



# The Impact of Complex Language Environment and Education Policy on Education Quality in Guangdong Province

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**Abstract.** This paper reviews the impact of a complex language Environment and education policy on education Quality in Guangdong Province. Chinese central government puts considerable value on the universal education quality in China. Guangdong is one of the best representative provinces in China, with its highest population and highest GDP contribution. Although Guangdong province spent a great portion of financial resources in response to central education policies, there are still many significant social barriers in the implementation stage. This paper first focused on investigating the linguistic landscape of Guangdong province and discussed how education quality is negatively impacted by this problem by using the social group of migrant children as a case study. By further assessing the financial distribution difference among Guangdong locals, and the current education policies at both central and provincial stages, this article points out that there are still crucial inequalities in education within Guangdong province. However, by combining with the analysis of the central long-term education policies, analyses could be made that the Chinese government highly focuses on the problem of linguistic variation and inequalities. In the long-term, policies will further build a universal language environment and education equality by regulating linguistic use in school, higher teacher's professional requirements, and distribution problems in locals, bringing societal improvements in the future.

**Keywords:** Policies · Language Environment · Education Quality · Guangdong Province

## 1 Introduction

Compulsory education has always been the main factor in Chinese education values. A united and equal education environment is one of the biggest goals for Chinese education to achieve further societal progress. However, China is a country with massive different ethnic groups and different languages.

Guangdong province would be one of the provinces best representing China's current circumstance. Guangdong is the most populous province in China and is also the province with the highest GDP contribution. As its experiencing a rapid economic expansion, it opens a great number of working opportunities allowing people to move from rural

areas to cities or from other provinces. Guangdong has the greatest floating population in China. This great flow of population results in many people with diverse language contexts joining cities.

A complicated language environment causes significant problems for especially children with linguistic barriers to learning and often leads to lowering education qualities. Therefore, learning about the contribution of the language environment and how this impact overall education qualities is highly important.

Education policies are the key factors leading to societal improvements in the long term. Chinese central government highly values education. A series of educational requirements and perspective outcomes were published in order to achieve universal modernized education in the future. However, there are many barriers to entirely implementing these and achieving high qualities of education in locals, such as in Guangdong. Thus, by knowing what the linguistic landscape is, what are the targeting policies, and the resource distribution in Guangdong province, further analysis could be made on the current education qualities in Guangdong and the perspectives shifts in the future.

## 2 Guangdong Province Linguistic Landscape

As of November 1, 2020, the seventh national census registration time, Guangdong has a 52.06 million floating population, accounting for 41.32% of the province's permanent population. 29,622,100 of them are from other provinces, accounted 56.89% of the floating population; 22,444,100 people flowed within the province, accounting for 43.11% [1]. Compared with the sixth national census in 2010, the floating population increased by 17.75 million (an increase of 51.71%). The number of migrants from other provinces increased by 8.12 million [1]. These are all people likely with different languages.

Language dilemma is a key factor influencing Guangdong's education quality. Guangdong is a province with a complex linguistic environment. Of the seven dialects of Chinese, three are spoken in Guangdong: Cantonese, Hakka, and Min, as well as some local dialects. These are distributed differently among different cities and counties, while there are also many dialects branched from these main dialects. 81% of cities in Guangdong province have multiple overlapping spoken dialects. Cantonese is the widest spread language within Guangdong province, except for some small counties, most areas in Guangdong province use Cantonese as the priority, or at least most people within the area knows the language of Cantonese. Through research with uncertainty due to county areas, Governmental statistics accounted for about 15 million of the population in Guangdong speaking Hakka, mainly spread in the middle and east part of Guangdong Province [2]. Min, on the other hand, is mainly spread in areas such as Chaoshan and Leizhou areas, accounting for 17million of the population in Guangdong province [2].

Up to 2015, among all residents, the age group of 0–14 contributed to 17.39% of the population. The massive migrating population in Guangdong province is also increasing by 0.79% annually [1]. Through statistics, observations could be made by having such an increasing great demand for education. This brings a significant challenge to the language environment and teaching qualities in schools.

