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The Mediating Role of Teacher Support in the Relationship Between Marginalization and Academic Performance Among Migrant Children in China--Evidence From CEPS Data

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KEYWORDS

*Teacher Support,
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ABSTRACT

Migrant children are a special group in the process of China's economic development. They not only linger on the edge of unequal educational opportunities, but are also marginalized in schools. Using data from the China Education Panel Survey (CEPS), a nationally representative sample of junior high school students, the study attempts to examine the relationship between migrant children's marginalization and academic achievement, and check the moderating role of teacher support in this relationship. The results show that positive teacher support has a negative moderating effect on the marginalization of migrant children. When teachers take a positive and supportive attitude toward socially marginalized students, the marginalized children are more integrated within their peer groups over time. The more actively teachers support migrant children, the more they can reduce the probability of migrant children being marginalized. Teacher support also has a positive impact on migrant children's social behavioral development and academic performance to a large extent. The positive attitude of teachers enables migrant children, a marginalized group, to have stronger school adaptability and a more positive development direction of social behavior and academic performance.

1. Introduction

As the scale, complexity and diversity of population movements continue to increase, migration is becoming one of the decisive global issues of the 21st century (International Organization for Migration, 2020). As a country with a large population, intra-country mobility and migration are part of the devel-

opment process and common phenomenon. Currently, the trend of family migration trend of China's floating population is still obvious. A large number of rural young children from the countryside are migrating to the cities with their parents, forming a new social marginalized group, namely the group "migrant children". The so-called migrant children refer to the children of farmers who have moved to the city with

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their parents to work and study. Generally, they are school-age children and the youths aged from 6 to 14 or 7 to 15 whose households are registered in other provinces, or villages in other districts outside the province (Ministry of Education, 2020). Following their parents into the city, they are not allowed to take advantage of the same educational opportunities as children their ages in cities because they lack a right of residence (HuKou system) in their home villages or other districts outside the province (Ministry of Education, 2020). As a result, they join a sizable group of educationally marginalized groups. Children who were left behind are the opposite of migrants which are called left-behind children. Whether they are "left-behind children" or "floating children," all of these children are affected by this widespread population migration directly or indirectly when they must return to the location of their household registration to live, attend school, and separate from their parents due to their ages. According to the Report on the Development of China's Floating Population 2018 released by the National Health Commission, the number of floating children in China reached 34.26 million, accounting for 12.8 percent of the country's total number, according to the results of population sampling in 2015 (China Migrant Population Development Report, 2018). The main form of social mobility is from rural to urban, and its purpose is to work. Therefore, most of the floating population are young and middle-aged people between the ages of 18 and 45 whose children are in the school-age stage. When children follow their parents to the city, various problems such as the education of migrant children arise (Zhou, 2020).

1.1. Teachers Actively Supportive and Academic Performance

Academic achievement is one of the important indicators to evaluate students' learning achievement and the equity and quality of education in different countries (OECD, 2016). Good academic achievement is not only beneficial to individuals in the process of development to achieve a virtuous circle (Ye et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2020), but also an important factor in interrupting the intergenerational transmission of poverty (Altschul, 2012). Therefore, it is of great significance to analyze the influencing factors of academic achievement. Because teachers play an important role in the education and teaching process, House (1981) believes that teachers' sup-

port has become a key factor affecting students' learning in the school learning process. Besides teacher support is also an important part of the social support system (Yu et al., 2017). In the teacher-student relationship, teacher support constitutes the main level and becomes a key part of the social support system for adolescents and children (Yang et al., 2020).

