



# Drawing on International Experience to Explore the Issue of Educational Equity for Migrant Children in China: A Case Study of Guangzhou

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## Abstract

In the context of globalization, this paper takes Guangzhou, a megacity in China, as a case study to explore the practical dilemmas, causes and solutions to the problem of educational equity for migrant children. The study shows that as a national central city with a high degree of globalization and a huge foreign population, Guangzhou's migrant children face typical problems in the allocation of educational resources, such as policy admission threshold restrictions, blocked access to higher education, and difficulties in social integration. The root reason is the concrete embodiment of the profound contradiction between the labor flow driven by globalization and educational resource allocation model based on the household registration system. This paper draws on international policy experience through comparative research on international cases such as the United States and Germany. Finally, it puts forward local and systematic countermeasures and suggestions for Guangzhou: deepen the reform of household registration and finance linkage in the system and explore "money goes with people". In terms of policies, the enrollment process should be simplified, the right to go to higher education in other places should be guaranteed, and teacher training should be strengthened. Build a multi-colaborative support network at the social level. This study aims to provide theoretical reference and practical guidance for Guangzhou and other similar megacities to solve the problem of educational equity for migrant children and improve urban inclusiveness and sustainable development.

## Subject Areas

Sociology

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## Keywords

Globalization, Migrant Children, Educational Equity, Guangzhou, Social Integration, Policy Research

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## 1. Introduction

In the process of globalization, the problem of educational equity brought about by population mobility is a common challenge faced by all countries. Economic globalization continues to promote labor migration, and the demand for cheap labor in developed countries, the layout of global industrial chains, and the urbanization process of developing countries have jointly promoted the flow of many laborers from rural areas to cities, from underdeveloped areas to developed areas, and even across borders. The children of these migrant workers became migrant children. In China, tens of millions of migrant workers continue to flow into the Yangtze River Delta, Pearl River Delta and Beijing-Tianjin regions from Sichuan, Henan, Hunan and other provinces. Looking at the world, Mexican immigrants poured into the United States; Indians entered Canada. These have directly created a large group of migrant children. Therefore, without the huge changes in the economic pattern and population migration brought about by globalization, there would be no such large-scale and concentrated educational equity problems for migrant children. It is in the context of globalization and intensifying global population mobility that the issue of educational equity for migrant children in China has become a local governance challenge with significant international relevance, which is manifested in difficulties in enrollment, integration and development.

Educational equity means that all students, regardless of their background, should have equal access to educational opportunities and resources. The theory of educational equity emphasizes the distribution of resources, equitable educational opportunities, and equality of outcomes [1]. In China, educational equity first means that children have school, which is focused on universalizing nine-year compulsory education, reducing dropout rates, and allowing every school-age child to have access to school. In 1986, the promulgation and implementation of Compulsory Education Law realized the equity of opportunity in the legal sense of educational equity. Based on guaranteeing basic enrollment opportunities, it will also try to narrow the gap between regions and schools to achieve equality in resource allocation. However, due to China's dense population, efforts are still being made to achieve comprehensive educational equity. According to statistics, by 2020, the floating population in China had reached 276 million, accounting for nearly 20% of the total population [2]. The number of migrant children has also been increasing annually. Studies have shown that significant disparities exist for migrant children in terms of school enrollment rates, academic performance, and educational continuity, making their compulsory education a focal point of societal concern. Moreover, Ref. [3] found that migrant children attending public schools

