



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Inequality Confounding Migrants to Access Compulsory Education: An Empirical Study on Implementation of Household Registration Policy in Beijing, China

*¹Bo Li, ²Olga Sazhina

¹Department of Sociology and Social Policy, Lingnan University, Hong Kong

²Department of Asian and Policy Studies, The Education University of Hong Kong

Abstract

In wake of urbanization and economic transitions, the amount of floating population in China has been increasing consistently since late 1990s [1-3]. In particular, adult migrants hailing from remotely underdeveloped regions are keeping bouncing willingness to bring along children to migrant destinations in order to receive better quality of social services, such as education. However, in comparison with local residents, migrants with non-local household registration identity (hukou in Chinese) are struggled indefinitely in receiving educational opportunity equally.

This study concentrates on compulsory educational inequality in terms of school enrolment rate to migrant students with non-local hukou identity who are eager to be members of public primary schools in Beijing, and carries out an critical examination as whether hukou policy still plays a pivotal role directly unbalancing opportunities between local and migrant students recruited by public primary schools in this captured city, which is technically regarded as the central research question of the study. Also, this study is supposed to look at whether other particular regulations at the meantime as derivatives of hukou policy diminish equal opportunities for migrants in terms of educational attainment.

The data employed were collected from first-hand materials by means of conducting semi-structured interviews and distributing surveys and second-hand documents including policy documents, governmental reports, press releases and literatures. There are three crucial findings emerged up after examinations:

1. Hukou policy is no longer directly unbalancing opportunities for students with difference hukou identities to sit in schools, its derivative named Five-certificate regulation (wuzheng in Chinese) has become an substitution
2. National College Entrance Exam (gaokao in Chinese) is another parameter in enrolment processes influencing educational choices that immigrant parents are going to make
3. In order to maximize chance to be treated fairly, majority of migrants have a behaviour of seeking social connections (guanxi in Chinese) to plough tracks for fields with better educational resources, although most of them came to nothing. This study, at the meantime, comes up with policy implication: government should take actions to diminish negative impacts of hindrances in process of hukou identity transitions both institutionally and practically.

Keywords: Migrants; Hukou; Population Mobility; Educational Inequality; School Enrolment Rate; Beijing

Introduction

This study is carried out in Beijing which is representing counterparts with similar rigid hukou policy circumstances. Undoubtedly, seeking ways to access high quality education, this has been universally viewed as a solid foundation to be social elites and to further upgrade social status [4].

According to the stats from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the capital city possesses the largest number of higher educational institutions (with 91 in total, more than Shanghai with 67 and Guangzhou with 81 in 2015) including substantial elite institutions (with 26 labeled with “985” and “211” national project titles, comparing against Shanghai with

9 universities within same category and Guangzhou with 4 in 2015).

Around 2,020 primary and secondary schools prop up in compulsory educational system in the city, which could serve for more than 1 million students receiving basic education [5]. In this case, with regards to the grids of Combined Effect theory and Chinese educational system, especially influence from the

Correspondence to: Bo Li, M.Phil. Student in Department of Sociology and Social Policy, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, Phone: +852-97606305, E-mail: boli3[AT]ln[DOT]hk

Received: Sept 08, 2018; **Accepted:** Sept 20, 2018; **Published:** Sept 24, 2018

National College Entrance Exam (gaokao in Chinese) policy, migrant parents are working to pave roadways for children to access reputable colleges with the best educational resources in the state since childhood. Thereby receiving compulsory education becomes the earnest wish that adult migrants have for children. In light of Chinese Compulsory Education Law and relevant policies and regulations, the higher educational institutions are supposed to set up different admission criteria to recruit more local candidates through gaokao, which is labeled as ben di sheng yuan in Chinese. Those candidates have an essential feature that they must be in residency with local hukou identity. This scenario results in two consequences:

1. Lower enrolment marks and comparatively less requirements for gaokao to enter into same categorical colleges comparing with other competitors from other regions
2. An engine pushing the increasing number of households from other regions to migrate to Beijing since periods of primary or secondary school to equally share better educational resources, more importantly, getting enough time to transit into Beijing hukou identity, which could stipulate opportunities of being recruited by prestigious universities as local student identities.

