



Australian and International Journal of Rural Education

How Does Cultural Capital Influence the School Choice of Rural–Urban Migrant Families in Nanjing, China? Evidence From a Survey Study

Liuning Yang

The University of Auckland

Liuning.yang@auckland.ac.nz

Abstract

Across China, the household registration (hukou) policy has restricted the school admission of rural–urban migrant children in urban areas. In 2017, the Nanjing government issued the *Tenants Have the Same Right as Householders* (THSRH) policy to allow tenants in urban areas access to public-school resources. However, what the migrant children have experienced in and after negotiating access to these schools deserves serious attention from educators, scholars and policymakers. This study surveyed 186 rural–urban migrant parents in Nanjing who chose to send their children to junior secondary schools after the implementation of the THSRH policy. The study identified that higher socioeconomic and household status of rural–urban migrants increased their choices for junior secondary schools. However, the study demonstrated that the restriction in the hukou policy is still a dominant factor influencing public-school access. The study highlighted that the interaction of the development of extracurricular abilities and investment in private supplementary tutoring are two main factors that influence the school choices of rural–urban migrant families.

Keywords: *rural–urban migration, school choice, educational equity, cultural capital, education policy*

Introduction

Since China's introduction of continual reform and openness, the economic divide between urban and rural regions has widened. This encourages individuals from rural regions to relocate to cities in search of better paying job opportunities (Wu et al., 2010, 2014). Internal migration is driven not just by a desire for better job possibilities, but also by a disparity in education between rural and urban areas (Liu, 2015; Peng, 2021; Wang, 2009). It has also been confirmed that educational disparities exist in school infrastructure construction, teacher training and distribution, and funding investment (Luo & Zhang, 2017), and these disparities were reflected in the PISA result in 2018, which revealed a 42% education disparity rate between rural and urban China. Despite the fact that migrant workers may make decisions based on assumptions rather than studies, they prefer to bring their children to cities because they believe their children will be able to access education, medical treatment, and other social welfare services (Xiong, 2017).

The growth in the number of rural–urban migrants has put a strain on the urban schooling system. The number of rural–urban migratory workers was expected to surpass 496 million by 2021, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (2021). As a result, local governments have adopted local school admission regulations that prohibit urban public schools from admitting

rural–urban migrant pupils, in accordance with central leadership directives. Two central government regulations, the Compulsory Education Law of China (CEL) and the hukou policy, limit the admittance of rural–urban migrant pupils to schools. Hukou policy refers to the Household Registration Policy; hukou means household registration in Mandarin. The CEL mandates that every child gets nine years of compulsory education, and local governments are accountable for children with hukou status who reside within their jurisdiction. People with distinct hukou status (rural or urban) have varied rights because of the differences in hukou policy, and individuals' social welfare, including education and medical treatment, is strongly related to their hukou status. As a result, migrant children in cities have to enrol in migrant-run schools or pay substantially higher school selection fees to acquire access to public-school resources (Goodburn, 2009; Tan, 2010).

In 2006, the Chinese central government revised CEL to address the growing educational needs of rural–urban migrant communities, stating that “*local government should provide migrant students with equal conditions to receive compulsory education if they live with their migrant parents*” (National People’s Congress of China, 2006, p. 6). The Chinese government then published the *liangweizhu* rule, which clarified that the local district-level government is responsible for ensuring that rural–urban migrant pupils are successfully enrolled in public schools in urban regions throughout their obligatory education term. *Liangweizhu* rule literally means “*two majors*” or “*two major responsibilities*” policy. It regulates that local urban governments are the major departments to address rural–urban migrant students’ compulsory education and public schools are the major schools used to accommodate rural–urban migrant students at the stages of compulsory education. Local governments at the city level then announced their localised rules in response to the policy. They did, however, impose certain limits on migrant pupils’ entry to public schools, such as needing difficult documentation (Li & Tan, 2019) and mandating parents’ minimum work hours or income as enrolment requirements for their children (Wang, 2009).

It is also worth noting that social marginalisation has also played a role in excluding rural–urban migrants from schooling. As a result, rural–urban migrant groups have evolved into autonomous communities that are shunned by local urban populations. *Nongmingong* (rural laborers) or “*outsiders who work in cities*” is a term given to rural–urban migrant workers that connotes low manners and a lack of hygiene. Their children are known as *nongmingong zidi* (children of rural labourers) or “*floating children*” (Mu et al., 2018), and they have been accused of discrimination in schools by instructors and urban classmates (Chen et al., 2013). Urban teachers indicated that migrant parents are “*difficult to communicate*” with, making it impossible for them to establish a healthy teacher–parent connection (Chen et al., 2013, p. 698). The marginalisation of rural–urban migrant children limits the desire of local urban schools to welcome them, and this is reflected in school admissions.

In 2017, Nanjing, which is one of the largest cities in east China (population about 10 million), implemented a new household registration policy named *Tenants Have the Same Right as Homeowners* (THSRH) policy (Department of Properties and Housing Arrangement, 2017). Tenants in Nanjing are individuals who do not own real estate or have an urban hukou, whereas homeowners are those who do. *Right* refers to the right of getting public services such as education and medical services. The program ensures that rural–urban migratory workers who rent houses in cities have the same access to public education, medical care, and other social welfare benefits as homeowners (Department of Properties and Housing Arrangement, 2017). The THSRH strategy aims to meet the rising educational needs of internal migrants. In terms of policy substance, this is the first time that local hukou policy has not imposed any evident limits on rural–urban migrant families’ (tenants) school choices. As a result, media outlets speculated that the strategy may place migrant and urban pupils on the same starting line in terms of school choice.