This complex language environment will first cause communication barriers for children to adapt to the environment and learn in the classroom. Moreover, the exclusivity of different languages will also breed the problem of campus bullying.

## 2.1 Language Impact on Education Quality

Language is a factor that correlates deeply with building interpersonal relationships with other students; students with difficulties tend to have higher rates of mental illness. The lack of language expression and learning ability of children makes them unable to integrate into school life effectively. They are unable to communicate effectively with others in their daily life and learning process, and thus, in the long term, this is not conducive to the healthy growth of children. When their spoken language is different, most tend to adapt inferior and lose the sensitivity to study or communicate with other people [3]. In relation, statistics also show an overall higher rate of psychological problems occurring in children with language expression difficulties [3]. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to students' development of language expression ability. Furthermore, students are more likely to be issued in physical conflicts if they are in families with bad family connections or low parent education levels [4]. This also proves to have a positive correlation with parents that lack mandarin linguistic ability overall [4].

The social and linguistic environment is the priority thing people need to face and perceive in school or in daily life. To better observe how the linguistic environment impacts people, research has been done, and statistics show that most age ranges will be able to understand multiple but similar dialects at work, while the group with higher education status shows an overall unified language environment [5]. In contrast, only 34% of the migrant population 0–14 age group acknowledgments in mandarin, which would cause a major problem for students to learn in school and build an interpersonal relationships with other students [5].

Most of the time, children's language choice and language ability are strongly correlated with parents' teaching methods. Many parents do not play a successful role in language teaching, especially in children's early developmental stages. Moreover, many parents do not pay enough attention to their children's language formation, believing that their language mastery and understanding are more "spontaneous" [6]. This kind of understanding will have a serious impact on children during early childhood, which will restrict their language development and language learning ability. When teachers are trying to teach a new language, these children are more likely to face some barriers during learning.

All these language factors will cause unevenness in students' ability to learn. Students with disadvantages in language directly result in receiving lower grades, lower class participation, and having trouble comprehending class contents. Even more, some may start physical conflict or be bullied due to communication or pronunciation problems [6]. Many teachers assume them to be "bad students" and therefore disregards their actual need. Thus, a complex language environment and the unevenness of students' language ability both have a significant impact on education quality in Guangdong province.

## 2.2 Migrant Children

Migrant children are the most significant group affected by diverse language problems. Guangdong province has the largest migrant population in China and also the largest number of migrant children in China: nearly 13 out of every 100 migrant population live

in Guangdong province, and nearly 23 out of every 100 migrant children in compulsory education are in Guangdong Province [7]. The compulsory education of migrant children is the most prominent educational equity issue in China. Migrant children are younger, and they will have a strong sense of discomfort when they go from their familiar environment to study and live in a strange and chaotic city.

As statistics show, most migrant children are required to know more than two or three languages, and this is especially the case in Guangdong province. For students migrating within Guangdong province, if they travel from Chaoshan areas to cities such as Guangzhou or more populous cities, they are likely required to know both Min and Cantonese, and in the meantime, they are required to learn Mandarin in school, as well as using Mandarin to learn English as a curriculum.

To build on this, most migrant children show a lack of family connection due to the heavy workload of their parents. According to Cheng L et al., there is a strong correlation between migrant children's interpersonal relationships with multiple family-related factors [8]. When parents have higher educational levels, the chance of students facing physical conflict problems with others remains low. Statistics prove that children's attachment to their mother also directly affects their social status in school; the well-being of parents' marriage and family connections all contributes to students' behaviors in the classroom [8]. Numerous studies on children's interpersonal relationship on campus found that campus interpersonal relationship has an important impact on children's social adaptation and future life trajectory. Therefore, having students overcome language problems and easing their psychological challenges is deeply important to achieve overall successful education and societal achievements in the future.

