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# Analysis on Vocational Education and Social Mobility of New Generation Migrant Workers: A Case Study of Shijiazhuang City

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**Abstract** Based on survey data of current situations of new generation migrant workers' vocational education and its influence on social mobility in Shijiazhuang City, the author believes that there are many drawbacks in vocational education of new generation migrant workers, including low participation and varied training environment of enterprises. In addition, the influence of vocational education of migrant workers on social mobility is not very satisfactory. Finally, it presents countermeasures for improving vocational education, to promote social mobility of new generation migrant workers.

**Key words** New generation migrant workers, Vocational education, Social mobility

## 1 Introduction

New generation migrant workers refer to laborers born after the 1980s with age older than 16 and registered permanent residence still agricultural household. Data released by the State Statistics Bureau indicates that in 2009, the total migrant workers in China reached 230 million, of them 150 million go outside and 16 – 30 years old migrant workers account for 61.6%<sup>[1]</sup>. New generation migrant workers have gradually become mainstay of migrant workers and receive wider and wider attention. Thus, the solution to their employment and social mobility problems will play a great role in promoting urbanization and realizing overall urban and rural development. To solve these problems, the quality of new generation migrant workers must be improved. Vocational education is a practical approach, so it becomes an important factor influencing employment and social mobility of migrant workers. In July, 2011, I surveyed vocational education and social mobility situations of new generation migrant workers in Shijiazhuang City. Survey adopts random sampling method and survey objects are new generation migrant workers living in concentrated building sites, enterprises, restaurants, market and urban villages. Their age, gender, marital status, and educational level are surveyed. The questionnaire focuses on vocational education and social mobility of new generation migrant workers. I handed out 430 copies of questionnaire and received 425 copies, and 409 copies are valid.

## 2 Current situations and problems of vocational education of new generation migrant workers

**2.1 Basic recognition and enormous demand for vocational education and training** Transformation and upgrade of industrial structure constantly impose new requirement for labor quality.

The survey of Employment Department of Ministry of Labor and Social Security in 24 large and medium cities (including Beijing, Tianjin, Guangzhou, and Xi'an, etc) indicates that: 80.0% jobs need above junior level, 13% need intermediate worker qualification, and 81% need skilled workers<sup>[2]</sup>. At the background of increasing competition of labor market, migrant workers start to care about improving their quality. Survey indicates that 52.1% migrant workers think it is very necessary to receive education (not merely regular school education), 34.7% consider it is necessary, and 8.8% and 4.4% think not very necessary and not necessary respectively. Besides, 37.4% migrant workers think it is very necessary to receive training for outside work, 38.9% think it is necessary, 17.6% believe not very necessary, and 6.1% state that it is not necessary. As to obstacles influencing employment, 31.8% think it is educational level, 26.5% attribute to skills and social relationship, 4.4%, 4.4% and 6.4% impute to gender, age and other factors. Generally, new generation migrant workers have realized the importance of education, long for participating in various trainings, especially vocational education, to improve their employment or undertaking ability.

**2.2 Low participation of vocational education** Although new generation migrant workers have realized the importance of their quality, their participation proportion is low in vocational education and trainings. The survey indicates that 65.3% migrant workers haven't received vocational education or training before going outside for work, and 61.6% haven't received vocational education or training after going outside for work. As to obstacles to new generation migrant workers' participation in vocational education and training, 27.4% select "no time", 19.4% select "afraid of learning well because of poor cultural foundation", 16% do not know where to receive education or training, 12.7% think the training cost is high, 8.5% say training is impracticable, 5.1% select "no suitable course", 7.8% choose "influence income", and 3.1% consider training class is irregular. There are subjective factors (such as economic and social resource shortage of new generation migrant workers) and objective factors (such as

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imperfect vocational education and training).

### 2.3 Drawbacks of vocational education

**2.3.1** Contents of vocational education are not practical and pertinent. For the nonce, vocational education and training focus on theory but neglect practice, and operation takes up only a small portion. Education content upgrades slowly and fails to reflect new knowledge, new technology, new process and new method; training courses are narrow, single and remain at low level, and disconnected with employment, so not adapted to changes of employment market demand. Some migrant workers have received vocational education or training, but it is difficult to bring practical effect. The survey shows that 12.5% and 35.9% migrant workers reflect close connection and high connection of vocational education contents with practice, 40.1% say the connection is little, and 11.5% consider nearly no connection.

**2.3.2** Forms of vocational education are to be improved. Forms and methods of vocational education directly influence realization of expected education effect. Most new generation migrant workers come from actual work positions, have separate and mobile characteristics, but time and effort in education are limited. At present, vocational education and training still take form of class teaching and focus on theory lecturing, but neglect actual operation and practice. Relatively fixed and limited personal instruction restricts broader participation in training of migrant workers. What's more, vocational education and training of new generation migrant workers are mainly simple and remain low level, and lack diploma education. These fail to satisfy demands of new generation migrant workers for improving their education. The survey indicates that their opinions of present vocational education are 12.5% excellent, 39.7% good, 37.7% average, and 10.1% bad. Although 50% new generation migrant workers approve the way of vocational education, there is still gap with teaching method required for desired effect.

