

Does Rural Hardship Allowance Work? --The impact of Beijing's rural hardship allowance policy on teachers' mobility intention and work engagement

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Abstract

Rural education is a weak link in China's education system, which is characterized in the shortage, low quality, insufficient vitality and serious loss of rural teachers. As an area with strong economic strength and high quality of elementary education, Beijing has issued a policy of post subsidy for rural teachers, input a lot of funds, and tried to solve the above problems through economic compensation. In this study, 1628 teachers from 39 schools in 8 suburban counties of Beijing were investigated. The multi-layer linear model was used to analyze the impact of the policy on teachers' flow will and work enthusiasm. The study finds that the high-subsidy policy reduces teachers' flow will to a certain extent, but it has no obvious effect on preventing the flow of high-level teachers, and does not significantly improve teachers' work enthusiasm. In a word, economic leverage plays a limited role in solving the problem of rural teachers' loss. The most important obstacle to teachers' vitality is still the restraint of the education system, which the subsidy policy can't break through. Further decentralization and the improvement of school management are essential to the educational management system.

Keywords: rural hardship allowance; teachers mobility intention; teachers work engagement;

I Introduction

The prominent problems facing China's rural education include: inadequate supply of high-caliber teachers who show little willingness to invest effort in teaching profession, as well as high attrition. The effective measure identified by many scholars and policies is to provide sufficient monetary compensation for teachers (Guoming & Xinrong, 2014; Jin-qiu & Yu-hong, 2012). In 2017, the average education fund for each

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student in Beijing reached RMB 36,500(Education, Statistics, & Finance, 2018). With abundant resources, there are hopes that "money" can solve all the educational problems, and that allowance is the most immediate one. At the end of 2016, Beijing implemented the policy on rural hardship allowance given by municipal financial department. Allowance differentials are based on the direct distance between school and city center. The monthly allowance is between RMB1,400 and RMB 4,000 per teacher, much higher than that of other provinces. The policy has benefited 33,658 teachers from 771 rural schools in Beijing. In 2017 alone, more than RMB 900 million was allocated for this purpose. This paper focuses on whether the policy, the approach of which is similar to the nouveau riche's way of spending money, enhances teaching quality.

The main area where China's rural teachers fall short is low caliber, which can be borne out by the following four signs. First, quite a few rural teachers have outdated educational concepts, knowledge and teaching skills, unable to adapt to the needs of educational reform and development. Second, although they are degree holders, there is a jarring gap between qualifications and credentials. Third, given the lack of supplementary mechanism to recruit

qualified teachers, community-sponsored teachers are qualified as state-sponsored ones, temporary teachers outnumber regular ones, and the under qualified are teaching outside their area of certification(Xianzuo, Xin, & Qingyang, 2013; Huisheng, 2003). Fourth, rural teachers often suffer the lack of drive, showing little enthusiasm to be fully engaged in their profession. The problem is compounded by the bleak prospects for rural areas, driving the talented and the ambitious to leave.

To leave becomes a natural choice, with the not-encouraging living conditions in rural areas being the main culprit. Surveys show that over 60 percent of rural teachers want to teach in urban schools (Weitao, 2015). Besides the undesirable working and living conditions, low remuneration accounts for the high attrition of rural teachers (Guofeng, Haowen, & Leiyu, 2015; Lijuan & Xiaoyu, 2006). Factors like gender, age, educational level, years of seniority and marital status also play a part, yet a minor one, reflecting individual choice (Guofeng et al., 2015; Guarino, Santibañez, & Daley, 2006). Obviously, researchers should pay more attention to salaries. A number of studies show that the more the teachers are paid, the less likely they exit (Podgursky, Monroe, & Watson, 2004; Stinebrickner, 1998; Falch, 2011; Clotfelter, Glennie, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2008). Imazeki(2005) identified two categories: teachers moving to other school district; teachers exiting the profession. Based on this, he studied relevant data on the state of Wisconsin, showing that teachers' decision to move is often linked with pay raises in the neighboring school district, with female teachers being the most likely to be influenced. The research conducted by Zhao Zhongping and Qin Yuyou (2016) shows that the lower the teachers' wage, the higher the mobility; and when the working environment fails to meet teachers' expectations, higher-caliber teachers like holders of higher degrees and titles, core staff and Party members, as well as younger teachers are more likely to move. Our surveys in 12 primary and middle schools located in Hubei, Jiangxi and Henan provinces validate this point (Guofeng et al., 2015).