Scholars have proposed that the school choice of rural–urban migrants is affected not only by the household registration policy, but also by a variety of social and cultural variables (Wei & Hou, 2010). Following the implementation of the THSRH policy, it is a timing opportunity to assess school selection procedures and emphasise the elements that impact rural–urban migrant parents’ school choice. The key research questions are as follows:

1. What are the household status, socioeconomic level, and school choice of rural–urban migrant families after the implementation of THSRH policy?
2. What are the economic, social and cultural factors that influenced their school choices?

The following are some of the paper’s contributions. First, this research takes place after the implementation of the THSRH policy, which had only been piloted in a few large Chinese cities. This is the first research to give a snapshot of school choice after the adoption of the policy. Second, this work aimed to identify characteristics that impacted rural–urban migrants’ school admittance when the hukou policy’s limitations were gradually eased. Third, the study identified several factors that had a statistically significant impact on rural–urban migrant families’ school choices, including parents’ investment in private supplementary tutoring for their children and the interaction effect of afterschool reading, music or art activities, and family activities. This discovery compared and contrasted the cultural influences revealed in prior research. Finally, the challenges and hardships highlighted in this research may be useful in future policy changes of the THSRH policy in Nanjing and other places where the policy is being piloted.

Literature Review

The Restrictions of Hukou Policy

Previous research on rural–urban school admissions has focused on hukou regulation limits as well as social and cultural factors. Despite the fact that policy modifications for improved participation of rural–urban migrants in urban education began with the revision of CEL in 2006, many academics still regard the process of removing the limits of the hukou policy on rural migrants as a protracted and dynamic process (Wu & Li, 2016). The question of whether hukou policy continues to influence rural–urban migrants’ school choice is currently being debated.

Some academics argue that hukou policy continues to have a substantial impact on rural–urban migrants’ school admissions. According to data collected by Wu and Li (2016) from 445 rural–urban migration households in Guangzhou, Dongguan and Suzhou, 49.8% of all respondents experienced difficulty enrolling their children in public schools. Wang (2009) conducted a survey of rural–urban migrants in Beijing and discovered that local governments require rural–urban migrant families to provide additional documentation to demonstrate their ability to fund their children’s studies in cities. In an interview with rural–urban migrant populations in Beijing, Zhang and Luo (2016) discovered that most rural–urban migrants thought they received less policy assistance from the federal and local governments. Tan (2010) argued that the rural–urban migrant community in Beijing is still an “invisible population” (p. 32), because rural migrants believe their children’s school entrance has not been taken into account in the education or household registration legislation. As a result, some researchers say that the hukou policy’s constraints still keep rural–urban migrant pupils out of state-run schools, forcing them to choose their own schools.

Some experts feel that the influence of the hukou policy is diminishing as a result of national and local laws to accommodate rural–urban migrant pupils in the urban public education system (Liu & Jacob, 2012; Qian & Jing, 2014). Many of the migrant groups questioned by Liu and Jacob (2012) were allowed access to public schooling. Qian and Jing (2014) also asserted that families from migrant groups with better socioeconomic status had already benefitted from policy advantages. According to policy experts, the ability to regulate school admission policies has been devolved

to local governments (Liu, 2015). Consequently, local school admission policies have grown less tied to hukou policies and have become more flexible and inclusive in conjunction with local economic growth, rather than socially barring rural–urban migrant populations (Liu, 2015).

With the gradual relaxation of local household registration policies, many academics began to focus on the social and cultural resources that impact school choice. Inequalities among migrant children, according to Wei and Hou (2010), are produced “*by such factors as household financial and social status and household cultural environment*” (p. 87). They also projected that after the hukou policy no longer limited rural–urban migrants’ school choices, social and cultural factors would continue to play a role in perpetuating inequities for children in rural–urban migrant communities (Wei & Hou, 2010). Although the abolition of the hukou policy’s influence will take time, social and cultural issues have already begun to appear.

Social Exclusion

Current research focuses more on the social factors influencing school admission. To quantify the social elements that impacted the education of rural–urban migrants, Wu et al. (2010, 2014) created a framework of family, societal and school social capitals. Scholars have agreed that social variables, such as community social capital and family social support (Wu et al., 2014) as well as family income and parental tutoring, have a significant influence on the school admittance of rural–urban migrant pupils (Fang et al., 2017). Wu et al. asserted that rural–urban migrants lack community social capital because they are alienated from the local urban community, based on survey data from 806 respondents. Furthermore, owing to the stringent constraints imposed by the household registration policy, rural–urban migratory parents could only find low wage labour jobs that required long shifts (Goodburn, 2009), resulting in a loss of family financial resources. Working for such a long period of time limited parent–student contacts, such as engaging in family events or checking homework (Fang et al., 2017).

