

School Choice in Chinese Context: Analysing the “Nearby Enrollment” Policy for Compulsory Education in Beijing through the Policy Cycle

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How to cite this paper: Weng, J. S. (2024). School Choice in Chinese Context: Analysing the “Nearby Enrollment” Policy for Compulsory Education in Beijing through the Policy Cycle. *Advances in Applied Sociology, 14*, 322-336.
<https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2024.146022>

Received: May 25, 2024

Accepted: June 25, 2024

Published: June 28, 2024

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Abstract

School choice policies have been viewed as a widely debated topic in education policy. A number of scholars have contended that school choice policies meet the needs of diverse student populations and provide parents with a variety of enrollment options. Nevertheless, other scholars argue that the policies have created problems such as disorganization in education. A significant amount of research has been devoted to understanding how these policies have been implemented in public education systems around the world and the effects that the policies have led to. It can be worth mentioning that few studies have analyzed the discrepancies between the policy text and the policy implementation of school choice policies in terms of the policy cycle and policy implementation, especially in the context of China. This paper will use textual analysis under the guide of the theory of policy cycle to analyze the dynamics of the policy and the factors that led to the discrepancy between the policy text and the policy implementation, using the example of Beijing’s “nearby enrollment” policy. Overall, although Beijing’s enrollment policy has been constantly adjusted at different stages of development due to the dynamic nature of the policy’s continuous adjustment, there are still discrepancies between the policy text and the policy implementation.

Keywords

School Choice, Nearby Enrollment, Policy Cycle, Neo-Liberalism

1. Introduction

Because of the impact of globalization’s political economy on national and local economies and cultures, Neo-liberalism has garnered considerable attention in the last few decades (Hursh, 2007). School officials began to see the function of

public education through a neoliberal lens, emphasizing economic, political, and social efficacy in their responses to customers (Parrillo, 2009). By the mid-1990s, champions of deregulated, free-market school choice began to see their reform agenda as highly “democratic” in one way, according to Wells, Slayton, and Scott (2002). In the United States, for example, democracy is increasingly associated with the freedom to consume and possess property in a capitalist society. As for education, the implication in the context of education is freedom to pick schools and freedom from government regulation (Parrillo, 2009). School choice policies have acquired international traction as a popular reform option supported by governments, reformers, and communities for more than 25 years (Potterton et al., 2020). Many scholars believe that school choice policies have satisfied the needs of different groups of students and provide parents with a variety of options for enrollment. However, on the other hand, some scholars argue that the policies bring about problems such as increased inter-school disparity, disruption of educational order. These lead to the result that the topic of school choice becomes controversial. As a result, a significant corpus of study is devoted to understanding how these policies are implemented in public education systems around the world (e.g., Ball, 2012a, 2012b; Chakrabarti & Peterson, 2009; Buchanan & Fox, 2017; Lubienski & Yoon, 2017; Mehta, 2013; Ndimande & Lubienski, 2017; Powers, 2009). The school choice policies have been presented in a variety of ways in various countries. How does school choice policy work in the Chinese context? What are the factors that account for the discrepancies between policy text and policy implementation? How can the theory of policy cycle help analyze those discrepancies? To answer these questions, this essay will especially focus on the school choice policy—the “nearby enrollment” policy for compulsory education in the context of Beijing, China. First, the essay will provide some background knowledge of the Neo-liberalism, school choice and the “nearby enrollment” policy. In particular, the background of the school choice in China will be highlighted in detail. Then, it will introduce the theory of policy cycle. At the same time, a better understanding of the analysis of the “nearby enrollment” policy in Beijing will be offered through linking the lens of policy cycle. From the perspective of policy cycle, the “nearby enrollment” policy in Beijing will be analyzed from the three contexts of policy cycle in order to show that although Beijing’s enrolment policy is constantly being adjusted to the issues because of the dynamic nature of the policy that is constantly being adjusted at different stages of development, there is still a discrepancy between the text of the policy and its enactment.

