

The Implementation Dilemma and Optimization Strategy of the Teacher Exchange Rotation Policy in Compulsory Education

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Abstract: Educational equity is an essential foundation for social equity. The teacher exchange rotation policy is an essential strategy for promoting the balanced development of compulsory education, and it is a necessary way to revitalize education. The policy enables children in weak and rural schools to access quality educational resources. After implementing the teacher exchange rotation policy, teachers mobilized reasonably from school to school. They exchanged and cooperated with their peer teachers in the rotation schools, but the rotation was ineffective. The current teacher exchange rotation system faces many dilemmas that have yet to be resolved. Therefore, to achieve the balanced development of compulsory teaching services and promote the construction of the teaching force, it is necessary to implement effective solution strategies to realize the value and significance of teacher exchange and rotation.

1. Introduction

Educational equity has always been an essential cornerstone in promoting elementary education in all countries. So that achieve equity in education, numerous initiatives have been implemented over the years in countries around the world. The most important thing to realize educational equity is the equity of teacher resources. Although, over the years, China has achieved remarkable results in the construction of compulsory education teachers, there is still an imbalance distribution of high-quality education resources. This has resulted in different educational and teaching resources between each school and widening differences in the quality and standard of provision.

The teacher exchange rotation policy refers to the policy system of organizing teachers in the region to participate in exchange rotations to teach in other schools for the purpose of promoting the balanced development of compulsory education [1]. China first proposed a teacher exchange rotation policy in 1996 [2]. The policy document states that "teachers are encouraged to teach from urban to rural areas and from strong to weak schools." In 2014, the Chinese Ministry of Education and other joint departments issued the Opinions on Promoting the Exchange and Rotation of Principals and Teachers in Compulsory Education Schools within County (District) Areas, which provided new policy guidelines for teacher exchange and rotation [3].

In 2023, the Chinese government issued the Opinions on Building a Quality and Balanced Basic Public Education Service System, which shows that it is necessary to accelerate the balanced development of schools, to promote the balance of teachers as the focus, to narrow the gap in school quality between schools, to achieve educational equity [4]. Based on this, Beijing, Shanghai, and other regions have carried out teacher exchanges and rotations, and according to the new requirements, teachers in all areas will rotate their positions every six years. The number of teachers involved in the rotations should account for 20-30% of the total number of teachers in the school. However, the teacher exchange rotation policy has encountered numerous challenges during the implementation process. Several studies have found that the measures related to the teacher exchange rotation system in many areas are imperfect; the goals deviate from the realistic results, etc. In addition, teachers' weak willingness to exchange rotations and poor adaptability affect teachers' career planning. It is necessary to find solutions to increase teachers' motivation to participate in exchange rotation and the effectiveness of the system's implementation.

2. The value of teacher exchanges and rotations in compulsory education

2.1 Achieving quality and balanced development of compulsory education

In the context of inequality of educational resources, the weak schools, especially the rural ones, rarely have quality backbone teachers serving in their schools. It is difficult for many weak schools to retain excellent teachers, and outstanding teachers will take the initiative to seek jobs in high-quality schools, resulting in a severe turnover of teachers [5]. The lack of good teachers in weak schools is the main reason for the imbalance in education. Many weak schools are poorly educated and lack resources for elementary education, resulting in the reluctance of good teachers to take up their posts. As a result, the level of teachers in weak schools lags far behind that of quality schools. In order to improve the quality of compulsory education, the Chinese Government should provide development opportunities for weak schools and narrow the gap between schools. The teacher exchange rotation policy is an important means of equalizing resources for compulsory education. In recent years, China has introduced several policies related to "teacher exchanges and rotations", the implementation of which has enabled weak schools to raise the level of their teaching staff and primary and secondary school students to obtain the same educational resources and enjoy educational equity at the compulsory education stage. Furthermore, many parents are obsessed with having their children study in a high-quality and high-level environment, and prestigious schools and teachers are their primary choices, which this system can alleviate. Therefore, the teacher rotation system not only equalizes education resources but has positive implications for parents, schools, and children.