From the perspective of economics, monetary compensation for rural teachers is a universal practice (Mcewan, 1999), which is based on the theory of compensating wage. It emphasizes that people working in professions prone to hazards and unpleasant experiences need to be compensated (J.Borjas & Yeliang, 2010). The theory also makes clear that the sum of compensation is determined by environmental factors, which means rural teachers working in less favorable circumstances may receive more, and vice versa(Ling, Jinzhen, & Ting, 2015). Since 2001 the state of California has given \$1,800 a year to math, science and special-education teachers in schools with high poverty rates and low performance. The program has reduced teacher attrition, especially among teachers with longer years of seniority (Stockard & Lehman, 2004). Surveys find that, as the policy makes its effect felt, the elder teachers get much more benefits than the younger ones. Therefore, they are the least willing to move. Of course, their preference also reflects the fact that they are not competitive enough to seize the opportunity of being transferred to cities and other regions (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012).

The lack of drive and work engagement is not an isolated case at all among rural teachers. Work engagement is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). It is a determinant of whether the employee is content with his or her work, deliver good performance or choose to quit (Rabinowitz, Samuel, Hall, & T, 1977). A number of factors determine the level of work engagement. Besides gender, age, education, marital status, working years, personality, work values, higher-level needs intensity and other personal traits, work-related factors have a greater impact. They include social recognition, working conditions, leadership and management, income and welfare (Weiqi, 1998; Rabinowitz et al., 1977). Among them, the factor that a slew of studies pay the most attention to is the sense of organizational support, which has a high positive correlation with work engagement (Eisenberger, Armeli,

Rexwinkel, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). Organizational support mainly refers to the care and attention from organizations, which has also been verified in Beijing (Jianghong, Xinhui, Shiqing, Lixin, & Bo, 2018; Jianmin, Xinxin, & Jiaqing, 2015; Bakker & Bal, 2011; Tims, Bakker, & Xanthopoulou, 2011; Hongyan, Peizhen, & Liu, 2012).

Many studies have shown that compensating wage can change teachers' performance (Guo-hua & Hai-jiang, 2016) and satisfaction level (Jimerson, 2003), indirectly affecting teacher mobility and work engagement (Fei-fei & Ping, 2016). Job satisfaction, a major factor that determines employees' willingness to quit and to be fully engaged (Weiqi, 1998), is regarded as the mediator variable for teacher mobility (Mobley, 1977; Smart, 1990; Rosser, 2004; Daly & Dee, 2006). Similar conclusions were also drawn in China-based studies (Fei-fei & Ping, 2016).

Some scholars also make observations on the flip side of the compensating wage, which can be divided into retention salary and incentive one. The first kind refers to the fixed part of the salary, including basic salary and all sorts of perks and allowances. The compensating wage falls into this category, which is a livable salary for employees to make ends meet, and thus can only enable that they have a sense of job security. Though compensating wage discourages teachers to leave, it cannot serve as an incentive for them to flourish (Xiaoyi, 2007).

This research attempts to explore that, against the existing background in China, whether monetary compensation can have a positive impact on rural teachers, and to analyze the role of rural hardship allowance in influencing teachers' mobility intention and work engagement.

II Design

1. Samples

Based on the "Rural Teacher Support Initiative: Transformation Scheme for Rural Schools in Beijing", this research adopts the method of cluster sampling. For this purpose, questionnaires were sent to schools involved in the Scheme. These schools are all located in the outskirts of Beijing, the majority of which benefit from the policy of rural hardship allowance. Since the allowance they are entitled to is stratified, the samples they represent are typical.

It is worth noting that this research is conducted in two phases. Data related to teachers' work engagement were not collected in the first phase. In order to further explore the impact of rural hardship allowance on teachers, we added a study to measure work engagement in the second phase. By collecting data samples and sorting them through, we established two-batch models. The first batch is based on the samples in both phases, involving 1,628 teachers from 39 schools, with teachers' mobility intention and job satisfaction as dependent variables; the second batch has work engagement as the dependent variable, with samples chosen from the second phase and supported by 939 teachers from 21 schools.