are still viewed more as a privilege than a right. The main issues faced by migrant children include economic hardships, cultural adaptation barriers, and policy restrictions [4]. The hukou system, established as an important means of social management since the founding of the People's Republic of China, has contributed to developmental imbalances between urban and rural areas and between different regions. Due to hukou restrictions, migrant children often cannot enjoy the same educational resources as urban hukou children, severely affecting educational equity and social stability [5]. Since 2012, the Chinese government has introduced a series of hukou reform policies aimed at relaxing settlement restrictions and optimizing the allocation of public service resources to improve the living and working conditions of the floating population. However, the compulsory education of migrant children still faces numerous challenges. The constraints of the hukou system persist, and migrant children often encounter complicated procedures and high entry barriers when enrolling in schools in their destination areas. Therefore, this study mainly adopts literature review, policy analysis, and case studies to conduct a detailed and multifaceted exploration of the issue of educational equity for migrant children under China's household registration reform. Meanwhile, to connect a global perspective and local issues, the study takes the United States and Germany as two international cases to provide suggestions with international perspective and practical operability.

## 2. Research Implications

At the theoretical level, traditional research on educational equity mostly focuses on static dimensions such as regional, urban-rural, inter-school, and class. This study puts the issue of educational equity in the macro context of globalization, introduces the key variable of mobility, and explores how educational equity changes from simple territorial equity to human equity in the context of rapid cross-border and cross-regional population flows, thus expanding the interpretive dimension and connotation of educational equity theory. Meanwhile, this study can enrich the theory of educational equity, globalization and social development. This study does not look at the issue of education in isolation but analyzes the changes in social structure. By analyzing the institutional barriers, resource allocation and social exclusion mechanisms behind the educational difficulties of migrant children, we can get a glimpse of the challenges of social integration, the reproduction mechanism of social inequality, and the modernization process of national governance capacity in the context of globalization and provide enlightening empirical cases and theoretical thinking for related disciplines.

The practical significance of this study is that it can provide a basis for policy formulation and promote social integration and sustainable development. The education of migrant children is a systemic problem involving household registration, finance, education, social security and other fields. This study aims to put forward systematic and actionable countermeasures and suggestions, such as reforming the financial allocation mechanism, optimizing the points enrollment

system and improving the policy of the high school and college entrance examination in different places, providing an empirical basis and path choice for the government to build a more fair, inclusive and sustainable public education service system.

### 3. Research Objectives

This study aims to systematically explore the generation logic, practical predicament and solution path of the issue of educational equity for migrant children in China from a global perspective. Specifically, it first reveals the root cause of the problem and analyzes how global forces interact with China's local system to jointly shape the deep mechanism of educational inequality for migrant children. Secondly, by selecting the United States (a traditional immigrant country that emphasizes legal rights and multiculturalism) and Germany (a country that has shifted from the guest worker model to active integration and emphasizes systematic support) as typical cases, an in-depth comparative policy analysis is conducted to clarify the effects of different policy models. The advantages and limitations provide China with both positive and negative international experiences and lessons to solve related problems and avoid repeating the mistakes of other countries.

Furthermore, this article mainly explores a research question: How to understand and solve the problem of educational equity for migrant children in China in the macro context of globalization?

### 4. Reasons Caused Education Inequality of Migrant Children in China

The educational inequality faced by migrant children in China stems from multiple institutional and structural factors, with the household registration (hukou) system, unequal distribution of educational resources, and barriers to social integration constituting the core challenges. As an institutional legacy of the urban-rural dual structure, the hukou system not only restricts migrant children's equal access to urban public education services but also reinforces educational exclusion through complex enrollment policies and advancement thresholds. Meanwhile, the uneven distribution of educational resources across regions and between schools has concentrated on migrant children in underfunded private institutions with inferior teaching quality and inadequate facilities, further exacerbating disparities in educational outcomes. Additionally, the lack of robust social support networks and the unsustainable nature of public welfare programs hinder migrant children from accessing comprehensive developmental opportunities. Drawing on case studies from Guangzhou, this paper systematically examines how these key factors interact to reveal the underlying mechanisms of educational inequality among migrant children.