2. Background

Neo-liberalism has given rise to the educational reforms of school choice. School choice policies vary in different areas of the world. One of them requires students to be assigned to school districts or attendance zones under the legal prerogative of “proximity to schools”, as is the case in mainland of China. In China,

a notable feature of school choice is the involvement of school choice fees. Parents can obtain enrollment places by paying additional fees to schools, even if those schools are not within their enrollment boundaries. While school choice is a problem in many Chinese cities, it is particularly prominent in Beijing. As China's capital city and a mega-population city, the high demand for quality education due to huge population movements has led to a strain on quality education resources and an inability to fully satisfy the majority of parents' demand for quality compulsory education, making the severity of the problem of school choice in Beijing distinct and representative of other ordinary cities in China. This section will provide background knowledge on the situation of school choice by paying attention on the different approaches to school choice in various countries, particularly in China, and in one of the most representative cities of school choice, Beijing.

2.1. Neo-Liberalism & Choice

Neo-liberalism claims that the ideal way to increase human well-being is to give entrepreneurs more freedom and skills inside an institutional framework marked by strong private property rights, open markets, and free trade (Harvey, 2005). The competition fostered by this market approach is said to contribute to economic development, both for individual participants and for the broader economy (Brenner & Theodore, 2002), and is thus emphasized in educational policy. Education policy can be defined of principles, norms, and ambitions for how educational systems should run (Burch, 2018). Such rules are created at a certain point in time and in a specific context, and they are intended to fulfil specific demands (Kress, 2000; Woodside-Jiron, 2011). The inextricable link between education and its broader social context has to be taken into account, especially as the neoliberal movement for individual autonomy, choice, and freedom gains traction in subtle but frightening ways. What emerges from this review of the background knowledge of Neo-liberalism being emphasized in education policy is that when study school choice policy, it can be crucial to think about it in a specific context. School choice is not a simple educational phenomenon, it is not the result of isolated, individual or accidental factors, but the comprehensive effect and interaction of various factors such as mechanism, law, policy, economy, culture, society and population. It can be significant to relate policy to the broader social context.

Furthermore, Neo-liberalism marks a social shift in the relationship between the public interest, the market, and individualism. Within the neoliberal framework, the market becomes the primary operator within the public sector, while individual "choice" signifies personal responsibility (Hursh, 2007). Burch (2018) explains that Neo-liberalism in education assumes that choice and competition among schools will create a system that meets the needs of all students, as schools will strive to remain competitive in the market. Within this framework, commentators argue that individual students become data points and are measured against mythical "ideal" students who can successfully meet rigorous stan-

dards of proficiency (Burch, 2018). As Apple (2006) asserts, the neoliberal system ignores inequality and threatens to further hierarchize schools. This inspiration for the focus on school choice policy is that it can be unreasonable to overemphasize its positive effects, such as schools being able to remain competitive in the market and parents having a variety of choices. Focusing too much on the positive aspects and ignoring the other can be flawed.

2.2. School Choice & Nearby Enrollment Policy

The so-called school choice refers to the fact that the families who enter the school, in the reality that the distribution of high-quality educational resources is not reasonable enough, voluntarily give up the nearby enrollment according to their own wishes, and choose to study in a school that meets the comprehensive interests of the families through various channels. When objective differences in school quality and a growing diversity of parental choice are taken into account (Tsang, 2001), moving costs for either relocating or long-distance commuting are unavoidable if parents want to attend any “best school” rather than the one closest to home, creating a difficult situation for planning policies aimed at reducing school travel distance (Bi & Zhang, 2016). Reducing inequity in the distribution of high-quality education resources across areas and groups appears to be a plan that satisfies both the need for high-quality education and the convenience of close schooling. However, establishing the evaluation criteria during the process of achieving that ideal condition in practical policymaking is difficult (Bi & Zhang, 2016). Although ensuring equitable access to basic education is pounded home as a general principle in most countries’ public education systems, not all aspects of the goal can be met at the same time. In specific settings, there have been two unique solutions and two distinct techniques practised and discussed (Bi & Zhang, 2016).