Teacher support can buffer the adverse premorbid family factors on students' academic performance (Luthar, et al., 2000). For example, parents of migrant children often have little time and energy to support their children due to work and living pressures (Zeng, 2011). It can be said that migrant children spend a lot of their time in school, so teachers as a important source of support. As a stable positive factor in child development (Sakiz et al., 2012), teacher support has a positive impact on students' learning, personal development and mental health (Mercer et al., 2014). Farmer (1985) argues that teacher support can make students perceive teachers' support for their academic achievements and future plans. Compared with parents, the teacher support has greater influence on adolescents' academic development, personality sociality and career development (Hu et al., 2013). Some studies have found that the positive effect of parental involvement on the academic performance of junior high school students depends on the high emotional support of teachers (Qiao et al., 2013). Disadvantaged children are more sensitive to the warmth and support offered by teachers (Meelan, et al., 2003). At the same time, Doll et al. believe that teacher support is a positive relationship perceived by students to be respected, helped and valued by teachers, and teacher support can improve the learning status and learning input of the class. Teachers are important others in students' growth environment, thus teachers' personality characteristics, self-efficacy, teaching behavior, etc. will affect students' academic achievement (Ryan & Deci, 2017; Huang et al., 2007).

1.2. Migrant Children Are Marginalized

The theory of "marginal" and "marginalization" is established with on the basis of sociological research, such as Parker's "marginal man" and Wallerstein's concept of "core field, margin, semi-margin". They all refer to the status of a certain thing being ignored and marginalized with regards to the central field. Scholar Li Jian believes that the edge is the opposite of the

center and the core, and it is a description of the position or status of different objects (Li, 2013). Edge essentially represents a trend. Scholar Li Weifeng believes that marginalization refers to certain things or social subjects showing unfavorable tendencies in a specific aspect (Li, 2011). This unfavorable tendency also reflects the unfavorable situation of social subjects or things (Zhuang, 2021). Some scholars adopt descriptive explanations that meet their own academic choices. Generally speaking, the concept of peripheral-center is mainly used to express the status differences and inequalities between things. In addition, we use the concept of "field" to illustrate marginalization. Pierre Bourdieu argues that to think in terms of the concept of field is to think in relation. From an analytical point of view, a field can be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relationships that exist between various locations (Bourdieu et al., 1998). The location and status of each element of this network or configuration show the "central or marginal presence" of this element in the field. The main relationships and structures that make up the network will be paid attention to and "caring about", while the essential but secondary structures will be ignored and marginalized (Liang, 2008). In social psychology, marginalization tends to be a group conceptually and how individuals become members of the group. By definition, members of marginalized groups behave less like others, so they are less engaged and have limited social influence within the group (Ellemers & Jetten, 2013).

Marginalization of education is a relatively abstract term, that is, non-central, non-mainstream education, or that education is rejected by the mainstream (such as mainstream society, mainstream crowd, mainstream ideology, mainstream culture, mainstream economy, etc.). The marginalization of education mentioned in this paper refers to the children of migrant workers in cities have always been on the edge of the urban education field when compared with urban children in an environment where the barriers between urban and rural areas have not yet been eliminated. Not only do they encounter inequality in the right to education and access to educational resources, but they also suffer from exclusion and discrimination in schools. This paper focuses on the marginalization of migrant children in schools.

Migrant children have various "marginalization" problems such as high negative emotions, high feelings of discrimination, and low social integration due to their inability to adapt to changes in various envi-

ronments such as living environment, educational environment, and communication environment (Zhang, 2018). Migrant children, as a vulnerable group, have difficulty adapting to and integrating into the big environment of the city due to their own particularity and the influence of social exclusion. Whether it is geographical or psychological aspects, they have fallen into a state of marginalization, which seriously affects the overall development of migrant children (Li et al., 2009).

In a broad sense, migrant children do not have the same educational opportunities as urban children, and their education is marginalized. This kind of marginalized education greatly restricts children's future development from migrant workers in cities. In a narrow sense, most studies have shown that there are certain difficulties in establishing friendly relations between migrant children and local children because migrant children have poor school adaptation. Researcher Yang believes that migrant children are labeled as "outsiders" and are discriminated and rejected by local children, and they will have negative feelings such as inferiority in their hearts (Yang et al., 2016). Some scholars believe that due to the influence, such as family economic level, personality factors and academic performance, it is difficult for migrant children to find peers or groups to belong to in urban schools. Instead, they look for partners who have the same life background and experience as themselves in the living area where they live. There is a certain gap between the small group formed and the mainstream group, which causes obstacles in the communication between migrant children and urban children (Chen et al., 2015).