Although Wu et al. (2010) argued that economic and social variables may be transferred to cultural aspects to affect rural–urban migrant children’s school choice, there has yet to be a measurement to comprehensively assess the impact of cultural factors. Several research have shown the influence of various cultural elements, such as extracurricular ability development (Chen et al., 2013), parents’ educational level (Wang, 2009), musical instrument playing (Zhang & Luo, 2016), and private supplemental tutoring (Zhang & Bray, 2017). Although these characteristics have been discovered in past studies of the hukou policy or the social capital of rural–urban migrants, there has been less systematic study on the impact of cultural elements on rural–urban migrants’ school admissions at this time.

Theoretical Framework

Scholars sought conceptual frameworks to logically explain individual–context interrelationships as a result of disparity in the education of rural–urban migration pupils (Joy et al., 2020; Mu et al., 2019). Bourdieu’s notions of capital and field have been used to explain migration and education issues in a number of studies (Mu et al., 2019; Yu, 2018, 2020). Bourdieu (1978) demonstrated that the value of capital is determined by the particular field in which it is deployed, and the strategy by which actors deploy their capital is determined by the actor’s position in that field. Furthermore, Bourdieu discovered that the impact of various types of capital differed for different social classes. He then devised the concept of habitus to describe people’s actions in relation to the field (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990).

Capital

Capital, according to Bourdieu’s theory, has a social component in addition to an economic one (Al Ariss et al., 2013; Albright et al., 2018). In terms of capital formations, Bourdieu (1986), like

Marx, defined capital as accumulated labour. Bourdieu (1986), on the other hand, described labour as including economic, social, cultural, and symbolic dimensions. The capital of a person or a social organisation determines their power. Individuals and social groupings are classified into social hierarchies, depending on the amount of capital they have (Al Ariss et al., 2013). Scholars have suggested that the individual's or a social group's strategy of capital investment, accumulation and transformation to strengthen their position in a specific field is the focus of research on Bourdieu's theory (Li, 2011; Wu et al., 2014).

In *The Forms of Capital*, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defined three forms of individual capitals: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital refers to the command of economic resources, such as income, property, material possessions and savings (Al Ariss et al., 2013; Wu et al., 2010; 2014; Mu et al., 2019). In terms of social capital, Bourdieu (1986) defined it as “*the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition*” (p. 248). Family, socioeconomic class (e.g., school type) and group memberships (e.g., rural–urban migrant community) may all legitimate and institutionalise social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). According to the preceding discussion, rural–urban migrants face significant economic and social disadvantages. Furthermore, Bourdieu claimed that economic and social capital could not account for the disparities in schooling resource allocation across social classes. Bourdieu proposed that, in addition to economic and social capital, cultural capital or a mix of cultural resources contributes to school selection and academic achievement of individual students (Yoon, 2020).

According to Bourdieu (1986), a person's cultural capital is linked to their social status and transmitted down to their progeny. Schools, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), serve as a mechanical system that reproduces the social stratification structure. As a result, since its inception, the idea of cultural capital has been swiftly associated with educational sociology and used in a variety of study topics relating to migrant schooling difficulties (Romanowski, 2003). Li (2011) conducted interviews with rural–urban migrant families in Chengdu and stated that, similar to cross-national migration, rural–urban migrants had less cultural capital than their local counterparts. According to Li (2011), the school service delivery model, particularly the school admittance policy, has generated an uneven cultural and social environment for rural–urban migrants and dominant citizens.

Cultural capital is split into three types by Bourdieu (1986): embodied cultural capital (e.g., an individual's inherent knowledge and abilities), objectified cultural capital (e.g., books, calculators), and institutionalised cultural capital (e.g., education background, occupation certification). Individuals' engagement in cultural events or activities, such as leisure reading, attending concerts or plays, is referred to as embodied cultural capital in China (Li, 2011). Scholars (e.g., Pao, 2014; Wang, 2009) prefer to quantify objectified cultural capital by how many books a person has or how much money they spend on cultural items (e.g., CDs, paintings, sculptures) or services (e.g., extracurricular tutorials, subscription fees). An individual's education degree and credentials are characterised as institutionalised cultural capital. The three types of cultural capital may be useful in analysing the results of cultural elements that impact rural–urban migrant children's school choices.

Field

According to Bourdieu, capital has no universal or final worth, but only that which is generated from social context and institutions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu (1986, 1990) used *field* to describe the social setting in which capital demonstrates its worth. Fields are governed by “*socially established, implicitly agreed rules of the game*” (Al Ariss et al., 2013, p. 2545). That is, all

economic, cultural, and political factors (e.g., policies, Confucian cultural traditions) cannot directly influence players (parents and their children) in the field (education or policy field), but they are reconstructed and converted to shared rules by the field agent to influence individuals' practice (Gong, 2010). Players in the field are not necessarily equal since the rules are affected by people who hold wealth and power and seek to grow their capital (Gong, 2010). Individuals must continually struggle for dominance in the field using the resources they have (Bathmaker, 2015). Furthermore, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) indicated that various fields (e.g., educational, legal, organisational) exist simultaneously in a social context, some of which may be nested in others (e.g., subfields of different household status in the field of rural–urban migratory communities) (Al Ariss et al., 2013). Each area or subfield has its own set of rules, which may reinforce or contradict one another, altering capital values in complicated ways (Al Ariss et al., 2013; Gong, 2010).