Adaptation, accommodation, acculturation, assimilation, inclusion, and cohesion are the several main problems recognized for migrant children in school. When children, especially at the lower ages, do not receive a sense of comfort and sense of belonging, or even language obstacles, children may find the learning process significantly hard. From the aspect of students in kindergarten or elementary school, schools usually will formulate unified teaching activities according to the different ages of children. In the language context, there are also unified language learning outcomes and expectations students should be capable of. However, although the language environment provided by schools is relatively standard, they are all using mandarin as the official education language, and the problem of children's differentiated development is ignored. In addition, in the actual teaching in schools, teachers do not likely to do unified planning for all children's language learning and development to achieve expected educational goals. Therefore, in the process of daily teaching activities, teachers will choose the "best" way to carry out teachings, such as encouraging or exhibiting children with good performance or their works. Meanwhile, they will choose to slightly avoid performing or stranded the work from children with "poorer" academic performance, which usually is correlated with migrant children or children with language disadvantages.

### 3 Education Policies

Education policies are the key factors that can lead to societal improvements in the long term. In February 2019, the Chinese central government improvised the policy “Modernization of Education in China 2035” [9]. The overall goals for promoting the modernization of education are 1. By 2020, the overall strength and international influence of education in China will be significantly enhanced; 2. The average years of schooling of the working-age population will be significantly increased; 3. By 2035, China will achieve the modernization of education and fall into the ranks of the country with strong education [9].

By November 25, 2021, the central government further implemented the “Notice on the Work of Creating high-quality and balanced Compulsory Education at County Level” [10]. This comprehensively implements the task of “double reduction” and accelerates the narrowing of the inter-school quality gap of compulsory education within counties. It aims to improve compulsory education from a basic balance to a quality balance between places and ensure that all school-age children enjoy equal and high-quality compulsory education [10].

#### 3.1 Policies Targeting Language Environment

In relation, policies can also ease the problem of the language environment in Guangdong society in the long term. In order to further achieve a unified language environment, the Chinese central government and Guangdong local government proposed policies to support language development within schools and society. According to “National Spoken and Written Language Measures for the Administration of Language Standards of the Working Committee” (Revised in 2015), the Chinese central government started to carry out higher regulations on language use in education [11]. Guangdong province improvised continuing education and training for teachers’ qualifications by regulating 1. Training targets: The training target is full-time (part-time) statistics practitioners, focusing on those who have obtained the Statistics Professional Qualification certificate before 2013 but have not participated in the continuing education training; 2. Training content: Local areas can independently choose training courses based on the actual situation of local statistical work, but they should pay attention to the rotation of training courses each year and training form completion examination; 3. Continuing education endorsement; 4. Continuing education registration and past history record; 5. Textbook subscription [12].

In 2013, the Education Ministry of Guangdong province and Language Working Committee of Guangdong Provincial Department of Education announced the future implementations of Outline of The National Medium- and Long-term Program for The Reform and Development of Chinese Language Undertakings (2012–2020) by deciding: 1. Promote the standard spoken and written the Chinese language; 2. Strengthen oversight, inspection, and services for the use of spoken and written languages in society; 3. Carry out the recitation, writing, and speaking of Chinese classics, and give full play to the function of inheriting the Chinese language and culture; 4. Increase financial input to ensure the development of the spoken and written languages; 5. Strengthen language examination and use of language in school [13]. These policies will regulate

higher requirements on language use in schools, therefore achieving a universal language environment in the future.

### 3.2 Different Education Funding and Education Qualities Among Areas

The statistics bureau of Guangdong province calculated a 538.69 billion (¥) investment in Guangdong education expenditure in 2020, which accounted for 20.30% of the total budget investment in Guangdong province [14]. This portion of investment in education is significantly higher than the average of other provinces, which shows the Guangdong government's incentives to improve qualities of education. Also, there is a 9.52% increase in budget spending on education compared to 2019 [14]. This seems to be a great indicator proving the education qualities in Guangdong province are high.

Even the goals of the policies aim to reduce language barriers and create equal high-quality education for students, yet, in reality, there is a significant difference in education funding between cities within Guangdong Province. According to the financial fund public by each city's government within Guangdong province, the distribution of financial resources differs dramatically. Shenzhen reported a 30.3 billion (¥) total financial budget for educational purposes, while Guangzhou reported a 9.9 billion (¥) of total financial budget for the educational purpose [15, 16]. Interestingly, a single university-Shenzhen University, has a budget investment of 5.6 billion (¥) during the year 2022, which is already higher than the budget input of many districts in other cities. Chenghai District in Shantou only reported a 1.09 billion (¥) budget for education, while Jinping District in Shantou accounted for 1.39 billion [17, 18]. Even compared with other cities such as Heyuan, Heyuan accounted for 6.5 billion (¥) in the education budget in the year 2022, while other cities such as Foshan are similar [19, 20].