Some scholars have conducted research on migrant children in public mixed schools and found that migrant children are mostly in a minority group in public mixed schools, and they are affected by language communication, customs, and personality factors. For them, it is difficult to establish new peer relationships and gaining support from peers (Ding et al., 2014). Therefore, we focus on three aspects of marginalization: often alone (loneliness), not belonging to the circle of friends, unpopular, and excluded (Van den Berg et al. 2020).

There is a connection between the marginalization of migrant children and their physical and mental development, and teacher support plays an important moderating role in reducing their marginalization. Few studies have paid attention to migrant children as a special social group, the relationship between their

marginalization and academic development, and the important moderating role of teacher support, this study aims to fill this research gap, and using data from the China Education Panel Survey (CEPS). Based on the above theoretical analysis, the study aims to test the following hypotheses:

- 1) Teachers' active support and students' academic performance have positive influence.
- 2) Student marginalization and student academic performance have opposite effects.
- 3) Positive teacher support and student marginalization have opposite effects.
- 4) Positive teacher support has a significant positive moderating effect between marginalization and student academic performance.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Data Sources

The paper used the 2014-2015 CEPS data collected by the China Survey and Data Center of Renmin University of China. The China Education Tracking Survey ceps is a nationally representative longitudinal survey of junior high school students. It aims to reveal the impact of family, school, community and macro-social structure on individual education-

al output, and to further explore the role of educational output in the course of individual development. The survey used stratified sampling and random proportion sampling design. The first survey randomly selected schools in 28 counties across the country as a preliminary sample, and among these countries 112 schools was randomly selected. Finally 221 classes were selected from these schools. In the second survey, a total of 10279 first-year junior high school students were successfully followed up with 9449 students.

CEPS inquire students, parents, and teachers in the form of questionnaires. The survey content includes personal information, household registration and living environment, social behavior development, family education environment, relationship with teachers, academic information, grades and school adaptation, etc. The contents of these surveys will help us to study the situation of migrant children in school and the potential mechanisms that affect their development.

The sample size of the data analysis in this study is 8943 people. Descriptive statistics (see Table 1) show that 53.1% of the samples are agricultural household registration ($n=4750$), and 44.38% families only have one child ($n=3969$). 73.1% of the students'

Table 1 | Descriptive statistical analysis

Items	Categories	Number	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Account type	Agricultural household registration	4750	53.114	53.114
	Non-agricultural household	2354	26.322	79.436
	Household registration	1818	20.329	99.765
	no registered permanent residence	21	0.235	100.000
Is it an only child	no	4974	55.619	55.619
	Yes	3969	44.381	100.000
	Medium	6540	73.130	73.130
	Poor	1133	12.669	85.799
family economic condition	Rich	950	10.623	96.422
	very poor	257	2.874	99.296
	very rich	63	0.704	100.000
Total		8943	100.000	100.000

family economic conditions are at the middle level (n=6540).

2.2. Measure

2.2.1. Teacher Support

According to the CEPS 2014-2015 survey, Chinese migrant children's perceived support from their teachers was classified as a teacher's behavioral characteristic. Teacher support is evaluated based on the measurement of Lei & Li's (2020) research on teacher support. In the questionnaire, there will be questions such as "the teacher often praises me; the teacher often asks me questions; the teacher is very helpful to my future; when I have bad emotions, the teacher will be indifferent to me and isolate me; the teacher will try to help me" and other questions. These items are scored in the form of a four-level Likert scale from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (4), and the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) was 0.906, indicating that the reliability of this questionnaire was high.