Allowing or supporting school choice in educational policies that transform proximity into an option for parents, taking distance between school and home as one of many criteria, as is the case in England and Wales, is one way (Hamnett & Butler, 2013). Despite having a traditional school district structure, some industrialized countries, such as the United States, are seeing an overall trend toward the creation of different school choice alternatives (Ingram & Kenyon, 2014). “Choice,” on the other hand, is inextricably linked to resources such as money, location, and cultural capital, all of which are unevenly distributed among the population (Reay, 2012). Many of the equity-destroying practises associated with school choice, such as “collateralized choice” (Taylor, 2007), “white flight” or “district avoidance” (Noreisch, 2007), and the methods by which individual motorized students are driven further and further away from school, have been demonstrated in leading Western countries (Easton & Ferrari, 2015).

The other option is to require pupils to be assigned to school districts or attendance zones under the legal privilege of “proximity to school,” as is the case in mainland of China (Li, 2007). In China, “attending adjacent schools” is con-

sidered to be the legitimacy of the school district system in the sense of educational equity (Zhu, 2001). Governments at all levels should safeguard the right to “schooling in the vicinity” of school-age children nationwide, according to China’s Compulsory Education Law, enacted in 1986 and modified in 2006. However, because the current hukou system (household registration system) ties public benefits to the location of the household registration, such a provision is considered flawed because, as some migrant children have discovered, if a child does not have an eligible household registration, he or she cannot attend a public elementary school near the household registration (Yang, 2006).

2.3. School Choice in the Majority of Chinese Cities

Since the reform and opening up, as China’s economic strength and social development level and civilization have increased significantly, the disposable income of individuals and families has increased rapidly. At the same time, the development of education has accelerated and expanded, and the gap in education and teaching standards between urban schools of all levels and types has widened (Bi & Zhang, 2016). Especially in the examination-driven education system, the existence of key schools in the state sector has led to huge differences in the quality of schools, which has exacerbated the imbalance of educational resources among schools and led to the social phenomenon of “school choice”. In China, school choice is a bottom-up movement, initiated by parents who want to choose a school for their children from kindergarten onwards that they believe is good. A striking feature is the involvement of school choice fees (Bi & Zhang, 2016); that is, parents pay additional fees to schools of their choice that are not within their enrollment range. Thus, school choice students can pay school choice fees to get into their preferred schools, while schools and local governments can increase their economic capital by collecting and sharing fees from school choice students. This high fee for school choice in many Chinese cities has evolved to some extent into social injustices (Bi & Zhang, 2016).

2.4. School Choice in Beijing

While school choice is a problem in many cities in China, it is particularly prominent in Beijing. The 21st Century Education Research Institute found through a survey of four major urban centers in Beijing that only 48% of the students enrolled in school in 2011 were computer-ranked. More than half of the students chose their schools through other channels (Han, 2020). As China’s capital and megacity, Beijing has a resident population of 21.71 million and a non-domiciled population of approximately 7.6 million. The city’s large and fast-moving population has led to a high demand for quality education, resulting in a strain on quality educational resources that cannot fully meet the capital’s need for quality compulsory education (Han, 2020). Because of the severity of the school choice problem in Beijing that distinguishes it from other ordinary cities in China, Beijing is chosen as a representative context for the analysis of

school choice policies in this essay. The next section will analyze the “nearby enrollment” policy in Beijing by introducing the policy cycle theory and contextualizing it in the Beijing context.

3. Policy Cycle & the “Nearby Enrollment” Policy in Beijing

Policy is more than just the stated content of a policy. It’s critical to think of policymaking as a process that includes everything that happens before and after the policy text is written. From the setting of influence, through the production of policy texts, through practise and outcomes, the evolution, formation, and reality of these policies are traced (Ball, 1994). The trajectory viewpoint looks at how policies evolve, change, and decay over time and space, as well as where they break down. Policymaking is a process that takes place in the context of meaning conflicts. The policy cycle framework views a policy’s evolution as three interconnected settings, each with its own set of venues of activity requiring struggle and compromise (Bowe et al., 1992). The “policy cycle,” as defined by Stephen Bowe, shows that there is still potential for local interpretations (Ball, 1994). This section seeks to draw attention to the dynamic development of policy in specific contexts and the differences between the text and enactment of policy under policy recontextualization throughout the enactment of “nearby enrollment” policy in Beijing by presenting the concept of policy cycle and contextualizing it in the Beijing context.