Despite the difference in financial investment in education among different cities, the education qualities prove to be significantly different as well. Cities with better economic developments always correlate with having higher qualities of schools; even the school qualities also differentiate a lot between districts. The top 10 secondary schools in Shenzhen and Guangzhou all show that about 99% of students go into university. Also, students within top schools in more developed cities proved to receive significantly higher scores in China's college entrance exam than the students in smaller cities. Thus, this also increased the incentives for people to migrate to more developed cities to allow their children to receive a better education.

### 3.3 Possible Teaching Methods and Teacher's Salary

In relation to language development, higher qualities and better methods from teachers are expected. There are various teaching methods available for teachers to consider dealing with children with language disadvantages. Lyu claimed that storybook reading with children is a great way for teachers to ease their language developmental problems [3]. The observations of drawings in the story books can support them visually in comprehending, thus supporting children to understand the rich ways of expressions in the process of reading. When children read, they will be attracted and bring their own ideology to pictures and plots in the books [3]. Teachers can encourage children to read classic dialogues, correct the pronunciation of children in the process of reading, and

guide children to read with emotion so as to improve the language expression ability of children with a native flow. Furthermore, during the process of training, the use of storybook stories can allow a pleasant learning experience for children. Most story books contain rich and profound life philosophy and ideological truth, but in the actual reading process, many children are unable to understand effectively [4]. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to lead children to deeply analyze and understand the connotations of stories in various picture books. Teachers need to adopt appropriate methods, and this is conducive to helping children gradually form correct ideological values.

Involving children in the classroom, providing methods such as peering students together, building teamwork, and strengthening language education by themselves are also some good ways to help children with language disadvantages [6]. Teachers should help the formation of a comfortable environment for students; also, they should build more personal interactions with students. Paying attention to the individual development of children and establishing corresponding personalized student needs is highly important.

All methods require high qualities of teachers and their incentives to lead students to a better future. However, the professionals or the ability of teachers also differentiate from local to local. As mentioned, the educational budget investment differs from place to place; this also results in differentiation between the average teacher's salaries among places. Teachers in more developed cities tend to receive higher salaries on average. The average salary of teachers in Shenzhen is 10–15 thousand (¥) per month, while the teachers in cities such as Shantou only receive an average of 3–4.5 thousand (¥) per month [21, 22]. Compared to the average salary in Shenzhen, teachers also receive an overall 15% higher salary. The average salary of teachers in China is 6–8 thousand per month; in this circumstance, Shenzhen will attract teachers with higher professional abilities. However, in comparison, due to the low income of teachers in smaller cities decreases local teachers' incentive to improve education qualities for students.

## 4 Conclusion

As discussed, the Chinese central government implemented many education policies targeting universal education quality and a unified language environment. In response to these policies, the Guangdong government placed considerable value on education. A great portion of the financial budget also goes to locals to improve education quality. However, at the implementation stage, in reality, the distribution of education resources remains extremely uneven, and the quality of education in smaller cities remains low. Further barriers and the sense of inequalities still exist.

The complicated language environment brought many challenges to education in Guangdong province. This is a significant factor that negatively influences the education objectives of China. Students with different spoken languages usually receive lower grades and have lower learning abilities. As spoken language is different, students also find it hard to build interpersonal relationships with others, bringing many educational quality problems.

By looking at the developing education policies published by central and provincial governments, observations of future universal linguistic use could be made. Furthermore,

the problem of inequality and unevenly distributed education resources should be eased in the long-term by undertaking the “China’s Education Modernization 2035” regulation. Perspectively, a positive trend of increasing education qualities in Guangdong and overall Chinese society is expected. Further research could be done, such as on the influence of China’s education policy and how did it shift over time.

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