2.2.2. Academic Achievement

Students' academic achievement is divided into two parts: academic achievement and social behavior development for analysis. In the social behavior development questionnaire, "in the past year, have you skipped classes or skipped school; have you been inattentive, have you cheated in exams, plagiarized

homework; in the past year, have you been able to observe order, be friendly to others, help others, etc." The items are in the form of a five-point Likert scale, rated from never (1) to always (5). In the questionnaire about academic performance, there are questions, such as "do you feel difficult in learning mathematics, do you feel difficult in learning Chinese, and do you feel difficult in learning English". A four-level Likert scale was used to score from extremely strenuous (1) to not at all strenuous (4), and the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) was 0.791, indicating that the reliability of the questionnaire was reliable.

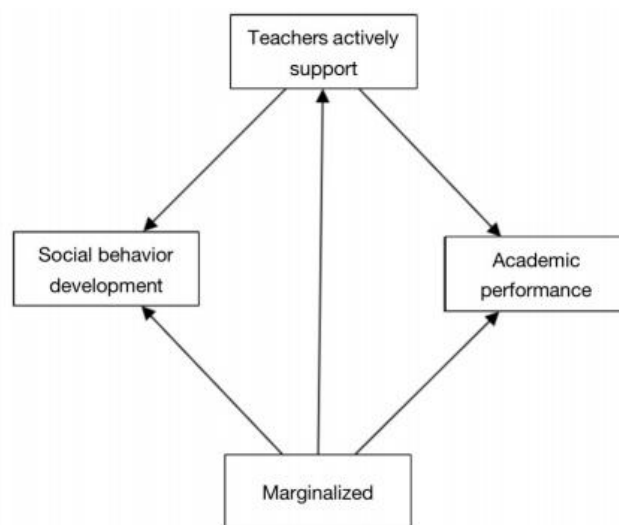


Figure1 | Path analysis

Table 2 | The relationship between marginalization, teacher support, and academic achievement

X	→	Y	Unnormalized path coefficients	SE	z	p	Normalized path coefficients
Teachers actively support	→	academic performance	0.24	0.009	26.823	0.000**	0.254
Teachers actively support	→	Social behavior development	0.120	0.005	9.073	0.002**	0.129
Marginalized	→	academic performance	-0.176	0.008	-23.102	0.000**	-0.219
Marginalized	→	Social behavior development	-0.147	0.004	-33.837	0.000**	-0.324
Teachers actively support	→	Marginalized	-0.116	0.008	-13.701	0.000**	-0.137

Note: → indicates that the path affects the relationship; *p<0.05,**p<0.01

2.2.3. Marginalized

Questions such as "the teacher often pays attention to me in class; most of the classmates in the class are friendly to me; I often participate in activities organized by the school or class; I feel close to the people in this school" appear in the questionnaire about the marginalization of students. These items are in the form of a four-level Likert scale, and the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's α) was 0.914, which was high score in reliability.

3. Research Result

3.1. Path Analysis

This paper use path analysis method to explore the influence relationship among marginalization, Teachers support and Academic achievement. It can be seen from the above table that Teachers actively support has a significance level of 0.01 for academic performance and Social behavior development ($p < 0.01$), indicating that Teachers actively support will have a significant positive impact on academic performance and Social behavior development. According to the standardized path coefficient value, Teachers support has deeply impact on Academic achievement than student Social behavior development, with an increase of one unit in Teachers support, academic achievement increases by 0.254 units, and student Social behavior development increases by 0.129 units. Marginalized has a significance of 0.01 level for Academic performance and Social behavior development path ($p = 0.000 < 0.01$), and the standardized path coefficient is less than 0, thus indicating that Marginalized will have a significant negative impact on academic performance and Social behavior development, and the impact of marginalization on students' social behavior development is greater than that of academic achievement, marginalization increased by one unit, academic achievement decreased by 0.219 units, and students'

Social behavior development decreased by 0.324 units.