3.1. Context of Influence

The context of influence is where the policy agenda is initiated, and therefore where discourse produces the possibilities of policy—how to define the social problem and what the possible solution is (Bowe et al., 1992). In the context of the “nearby enrollment” policy in Beijing, the problems of school choice fees, the influx of immigrants, parental choice tendencies and the enrolment policy of public primary schools in the current Chinese social context will be presented as follows.

3.1.1. School Choice Fees

In the 1990s, the implementation of the priority school policy exacerbated the imbalance of educational resources among schools, undermined the principle of educational equity, and led to the emergence of various educational chaos such as “school choice fees” (Tsang, 2001). In the context of tax reform, local governments, faced with tight education budgets, began to take some of the funds from school choice fees as a supplement to education funding. Schools also began to charge school choice fees, as education funding was insufficient for schools to meet their own development requirements. In some cases, public schools were converted or “co-located” with government agencies to receive high “co-payment” fees. Driven by common interests, local governments and schools have given tacit approval to the collection of school choice fees, and a culture of school choice has spread, and violating educational equity (Bi &

Zhang, 2016). Consequently, policy issues have been accumulating, causing great national concern.

3.1.2. The Influx of Immigrants

Under the “Two Mainstream Channels” policy enacted in 2001, local governments in Beijing and Shanghai struggled to accommodate as many migrant children as possible, resulting in a situation where many state schools were enrolling too many students (Yu, 2021). As a result, the majority of teachers and principals interviewed felt that the burden of increased workload, pressure and shortage of teaching resources had led to a decline in academic performance in their schools. More than half of the teachers and principals interviewed reported a shortage of teaching resources as a result of enrolling too many (immigrant) students (Yu, 2021). Principals also reported that small class size reforms designed to improve the quality of education by reducing class size had to be halted. At the same time, most teachers interviewed complained that their workload had increased because some immigrant parents were unable to cooperate with them in their children’s home learning as much as local parents (Yu, 2021).

3.1.3. Parental Choice Tendencies

As society progresses, Chinese parents tend to choose schools with a good reputation and high quality of instruction (Tsang, 2001), while the distance of the school from home and the costs associated with the policy seem to be secondary. The local market for homeownership plays a key role in this regard. Differences in school quality are often capitalized into housing prices, and parents use the housing market as a way to compete for school places (Cheshire & Sheppard, 2004). This is also true for Beijing. In Beijing, housing prices in the legal catchment areas of key elementary schools are notoriously high; in 2011, the premium for housing in the Beijing real estate market for key elementary school districts was about 8.1% (Zheng et al., 2012). Social surveys directly suggest that parental choice is unavoidable. According to a public opinion survey on the implementation of urban and rural planning in Beijing (2013), 37.4% of families said they would rather travel long distances to attend a high-quality school (BICP, 2013).

3.1.4. Enrolment Policy of Public Primary Schools

Under such circumstances, quality public primary schools in competitive districts have made it clear to give priorities to the students with a hukou and even a housing property in a designated catchment area, a so-called school neighbourhood (Lai et al., 2009) which is distinguished from the school district as the specified lawful spatial range for enrolment, while school district is not directly involved in enrolment. This policy then marginalizes children with non-local hukou in local decision-making. They can enter a public primary school only by providing an actual proof of residence or parents’ residence permit to prove the legitimacy of actual residence, which is a disguised alternative requiring housing purchase in the designated area (Hu et al., 2014).

3.2. Context of Text Production

A second context refers to policy text production. While usually articulated in the language of general public good, the policy text is the outcome of struggle and compromise between policy-makers and therefore presents the interests of particular groups (Bowe et al., 1992). In this section, apart from the transmutation of the policy text, the arenas within the context of the “nearby enrollment” policy in Beijing will also illustrate how different interests are integrated into and presented through the policy texts.