Hukou policy which was introduced in 1950s to classify citizens as rural or urban residents and constrain population mobility have experienced several periodical reforms [6]. At the latest stage, in order to work in urbanization development, public administrators came up with emerging political institutionalization instead of hukou policy to directly constrain population mobility [7]. Also, in face of the constantly increasing number of migrants, the authorities raises threshold of shifting hukou identity other than expanding and redistributing educational resources to create a more equal environment for any of children with justified rights in receiving compulsory education equally. There are a bunch of emerging regulations that can unquestionably be regarded as derivatives of hukou policy, such as Five-certificate regulation (wuzheng in Chinese), most of them are relevant to timing requisite of residency and the number of exact years on payment for local social insurance.

Reasonably, the mega-city needs to control the size of population due to its particular political purposes and functions. Nevertheless, what is necessarily critical is that as one of basic human rights, education should not be intentionally manipulated by authorities through designing and launching specific policies or regulations to distinguish different groups of people based on ethics, social identities, beliefs and races. Compulsory education viewed as one of fundamental public shared resources for townfolk is being influenced tremendously by hukou policy within Chinese political regime, particularly to low-income migrants, influences from the policy is catastrophic [8]. Along with transitions of hukou policy, in fact, there is a range of difference in terms of public resources allocation and reallocation for local residents and migrants due to the disparity of hukou identities. Therefore,

educational resource distribution regime falls into a backdrop in view of these rigid restrictions. Controversially, advocacies by the government to equalize public resource distribution to customers maximally seem to be opposite with policy practices. Hukou policy is being utilized as a hook not only intentionally picking up more local candidates for territory colleges, even worse this policy starts to form social stratification since childhood.

Literature Reviews

The tidal wave of migrant steam in China emerging up since late 1980s has reached a point in which the increasing number of young migrants settling down for years and bearing children in destinations [1-3]. According to this phenomenon, more city-born migrant children had already reached school age by 1990s [2]. Consequently, a range of issues regarding education attainment for migrant children is likely to be more crucial and controversial over a long period [1,2,9]. In the meantime, along with reformations of hukou system, arrangement of social resources has been shifted based on particular policies. Some of scholars put systematically that China has formed four social stratifications and one of them is a rural-urban divide based on residential identities since hukou restricts majority of Chinese citizens dwelling in birthplace for lifetime [10-12].

There is a range of difference in terms of social welfare distribution to local residents and migrants due to the disparity of hukou identities. Education is one of basic social welfares being impacted tremendously within the distribution regime [8]. Previously, many of studies regarding migrant issues concentrating on adult migrants [9]. As statement above, children have been one of major actors concerned performing actively during the process of population mobility [1,9]. Interestingly, some of emerging studies start focusing on issues of migrant children in terms of social welfare attainment including social insurance, healthcare services and compulsory education access [9,11,13]. According to [13], there is an invisible wall existing in China which divides the demographic society into a dual one with identity differentiation between rural and urban regions.

Students from rural regions are almost impossible to attend urban schools for compulsory education owing to limitations of hukou identities and other concerning social and political parameters [13]. Many of social policy researches highlighted that migrants from rural regions encounter difficulties in the process of population mobility before elimination of differentiation between agriculture and non-agriculture hukou identities [10,12,13].

Although some of scholars started shifting research intentions from rural migrants into those living in mega-cities. For example, [9] paid attentions on the connection between hukou identity and educational attainment for migrant children in Shanghai, there are still few studies discoursing the link between hukou system and educational attainment in Beijing, where hukou policy is being implemented far rigidly. The fundamental and straightforward reason is that the two Chinese flagship cities are endowed with entirely

disparate functions and connotations [14,15]. Considering the extraordinary political position that Beijing is performing on, the study expounded systematically to uncover comparatively objective circumstances regarding compulsory educational attainment in terms of the fact of school enrolment rate for migrant students and what particular obstacles apart from hukou policy diminish chance being recruited equally by local schools in the city.

Research Objectives

- a. To examine influence of hukou policy bringing into educational sectors in terms of differentiation of school enrolment rate among students with local and non-local hukou identity.
- b. To uncover impacts of hukou policy and its derivative regulations on educational equality regarded as a key dimension of social justice.