#### 4.1. Household Registration System

The Reform and Opening up is a special period of social and economic transformation

for China. Since that period, many rural labor forces began to move to cities, forming a special group, migrant workers. With the trend of family-oriented migration of the migrant workers, the education of their children has become increasingly prominent, which has become a social issue that cannot be ignored, which has attracted widespread attention from the whole society and government departments. The central and local governments have successively introduced a series of policies and measures, emphasizing the principle of focusing on the management of the places of inflow and full-time public primary and secondary schools to solve the problem of compulsory education for the children of migrant workers. Since 2012, the reform of the household registration system has entered a stage of comprehensive tackling. During this period, to solve a series of social problems including the education of the children of migrant workers, the central government took accelerating the equalization of public services as the main goal and started the reform by comprehensively relaxing the conditions for the settlement of the agricultural transfer population. Specifically, the government would further relax the control of the integral settlement index of the migrant population in megacities, firstly promote accumulation recognition of the number of years of household registration access in the same city of the Yangtze River Delta and the Pearl River Delta and other urban areas. However, for a long time, the distribution imbalance of household registration interests between urban and rural areas has gradually shaped the pattern of dual structure of urban and rural areas, which has largely hindered free flow of labor among different social levels.

The so-called dual structure of urban and rural areas is to divide urban residents and rural residents into two completely different social groups in terms of identity. And the allocation of public resources and basic public services are inclined to towns and urban residents. To pursue a better life and earn a living, rural migrant workers enter the cities to work, which is a breakthrough in the urban-rural dual structure. As for their children, one of the most important things is being provided fair and equal opportunities of receiving compulsory education.

#### **4.2. Lack of Educational Resources**

In the process of urbanization in China, an increasing number of children of migrant workers have migrated with their parents to seek better educational opportunities in cities. However, due to the limited carrying capacity of urban education centers and the restriction of the expansion period of education, urban areas have set higher enrollment thresholds for public schools for floating rural students [6]. Although public junior high schools are the main institutions responsible for the education of migrant children, they cannot provide enough degrees for all of them. Most migrant children attending public schools do not enjoy truly equal access to quality education resources. They are mostly placed in special schools for children of migrant workers or in schools with relatively poor teaching quality. This is partly due to the shortage of quality school resources, and partly because the school authorities and even the parents of the schools do not welcome migrant children to

such good schools [7]. But, due to the nature of private schools, schools for migrant children are naturally at a disadvantage in many aspects such as resources, supervision, teachers and safety. Most receive no government subsidies and charge low tuition fees because the children enrolled are mostly from migrant families with low socioeconomic status who are unable to attend public schools [8].

### **Inequality of Access to Digital Educational Resources**

With the advancement of digital transformation in education, digital educational resources should have become an important tool for promoting educational equity, but for migrant children, the technological divide has instead exacerbated their educational disadvantages. This inequality is reflected in three dimensions: shortage of hardware and equipment, fractured intergenerational transmission of digital skills, and implicit exclusion of technological tools, and is influenced by family economic conditions, policy design, and social stratification mechanisms [9]. This problem was particularly prominent during the epidemic: for example, about 30% of migrant children in Shanghai were unable to effectively participate in online learning due to a lack of equipment or network conditions, and some students even had to borrow neighbors' equipment or go to public places to dabble with the Internet. In addition, the bandwidth of migrant children's homes is generally low, with 60% of homes only able to support basic video lessons, making it difficult to meet the demand for interactive teaching and learning, resulting in significantly less effective online learning than for local children. The low educational and occupational characteristics of migrant children's parents limit their digital literacy, forming an obstacle to intergenerational transfer.