The adoption of various levels of policy in reference to their school entrance and school procedure has established a policy field for rural–urban migrant students and their parents (Yu, 2018, 2020). To compete for a better school place, a better schooling experience, and a better education result for their children, each rural–urban migrant family needs to deploy their various types of capital in the policy field (Bathmaker, 2015). However, as previously stated, such contests could never be fair. That is, although rural–urban migrants have a lot in common, their socioeconomic standing and the capitals they have gained are rather different (Li, 2011). Their capital discrepancies may therefore be linked to the existing admittance disparity experienced by rural–urban migrants.

The Limitations of Research on Rural–Urban Migration Using Pierre Bourdieu

The research of the aforementioned academics has four limitations. First, since the loosening of the hukou policy's limits on rural–urban migrants' school choice is a dynamic process, prior research conclusions could not be applied to the rural–urban migrant population in Nanjing after the THSRH policy was implemented. The relationship between the highlighted parameters and migrant families' school choices in Nanjing has to be examined and validated. Second, while several studies have suggested that economic and social capital factors could be transferred to cultural factors to influence rural–urban migrants' school admission decisions (Li, 2011; Wu et al., 2010, 2014), they have failed to measure the process of capital transformation and its impact on school choice decisions. Third, the majority of current research in China on the cultural capital components of rural–urban migration students uses qualitative approaches (Li, 2011; Yoon, 2020). Although this research has interpreted the difficulties of rural–urban migrant families' problems successfully using Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, it also raised questions of transferability to a broader range of rural–urban migrant populations owing to the use of a single approach. Fourth, even though some researchers discovered that rural–urban migration families lack cultural capital in their school choices, other cultural capital factors that have a substantial impact are not identified in their studies. The remainder of this paper attempts to fill these gaps, by providing a snapshot of the household status, socioeconomic status, and cultural capital of rural–urban migrant families in Nanjing, as well as identifying the cultural capital factors that influenced their school choices after the THSRH policy was implemented.

Methodology

For the study, a survey was conducted in May 2020. The study's respondents were rural–urban migrant parents without an urban hukou, whose children were enrolled in Nanjing's Year 6–8 schools. Following the THSRH policy, these parents had the opportunity to choose their children's schools. The researchers used a purposive sampling approach to recruit individuals from two major Chinese social media platforms (WeChat and Tencent QQ) (Bryman, 2016). The questionnaire was circulated, and social media advertising was posted to four social media

groups of rural–urban migrants in May 2020. The research obtained 186 valid replies after 21 days of data collecting and cleaning.

The instrument of demographic information was created using the PISA 2018 parental questionnaire (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). The household and socioeconomic status instruments were adapted to reflect the Nanjing context. Questions regarding cultural capital variables were recategorised using Bourdieu's (1986) concept and Li's (2011) and Pao's (2014) interpretations of cultural capital in the Chinese context. To ensure face validity, the redesigned questionnaire was forwarded to two external experts (professors from a Chinese university whose primary research focused on rural–urban migration problems). The survey was performed online after receiving ethical clearance from the university and consent from participants. The questionnaire's reliability and validity were tested in a pilot study with 25 participants. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the cultural capital variables in the pilot research are all over 0.6 (embodied cultural capital factors 0.604; objectified cultural capital factors 0.738; institutionalised cultural capital factors 0.832), indicating that the data are reliable.

The study's main data analysis models were descriptive statistics and factorial variance analysis. The data analysis initially offered summary descriptive statistics on rural–urban migrant families' household status, income and socioeconomic status. The influence of each factor on school choice was then investigated using factorial variance analysis. Household status (i.e., location and living conditions), embodied cultural capitals (i.e., after-school reading, music or art activity, family activity, and homework checking), objectified cultural capitals (i.e., family investment in schooling, private supplementary tutoring, and art or music activities), and institutionalised cultural capitals (i.e., fathers' and mothers' educational levels) are among the independent factors.

Findings

School Choice

The complete descriptive data of the school choices of the questioned rural–urban migration parents are shown in Table 1. Regarding school choice, 81.5% of rural–urban migrants' children were reported to have enrolled in public schools. When choosing schools, the majority said they had various options (39.3% had the best choice of multiple choices; 29.8% did not have the best selection of multiple choices). In terms of the difficulties they described, the research questioned them in the questionnaire about how difficult it was to get school admission information and prepare essential paperwork. Only 28% found it challenging to pick schools for their children; 26.2% of those said it was fairly challenging, and just 1.8% said it was very difficult.

Compared to previous research in other cities, the results of this study demonstrated a more favourable outcome for school choice, satisfaction, and the public-school enrolment rate (Li & Tan, 2019; Wang, 2009). The enrolment rate in public schools in this research (81.5%), however, is much lower than the enrolment percentage announced by the Nanjing government in 2020 (99.5%) (Government of Jiangsu Province, 2021). It is expected that Nanjing will continue to have a large “invisible population” (Tan, 2010, p. 32), defined as the population that is disenfranchised and unable to request aid in accessing public education resources.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of School Choice and Satisfaction

School Choice	N	%
Public schools	137	81.50%
Private schools	31	18.50%
Choices Available		
I have several choices, and this school is my best choice.	66	39.30%
I have several choices, but this is not my best choice.	50	29.80%
I got only one choice, but I feel overall satisfied with the school.	45	26.80%
Not satisfied with the school, but this is the only choice.	7	4.20%
Difficulty in School Choice		
It was very easy	27	16.10%
Slightly easy	94	56.00%
Slightly difficult	44	26.20%
It was very difficult	3	1.80%