Teachers actively support showed a significance level of 0.01 for the Marginalized path ($p = 0.000 < 0.01$), and the standardized path coefficient value was $-0.137 < 0$, It shows that Teachers actively support will have a significant negative impact on Marginalized. An increase of one unit of Teachers actively support will reduce students' marginalization by 0.137 units. In summary, hypothesis1-3 is established.

According to the evaluation indicators of the path analysis model, χ^2/df , GFI, RMSEA, and CFI are all above the standard level, indicating that the model fits well, and the analysis results of this analysis are relatively reliable.

3.2. Moderating Effect

3.2.1. Social Behavior Development

In this paper, the method of hierarchical linear regression is used to test whether the active support of teachers has a significant moderating effect on the marginalization of academic performance and the development of students' social behavior. It can be seen from the above table that the interaction item between Marginalized and Teachers active support

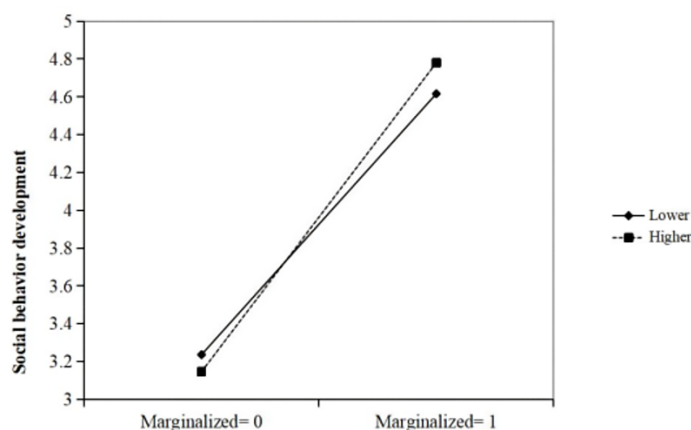


Figure 2 | Slope Analysis of the Moderating Effect of Teacher Support on the Relationship Between Marginalization and Social Behavior Development

Table 3 | Model fitting index

	χ^2/df	GFI	RMSEA	RMR	CFI	NFI
value	2.144	0.997	0.07	0.005	0.982	0.982
standard	<3	0.9	<0.10	<0.05	0.9	0.9

Default Model: $\chi^2(21) = 516.440$, $p = 1.000$

shows a significance ($t=2.296$, $p=0.022<0.05$). It means that there is a significant moderating effect of Teachers actively support on the influence of Marginalized on Social behavior development, that is, when Teachers actively support stand in different levels, Marginalized has a significant difference in the influence of marginalized on social behavior development.

It can be seen from the simple slope diagram (Figure 2) that the slope of the moderator variable at high levels is greater than the slope at low levels. It can be concluded that Teachers actively support positively regulates the effect of Marginalized on Social behavior development, indicating that Teachers actively support strengthens the impact of Marginalized of behavior development.

3.2.2. Academic Performance

Table 5 The moderating effect of teacher's positive support on the marginalization and academic performance of migrant children.

From the above table, the interaction item between Marginalized and Teachers actively support showed significant ($t=6.396$, $p=0.000<0.05$). It means that when marginalized affects academic performance, when the moderator variable (Teachers actively sup-

port) is at different levels, there is a significant difference in the impact amplitude, that is, the moderator effect exists.

From the slope diagram (Figure 3) that the slope of the moderator variable at high levels is greater than the low levels. It can be concluded that Teachers actively support positively regulates the effect of Marginalized on academic performance, indicating that Teachers actively support strengthens Marginalized for academic performance influences.