The design of some educational policies and technological tools has not fully considered the actual needs of migrant families and has instead become a new means of exclusion. For example, the smart campus system implemented in many places requires parents to complete homework submissions and home-school communication through APPs, but parents of migrant children have difficulty adapting to such technological thresholds due to the nature of their work, e.g., night shifts in the manufacturing industry, or their literacy levels. According to a survey conducted in a Guangzhou district, 32% of migrant children were categorized as having low home-school cooperation because their parents did not respond to teachers' messages in a timely manner, which directly affected their eligibility for merit assessment. In addition, the content design of online education platforms is often based on the cultural background of urban middle-class families, and the differences in language habits and life experiences of migrant children make it difficult for them to integrate into virtual classroom interactions, further exacerbating their marginalization [10]. In addition, there are significant regional differences in the distribution of digital education resources. Although the hardware facilities in developed regions in the east are relatively well-developed, schools in urban and rural areas where migrant children are concentrated still face a shortage of resources. For example, only 40% of classrooms in private schools for migrant children in the suburbs of Shanghai are equipped with interactive whiteboards, compared

to 95% in public schools in the city. The challenge is even greater in the central and western regions: when migrant children return home from labor exporting provinces such as Henan and Anhui, the risk of disruption rises due to the low network coverage of rural schools (less than 50%), which makes it difficult for them to connect to urban educational progress [9]. The unequal nature of digital educational resources is the mapping of socioeconomic stratification in education. If technology is only considered as a tool and structural conflicts are ignored, migrant children may fall into the “digital poverty trap”. Moreover, the impact of digital poverty on migrant children is a process that will gradually accumulate and amplify. Because education is not only about learning knowledge, but also about learning “how to learn”. Migrant children lag far behind their peers in information retrieval, critical thinking, online collaboration, and digital content creation due to their limited exposure to digital technologies. This digital literacy trap puts them at a disadvantage in any future learning that requires technological assistance.

## 5. Draw on International Cases

### 5.1. The United States

The United States is a country built by immigrants and has the largest and most diverse immigrant population in the world. Its immigration history spans hundreds of years, and it has accumulated a lot of experience, data and research results on how to deal with the issue of immigration integration, especially the education of second-generation immigrants. China’s domestic population movements, such as from rural to urban, are comparable in size and impact on social structures to international migration in the United States. The judicial practice of the United States provides a top reference for how China can legally and fundamentally protect the rights of migrant children. For example, in 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Plyler v. Doe*, ruling that states may not deny any child the right to free public education based on immigration status. This judgment establishes that even children of immigrants without legal status are equally protected by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution [11]. In addition, in 1982, the U.S. Congress introduced the Emergency Immigrant Education Act (EIEA). The bill is an education funding bill designed to help school districts with large numbers of immigrant students cope with economic challenges and hardships, and the federal government uses these funds to share the additional expenses incurred by school districts due to immigrant children. These funds are often used to recruit additional teachers, provide tutoring services, purchase teaching materials, and conduct language support programs to ensure that school districts with a high concentration of immigrant students do not affect the quality of education due to insufficient resources.

However, the education policy of immigrant children in the United States is not static and is often affected by the political atmosphere and government changes. For instance, in July 2025, the Trump administration announced a ban on immigrant children without legal status from participating in the federally funded Head

Start, a program that provides preschool education for children from disadvantaged families. This policy change shows that the issue of educational equity for immigrant children is often intertwined with broader political issues such as border security and public welfare borders, and its specific measures may be repeated and fluctuated depending on the governing philosophy.

## 5.2. Germany

After World War II, Germany introduced many guest workers (Gastarbeiter) due to labor shortages, initially pursuing a policy of “we are not an immigrant country”, hoping that these foreign workers would eventually return to their homeland. However, the fact is that many people settled down, and the problems of their children’s education gradually became prominent. China’s past policy is somewhat like Germany’s early guest worker conception: welcoming rural labor to the city to contribute to the economy but relatively lagging in providing complete social integration, including the education of their children and the welfare of their families. Therefore, the entire mental journey and policy adjustment process of how Germany transformed from a “non-immigrant country” to an “integrated country” has unparalleled rehearsal and enlightenment value for China. Germany’s successful integration of immigrant children in the vocational education system is particularly worthy of reference for China, which also attaches great importance to the development of vocational education.