3.2.1. Transmutation of the Text of Beijing’s Compulsory Education Enrollment Policy (1997-Now)

1) Allowing school choice: charging school choice fees (1997-2000)

In 1997, the State Education Commission issued the “Opinions on the Principles of Regulating the Current Conduct of Compulsory Education”, which allowed a small number of public schools to enroll selective students for a short period of time after approval in cities where it was difficult to achieve free admission to compulsory education schools in one step. In 2000, the Ministry of Education issued the “National Primary and Secondary School Fees Special Treatment Implementation Opinions” and the Beijing Municipal Education Commission “Notice on the Issuance of Opinions on the Treatment of Primary and Secondary School Fees in 2000”. The document proposes to continue to promote the elimination of the problem of unscrupulous fees and schools selecting students, and to achieve the goal of stopping the admission of selected students to public schools within three years (Han, 2020).

2) Prohibition of School Choice: Multi-sectoral Linkage (2000-2010)

In 2001, the Office of the State Council and the Ministry of Education issued the Opinions on Further Improving the Work of Rectifying Education Fees, which reiterated the policy objective of prohibiting fees, and required that compulsory education must adhere to the principle of enrolling students in schools close to where they live. In the face of the school choice trend and the blatant replacement of policies, in 2004 the Ministry of Education, together with other relevant departments, jointly issued the “Opinions on the Implementation of the 2004 Work of Regulating Education Disorderly Charges”, which strictly regulated the charging behavior of schools of all levels and types, and resolutely prohibited the establishment of unauthorized charging items, the raising of fees and the expansion of fees. From 2004 to 2010, the state has issued successive “bans” to regulate disorderly fees. Beijing has also issued “Opinions on Further Regulating Education Fees” and “Notice on Strictly Implementing the “Three Limits” Policy on Admission of Selective Students” (Han, 2020).

3) Policy Promotion Period: Policy Changes under the Promotion of Fair and Balanced Development of Compulsory Education (2010-now)

The 2010 National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) makes balanced development of educational resources a strategic task in compulsory education, effectively reducing school dispari-

ties, addressing the problem of school choice, and accelerating the development of weakly-performing schools. It is clearly stipulated that no key schools and key classes shall be set up in the compulsory education stage to ensure that school-age children and teenagers are enrolled in schools close to their homes. In the same year, the “Beijing Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)” proposed to establish a fair, high-quality, innovative and open education pattern in the capital, and to promote the high-quality and balanced development of compulsory education. At this point, the policy value orientation of the national and local governments shifted to focus on education equity and education balance, starting a new policy course of pay (Han, 2020).

3.2.2. Integration and Presentation of Different Interests

Policy, according to Jenkins (2007), is about deciding what goals to pursue and how to attain them in a particular scenario. To put it another way, policies are the techniques and mechanisms through which intentions are translated into actions. As a result, action and policy are inextricably linked. Trowler (2003) expands on the idea that policy is dynamic and processual, claiming that it stems from three sources: the competition between policymakers and policy implementers, the fact that policy statements can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and the enormous complexity of executing policy. When considering policy, it's helpful to think of it as a dynamic rather than static process. There are three basic sources of dynamism: First, there is frequently disagreement between those who formulate policy and those who implement it on the most essential policy issues or problems, as well as the desired outcomes. Second, policy interpretation is a dynamic process: policy statements are virtually always open to alternative readings, depending on who is conducting the “job” of interpretation. Third, policy practise is exceedingly complicated, covering both the practises that the policy “describes” and the practises that are intended to put the policy into action. Simple policy descriptions of practises do not convey their diversity and complexity, and policy implementation results in practise may diverge from policymakers' goals.

In response to this view, Trowler (2003) argues that this view emphasizes the importance of social agency, struggle and compromise, and the importance of understanding how policy is “read”. In addition to this, Ball (2012a) also points out how policy is a statement that emerges from the struggles and compromises between the different individuals, groups and interests involved in the policy making process. In the context of this paper, conflicting and conflicting interests emerge between the government, as the main body of policy development, and local officials and schools, as the main body of policy implementation. Dating back to the 1990s, in the context of the tax-sharing reform, local governments were strapped for education funds and under financial pressure. This, coupled with the abolition of the education surcharge and farmers' pooled funds after the rural tax reform and the state's exemption of school fees at the compulsory edu-

cation level in 2007, further increased the burden on grassroots education (Han, 2020). This has led local governments and schools to make up for the lack of funding by charging school choice fees. The emergence of the school choice fee issue, however, has led to widespread discontent among parents and questions about educational equity. Such discontent has played a role in the collective struggle and compromise of different interests.