**2.3.3** The vocational education teachers are not very satisfactory. New generation migrant workers have complex composition, diverse working background, and multiple teaching objectives, which lay down higher requirement for teachers of vocational education and training. Teachers should have solid theoretical knowledge and rich practice experience, as well as certain coordination and cooperation ability. At present, most teachers engaged in vo-

cational education and training come from ordinary colleges, and are used to following the conventional teaching modes and methods. Consequently, the teaching effect is greatly reduced. Besides, teachers' structure is simple and their comprehensive quality is low, so it fails to suit demands of numerous migrant workers. In the question of "can the existing vocational education teachers satisfy your learning demand", only 5.6% think it totally can satisfy, 47.7% consider it basically can, 33.5% and 13.2% believe it basically not can and it fails to satisfy respectively. This reflects that there is still a great space for improving teachers' quality and structure.

**2.4 Varied training environment of enterprises** Support of enterprises will increase opportunities of new generation migrant workers receiving vocational education and training. In practice, however, most enterprises get used to taking migrant workers as cheap labor and having no concept of providing opportunity for training of migrant workers. In addition, new generation migrant workers flow frequently and their employment is not stable, so training of enterprises shows externality. In this situation, enterprises generally pay attention to training of management and core workers, and neglect that of most migrant workers. The survey indicates that 16.9% and 39.6% think enterprises provide a lot of and many training opportunities, 27.1% and 16.4% think enterprises provide few or no opportunities. Among the surveyed migrant workers, only 14.9% have participated training organized by enterprises.

## 3 Influence of vocational education and training on social mobility of new generation migrant workers

**3.1 Relationship between vocational education and working stability** The "times of changing jobs in recent 3 years" is surveyed to analyze the influence of vocational education and training on work stability of new generation migrant workers. Through cross analysis, it is found that among the migrant workers who have changed jobs for more than 3 times, the proportion of those who have participated in vocational training is obviously lower than those who have not. The relationship between participation in vocational training and the job stability takes on direct correlation, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 The relationship between participation in vocational training and the job stability of new generation migrant workers**

Items	Number of samples	Times of changing jobs in recent 3 years			
		0	1 - 2 times	3 - 5 times	More than 5 times
Received vocational education and training	162	57	68	25	12
Not received vocational education and training	247	89	77	45	36

As listed in Table 2, technical level is directly correlated to job stability, but the difference is not significant in job stability of technical level below intermediate skilled worker. This indicates that only reaching certain technical level, may the job stability be realized; technicians with the highest technical level have higher demand of job, so their job stability ranks the second, and the work mobility of senior technicians is higher than technicians and

senior skilled workers. This is consistent with the vocational education and training increasing number of jobs available, promoting ideal employment and guiding new generation migrant workers to form correct processional idea.

### 3.2 Vocational education and future sense of belonging

Most new generation migrant workers have strong sense of belonging to cities. They are eager to incorporate into cities and change

their status. However, whether they can incorporate themselves into cities directly depends on their comprehensive quality. In the survey, only 26.2% migrant workers select "return home eventually", 24.3% migrant workers have participated in vocational education or training. The proportion of those with no technical level, junior and intermediate skilled workers actively returning

hometown is 24.5% , 37.7% and 23% respectively, and that of senior skilled workers, technicians, and senior technicians is 17.5% , 11.1% and 14.3% separately. The former is obviously higher than the latter, showing the vocational education is an important factor influencing future flow direction of new generation migrant workers.

**Table 2** Cross analysis of technical level and times of changing jobs in recent 3 years

Items	Times of changing jobs in recent 3 years				
	Number of samples	0	1 – 2 times	3 – 5 times	More than 5 times
No	160	53	44	35	28
Junior skilled worker	105	32	32	24	17
Intermediate skilled worker	100	30	39	19	12
Senior skilled worker	28	13	11	3	1
Technician	9	7	1	0	1
Senior technician	7	2	4	1	0

**3.3 Vocational education and occupational status** Social mobility of new generation migrant workers is firstly manifested as occupational mobility, consisting of initial employment and second time employment. The initial employment of new generation migrant workers realizes their non-agricultural transformation, showing the upward flow characteristic. Generally, however, for the second time employment in non-agricultural field, their occupational status will have little promotion. Thus, the influence of vocational education and training is limited on vocational selection and mobility of new generation migrant workers. The survey indicates that there is certain positive correlation ( $P < 0.05$ ) between participation in vocational training and changes of occupational status, but the influence of the former on the latter is not big; 46.5% migrant workers say that there is no big change in their occupational status, and 19.7% say there is no change. Now, social policies and systems fail to provide reasonable and effective guarantee for rights of new generation migrant workers, which is not favorable for promotion of their occupational and social status. Vocational education and training are limited in coverage, and the effect is not very satisfactory, and it is not adequate to change the weakness of human capital of new generation migrant workers. Consequently, their occupational selection is very narrow and opportunity for upward flow is few. In this situation, most new generation migrant workers are basically not willing to participate in vocational education and training.