1. Research Questions and Hypothesis

Substantial social issues are coming out in destinations along with population mobility. The fundamental causation of resulting in relevant social issues is disparities of resource distribution systems [16]. Due to limitations of resources, it is necessary to prioritize stakeholders involved in specific policies when analyzing particular social phenomena. Educational resources are allocated to different regions based on several important criteria including economic development, the number of population, demands of labour market and political positions of cities. Beijing, as the midst of politics and culture in China, is universally viewed as the drogue of policy designation. Also, as the frontier of hukou policy experiment in China, the capital attracts the most controversial opinions in terms of whether the government should loosen political hoops to make more migrants particularly who are engaging in low-payment occupations live easier and promisingly.

However, facing to public appeals and the increasing number of floating population spilling into the capital city, comparing to other metropolises, Beijing has loosened little restrictions regarding immigration regulations. According to relevant literature reviews, there is a central question of this study formulated and expected to be explained:

Whether hukou policy still plays a pivotal role directly unbalancing opportunities between local and migrant students recruited by public primary schools in this captured city, particularly in terms of differentiation of school enrolment rate? In order to unveil issues and facts behind the nexus between hukou identity and school enrolment rate, there are two specific research questions formed based on the central research question:

- 1. What are particular social factors including family background, social status and social connection nets limiting migrant children on getting equal chance of being recruited by primary schools apart from the hukou policy?

- 2. How residents including local residents and migrants response to educational inequality?

What is worth highlighting is that many of elements are enable to unmask educational attainment inequality such as disparities of teaching quality distribution and learning environment and facilities [17-19]. Among those parameters, school enrolment rate is the elementary step of getting education opportunity and can comparatively easily reveal how policy impacts on education equality in the beginning of educating process. The enrolment rate in primary schools, therefore, is viewed as the factor to measure in the study to achieve research purposes.

For the sake of examination of specific questions, this research formulate a hypothesis based on human commonsense: not only hukou identity differentiation, but also other social factors including social connections and family income, harm the equality in terms of being recruited by primary schools for migrant students. According to this hypothesis, it is correspondingly straightforward to form variables involved. [Table 1]

This hypothesis reveals that this study expects to unveil a linear relationship between school enrolment rate and social influential dimensions. Meanwhile, the hypothesis is supposed to present a comprehensive model to prioritize positions and influence of all these social factors in the process of applying to attend local schools by migrants. Regarding to responds from surveys and semi-structured interviews, in view of time and size of sample limits, it is still worth mentioning that results from quantitative analysis can merely reflect educational inequality in terms of differentiation of school enrolment rate, other elements such as resource distribution, quality of teaching, learning environment and facilities are excluded in this study and need to be further discussed.

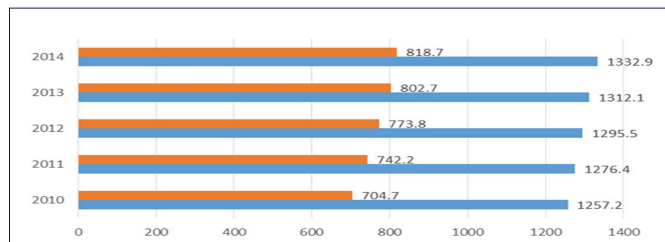
2. Methodology

The fieldwork involved in this study was conducted since September 2017 and lasting for six months. The potential respondents were selected randomly in districts of Handian and Tongzhou, which both are territorial regions at the county level in Beijing. Handian district is featured with its substantial number of higher educational institutes, the other district located between Tianjin and Beijing is a typically geographical intersection attracting huge number of floating population settling down as it is relatively lower expenditures. Both captured destinations have potentially influential factors related to the study. [Figure 1]

Variable Type	Parameters	Explanation in Y=aX formula
Independent Variable(s)	Hukou identity	X(s)
	Family income	
	Social connections	
Dependent Variable	School enrolment rate	Y

Source: authors' design

Table 1: Variables involved in the study.



Source: Population Statistics Annual Report (various years), National Statistics Bureau of the People’s Republic of China. Beijing, China.

Figure 1: The number of population comparison between local residents with blue bar and migrants with orange bar; accounting with million per head.

Data Collection Techniques and Sample Size

Data employed in this study were attained through two approaches of questionnaire survey and semi-structure interview. The questionnaire survey is designed with 11 items as multiple choice questions and each question consists of two to four choices. All answers are fell into the scale of “1-4” for measurement. The survey was distributed randomly through online, in order to make analysis result reliable and objective. The online survey were expected to collect 300 to 400 samples in four months. Eventually, 332 filled online surveys were responded and valid. The amount of sampling from semi-structured interview approach was supposed to get valid responses from 15-20 family with hukou identity differentiation, lastly 15 valid responses through this approach have been reached. Each interview conducted by We Chat or telephone lasting for from 35 minutes to 1 hour with contemporaneous note-takings.