As Deem and Davies (1991) point out, human agency can play a role in subverting the intentions of others in the process of educational change. Here, the broad participation of public opinion can influence the government to make changes to policy texts. For example, Chinese parents' condemnation of school choice fees influenced the Chinese government to revise the text of its school choice policy. Parents began to express and appeal for equal rights and benefits through various channels and means (Han, 2020). In the new media era, some parents exposed the phenomenon of overpriced school district houses in Beijing's Jingshan East Street, where 400 square meters of school district houses were quoted at \$130 million, equivalent to \$325,000 per square meter, through multiple channels such as the Internet and newspapers (Han, 2020). The phenomenon was quickly spread and spread, and netizens started a wave of public opinion by following posts, voting, forwarding and commenting, which reached a certain base of policy tendency, and the online public opinion coalition formed through the accumulation of public opinion became an important driving factor for policy development. Under the supervision of public opinion pressure, the government, which aims to implement educational fairness, has introduced a number of ban notices on school choice fees to address parents' concerns about the educational inequity caused by the phenomenon of school choice fees, and strictly prohibits schools of all levels from charging fees (Han, 2020). As can be seen, public opinion can exert tremendous pressure on government decisions, ultimately achieving the result of influencing the policy agenda and policy direction. In general, by looking at the context of text production in the policy cycle, it is possible to better understand the conflicting interests of the government as the main policy maker, local governments and schools as the main policy implementers, and parents as the target group, and how they struggle and compromise and are presented through policy texts. It can be seen from the above that due to the dynamic nature of the policy, the "nearby enrollment" policy in Beijing can be adjusted constantly to the issues at different stages of development. However, there is still a discrepancy between the text of the policy and its enactment due to the complexity of the context of practice.

3.3. Context of Practice

The last context is that of practice. As Bowe et al. (1992) point out, emphasizing the agency of practitioners "policy is not simply received and implemented within this arena, rather it is subject to interpretation and then "recreated". This section will analyze the complexity of the context of policy in order to better

understand the discrepancy between the text of the policy and its enactment.

The definition of policy is generally characterised as an attempt to solve problems as a matter of course in most of the existing work on education policy (Ball, 2012a). Such a policy understanding may appear to be superficial. Most policies don't instruct you what to do. Because of the differences between policy and practise, the presentation of policy cannot simply be viewed as a problem-solving attempt. It's critical to understand the distinction between the two when interpreting a new policy. Policies are frequently crude and are expressed solely through language. Practice, on the other hand, is complicated. Its nature is erratic and ephemeral (Ball, 2012a). As a result, policy is susceptible to implementation. The policy can readily be degraded and weakened in the course of practise. Moving from policy to practise also necessitates a transformational process. In other words, rather than being merely implemented, these policy statements must be translated from text to relevant action impacted by context. The interpretation of policy materials is part of the translation process. While policy writings released by the government and appropriate professional bodies are typically authoritative and compelling, they are impacted by policy actors during the translation process. Policy actors can use a range of resources to interpret policy documents. Each policy actor, in particular, reads or is exposed to content related to their own experience, and will interpret the policy through the lens of their own identity and subjective perspective (Ball, 2012a). As a consequence, various policy actors will read the same policy wording differently. This can explain the discrepancy between the text and the enactment of the policy, despite the fact that a dynamically evolving policy can be adapted to the problem.

