

## ABSTRACT

### **Determinant Factors of Kindergarten Choice of Ethnic Minority in China**

#### **—A Case Study of Mongolian People in Inner Mongolia—**

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In China, the law guarantees equality in ethnic minority languages. However, there has been an alarming increase in the use of Chinese as the language of communication, instead of ethnic minority languages. Loss of ethnic minority languages and a trend toward the use of Chinese as a mother language are particularly rampant among ethnic minorities living in urban areas. Preservation of ethnic languages by the ethnic minority community and its transmission to the younger generation have become a point of focus. Although learning of Chinese and English is stressed from childhood, ethnic languages are not given due importance and consequently ethnic language skills have declined. It is necessary to identify the factors determining the selection of a kindergarten for young ethnic minority children. Kindergarten is a child's first step into formal education and has a significant bearing on the selection of schools thereafter. Therefore, the type of kindergarten chosen is extremely important for child's future.

This study focuses on the kindergarten selection of the ethnic Mongolian population residing in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region.

The following five research questions were addressed:

1. How did minority education develop? What are the factors influencing minority education?
2. What hurdles do minority children encounter while seeking admission into kindergarten? How do these difficulties affect the ethnic minority community's choice of kindergarten?
3. What are the differences between minority kindergartens and ethnic Han kindergartens, and what are the factors affecting ethnic minorities' choice of kindergartens?
4. How do the expectations of ethnic minority parents affect their kindergarten choices?
5. How do ethnic minority communities carry out the practice of early childhood education, and how does this practice affect their choice of kindergartens?

This study involved quantitative research, interview surveys, and participatory observation. Field surveys were conducted three times. The respondents were parents and kindergarten teachers of urban Mongolian children.

This study identified six macro-factors and five micro-factors affecting the selection of minority

kindergartens in China. The macro factors are population, economic, politics, ideology, language status, and identity, and the micro-factors are the elements constituting the quantity and quality of early childhood education, language of instruction, family background, expectation of parents, and the educational practice of the minorities themselves.

A comparison of the results of our study with those obtained from previous studies revealed the following: first, the six macro-factors obtained in our research are similar to those of earlier results. In addition, the factors related to the quantity and quality of early childhood education, the language of instruction, and the expectation of parents are also consistent with the results of previous research. However, the factors affecting the population, economy, ideology, language status, and identity of minority schools are determined by political regulations.

Second, our study revealed new findings that are different from those of earlier studies. First, with respect to parents' educational background, the higher the educational level of parents, the higher the number of choices for Mongolian kindergartens. This is inconsistent with the conclusions of minority studies in other regions. However, previous research found that urban Mongolian people with higher education have strong ethnic consciousness. This can explain why parents with higher education level have higher expectation for their children's ethnic education. Second, our results shed light on the hitherto unexplored area of private kindergartens of ethnic minorities and the early childhood education supported by ethnic minority communities by focusing on the early childhood education and practical activities of minorities who leave their autonomous areas and live in major cities. This is a new phenomenon in China and has not been studied yet. Therefore, our conclusion on this issue is a new finding.

This study comprehensively analyzes the macro- and micro-factors determining the selection of Mongolian kindergartens and provide new findings on minority kindergarten choices. We also provide basic data on the practical activities carried out by the government, schools, ethnic minority communities, and families for advancement of ethnic minority education.