Economic Capital: Income and Household Location

Table 2 presents the household location and status of rural–urban migrant families in Nanjing. Participants were asked about their household location and their current living situation. More than half (56.5%) of the surveyed respondents lived in metropolitan areas of Nanjing.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Households

Household location	N	%
City	47	28.00%
City boundaries (areas close to the city centre, but with lower property prices)	95	56.50%
Towns	25	14.90%
No location provided	1	0.60%

In terms of income, Table 3 indicates the family income of the rural–urban migrant participants of Nanjing. Income is presented in yuan, the basic unit of Chinese currency. ¥32,400 is the annual subsistence allowance of a household in Nanjing in 2020; ¥48,400 is the minimum yearly wage standard of Nanjing; ¥64,560 is the average annual income of Nanjing. Although 7.7% of the rural–urban migrant families still had a household income lower than the subsistence allowance, the findings of this study indicated an increase in income compared with the findings of a previous study (Fang et al., 2017). However, the findings showed that 60.1% of rural–urban migrant families in Nanjing had a lower-than-average household income. The disadvantage in family income further reflects on the school choice process. This finding is consistent with Wu and Li's (2016) survey results, which showed that 47.04% of the participating rural–urban migrants in two major cities reported that education expense was the major issue they faced in their school choice.

Household income is an essential factor of socioeconomic status. Some rural–urban migrants owned properties, had a higher income and had already accessed urban public education resources. By contrast, public-school access to those of low socioeconomic status was still restricted. In sum, it could be concluded that the socioeconomic status of rural–urban migrants has increased compared with previous studies. However, the effect of the increase in

socioeconomic status on school choice is limited because the gap in socioeconomic status between rural–urban migrants and urban residents still exists.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Family Income

Family income	N	%
Less than ¥32,400	13	7.70%
¥32,401 to ¥48,480	50	29.80%
¥48,481 to ¥64,560	38	22.60%
More than ¥64,560	67	39.90%

Two variance analyses were undertaken to examine the effect of household location and family income on the school choice of rural–urban migrant families. There was no significant effect of family income ($F(3, 167) = 0.62, p = 0.918 > .05$) and household location ($F(3, 166) = 0.836, p = 0.435 > .05$). The result suggested that the income level and household location of rural–urban migrant families did not statistically influence the school choice of rural migrants. There is debate among scholars about how income influences school choice. Most scholars believe low income directly restricts rural–urban migrant families’ school choices (Li, 2011; Qian & Jing, 2014). However, Wu et al. (2010) suggested that financial factors cannot directly impact school choice and academic outcomes, but they could be translated into the next generation’s human, social and cultural capital. The finding of the current study is consistent with Wu et al.’s (2010) finding that family income has no statistically significant influence on school choice decisions.

Analysis of Cultural Capital Factors

Embodied cultural capital is measured by rural–urban migrant children’s frequency of participating in music, art or family activities and the time spent doing homework or reading after school. Table 4 presents the effect of the significant indicators of families’ embodied cultural capital on school choice. The only statistically significant factor is the interaction of after-school reading, music and art activities, and family activity. It yielded an F ratio of $F(2, 78)=4.33, p=0.016 < .05$, showing its significant influence on rural–urban migrants’ school choice. In terms of individual effects, the factors did not show statistical significance ($p > .05$) and all the interaction effects, including the factor of homework checking, did not report statistical significance either.

The results show that embodied cultural capital factors, especially those in relation to extracurricular development, contributed to the school choice of rural–urban migrant families. This is generally consistent with findings from Liu and Jacob (2012) that the current stage of addressing the education equity of rural–urban migrant students is “*from access to quality*” (p. 177). That is, more emphasis should be put on increasing the quality of education for rural–urban migrant students. Results of this study support the claim by providing evidence of the correlation between school access and extracurricular development. In sum, the development of embodied cultural capital hugely contributed to the choice of public schools.

Table 4. Factorial variance analysis of embodied cultural capital

Source	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Corrected Model	88	0.182	1.548	0.025
Intercept	1	85.126	722.471	0
A	3	0.135	1.143	0.337
M	3	0.146	1.24	0.301
Fam	3	0.143	1.217	0.309
H	3	0.125	1.057	0.372
A × M	6	0.145	1.231	0.300
A × Fam	8	0.113	0.960	0.473
A × H	9	0.161	1.363	0.220
M × Fam	6	0.149	1.268	0.282
Fam × H	6	0.181	1.534	0.178
M × H	8	0.132	1.123	0.357
A × M × Fam **	2	0.51	4.331*	0.016*
A × M × H	5	0.142	1.202	0.316
A × Fam × H	3	0.038	0.321	0.810
M × Fam × H	6	0.179	1.522	0.182
A × M × Fam × H	1	0.132	1.116	0.294
Total	167			
Error	78	0.118		
Corrected Total	166			

R Squared = .636 (Adjusted R Squared = .225)

< .10; *p < .05; **p < .01

A: After-school Reading; M: Music or art activity; Fam: Family activity; H: Homework checking

The measurement of objectified cultural capital includes the amount of parents' investment in schooling, private supplementary tutoring and the development of art or music abilities. Table 5 shows the result of the factorial analysis of variance on the effect of migrant parents' objectified cultural capital factors on their school choices. Only the effect of parents' investment in private supplementary tutoring was statistically significant at the .05 significance level. The effect for private supplementary tutoring yielded an F ratio of $F(3, 134) = 3.10$, $p < .05$, indicating a significant difference between parents who pay more for children's private supplementary tutoring. Considering the sample size, the effects for money paid for art and music activities ($.05 < p = 0.08 < .10$) and the interaction between private supplementary tutoring and art and music activities ($.05 < p = 0.08 < .10$) may still show relevance to the school choices of rural–urban migrants.