In the process of policy enactment, many scholars regarded policy enactment as a dynamic, non-linear, complicated, and continuous policy process that includes re-contextualization, interpretation, translation, and transformation (Ball et al., 2012). They are attempting to materialise Foucault's concepts of discourse, power, and actor in the educational policy process, where policy actors are understood as policy actors reading texts in a variety of contexts, giving concrete meaning to policy texts, and integrating them into the daily work trajectory. Depending on the setting, policy texts are translated into real policy action measures. Policy actors' assessments of "new policy contexts" can likewise be understood as re-contextualizing policy. In the context of this essay, the interpretation of the policy by local officials as policy actors gives new content to the policy text in several ways. The first is the conceptual ambiguity of local officials regarding the text of the "nearby enrollment" policy in Beijing (Ball, 2012a). According to the text of Beijing's policy on admissions in the vicinity of the school, there is a lack of guidance from the education departments of each district and county. For example, the concept of "close to" is never explained in detail, but is only proposed to implement the policy of admitting pupils who live "close to" the school (Han, 2020). Therefore, the policy text is too general and vague on the key issues, which brings resistance to the policy enactment. The

second is the lack of openness and transparency in the process of school district delineation by local officials in policy development. Some children are separated from their families as a result of demolition and resettlement or work units, while others are sent to other schools at random due to a lack of school spots in their districts. The main cause of this situation is because the policy-making and school district zoning processes are not open and transparent enough, and there are no defined implementation requirements or public participation (Han, 2020). Additionally, there is also a lack of communication and coordination between local officials and various departments. When the people in the district ask the relevant educational administrative departments about the lack of land for education in the district and the failure to implement the supporting schools, each government department stands on its own ground and excuses itself on the grounds of historical problems or the need for joint collaboration among multiple departments (Han, 2020). In short, all these factors can lead to the discrepancy between the text and the enactment of the policy.

4. Other Factors Contributing to the Enactment Discrepancy: Intrinsic Pressure to Enactment the “Nearby Enrollment” Policy in Beijing

4.1. Uneven Distribution of Quality Educational Resources

Apart from the factors mentioned above, the intrinsic pressure to enactment the “nearby enrollment” policy in Beijing can also cause the discrepancy between the text and the enactment of the policy, which cannot be ignored as well, for example, the uneven distribution of quality educational resources in Chinese society. Due to insufficient investment in education, China has been emphasizing the priority status of education development (Han, 2020). As a direct consequence of the long-standing priority school system, the development of education has been uneven, and the disparity between schools continues to grow. When families find that they cannot get quality education resources in their neighborhood, they look for policy space and try to get their children to go to a quality school district, for example, by spending a lot of money to buy a school in a quality school district (Han, 2020). The limited educational resources cause people to the pursuit of quality education resources inevitably leads to school choice. Therefore, the contradiction between quality education resources and general education resources has to a certain extent hindered the implementation of the “nearby enrollment” policy in Beijing.

4.2. School Choice Psychology of Students’ Parents

With the development of social economy and culture, people are increasingly aware of the importance of education for future survival and development (Han, 2020). Induced by the psychology of comparison and herd mentality, parents will try to make their children enjoy quality educational resources. As individuals, parents tend to focus on their own interests and make choices that meet their

own needs. At present, the parents of students as the main body of school choice do not express their educational demands smoothly, and can only passively adopt their own means to respond to the policy, which has not really achieved the purpose of implementing the “nearby enrollment” policy in Beijing (Han, 2020).

4.3. Inadequate Evaluation Mechanism

Educational evaluation is the process of evaluating and considering the effectiveness and status of the work carried out in the education system, through scientific and systematic collection of information and quantitative and qualitative analysis and research based on objective evaluation criteria. Evaluation mainly looks at the effects of policy implementation and the problems that arise, and serves the purpose of adjusting and improving policy goals and programs. Due to the long cycle of special evaluation, it generally takes about 3 - 5 years to evaluate a special policy, which can cause problems such as lagging and untimely policy evaluation (Han, 2020). Above all, all these factors can result in the discrepancy between the text and the enactment of the policy.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay first provides the background knowledge of the neoliberalism, school choice and the “nearby enrollment” policy. Then, it analyzes the “nearby enrollment” policy in Beijing through linking the lens of policy cycle, demonstrating the dynamics of the policy and the factors that lead to the discrepancy between the text and enactment of the policy. Apart from that, other factors contributing to the enactment discrepancy have also been presented in order to show that while dynamically evolving policy can be adjusted with issues, discrepancy remains between the text of the policy and its enactment.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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