Firstly, Germany indirectly supports the education of migrant children through extensive social welfare policies. For example, the “StartChancen” program. This is the longest and largest educational program in German history. The program will start in the 2024/25 academic year for ten years, with the federal government and the cantons jointly providing up to two billion euros per year, specifically to support schools with a high proportion of socially disadvantaged students, especially those from poor families and immigrant families [12]. These funds can be used to invest in improving school infrastructure and equipment, strengthening connections between teachers, students, parents, and more. Secondly, children in Germany, regardless of whether their parents are German citizens or not, enjoy free education in public kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and universities. In addition, each child in Germany receives Kindergeld, a monthly child pension of 180 euros from the government, which can be received until the child is at least 18 years old, and up to 25 years old if they are in school or vocational training. This provides financial support to immigrant families. Other benefits, including parental benefits and maternity allowances, which alleviate the financial pressure of immigrant families to a certain extent and create better conditions for children to grow up.

However, Andreas Schleicher, director of the Department of Educational Skills at the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and head of PISA, pointed out that the German education system has not adequately paid attention to and cared for children with immigrant backgrounds, which he

believes is a huge problem. He criticized Germany for doing far enough to provide early childhood education and resources for schools facing the greatest challenges, including attracting the best teachers [13]. This suggests that Germany may still be inadequate in resource allocation. Germany provides many immigrant children with decent employment and integration opportunities through strong welfare policies and vocational education dual systems, which is very much in line with China's current national conditions and the needs of technical talents.

These two countries have provided very targeted and operational positive and negative experience for China to solve the problem of migrant children's education from two aspects: legal rights protection and systematic integration support. By studying them, we can see the essence of China's own problems more clearly and learn valuable lessons from them to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, to develop more forward-looking and fundamental solutions.

## 6. Guangzhou Cases Analysis

This paper takes Guangzhou as an example to explore its policies and measures while facing migrant children's education inequality. Firstly, Guangzhou's geographic location and economic status are the preliminary factors that we made the choice. As the largest first-tier city in the South and the economic center of the Pearl River Delta, Guangzhou attracts the largest cross provincial and intra-provincial migrant population in Mainland China. According to the Ref. [14], the resident population of Guangzhou in 2022 was 1.883 billion, of which the non-household population would account for more than 44%, which means that the scale of migrant children is huge, and the structure is complicated. Meanwhile, Guangzhou is characterized by semi-urbanization, for example, there are many urban villages and urban-rural areas in Guangzhou's Baiyun and Panyu districts, which are inhabited by migrant populations. These are the areas where the migrant population resides, and therefore migrant children in these areas often face problems of difficulty in enrolling in school and in advancing to higher education, which is a typical area of conflict between the household registration system and education equity. Secondly, Guangzhou's compulsory education policy exploration is another reason. Guangzhou is one of the earliest cities in China to explore household registration as a factor affecting education equality. Since 2010, Guangzhou has implemented the points-based enrollment system for children of the migrant population. However, due to various reasons, like household registration and population, a great number of children must attend private schools, which creates a two-track educational divide with public institutions. It also corresponds to the factors influencing the shortage of educational resources in the above study. The last reason is the high feasibility of the Guangzhou case study. Every year the Guangzhou Municipal Bureau of Education releases the Guidelines for Compulsory Education Enrollment of Migrant Children and makes public the data on the approval of private schools, which provides persuasive support for this study. In addition, in Guangzhou social organizations have high participation, such as the Guangzhou

Migrant Children Service Center, which has been carrying out field research for a long time and has accumulated a wealth of materials. Therefore, Guangzhou is chosen as a case study because of not only its typicality in terms of the scale, policy complexity and social impact of migrant children, but also its rich academic research accumulation and data transparency. By analyzing Guangzhou as a case, we can provide more practical references for the education inequality of migrant children, as well as its relationship with the household registration system.