2. Variables

The outcome variables selected in this research include teachers' mobility intention and work engagement, along with job satisfaction which also serves as the independent variable in other two models with outcome variables.

- Teachers' mobility intention

This information was obtained from questionnaires in the form of an open-ended question entitled "Do you plan to work in other schools in the next few years?"

- Work Engagement

The Teachers' Work Engagement Scale uses the simplified version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9) revised by Schaufeli and Salanova, with three dimensions, namely, vigor, dedication and absorption. See the appendix for specific items in each dimension. The results of confirmatory factor analysis show that the scale is well

structured ($\chi^2/df=30.440$, $RMSE=0.076$, $SRMR=0.031$, $CFI=0.950$, $TLI=0.925$); the factor loading of the items is between 0.725 and 0.947; and the consistency reliability in each subscale is between 0.870 and 0.942. All this means the scale reliability and validity is good.

- Job Satisfaction

Teachers' Job Satisfaction Scale was revised from the Job Satisfaction Survey which was developed by Spector(1985). The scale is divided into nine dimensions: salary, leadership, promotion, welfare, rewards, working conditions, colleagues, work itself, and communication. See the appendix for specific items in each dimension. The results of confirmatory factor analysis show that the scale is well structured ($\chi^2/df=35.201$, RMSE=0.098, SRMR=0.014, CFI=0.886, TLI=0.750); the factor loading of the items is between 0.430 and 0.870; and the consistency reliability in each subscale is between 0.618 and 0.835. All this means the scale reliability and validity is good.

This research has the sum of allowance as independent variable, represented by an open-ended question in the questionnaire designed for head teachers. The title is "How much does your school pay each teacher as a monthly allowance (unit:RMB 1,000) ?"

Control variables include: gender, marital status, job title, years of seniority, the classification of core staff, economic conditions of the school district and organizational support from school. The model which chooses teachers' mobility intention and work engagement as outcome variables also determines job satisfaction. The organizational support scale is divided into three dimensions: management democracy and care, efforts to promote students' all-round development, and cooperation and emotional support among teachers. The results of confirmatory factor analysis show that the scale is well structured ($\chi^2/df=6.282$, RMSE=0.074,

SRMR=0.026, CFI=0.969, TLI=0.962); the factor loading of the items is between 0.769 and 0.938; and the consistency reliability is between 0.951 and 0.976. All this means the scale reliability and validity is good.

Results of descriptive statistical analysis for each variable are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Each Variable

	Number of Samples	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<i>School Level</i>					
Economic Conditions of the School District	39	2.1	0.38	1	3
Organizational Support	39	4.26	0.25	3.8	4.7
Sum of Allowance	39	1.71	0.93	0	3.93
<i>Teacher Level</i>					
Gender	1628	0.32	0.47	0	1
Marital Status	1628	0.88	0.33	0	1
Job Title	1628	11.89	10.11	0	41
Years of Seniority	1628	8.52	9.05	1	38
Core Staff	1628	0.37	0.78	0	3
Job Satisfaction	1628	3.47	0.56	1.47	4.89
mobility intention	1628	0.18	0.38	0	1
Work Involvement	983	4.16	0.75	1.00	5.00

Note: Classification and Graded Variables are coded as follows:

Gender: 0=Male 1=Female

Marital Status: 1=Married 2= Unmarried

Job Title: 1=Untitiled 2=Third-class Teacher 3=Second-class Teacher 4=First-class Teacher 5=Senior Teacher

Core Staff: 0=None 1=School-wide Core Staff 2=District-wide Core Staff 3=City-wide Core Staff

Economic Conditions of the School District: 1=Advanced 2=Average 3=Backward

Entitled Allowance 0=None 1=Entitled

mobility intention: 0=No Intention 1=Planning to move

3. Method

Data in this research is processed by the software package HLM7.0 for multilevel linear modeling analysis. The model with teachers' work engagement and job satisfaction as outcome variables chooses the Normal model, while the Bernoulli hierarchical model is employed to analyze the dichotomous variable of teachers' mobility intention. First, by establishing null model analysis, the researchers found that the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) of teachers' mobility intention, work involvement and job satisfaction is 10.65%, 7.50% and 8.94%, respectively. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt multilevel linear modeling analysis. The null model equation is as follows:

Mobility intention:

$$\text{Prob}(\text{mobility intention}_{ij}=1|\beta_j) = \phi_{ij}$$

$$\log[\phi_{ij}/(1 - \phi_{ij})] = \eta_{ij}$$

$$\eta_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$$

Among them, ϕ_{ij} represents the probability of teachers' willingness to move, η_{ij} the estimated log generation rate, γ_{00} the intercept term and u_{0j} the second-level residual.