2.2 Contribute to the development of teachers' professionalism

Chinese teachers used to have a work pattern of working in only one workplace. Until they retired, their workplace was almost unchanged. As a result, most teachers are accustomed to a single work style and environment and are seldom willing to take the initiative to be transferred to other workplaces to carry out their work. In terms of individual teachers' professional development, cooperation and exchange among teachers is a common way to improve their professional competence. However, long-term exchange and cooperation with the same group of teachers is not conducive to the further improvement of teachers' competence, and they may even easily lose the motivation for self-development, resulting in burnout. In particular, teachers in weak schools with uneven teaching standards must seek new environments and challenges to enhance their professionalism further. Additionally, the teacher exchange rotation policy is an excellent way to

contact new teaching models and skills, accumulate teaching experience, contact fellow teachers at different levels, broaden their horizons, and promote the development of teachers' professional qualities. The rotating schools have plans to conduct training in education and teaching skills, teachers' exchange and learning activities, and salon-sharing activities, all of which contribute to the progress and growth of teachers. Teachers can enhance their teaching ability and help foster the all-round development of students. The professional quality of teachers in weak schools will be improved after they have been rotated, and the overall standard of teachers in schools will be gradually raised.

3. The implementation dilemma of teacher exchange rotation policy

3.1 Teachers have cognitive biases with a lower willingness to rotate

In the process of implementing the teacher exchange rotation policy, numerous dilemmas have been encountered. For one, teachers' lack of in-depth interpretation of the policy has led to a bias in their cognitive perceptions. Some teachers misunderstand the purpose and value of rotational work [6]. Some regions have established corresponding implementation programs for rotating teachers according to China's national policies, which consider the actual situation in the area. Still, there are some problems with implementing programs for rotating teachers in various regions. For example, the policy document was vague and difficult for schools to implement. Schools did not interpret the policy for teachers, resulting in many teachers being unaware of the system and unclear about the specific purpose and value of its implementation and the implementation process. Moreover, the study shows that most of the teachers have a low willingness to rotate. Teachers who have experienced rotation are especially reluctant to rotate again, and their professional happiness and sense of achievement gradually diminish [7]. The vast majority of teachers are accustomed to their current working environment, which makes them reluctant to adapt to a new environment and face new work challenges. Some of the teachers have heavy workloads and are already burned out. Hence, they are even more reluctant to take part in rotations. Some teachers do not care about the exchange rotation policy and just want to do their current work well. And they may even easily lose the motivation for self-development, resulting in burnout. In particular, teachers in weak schools with uneven teaching standards must seek new environments and challenges to further enhance their professionalism. Therefore, teachers' cognition of policy is biased, and teachers' willingness to rotate is low.

3.2 The safeguard mechanisms for teachers to participate in exchange rotations are inadequate

The teacher exchange rotation policy includes safeguards to incentivize teachers to participate in the rotation. They are mainly extrinsic motivation measures, including additional conditions such as salary and benefits, title evaluation, and promotion. However, there are imperfections in these extra rewards; that is, it is difficult to solve the difficulties of teachers' lives, family, and work after they have entered the rotational schools. Furthermore, the purpose of these incentives is to encourage teachers to participate in rotations. However, such measures may cause teachers to participate in rotations for the sake of promotion and rewards rather than to improve their abilities, increase their experience, broaden their horizons, and develop their professionalism. This shows that intrinsic incentives are even more important for the professional development of teachers. Research has shown that intrinsic motivation is ideal for supporting high levels of teacher development [8]. According to self-determination theory, an individual's basic psychological needs are important, including autonomy, competence, and relatedness [9]. At present, the psychological needs of

teachers for rotation are easily ignored by the Government and schools, which will affect the motivation of teachers to participate in rotation, cause maladjustment of teachers, and impede the effective implementation of exchange and learning for teachers.

3.3 There is an insufficient system of management in the rotating schools

To begin with, schools do not attach enough importance to rotating teachers. High-quality schools have not prioritized the selection of backbone teachers to help weak schools; instead, they have randomly selected teachers with more ordinary abilities. School administrators are reluctant to allow backbone teachers to participate in rotations and prefer that outstanding teachers stick to their original schools [10]. In this way, teachers in weak schools cannot receive effective assistance. Such teacher rotation is often a mere formality and does not serve the purpose of equalizing education. What is more, teachers who have exchanged from weak schools to quality schools find it even more difficult to be taken seriously by the leaders of quality schools. When they are gradually marginalized in unfamiliar working environments, the rotation loses its significance. Moreover, many schools lack supervision and management of rotating teachers, do not strictly supervise the work of rotating teachers, and neglect to establish a reasonable supervision and evaluation mechanism [11]. The lack of strict supervision by the school will lead to slackness in the work of teachers on rotation. Not only is the professional capacity of teachers not enhanced, but it is not conducive to assessing the actual effectiveness of the policy. Also, the schools only do the selection of teachers for the earlier part of the rotation but neglect the later part of the evaluation of the exchange rotation teachers.