Consequently, Combining the experience from international cases with the actual situation in Guangzhou. The case analysis mainly focuses on the three aspects of enrollment policies, Zhongkao policy and public welfare programs to study the inequity of compulsory education for migrant children in Guangzhou. These three points systematically cover the admission, process assurance and result support, and reflect the multi-dimensional interactions between policies, systems and social forces.

## **6.1. Admission Policies**

### **6.1.1. Lower the Admission Requirements**

Admission policy is chosen as a point to study because it is the starting point of exclusion for migrant children receiving an education, and a threshold with conditions designed by policy. In terms of enrollment, the Guangzhou government mostly adopts the points-based attendance system in dealing with migrant children enrolling. After 2010, many local governments in the Pearl River Delta began to implement the points-based attendance system to attract laborers and provide public services [15]. So-called points-based attendance system detailed sets up many requirements in residence time, self-owned real estate, employment, social security, family planning, etc. So, the points-based enrollment policy is the core channel for migrant children to enter public schools, and this policy threshold, such as social security years, residence certificates, and stable employment certificates, directly decides whether migrant children can obtain a public school. In addition to that, some districts also set up additional points and minus points, such as education level, skill titles, social services, investment and taxation, commendation and awards, which all means that to accumulate points, parents need to spend a lot of energy to prepare a lot of materials. Consequently, the system is also regarded overly in favor of highly educated and highly skilled talents because of its tough conditions and limited places. In addition, the Two Five-Year enrollment pattern, five-year residence permits and five-year social insurance in Guangzhou, is also adopted by two districts in Guangzhou.

In the process of designing and implementing policies, the Guangzhou government constantly makes improvements, but there are many drawbacks and conflicts. For instance, policies give more preference for migrant children whose parents work in the official systems the government admitted. Comparatively, these policies mean high-cost and complicated procedures for migrant parents without official work. So, under the system, the government should constantly close the unequal points gap and bring more opportunities for children of low- and middle-

income migrant workers.

### 6.1.2. Simplify Enrollment Procedures

The cumbersome school enrollment procedures are also a headache for migrant families. Migrant families are required to submit various materials, so simplifying enrollment procedures is necessary. First, the principle of three reductions in materials can be adopted. Reduce duplicate certificates—harmonize the use of electronic residence certificates to replace paper certificates, which was fully implemented in Shanghai in 2024; reduction of paper materials—social insurance records, lease contracts, etc. are shared and accessible through government affairs platforms. Now Hangzhou as a pilot city implements zero material enrollment, only ID card number and residence permit number are required; reduction of additional conditions—eliminate the restriction on the number of consecutive years of social security payment. For instance, Guangzhou will no longer require one-year social security payments after 2024. Second, popularize process optimization. One-stop education service windows can be set up in the communities, services including residence registration, application for enrollment and material verification. It greatly compresses the time limit from 15 days to 3 days. Chaoyang District of Beijing is a pilot. Meanwhile, Zhengzhou's Acceptance of Shortcomings can be expanded nationwide. That means migrant children can first enroll and make up material later, and credit commitment letters can replace some of the materials, such as social security payment certificates and residence permits, and lower the entry threshold for migrant children.

## 6.2. Zhongkao Policy

Second, Zhongkao, senior high school entrance examination, is an institutional breakpoint in educational streaming, which affects whether migrant children can successfully go to school after compulsory education. Moreover, by tracking the path of migrant children to higher education in Guangzhou, it is found that the middle school examination is the strongest link in the household registration system, leading to a break in the educational trajectory. Guangzhou's Zhongkao policy stipulates that non-local registered students need to satisfy four-year continuous schooling adds three-year residence permit adds three-years social security to apply for public high schools, which leads to about 60% of migrant children being forced to return home or enter vocational schools after middle school [16]. This policy directly cuts off the upward mobility of migrant children and creates the phenomenon of half-education, which means part of migrant children's education will end in junior high school education. Even if migrant children can stay in Guangzhou to take the secondary school exams, less than 10 percent of them are admitted to high-quality senior high schools due to the weak quality of teaching in private junior high schools [17], compared to more than 35 percent of household registration students. Vocational education is regarded as a "second-class choice", exacerbating social inequality.