Data Analysis

Responses from online surveys were tested in regression analysis by employing SPSS. Semi-structured interviews with open questions were asked and at the meantime note-taking and vocal responses recording was used to analyse frequency of answers particularly key works of responses, concentrating on those independent variables (IVs).

Results

Findings from Regression Analysis

According to samples from the online survey, in total, migrants involved as respondents account for around 58%, and not all of them are featured as non-local hukou identity. The number of non-local hukou residents account for around 56% of those exotic people, which means that a few number of migrants involved in this research accounting around 2% have been transited into local hukou, which explicitly indicates that though there are indeed migrants who have capacity of making hukou identity transition, the number of the qualified is extremely small. Also, according to respondents, this study gets a percentage regarding family annual income, which claims that nearly 75% of migrant respondents are from comparative low-income family [Table 2].

Through employing SPSS to conduct regression analysis, the study indicates that hukou and family annual income play pivotal roles synchronously when migrant children apply for local primary schools, and the P-value significance (featured with 0.005) of hukou identity and family annual income are 0.000 and 0.016, respectively, which both are far smaller than 0.05. While the P-value significance of social connection (featured with 0.655) is much bigger than 0.05, which indicates that social connections have a weak relevance with school enrolment rate. In other word, social connection seems to be unimportant or indirect in terms of impacting on results of school enrolment rate to migrant children [Table 3].

According to the figures shown on the table, the hypothesis is partly supported apart from social connections comparing with other two influential factors are not making a difference in the process of school admission for migrant students. The causation resulting in this situation consists of either inadequacy of social connections or exploit in wrong approaches. This finding also has been indicated in interviews as bellow.

Findings from Semi-structured interviews

According to the central research specific research questions, there are several common responses from interviewees based on real-life experiences:

Characteristics	Figures	Percentage
Migrants	193 out of 332 respondents	58.13%
Hukou identity	186 out of 193 without Beijing hukou	56.02%
Annual income in Family without Beijing hukou	144 out of 193 lower than 250K (currency in RMB)	74.60%

Source: authors’ survey

Table 2: Characteristics of respondents.

Independent variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Hukou identity	0.297	0.064	0.401	4.651	0
Family annual income	-0.115	0.047	-0.238	-2.44	0.016
Social connections	0.035	0.078	0.042	0.449	0.655

Source: authors’ survey

Table 3: Regression analysis through coefficient model.

- i. “It is still and even much tougher to transit into Beijing hukou, since there are a dozen of additional requirements which need to be fulfilled before you are endowed rights with hukou identity transition application (i.e. no less than 15 years successive dwelling, successive payment of personal income tax, and private commercial tenement, etc.).”
- ii. “Emerging administrative regulations such as ‘Five-certificate’ which have already been the most considerable elements when migrant parents send children to local schools supersede hukou as more active parameters.”
- iii. “Most of interviewees without local hukou tried to make use of social connections to change hukou identity. Majority of them failed in the process but only one interviewee succeeded since her husband is working for a State-owned company (SOE for short) which offers ample local hukou quota for employees and their family members. Although her child is featured as local students, they also outlaid many on it.”
- iv. “Gaokao is another considerable element affecting migrant parents consider whether it is worthy to send their children to local schools even they will not be allowed sit for gaokao in Beijing, many cases indicate that migrants have to leave children behind which forms another severe social issue called left-behind kids.”
- v. “Majority of interviewees are quite passive to argue against the government even though their benefits are being harmed by certain policies.”

Conclusion

Generally, this study indicates that migrant children are still extremely hard to get enough and equal opportunities to sit in local public primary schools. Even though most of them have tried or are planning to develop or use social connections to achieve the goal. Comparative lower income and inadequacy of social connections in the city, as what discoursed according to findings, most migrant family came to nothing. In addition, Gaokao is another staple element affecting decisions migrants need to make. Unquestionably, students can receive better education and have larger chance to be recruited by top universities in Beijing. Most of interviewees in this study claimed that they do not want children to spend nine years in private schools and cost much on compulsory education for impossibility of sitting for gaokao as Beijing’s candidates. Majority of migrant children need to return to hometown for education and live with grandparents, which results in a severe social issue: left-behind children, which synchronously exists with empty-nest elderly.