Work involvement and job satisfaction

$$\text{Job Satisfaction/Work Engagement}_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j} + r_{ij}$$

Among them, γ_{00} is the intercept term, u_{0j} the second-level residual, and r_{ij} the first-level residual.

Table 2 Test for Random Effect in Null Model

	mobility intention		Work Engagement		Job Satisfaction	
Random Effect	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	Standard Deviation	Variance Component	Standard Deviation	Variance Component
First Level	-	$\pi^2 / 3$	0.720	0.518***	0.183	0.033***
Second Level	0.568	0.323***	0.206	0.042***	0.527	0.277***

Note: + <.1, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Logistic

Residual variance of the Logistic regression model is $\pi^2 / 3$.

Next, models were established to explore the impact of allowance on each dependent variable. The ideas are as follows: (1) Models 1, 3, and 5 are for control variables. At the school level, the controlled subjects include economic conditions of the school district, school culture, and job satisfaction. At the teacher level, the subjects are gender, marital status, job title, years of seniority, core staff and other variables. Through these models, the researchers examined the impact of school and teacher characteristic variables on the dependent variables. (2) Models 2, 4, and 6 are based on the control variable model, and the “sum of allowance” is added at the school level to examine the effect of the allowance policy. The model equation is as follows:

η_{ij} / work engagement / job satisfaction $_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{0x}$ * the second-level variable + γ_{y0} *the first-level variable + $u_{0j} + u_{nj}$ * all variables $_{ij} + r_{ij}$

η_{ij} is the estimated log generation rate of the teachers' willingness to move. It shares the same conversion method with null model. γ_{0x} and γ_{y0} are predicted values of main effect for each variable, ($u_{0j} + u_{nj}$ * all variables $_{ij} + r_{ij}$) the residual terms.

RESULTS

1. Allowance makes teachers less willing to move;

The model with the teachers' mobility intention as result variable is shown in Table 2. The results of Model 1 show that, besides gender and marital status, all the other factors can affect teachers' willingness to move, and the majority of these factors discourage teachers to move. The worse the economic conditions of the school district, the stronger the organizational support, the less likely for teachers with higher job title, longer years of seniority and higher job satisfaction to move. However, teachers with more qualifications and expertise are more willing to move. This is especially true for core staff ($\beta = 0.143$, $p < 0.05$, odd = 1.541). Among the factors affecting teachers' mobility, job satisfaction has the greatest impact ($\beta = -1.027$, $p < 0.001$, odd = 0.358). For every one unit increase in teachers' job satisfaction score, the probability of teachers wanting to work in other schools becomes 35.7 percentage points the previous one. The economic conditions of the school district has the second greatest impact ($\beta = -0.442$, $p < 0.01$).

The above results suggest that the remoter the geographical location, the worse the economic conditions, the more likely the teachers are content with status quo and not want to move. At the same time, the longer the teachers' commitment to teaching profession, the higher the job title, the more likely he or she yearns for stability. In addition to these factors that hinder the professional mobility, organizational support from school and job satisfaction are positive factors for retaining teachers.

The results from Model 2 show that allowance plays a positive role in reducing teacher mobility. Teachers entitled to allowance are more willing to stay. And the more the sum of allowance, the stronger the teacher's willingness to stay ($\beta = -0.150$, $p < 0.05$, odd = 0.861). For every 1,000 yuan increase in the sum, the teachers' willingness to move becomes the 86.1 percentage points the original one.

From the comparison between Model 2 and Model 1, it can be seen that the influence of allowance policy on teachers' willingness to move mainly weakens the impact of economic conditions of the school district, yet it has little effect on individual decisions. That is to say, even if the allowance is given, core staff still wants to move to a better school.