Furthermore, exam policies also greatly influence migrant children's right to

education. From 2018 to 2021, Guangzhou gradually implemented the new policy for the high school entrance examination, relaxed the application conditions for non-registered students from 2019, and adjusted the enrollment quota for non-registered students from 8% to 15% or 18% [18]. Zhongkao is a critical stage for migrant children to continue schooling in the inflow areas, which to some extent determines whether they continue to study in the cities. Since 2019, conditions for hukou-excluded students in applying for public general high schools have been modified as Two Have. The Two Have refers to the student who has a three-year complete student status in Guangzhou junior high school, and one of the student's parents or guardians has a "Guangdong Provincial Residence Permit" handled by Guangzhou City and within the validity period [18]. But the new Zhongkao policy didn't completely distract differences and gaps between non-hukou students and local students. The enrollment rate of migrant children in public general high schools in Guangzhou is 8%-18%, while the proportion of migrant children enrolled in junior high schools is 37.63% [18]. Moreover, even in 2022, the chances of migrant children in Guangzhou entering public high schools are still only 1/4 of students with Guangzhou registration, and their average admission quantile is still significantly higher than that of hukou students [18]. Therefore, in view of the unfairness of the high school entrance examination system, it is suggested to gradually abolish the difference between the enrollment system for hukou students and non-household students, paving the way for the realization of education equality for migrant children, and adjust the enrollment quota ratio of non-hukou students in general high schools. In addition, the government can decrease the tuition fee of private high schools to ease burdens for migrant children who cannot enter public high schools.

### 6.3. Public Welfare Program

Third, public welfare programs are a limited supplement to social forces and a social response to the absence of policies. It was pointed out earlier that due to the limitations of the hukou, many migrant children attend private schools. Compared with public schools, private schools lack resources for after-school services and psychological counseling, so some public welfare organizations, such as Xiao He's Home and Green Grass Public Welfare, fill the gap by providing community education and guidance for higher education. Xiao He's Home was established in Guangzhou as a community welfare program to provide a better living environment for migrant children. As a funding program, Xiao He's Home focuses on the education of migrant children by operating a child-friendly public space and builds a network covering migrant children, migrant families, local governments and enterprises who intervene in the improvement of the growth environment of migrant children and meet their growth needs [19]. In the process of building the public space, Xiao He's Home gradually strengthens the community's cohesion from motivating migrant children and mothers to participate in volunteering activities to giving them rights to organize activities [19]. This transformation not only builds

up a platform for migrant children and mothers to interact with each other but also enables them to have a sense of belonging and confidence. Meanwhile, their active acts would attract and hold social resources together, which finally form a positive cycle of social support networks. At present, there are 26 Xiao He's Homes built, operated and expanded in the Pearl River Delta.