Table 5: Factorial Variance Analysis of Objectified Cultural Capital

Source	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Corrected Model	32	0.268	2.149	0.001
Intercept	1	76.685	615.894	0
Schooling	3	0.069	0.557	0.644
PST **	3	0.386	3.099*	0.029*
AMT*	3	0.281	2.257 [#]	0.085 [#]
Schooling * PST	7	0.175	1.408	0.207
Schooling * AMT	7	0.174	1.399	0.211
PST * AMT *	6	0.238	1.913 [#]	0.083 [#]
Schooling * AMT * PST	3	0.255	2.05	0.11
Error	134	0.125		
Total	167			
Corrected Total	166			

a R Squared = .339 (Adjusted R Squared = .181)

[#]p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01

PST: Private supplementary tutoring; AMT: Art and Music training

The results show that migrant families' objectified cultural capital development strongly correlated with the choice of public schools. Scholars claim that migrant students' lack of academic competitiveness is one of the restrictions on the school choices of rural–urban migrant students, as local urban schools prefer students with better educational outcomes (Chen et al., 2013). Zhang and Bray (2017) claimed that the development of private supplementary tutoring has set up bias against those who have lower socioeconomic status. Results of this study align with Zhang and Bray's statement that the lack of private supplementary tutoring may increase the disadvantage in migrant students' academic competitiveness, which further damages the public-school admission of rural–urban migrant students.

In addition, the development of art or music activities had possibly become a hidden criterion for schools to select students. Zhang and Luo (2016) claimed that those abilities, including playing musical instruments, extracurricular reading, and sports training, in which rural–urban migrants are falling far behind, did not show up in curriculum teaching, but had become a “*hidden curriculum*” (p. 15) closely linked to school admission. Those ability developments need much more investment than curricular learning, and this is far above the budget of most rural–urban migrant children (Zhang & Luo, 2016). In sum, rural–urban migrant parents' investment in private supplementary tutoring and music or art ability development is the core objectified cultural capital factor that influences rural–urban migrants' school choices.

As the parents' role is of “*social agent*” for their children (Li, 2011, p.25), and cultural capital is passed down from parents to children, the institutionalised cultural capital of rural–urban migrant families is measured by parents' education levels. A factorial variance analysis was undertaken to examine the effect of parents' education level on their school choices. Neither the influence of the fathers' education levels ($p = 0.519 > 0.05$), nor the mothers' education levels ($p = 0.390 > 0.05$), nor the interaction effect of the fathers' and mothers' education levels, showed statistical relevance in the survey data. Education level is a crucial indicator of institutionalised cultural capital. Although several previous studies (Mu et al., 2018; Wang, 2009) suggested that parents' education levels impact school choice, the results of this study could not

support the effect of institutionalised cultural capital on the school choice of rural–urban migrant families.

Discussion

Drawing on the empirical findings of this study, the household registration policy is still the dominant factor that influences the school selection decisions of the rural–urban migrant community. Therefore, it could be a long process to remove the household registration restrictions for the school enrolment of migrant students. Despite the limitations of the household registration policy, it is positive that rural–urban migrant families had more options for selecting schools than in previous studies. As noted, rural–urban migrants often had to enrol in quasi-state (migrant-run) schools (Yu, 2021). The current study outlined empirical evidence that more choices are available, especially in some public schools they had been dreaming of. However, it would also be problematic to state that the school choice situation has improved for those in very disadvantaged social groups. Still, few rural–urban migrant families face difficulties accessing public schools or feel challenged when making school selections.

Also, it is critical that the characteristics of these rural–urban migrants changes along with the social and economic development; that is, the terminology of rural–urban migrants now also includes the second generation of rural–urban migrants, as well as university graduates who remain in host cities (Gao, 2021). The complexity of the characteristics of rural–urban migrants added difficulties in seeking policy solutions, especially those that are one-size-fits-all. The distinction of social status has raised the need for urgent research to clarify the sub-groups of rural–urban migrants and for targeted policymaking to address the schooling difficulties of those varied subgroups.

The results have outlined an interesting fact that the distinction of school choice decisions was identified as highly correlated to the factors which are beyond the school gate: private supplementary tutoring or extra-curriculum activities and ability development. The results indicated that those parents tended to focus more on the children’s development of extracurricular abilities after school, which shows that disadvantaged socioeconomic status led to lower academic success and impacted seriously on future enrolments. This study also suggests that the embodied cultural capital factors, emphasising time spent on after-school extracurricular activities, interacted together rather than operating individually to influence school choice. Activities showing higher distinction of tastes (e.g., musical instrument playing) distinguished the community and impacted school choice.