Table 3 The Influence of Rural Hardship Allowance Policy on Teachers' Mobility Intention

	Model 1		Model 2			
	Coefficient	S.E.	Odds	Coefficient	S.E.	Odds
Intercept	-0.274	0.386	0.760	-0.461	0.411	0.631
School Level						
Economic situation of school district	-0.442*	0.184	0.643	-0.372*	0.198	0.689
Organizational support	-0.163***	0.393	0.850	-0.109***	0.400	0.897
Allowance				-0.150*	0.077	0.861
Teacher Level						
Gender	0.084	0.117	1.088	0.084	0.118	1.088
Marital status	-0.104	0.153	0.901	-0.099	0.154	0.906
Job title	-0.029***	0.006	0.971	-0.027***	0.006	0.973
Years of seniority	-0.052***	0.009	0.950	-0.053***	0.009	0.948
Core staff	0.143*	0.058	1.154	0.149	0.058	1.161
Job satisfaction	-1.027***	0.084	0.358	-1.022***	0.083	0.360

Note: + < .1, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

2. Allowance has no direct impact on teachers' work engagement;

The results of the model with teachers' work engagement as result variable are shown in Table 3. The results of Model 3 indicate that organizational support, job title and job satisfaction can significantly predict the positive results of work engagement. The influence of job title, however, is extremely weak ($\beta = 0.005$, $p < 0.05$). Among them, job satisfaction is the most important factor ($\beta = 0.638$, $p < 0.001$). The results of Model 4 suggest that the predictive effect of the sum of allowance for work engagement is not significant ($\beta = 0.023$, $p = 0.491$). Since work engagement is a variable that is more biased towards teachers' internal needs, external factors are difficult to exert due impact. Thus, providing allowance does not enhance teachers' work engagement.

Table 4 The Influence of Rural Hardship Allowance Policy on Teachers' Work Engagement

	Model 3		Model 4	
	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.
Intercept	4.032***	0.094	4.058***	0.115
School Level				
Economic situation of school district	0.027	0.031	0.019	0.037
Organizational support	0.563***	0.074	0.555***	0.081

Allowance			0.023	0.033
Teacher Level				
Gender	0.042	0.047	0.039	0.048
Marital status	-0.107	0.067	-0.107	0.067
Job title	0.005*	0.002	0.005*	0.002
Years of seniority	0.027	0.029	0.024	0.029
Core staff	0.031	0.025	0.030	0.025
Job satisfaction	0.638***	0.045	0.642***	0.045

Note : +<.1, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

3. The impact of allowance through job satisfaction mediator is weak.

The above analysis shows the important impact of job satisfaction on teacher mobility and work involvement. That is to say, if the allowance can affect job satisfaction, its mediator role cannot be ignored.

The results of the model with job satisfaction as outcome variable are shown in Table 4. The results of Model 5 suggest that economic conditions of the school district and organizational support from school, as well as job title, years of seniority, and the classification of core staff, can significantly predict job satisfaction. The less developed the school district, the surprisingly higher the job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.068$, $p < 0.1$), the more likely the teachers are content with status quo. The stronger the organizational support from school, the higher the job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.630$, $p < 0.001$). However, the higher the teacher's job title, the longer years of seniority, the lower the job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.006$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = -0.005$, $p < 0.1$). Meanwhile, core staff are more satisfied with jobs than their non-qualified peers. And the higher the classification of core staff, the higher the job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.040$, $p < 0.05$). It can be seen that the satisfaction is an indicator reflecting teachers' self-actualization needs. It is mainly influenced by organizational support, while other factors' impact is negligible.

The results of Model 6 show that the sum of allowance is a significantly positive predictor of job satisfaction ($\beta = 0.040$, $p < 0.05$). That is to say, for every increase of RMB 1,000 in the sum, job satisfaction is up by 0.04 units on average, which means the impact is relatively weak. In contrast to Models 1 and 2, the allowance policy mainly weakens the impact of local economic conditions and school management on teachers' satisfaction, but such impact is also very weak.

