vacation with pay and more than 2 answers are limited. 99 exchange teachers answered these questions in all. Of them, 55 teachers chose ‘professional promoting’, 31 chose ‘taking part in training and advanced study’, 57 chose ‘salary rise’, 15 chose ‘vacation with pay’.

#### 3.3.5. Teachers’ expectation of evaluation in exchange

Questionnaire data revealed that 32.7 percent of teachers expected to be evaluated in their original school, but 63.3 percent in exchange school, only 1 percent chose ‘the county-level educational administrative department in charge of their performance evaluation in exchange schools’.

### 4. Analysis and Discussion

#### 4.1. Low standard of choosing exchange teachers Analysis and Discussion

The main standards for choosing exchange teachers in M County are composed of three aspects: 1) Teaching experiences in mountainous area; 2) Teachers’ school age; 3) Requirements of professional title. The data of
questionnaires indicated that only 18% of 100 surveyed exchange teachers were consisted with high-ranking teachers, from the aspect of professional title; and 75% without title of key teachers, 14% with school-level teachers, 10% with district-level key teachers, only 1% with city-level key teachers. It is apparent that the high-level teachers were not sent to poor schools in M county. The standard for exchange teachers was too low, quite a few urban teachers who went to rural schools to exchange had so backward educational concepts and poor instructing abilities.

4.2. No right of free choice for exchange teachers and exchange schools

According to the teachers exchanging policy by educational administration department, neither could exchange teachers and schools arrange the time to exchange, nor could they decide where to go. Especially the rural schools could hardly obtain the teachers they longed for. It’s obvious that dispatching exchange teachers by administrative force has seriously brought about a negative influence on the exchange teachers’ and schools’ enthusiasm about this policy. The data of questionnaires show that 44.9% of exchange teachers hoped that their former schools took their opinions into account; 86.9% of them argued that they could choose exchange schools on their own. Lacking in the rights and chances to choose had bad effects. As a result, this policy not only failed to achieve the goal of improving teaching quality of rural schools, but also interfered with the regular teaching order in exchange schools.

4.3. Exchange teachers’ job assignments uncorrespondence with their professions

After exchange teachers were assigned to exchange schools, the primary problem principals confronted with was how to employ them. From the data of questionnaires and interviews, we could find that subjects, taught by some teachers who were exchanged from urban schools, were uncorrespondent with their professions. Among 100 teachers surveyed, 37 exchange teachers’ professions were uncorrespondent with their instruction in exchange school. After exchanged to rural schools, many Chinese and mathematics teachers had to teach both Chinese and mathematics at same time. Sometimes, they even taught everything if needed, which were completely uncorrespondent with their own professions. Most teachers said “this method has not only increased our workload, but also debased the teaching quality.”

4.4. Too long time of exchange and single exchange form

It was stipulated that the time of exchanging teachers was 3 years in M county, and they must be engaged in routine works of instruction. Many teachers considered it too rigid, too long time and single form, which ignored individual teachers’ diversity and affected their identification with the exchange policy. The statistics of questionnaires showed that 82% of exchange teachers hoped the time of exchange should remain below 1 year, 42.4% of them have chosen the way to go to exchange schools to teach in a short term at intervals; 38% decided to go to exchange schools to guide instruction and research without routine works. Some teachers hoped to be exchanged in many ways at the interviews.

4.5. Unreasonable evaluation subject and no unified evaluation standards

According to the policy by M county, evaluation objects are separated from their work settings, which not only brought forth inconvenience to the routine administration in exchange schools but also failed to give impartial and reasonable evaluation to exchange teachers. This made many exchange teachers feel unfair of “doing well is the same as doing worse.” The investigation of questionnaires showed that 63.3% of exchange teachers hoped that they could be evaluated by exchange schools because they believed that exchange schools had more acquaintance with their works, which was more possible to evaluate their work objectively and impartially than their former schools.
5. Some advice on how to better the teachers exchange policy

5.1. Promoting teachers' identification with the teachers exchange policy and raising their teaching abilities in rural schools

The effective implementation of teachers exchange policy depends largely on individual exchange teacher’s initiative and his/her professional talent. In order to achieve the goal, it is undoubtedly significant to improve the exchange teachers’ identification with this policy. First of all, it is necessary to change the exchange teachers’ ideas and make them fully understand its value and significance as well as their responsibility they should bear. Secondly, before the exchange teachers going to work, it is important to strengthen the training of their education and teaching ideas, to give them more knowledge and abilities so that they have more preparations in facing continuous challenges happened in rural schools.

5.2. Raising selection standards for exchange teachers and giving them more autonomies

5.2.1. Raising selection standards for exchange teachers

Exchange teachers are chosen not just in the light of their rural teaching experience or their professional promotion demands but according to their professional ability and spirit of contribution.

5.2.2. Giving exchange teachers and exchange schools more autonomies

For rural schools, high-quality teacher resources means that the teachers must meet the needs of rural schools’ development and be able to contribute much to rural education. Therefore, besides the professional standards mentioned above, exchange teachers should be chosen by the terms of the teachers’ wishes and exchange schools’ needs. To some extent, the efficiency of the exchange policy largely depends on whether the exchange teachers and schools both get what they want. Therefore, during implementation of the exchange-teacher policy, we should pay more attention to the exchange teachers’ and schools’ autonomy so as to motivate their enthusiasm about this policy.

5.3. Reasonable appointment of exchange teachers

The task assignment for the exchange teachers should take their professional status and expertise into consideration and try to make them correspondent. At same time it is unnecessary to make identical rigid requirements for teachers’ exchange, because they may have different needs of exchange times and forms. We can provide diversified and alternative means of exchange within the specified time.

5.4. Reasonable evaluation subjects and unified evaluation standards

The evaluation subjects and standards should be determined by terms of different exchange forms and teachers’ work settings. In short, the evaluation of the exchange teachers should be fair, just and fully reflect their work characteristics, workload and values so that the evaluation function of inspiration and guidance can be developed better.

5.5. Better the coordinated supporting measures for teachers exchange policy

In order to make sure the successful implementation of a policy, it is necessary not only to consider if the policy value is reasonable, but also to create a good supportive environment for it. For the teachers exchange policy in China, it is essential to provide more convenient services for the exchange teachers in traffic and living according to local conditions, what’s more, to better the exchange teachers’ repay and welfare, to innovate encouragement ways and improve the attractiveness of exchange activities. At last, the goal will be realized that teachers exchange model be changed from now "passive exchange" which mainly depends on administrative force to "active exchange" which is started form the teachers’ spontaneous request.

Reference