Conclusion

This study reveals the dual influence of public policy and cultural capital on rural–urban migrant communities. In particular, the distinction of cultural capital of rural–urban migrant families is fixed and amplified by the public policy legalisation, thereby creating new inequalities of school admission within this social group. The lack of educational resources, especially high-quality educational resources, in cities directly leads to the government’s inability to reasonably allocate educational resources. Local governments choose to treat educational resources as a “*privilege*” to “*reward*” outsiders who contribute to the city’s economy. This ongoing practice goes against the original intention of educational equity.

This study suggests that public policy tools should be shifted from limiting the school admission of rural–urban migration children to building educational infrastructure and improving the quality of education. At the national level, the construction of the education system should not only consider the city, but also consider the balanced development between regions and between urban and rural areas to promote the popularisation of quality education resources.

Extra-curricular study and ability development are especially detected as important cultural capital factors that influence school choices. Eventually, the solution of achieving educational equity is not only to help rural–urban migrant students to access the free public-school system, but also, more importantly, to balance the unequal distribution of education resources among schools. According to Ma et al. (2018), the Chinese central government has continuously emphasised migrant students’ equal rights to compulsory education. In 2021, the Chinese central government initiated several new policy adjustments towards this goal. For example, it has trialled policies in Beijing which no longer allow extra-curricular activities as public admission criteria (National People’s Congress of China, 2021). In addition, in the Chinese long-term Fourteenth Five-Year Plan, the Ministry of Education has set a goal of “*promoting equal access and opportunities for rural–urban migrant students.*”

Although few are following local policies addressing this issue so far, it is believed that there will be some local policy adjustments in the coming year. According to Zhang and Luo (2016), local governments’ approaches determine whether a beneficial policy for rural–urban migrants will be successfully and effectively implemented. Thus, future study is needed to examine the school admission policy adjustments made by local governments.

While this study has discussed the effectiveness of the THSRH policy and examined the economic and cultural factors that influence rural–urban migrants’ school choices in Nanjing, this study has several limitations. First, as the study was conducted online only in 2020 throughout the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, the study may thus have lost some potential participants who had no access to the internet. These potential participants may have a lower economic and cultural situation, which may influence the accuracy of the measurement of rural–urban migrant families’ socioeconomic status. Second, given the features of the research design and the rather small sample size, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to all rural–urban migrants in China. The approaches that local governments undertake to address inequities vary and may need separate examination.

References

- Al Ariss, A., Vassilopoulou, J., Özbilgin, M. F., & Game, A. (2013). Understanding career experiences of skilled minority ethnic workers in France and Germany. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(6), 1236–1256. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2012.709190>
- Albright, J., Hartman, D., & Widin, J. (Eds.). (2018). *Bourdieu’s field theory and the social sciences* (pp. 1–15). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bathmaker, A. M. (2015). Thinking with Bourdieu: Thinking after Bourdieu. Using “field” to consider in/equalities in the changing field of English higher education. *Cambridge Journal of education*, 45(1), 61–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2014.988683>
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In I. Szeman & T. Kaposy (Eds.), *Cultural theory: An anthology* (pp. 81–93). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction*. Sage.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bryman, A. A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

- Chen, S., Adams, J., Qu, Z., Wang, X., & Chen, L. (2013). Parental migration and children's academic engagement: The case of China. *International Review of Education*, 59(6), 693–722. <http://doi:10.1007/s11159-013-9390-0>
- Department of Properties and Housing Arrangement. (2017). “租售同权”法案实施细则 [The regulations of tenants have the same right as householders]. <http://fcj.nanjing.gov.cn/>
- Fang, L., Sun, R. C., & Yuen, M. (2017). “Be useful to society”: Parental academic involvement in rural to urban migrant children's education in China. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 18(3), 361–371. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-017-9491-8>
- Gong, L. J. (2010). *资本: 社会实践工具: 布尔迪厄的资本理论* [Capital, the tool of social practice: The capital theory of Pierre Bourdieu]. Press of Henan University.
- Goodburn, C. (2009). Learning from migrant education: A case study of the schooling of rural migrant children in Beijing. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 29(5), 495–504. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2009.04.005>
- Government of Jiangsu Province. (2021). *我省启动未成年人保护工作宣传月* [Jiangsu province has launched the “month of underage care”]. http://www.jiangsu.gov.cn/art/2021/5/31/art_60096_9831898.html
- Joy, S., Game, A. M., & Toshniwal, I. G. (2020). Applying Bourdieu's capital-field-habitus framework to migrant careers: Taking stock and adding a transnational perspective. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 31(20), 2541–2564. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2018.1454490>
- Li, N. (2011). *China's migrant children: Lack of cultural capital and Hukou policy* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri-Columbia]. MOspace Institutional Repository. <https://mospace.umsystem.edu/xmlui/handle/10355/15781>
- Li, Y., & Tan, T. (2019). The relationship between family economical capital and reading interest of primary and secondary school students: The mediating role of family cultural capital. *Studies of Psychology and Behavior*, 17(4), 520–528. <https://caod.oriprobe.com/issues/1920069/toc.htm>
- Liu, J. (2015). Understanding inequality in public school admission in urban China. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 4(4), 434–447. <http://doi:10.1108/aeds-03-2015-0009>
- Liu, J., & Jacob, W. J. (2012). From access to quality: Migrant children's education in urban China. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 12(3), 177–191. <http://doi:10.1007/s10671-012-9136-y>
- Luo, F., & Zhang, Y. (2017). Probing the SES-achievement connection in the fast-changing society of China: A comparison of urban, rural, and migrant students. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 18(1), 101–113. <http://doi:10.1007/s12564-017-9472-y>
- Ma, Y., Hou, X., Huang, J., Wang, W., Li, Y., Zhou, X., & Du, X. (2018). Educational inequality and achievement disparity: An empirical study of migrant children in China. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 87, 145–153. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.02.026>
- Mu, G. M., Dooley, K., & Luke, A. (Eds.). (2019). *Bourdieu and Chinese education: Inequality, competition, and change*. Routledge.