**4 Countermeasures and recommendations**

**4.1 Optimizing system environment and strengthening policy guidance and propaganda** Government should actively promote the urban and rural dual system reform with household registration system as the core, to safeguard migrant workers enjoying equal interests and rights. This is helpful to establishment of orderly flow mechanism of new generation migrant workers. Besides, government should take vocational education and training of new generation migrant workers as fundamental and strategic issues, strengthen overall plan of vocational education, and stress its importance in legislative form. Administrative department and labor department in charge of vocational education should make uniform

planning, coordinate various forces, and take full advantage of existing education resources. In addition, government should include training of migrant workers into fiscal budget, increase investment, and provide subsidy in many ways, such as project entrustment, government purchase, training subsidy, or issuing free training ticket, etc. Furthermore, it is recommended to implement preferential policies to encourage and attract enterprises, training organizations and social organizations to participate in training. Finally, government and the media should enhance propaganda and keep smooth channel of information, to make migrant workers know policies, training information and training organizations in time, so as to make rational selection. For example, official website of labor department may set up special column or hot line for migrant workers.

**4.2 Improving teaching team** Establishing excellent quality and well structured teaching team is the precondition for bringing about significant effect of vocational education and training. Full-time teachers should constantly enrich their theoretical knowledge, and improve their professional skill and practical experience. Vocational education schools should establish the regular post rotation training system, to ensure teachers to update and handle technology in time, and encourage teachers to participate in technical innovation of enterprises, so as to deepen their professional knowledge and improve their practical skill. Besides, it should establish combined part-time and full-time teacher appointment system, to properly allocate teachers and realize social operation of teacher team. Also, it may invite specialized technicians to take on specialized course teachers or practice instructors, or introduce volunteers to provide vocational education and training services for migrant workers at low or free cost. This not only strengthens teacher team and reduces school cost, but also solves the conflict of limited economic ability of new generation migrant workers.

**4.3 Strengthening practicality, adaptability, hierarchy and forward looking of vocational education and training contents**

What new generation migrant workers care about most is applicability knowledge and skill related to their occupational selection or transformation. Thus, training institutions should give prominence to practicality when making training plan. It is recommen-

ded to adjust training courses according to local social and economic development and actual demand of labor market, to realize the coordination of vocational education with employment market and enterprises. In addition, education and training organizations should constantly develop multiple categories and levels of training contents, to reflect new achievements of scientific and social development. It should care about skills required for existing post and impart skills and core occupational ability necessary for improving employment level. Furthermore, it is recommended to actively push forward instructive education and training, improve overall quality of new generation migrant workers, and strengthen their employment or undertaking ability.

**4.4 Realizing diversity of vocational training forms** Firstly, it is recommended to select diverse teaching forms according to different education and training objectives and characteristics of migrant workers. Apart from traditional class lecturing, it can develop radio, television and Internet courses, to facilitate new generation migrant workers to select necessary training at any time. Secondly, it is proposed to improve vocational training facilities relying on communities, to realize reception of education and training nearby. Thirdly, it should implement open, diversified, and multiple level occupational education and training. For example, it can open flexible regular and irregular training class to satisfy multiple-level training demands of new generation migrant workers.

**4.5 Establishing employment access system to enhance employment guidance** To bring into full play functions of vocational education and training in improving employment quality of new generation migrant workers and promoting orderly flow of migrant workers, relevant authorities should establish professional qualification certification system and employment access system, to implement "no employment before training". Labor department should stipulate that migrant workers received vocational education

and training must pass professional qualification examination. The employment access system is intended to guide and regulate vocational education and training, promote coordination of training with market, and promote new generation migrant workers to value and participate in education and training. In addition, it is recommended to establish new generation migrant worker employment service system to strengthen employment guidance. Government department should enhance connection with training organizations and occupational intermediaries, and establish labor information resource management system, to realize organic combination of training and employment.

**4.6 Reinforcing supervision of vocational education and training** To ensure effectiveness of education and training and realize optimum consolidation of training resources, relevant government authorities should reinforce supervision of education and training institutions. Through random sampling vocational education and training institutions and following up pass rate of qualification certification, employment and undertaking conditions of new generation migrant workers, government should listen to ideas of migrant workers and survey performance of education and training. On the basis of survey results, government should decide to support or cooperate. At the same time, it is recommended to disclose survey results in official website or media for making optimum selection.

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can the efficient equilibrium be achieved. And this long-run equilibrium can achieve the transfer of rural labor to the city in the inherent characteristics of industry and agriculture, thereby laying solid foundation for the urban and rural areas to realize integration and economic efficiency improvement.