Table 5 The Influence of Rural Hardship Allowance Policy on Teachers' Job Satisfaction

	Model 5		Model 6	
	Coefficient	S.E.	Coefficient	S.E.
Intercept	3.407***	0.073	3.443***	0.094
School Level				
Economic situation of school district	0.068*	0.028	0.053	0.043
Organizational support	0.630***	0.053	0.611***	0.048
Allowance			0.040*	0.000
Teacher Level				
Gender	-0.031	0.032	-0.037	0.032

Marital status	0.014	0.053	0.010	0.052
Job title	-0.006***	0.001	-0.006***	0.001
Years of seniority	-0.005 ⁺	0.003	-0.004	0.003
Core staff	0.040*	0.018	0.038*	0.017

Note: ⁺<.1, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

IV Conclusions and Discussions

1. The rural hardship allowance policy has limited effect on discouraging teachers' departure

The results indicate that the policy of rural hardship allowance in Beijing can reduce the rural teachers' willingness to move, producing a positive effect. However, the willingness of core staff is still strong, which means the policy's effect is limited. This conclusion is drawn from twofold analysis.

First, we analyzed in which circumstances teachers show less wiliness to move. The results suggest that the higher the sum of allowance, the lower the teachers' willingness to move; and rural teachers from schools that are entitled to allowance are more willing to move than their less fortunate counterparts. Since the sum of allowance also reflects the distance from downtown, and is also highly correlated with local economic conditions, the results, combined with that of Model 1, display that teachers in the geographically and economically disadvantaged schools show less willingness to move in the first place, which means the allowance makes them more determined to stay. Special mention should be made, however, that this determination does not represent a positive result.

Second, we analyzed the role of policy for outstanding teachers. The results show that core staff are more willing to be transferred to other schools; and the higher the title, the greater the probability of attrition. Even under the influence of the policy, they barely changed their decision. The reason lies in their needs. What motivated them are not financial benefits, but more learning opportunities for their children, more inspiring environment to teach and reinvent themselves(Lowe, 2006), broader space to seek professional excellence(Yanling, Ping, & Xiao, 2016) and greater chance to self-actualization(Jian & Hang, 2017). Our results suggest that the allowance policy is unable to ensure that their needs are well catered for. In the long term, the effective way to attract high-caliber teachers is across-the-board pay increase for rural teachers and the elevation of social and economic status of rural schools. Its effect awaits validation.

All in all, given China's rapid urbanization, it is only natural that rural schools cannot retain talented teachers, which means the effort to dole out monetary compensation is somewhat futile. In the process of urbanization, a large number of resources are concentrated in cities, making them extremely attractive for high-ability teachers to move and to enjoy a better life. In other words, the attrition of rural teachers is not only a pain point in rural education, but a societal problem demanding a holistic approach. A capital city as prosperous as its counterparts in developed countries, Beijing has to think a lot on whether monetary compensation is effective as policy intervention, and whether it is a simplistic approach to address education conundrum. It is advised to implement a multipronged policy, with measures such as giving targeted training, swelling the ranks of rural teachers, establishing and improving mechanisms for teachers to exit and to receive bonus and awards, and creating more opportunities for teachers to unleash their fullest potential.

2. Monetary compensation cannot free rural teachers from the constraints of the system

Our research shows that the allowance policy proves ineffective to enhance rural teachers' work engagement, which is determined by management system. Obviously, monetary compensation is no formula for change. It is true that the government-dominated system deserves credit for securing China's rapid economic development and making China the role model in achieving remarkable transformation. Yet as everything has pros and cons, such advantage does not come without flaws. In the field of education, it means the government-dominated distribution model is unable to break the constraints imposed by the system.

China's teaching employment system has been a guarantee of career security, while the concept of mobility is pictured as harmful as devastating flood or ferocious beast. Such preference is deeply rooted in the following two realities. First, teachers are paid by local treasury, and employed by educational and administrative agencies. The employment contract between the two parties provides that teaching is a form of public service,

immune from liabilities stipulated in the Labor Law or Contract Law. Teachers are protected from arbitrary dismissal (Yong—hong & Yan, 2013). Second, the staffing system is a major limiting factor for teacher mobility. The mission of this system is to establish organizations, set personnel quotas and assign positions. The quotas are the very reference for financial departments to allocate funds. The staffing system has two hallmarks: institutional affiliation and tenure. First, each school determines the staffing numbers based on teacher-pupil ratio. That is to say, if a teacher is transferred to another school, the staffing quota remains; if educational and administrative agencies need to assign teaching positions between schools, a cross-department effort is a must, with several adjustments made in staffing plans, quotas and salaries (Ting & Haizheng, 2017). Second, teacher tenure is a guarantee of lifetime employment. Generally speaking, unless the teacher quits for individual reasons, or is fired due to criminal activities and immoral conduct, his or her contract renews automatically each year.