Besides, many respondents concerned in the study are passive to express political opinions either through informal means such as social media or formal reviews to authorities concerned. Reasons resulting in such a quite environment of public engagement are diverse including political pressure, national educational system and stereotype of opinion expression and

culture norms. This study implicates that the government is expected to take responsibilities of developing an open-access platform to encourage public opinions to engage in process of policymaking. Also what the central government needs to consider is not only balance population among regions, but also equalize basic public resources to assure a more balanced social system.

References

1. Liang, Z. (2001) The age of migration in China. *Population and Development Review* 27: 499-524. [[View Article](#)]
2. Zhao, S. (2000). Where are their school desks? Research and suggestions of the compulsory education of children of the floating population in large cities. In H. Ma, M. Wang, (Eds.), *China Development Studies: Selected Research Reports of DRC of the State Council* (pp. 97-101). Beijing, China: *China Development Press* [[View Article](#)]
3. Zhao, Y. H (2002) Causations and consequences of return migration: Recent evidence from China. *Journal of Comparative Economics* 30: 376-394. [[View Article](#)]
4. Jia, R.X, Li, H.B. (2016) Access to elite education, wage premium, and social mobility: the truth and illusion of China’s College Entrance Exam. The University of Houston Empirical Microeconomics Seminar Series. [[View Article](#)]
5. Beijing Municipal Education Commission (2015) Education Statistics Annual Report. Beijing, China: Beijing Municipal Education Commission. [[View Article](#)]
6. Chan, K.W (2010) The household registration system and migrant labor in China: notes on a debate. *Population and Development Review*, 36: 357-364. [[View Article](#)]
7. Wang, M.Y. L. (2002) Small city, big solutions? China’s hukou system reform and its potential impacts. *The Planning Review* 32: 23-29. [[View Article](#)]
8. Duflo, E, Udry, C. (2004) Intra-household resource allocation in Cote d’Ivoire: social norms, separate accounts and consumption choices. *NBER Working Paper*, 12: 1-52. [[View Article](#)]
9. Liang, Z, Chen, Y. P (2007) The education consequences of migration for children in China. *Social Science Research* 36: 28-47. [[View Article](#)]
10. Cheng, T, Selden, M. (1994) The origins and social consequences of China’s hukou system. *The China Quarterly* 139: 644-668 [[View Article](#)]
11. Solinger, D (1999) Contesting citizenship. Berkeley, California, USA. *The University of California Press* [[View Article](#)]
12. Bian, Y. J (2002) Chinese social stratification and social mobility. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28; 91-116. [[View Article](#)]
13. Wang, F, Zou, X (2001) Invisible walls within cities: migration and emergence of a dual society in Urban China. Los Angeles, California: Paper presented at annual meetings of the American Sociological Association. [[View Article](#)]
14. Tian, G. J, Wu, J. G, Yang, Z. F (2009) Spatial pattern of urban functions in the Beijing metropolitan region. *Habitat International* 34: 249-255. [[View Article](#)]
15. Liu, J, Zhan, J, Deng, X (2005) Spatio-temporal Patterns and Driving Forces of Urban Land Expansion in China during the Economic Reform Era. *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human environment* 34: 450-455. [[View Article](#)]

16. Scheve, K. F, Slaughter, M. J (2001) Labor market competition and individual preferences over immigration policy. *The review of Economics and Statistics* 83: 133-145. [[View Article](#)]
17. Zhu, W. J (2006) A sociological analysis framework that reveals education inequity. *Journal of Social Science*, 5; 106-117[[View Article](#)]
18. National Statistics Bureau of P.R.C. (2015). Population Statistics Annual Report. Beijing, China: *National Statistics Bureau of P.R.C.* [[View Article](#)]
19. National Statistics Bureau of the People's Republic of China. (2015) The Number of Higher Education Institutions. Retrieved from: [[View Article](#)]

Citation: Li Bo & Olga Sazhina (2018) (2018) Inequality Confounding Migrants to Access Compulsory Education: An Empirical Study on Implementation of Household Registration Policy in Beijing, China. *Sociol Insights* 2: 001-006.

Copyright: © 2018 Bo Li. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.