- National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2021). *Report of the seventh national census*.
http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/202105/t20210510_1817176.html
- National People's Congress of China. (2006). *The Compulsory Education Law of China*.
<http://english.www.gov.cn/>
- National People's Congress of China. (2021). 关于进一步减轻义务教育阶段学生作业负担和校外培训负担的意见 [Regulations of reducing the homework burden and extra-curriculum tutoring for students at compulsory education stage].
http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xxgk/moe_1777/moe_1778/202107/t20210724_546576.html
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2017). *OECD programme for international student assessment 2018: Parent questionnaire*.
https://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2018database/CY7_201710_QST_MS_PAQ_NoNotes_final.pdf
- Pao, M. (2014). A study on the correlation between students' cultural capital and learning motivation in Kaohsiung Elementary School. (Master's thesis, National Pingtung University of Education). NPTU Institutional Repository. <https://ndltd.ncl.edu.tw/cgi-bin/gs32/gswweb.cgi/login?o=dnclcdr&s=id=%22102NPTT0204026%22.&searchmode=basic>
- Peng, B. (2021). Chinese migrant parents' educational involvement: Shadow education for left-behind children. *Hungarian Educational Research Journal*, 11(2), 101-123.
<https://doi.org/10.1556/063.2020.00030>
- Qian, L., & Jing, A. (2014). Urban community development and private education dilemma: Based on a field study of a city in east China. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 2(6), 437-445. <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2014.020601>
- Romanowski, M. H. (2003). Cultural capital of migrant students: Teachers' and students' perspectives and understandings. *Rural Educator*, 24(3), 40-48.
- Shen, Y., & Zhong, H. (2018). Rural-to-urban migration and juvenile delinquency in urban China: A social control perspective. *Asian Journal of Criminology*, 13(3), 207-229.
<http://doi:10.1007/s11417-018-9267-z>
- Spring, J. H. (2009). *Globalization of education: An introduction*. Routledge.
- Tan, G. (2010). Under the same blue sky? Inequity in migrant children's education in China. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 12(2), 31-40.
- Wang, X. (2009). 农民工家长择校影响因素分析 [An analysis of the factors that influence the school choice of migrant parents]. *Contemporary Education and Culture*, 5, 102-110.
<http://doi:10.13749/j.cnki.cn62-1202/g4.2009.05.012>
- Wei, J., & Hou, J. (2010). The household registration system, education system, and inequalities in education for migrant children. *Chinese Education & Society*, 43(5), 77-89.
<https://doi.org/10.2753/CED1061-1932430505>
- Wu, Q., Palinkas, L. A., & He, X. (2010). An ecological examination of social capital effects on the academic achievement of Chinese migrant children. *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(8), 2578-2597. <http://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcq051>

- Wu, Q., Tsang, B., & Ming, H. (2014). Social capital, family support, resilience and educational outcomes of Chinese migrant children. *British Journal of Social Work*, 44(3), 636–656. <http://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcs139>
- Wu, Z., & Li, J. (2016). 农民工随迁子女在城市接受教育的现实困境和政策选择 [The actual difficulties and the realistic choice of rural–urban migrant students’ compulsory education in urban cities]. *Education Research*. 37(9), 19–31.
- Xiong, Y. (2017). Urbanized children: Urban-rural awareness and identity consciousness of migrant workers’ children. *Chinese Education & Society*, 50(4), 409–424. <http://doi:10.1080/10611932.2017.1382164>
- Yoon, E. S. (2020). School choice research and politics with Pierre Bourdieu: New possibilities. *Educational Policy*, 34(1), 193–210. <http://doi:10.1177/0895904819881153>
- Yu, H. (2018). Shaping the educational policy field: “Cross-field effects” in the Chinese context. *Journal of Education Policy*, 33(1), 43–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2017.1310931>
- Yu, H. (2020). Inheriting or re-structuring habitus/capital? Chinese migrant children in the urban field of cultural reproduction. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 52(12), 1277–1289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2019.1689814>
- Zhang, D., & Luo, Y. (2016). Social exclusion and the hidden curriculum: The schooling experiences of Chinese rural migrant children in an urban public school. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 64(2), 215–234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2015.1105359>
- Zhang, W., & Bray, M. (2017). Equalising schooling, unequalising private supplementary tutoring: Access and tracking through shadow education in China. *Oxford Review of Education*, 44(2), 221–238. <http://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2017.1389710>