This system not only limits teacher mobility, but stifles the growth of schools. Since the current trends are fewer kids and the flux of school-age children to urban areas, the size of rural schools is significantly reduced, which means the staffing quota sees a dramatic fall. As a result, rural schools are in a perpetual struggle against the inability to hire more teachers and the aging problem of existing teachers who are lack of drive and experiencing burn-out. This is a vicious circle. The workload defined in the state curriculum plan remains the same, yet the number of teachers dwindled, leading to multiple problems: increased workload, teachers' sense of losing control over their work, and job fatigue. (Zhihui & Changsheng, 2018; Shanhuai, XiuHong, & Yunyun, 2019)

The danger of inadequate mobility also manifests itself in low work engagement. With staffing system lacking agility to adapt to new realities, it is not hard to see that the policy intervention using monetary compensation is not an effective response to two tricky problems: teacher attrition and low work engagement. Our research shows two jarring trends. On the one hand, the worse the economic prospects of the school district, the lower the work involvement, yet the higher the job satisfaction, and the higher the willingness of teachers to stay. On the other, the senior the teachers engaged in teaching, the more willing they are to stay. This dichotomy reflects the lack of drive, low ability and low work engagement among rural teachers, those working in remote areas in particular. Therefore, the monetary compensation policy only makes existing teachers feel more secure. Or rather, it creates a worrying scenario: teachers who are unwilling to move or who have no proper qualifications and credentials to climb the career ladder show even less willingness to change status quo. The allowance policy is meant to attract and retain more outstanding teachers, but a market approach is not efficacious enough to crack a problem that is deeply rooted in the staffing system. Clearly, this approach fails to capture the essence of the problem. We cannot expect that it will bring about a paradigm shift.

3. Improving school management is more important than providing teachers with financial support

Our research suggests that the impact of organizational support from school on each variable is greater than that of allowance policy. Organizational support has a direct impact on teachers' work engagement ($\beta = 0.555$, $p < 0.001$). It also has an indirect impact on job satisfaction and teacher mobility. Thus, to retain rural teachers and improve their work engagement requires rural schools to attach greater importance to management.

In fact, this shift of perspective reflects the economic reality. The past few decades saw China's admiring development. The per capita GDP of Beijing reached \$19,100 in 2017 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2018), making it one of the developed regions in the world. Its expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP increased to over 4%. Abundant in resources, this city should think more on how to meet teachers' internal needs. Kilby (1960) found that employees in economically backward countries attached more importance to external rewards brought by work (such as fringe benefits, physical conditions, remuneration and good interpersonal relationship, etc.), while their counterparts in rich countries cherished internal rewards (such as development opportunities, recognition, fun and challenge of work, etc.). Adigun and Stephenson also showed that Nigerians working in the UK were mainly motivated by external rewards, while British employees pursued internal ones (Weiqi, 1998). If rural schools in Beijing aspire to enhance teachers' work engagement, they need to provide more organizational support, give more internal awards and improve leadership skills.

Under the existing system, schools have little autonomy and capacity to recruit, pay and dismiss teachers (Guorui, 2017; Chao & Zhihui, 2015). The only breakthrough they can make lies in the other aspects of human resources management, including training, promotion and organizational support. According to the motivation model for work engagement- $F(\text{force}) = V(\text{valence}) \times E(\text{expectancy})$, teachers' work engagement is

influenced by individual judgment on work values and by the expectation on whether he or she can get remuneration and have personal needs met (Kanungo, 1982; Brown & Leigh, 1996). Since teachers' salary is relatively fixed, and competitive compared to that of other professions, it becomes more important to impart more value to this profession. Results show that fostering a democratic school culture and showing more care and empathy to teachers are critical to attract and retain them. Rather than passively waiting for institutional changes and top-down policy intervention, school administrators should take proactive measures to improve leadership effectiveness and modernize management.

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