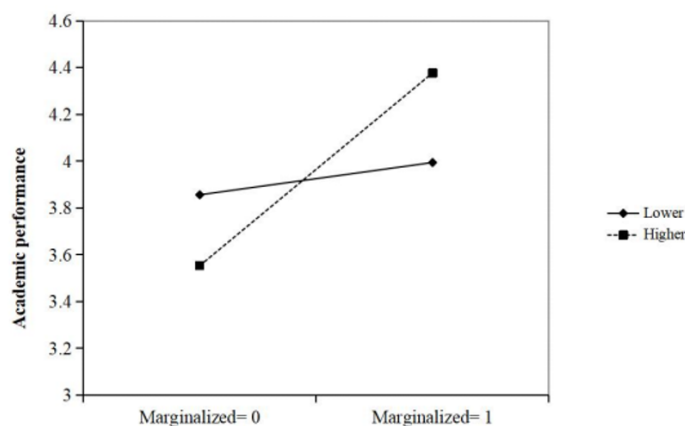


Figure 3 | Slope Analysis of the Moderating Effect of Teacher Support on the Relationship Between Marginalization and Academic Performance

Table 4 | The moderating effect of teacher's positive support on the marginalization and social behavior development of migrant children

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	3.925** (68.306)	3.925** (70.862)	3.926** (70.505)
Marginalized	0.705** (16.451)	0.694** (16.205)	0.690** (16.105)
Teachers actively support		0.037** (6.929)	0.037** (6.916)
marginalized*Teachers actively support			0.127* (2.296)
R^2	0.027	0.032	0.032
Adj. R^2	0.027	0.031	0.032
F	$F(1,8943)=270.640, p=0.000$	$F(2,8942)=159.977, p=0.000$	$F(3,8941)=108.455, p=0.000$
ΔR^2	0.027	0.005	0.001
ΔF	$F(1,8943)=270.640, p=0.000$	$F(1,8942)=48.017, p=0.000$	$F(1,8941)=5.271, p=0.022$

Dependent Variable: social behavior development
 $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ t statistics in parentheses

Table 5 | The moderating effect of teacher's positive support on the marginalization and academic performance of migrant children

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	3.926** (67.506)	3.926** (71.461)	3.925** (72.398)
Marginalized	0.708** (16.509)	0.723** (16.908)	0.069** (17.399)
Teachers actively support		0.038** (8.561)	0.040** (8.938)
marginalized*Teachers actively support			0.343** (6.396)
R^2	0.027	0.034	0.039
Adj. R^2	0.027	0.034	0.038
F	$F(1,8943)=272.554, p=0.000$	$F(2,8942)=173.934, p=0.000$	$F(3,8941)=130.069, p=0.000$
ΔR^2	0.027	0.007	0.004
ΔF	$F(1,8943)=272.554, p=0.000$	$F(1,8942)=73.292, p=0.000$	$F(1,8941)=40.913, p=0.000$

Dependent Variable: academic performance

$p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ t statistics in parentheses

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study contributes to the paper by uncovering the relationship between marginalization and academic achievement of migrant children in China by using nationally representative data of Chinese junior high school students, and examining the moderating role of teacher support in this relationship.

Consistent with our hypothesis, this study found that active teacher support had a positive moderating effect on the relationship between marginalization and academic achievement, some previous studies have shown that teacher support not only has a moderating effect on the degree of discrimination which students experience in school life, but also has a moderating effect on students' school adaptability. Our study then contributes to the article by providing new evidence that teacher support also has a significant moderating role in marginalization and academic achievement among migrant children.

Migrant children still involve the problem of being marginalized. At the same time, compared with their local peers who live with their parents, migrant children are still regarded as vulnerable children in China (Hu et al., 2014). Empirical research on exclusion and marginalization remains limited. The study fills this gap to a certain extent.

The results of the study have both theoretical and practical implications. In terms of theoretical significance, it helps to investigate the problems and unequal treatment faced by special groups of children in school and school life, and more researchers are also encouraged to conduct research on various aspects of children of special groups. Especially with the gradual increase of migration and immigrant groups, the problems of multicultural education and children with multicultural backgrounds cannot be ignored.

In terms of policy, it is helpful to improve the relevant education system and education methods to promote the development of special groups of children, reduce social and educational inequality. The physical and mental health of special groups of children cannot be ignored.

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