Xiao He's Home set a good example in building migrant children-friendly social networks, however, there are many challenges to meet and solve. Firstly, popularity. Taking Guangdong province as an example, major first-tier cities and cities with large numbers of migrants should constantly popularize social welfare programs and community service projects to provide migrant children with material conveniences and an environment for healthy mental growth. The second one is long termism. According to Ref. [20], a public welfare program in Panyu District covers 80% of the communities where migrant children gather, but its services only meet about 15% of the demand. Moreover, the public welfare program relies on external funding and volunteers, which is not sustainable enough. Sound and perfect community relations and social support networks for the growth of migrant children will not be achieved overnight, but will require continuous human and social resource support, and more patience from society. So, to guarantee public welfare programs' lifespan, it is necessary to set up a funding pool with three pillars, government, market and society. Government provides guarantee, put public welfare program for migrant children into the government's guiding catalog of purchased services; market replenishments by issuing Social Benefit Bonds (SIBs), which refers to that private capitals first invest social projects, and finally the government pays investors according to the results of the projects; social organizations as water storage to establish a permanent charitable trust fund. Finally, Funding for public welfare programs for migrant children usually relies on external donations and government support. Therefore, they may face problems such as insufficient financial support and limited fund-raising channels. Research shows that 63% of the public welfare programs for migrant children in Guangzhou were terminated within three years due to funding breaks, and the service area is concentrated in the central urban area, with less than 20% of the urban and rural areas covered [21]. Social welfare programs for migrant children not only require the participation of multiple social parties, but also their long-term patience and effort to provide resources and attention. However, currently most enterprise funding prefers to pursue the achievement of short-term targets, which brings challenges to the construction of community support networks.

## 7. Conclusions

The issue of educational equity for migrant children in China, particularly within the framework of compulsory education, remains a pressing challenge despite significant policy reforms since 2012. This paper has systematically examined the multifaceted barriers faced by migrant children, focusing on the persistent inequalities stemming from the Hukou system, the shortage of educational resources,

and the complexities of social integration. Through a combination of policy analysis and case studies in Guangzhou, the study highlights both the progress made and the enduring gaps that hinder true educational equity.

The Hukou system continues to be a foundational obstacle, perpetuating disparities in access to quality education. Although reforms have relaxed settlement restrictions and introduced point-based systems in cities like Guangzhou, these measures often favor highly skilled or educated migrants, leaving low-income families at a disadvantage. The cumbersome enrollment procedures and stringent requirements for public school admission further exacerbate inequalities, as many migrant children are relegated to underfunded private schools with inferior facilities and less qualified teachers. The case of Guangzhou illustrates how policies such as the “Two Five-Year” enrollment pattern and the points-based system create institutional barriers, transforming educational equity into a competition of family capital rather than a universal right.

The shortage of educational resources is another critical issue. Migrant children frequently attend schools that lack adequate funding, experienced faculty, and essential infrastructure. The disparity between public and private schools is stark, with migrant children in private institutions facing lower academic performance, higher dropout rates, and limited opportunities for upward mobility. The “money follows the person” policy, while a step in the right direction, has not fully addressed the financial inequities, as local governments often struggle to meet the demands of a growing migrant population. So based on establishing a unified national student information management system for primary and secondary school students, the central government and provincial finances should, in accordance with the data of mobile students recorded in the student information system, dynamically allocate the corresponding funds for compulsory education to the local governments of the inflow areas. The case studies in Guangzhou reveal that even with policy adjustments, the enrollment and advancement rates for migrant children remain disproportionately low, particularly in senior high schools, where stringent hukou-linked requirements force many to return to their hometowns or enter vocational education tracks.

Social integration and community support play a pivotal role in mitigating these challenges. Public welfare programs like Xiao He’s Home demonstrate the potential of grassroots initiatives to provide supplementary education and psychological support. However, these programs face sustainability issues due to reliance on external funding and volunteer efforts. The limited coverage and short lifespan of many initiatives underscore the need for a more robust, multi-stakeholder approach involving government, market, and civil society to ensure long-term impact.

In conclusion, while China’s hukou reforms and localized policy innovations have made strides toward improving educational access for migrant children, significant structural and systemic barriers persist. Achieving true equity requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of inequality: further

reforming the hukou system to eliminate discriminatory practices, increasing investment in educational resources for migrant-heavy regions, and fostering inclusive social policies that support integration. The Guangzhou case offers valuable insights into the complexities of policy implementation and the need for continuous evaluation and adaptation. Future research should explore scalable solutions and cross-regional collaborations to ensure that all children, regardless of their hukou status, can access the quality education they deserve. Only through sustained effort and systemic change can the vision of educational equity for migrant children be fully realized.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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