4. The optimization strategy of the teacher exchange and rotation policy

4.1 Strengthening the training of teachers on exchange rotations and guiding them to participate in their initiative

For the effective implementation of the teacher exchange and rotation policy, teachers' awareness of and support for the policy is particularly important. For this reason, teacher exchange training for rotating teachers should be reinforced. Before anything else, schools should adopt various forms of interpretation of the policy, such as expert lectures, so that teachers can correctly understand the rotation system's purpose, value, and implementation process. Schools should strengthen the publicity and interpretation of the policy, which will guide teachers toward the original intention of promoting the equalization of education resources. Through understanding the exchange and rotation system, teachers realize that the system is not only an effective way to realize their value but also an important initiative to promote equity in education and achieve a balanced distribution of resources. Meanwhile, schools can organize teachers to participate in various types of rotational exchange training and experience sharing at all levels. China's teacher exchange rotation pattern is mostly based on high-quality teachers to the weak schools of the volunteer model. Many teachers are in a passive rotation to guide teachers to actively participate in the current major problem. Nowadays, the two-way exchange model is more in line with the current situation. Therefore, the motivation of teachers to participate in rotational exchanges is strengthened through training and experience sharing. It will inspire teachers to aspire to their professional aspirations, correct their attitudes towards participating in teacher rotation and exchange, and cultivate a spirit of dedication.

4.2 Improve the incentive and safeguard system of exchange rotation to stimulate teachers' intrinsic motivation

If the issue of insufficient intrinsic motivation of rotating teachers is to be solved, the Government needs to improve the incentive safeguard system. The safeguard system should be more diversified, combining external and internal incentives. The Government and schools should take into account the psychological needs of teachers and formulate various incentive policies to encourage teachers to participate in exchange and rotation. To begin with, there has been an improvement in material incentives, including wage subsidies, professional title appraisal, awards, and other incentives, as well as the establishment of a special compensation system. Meanwhile, intrinsic motivation is the ideal driving force to support teachers' high-level development [12]. Therefore, the Government and schools should try their best to satisfy the demands of rotating teachers, resolve their concerns about life and work after rotation, and fully mobilize their motivation. For example, after the rotation of teachers, there are problems such as increased life pressure and being too far away from home. When teachers are in the process of job rotation, their value judgments tend to be stable after they have experienced teaching improvement and external recognition of their development value [13].

4.3 Improving the management system for rotating teachers and emphasizing humanistic care for teachers

To begin with, rotating schools should emphasize rotating teachers and adopt a democratic selection method. In addition, based on the developmental needs of the school, selection should adhere to the principle of fairness. Schools should listen extensively to teachers' wishes and improve the scientific nature of the selection process. Rotating schools should give humanistic care to teachers, pay attention to their needs, and help them to integrate into their new workplaces as soon as possible. Furthermore, schools should establish a reasonable supervision mechanism. Rotating schools should standardize the supervision and management of rotating teachers and conduct scientific evaluations of rotating teachers. Moreover, rotating schools should improve the assessment content and evaluation criteria for exchange and rotation work. The assessment subject should be diversified, and besides the government and the school, it should be participated in by parents and students as well, and the evaluation of students should be emphasized. Effective evaluation can reflect the effectiveness of teacher rotation and promote teachers' development based on fairness and impartiality. In addition, the Government can adjust its policies appropriately according to the results of the evaluation to truly bring into play the benign effect of rotation and exchange.

5. Conclusions

Optimizing the balanced development of compulsory education and promoting equity in education have always been the top priorities of elementary education. The policy of teacher exchange and rotation is currently an effective way to promote the balanced development of compulsory education, and the system not only improves the capacity of the teaching force but also enhances the overall level of teachers in weak schools and realizes their self-worth. What is most important is that the policy is conducive to fostering the all-round development of students so that more students can have the opportunity to receive education of a better quality. To achieve the goal of balanced development of compulsory education, the government, schools, and teachers must cooperate actively to achieve equity in education.

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