

Educational Permeability across Borderlands: Toward a Comparative Framework for Cross-Border Access to Public Education

This symposium addresses a critical yet underexplored dimension of comparative education: the conditions under which children of migrants and cross-border populations can access public schooling across national borders and boundary regions. Informed by an ongoing Japanese research project on Border Studies in Comparative Education (JSPS KAKENHI Numbers 23K22245 and 26K00445), the symposium introduces and empirically examines the theoretical framework of "educational permeability," defined as the degree to which public education is accessible across national borders and boundary regions at the pre-primary, primary, and secondary levels.

The concept emerged in response to the recognition that comparative education has predominantly operated within the confines of the nation-state, despite the increasing borderlessness of social phenomena such as migration, displacement, and transnational family structures. Research on border regions has revealed that children's educational access is shaped not only by legal and policy factors, but by economic disparities, geographical conditions, curricular differences, political and military relations, pandemic and public health constraints, religious diversity, and ethnic composition. The symposium advances an evaluative matrix that classifies borderland contexts into three categories — high, medium, and low permeability — and empirically tests this framework against cases drawn from three distinct border regions across Asia and the Americas. The matrix considers indicators such as ease of border crossing, economic disparity between neighboring states, host-country enrollment policies, curriculum compatibility, political and military relations, and ethnic and religious composition. Collectively, the three papers validate and refine the theoretical model, contributing to the emergence of a new subfield within comparative education scholarship and offering insights with direct relevance to educational policy in borderland regions.

Paper 1: Educational Permeability in Thailand's Borderlands: Cross-Border Schooling, Regional Migration Flows, and the Thai–Cambodian Case (Sunate Kampeeraparb, Thidawan Unkong, Minoru Morishita)

Thailand's borders with Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia constitute a nexus of considerable migratory complexity within Southeast Asia. This paper presents two complementary perspectives on educational permeability in Thailand's borderlands. The first, developed by Kampeeraparb and Ungorn, examines how children from neighboring countries — Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia — access Thai public schools, analyzing structural push-pull factors including GDP disparities, political instability, and Thailand's relatively open enrollment policies toward foreign children. Drawing on fieldwork data and

policy analysis, this perspective assesses educational permeability across Thailand's multiple land borders and explores how the Thai state's identity as a regional education hub intersects with the rights of stateless children. The second perspective, developed by Morishita, focuses specifically on the Thai–Cambodian border, investigating the lived experiences of Cambodian children who cross into Thailand to attend public schools. Based on fieldwork conducted in border communities, this perspective identifies the structural conditions — including marked economic disparities, the geographical accessibility of Thai schools relative to local Cambodian alternatives, and the accommodating stance of Thai enrollment policy — that collectively produce a zone of relatively high educational permeability. It further examines how permeability is modulated by the legal status of families, seasonal labor migration patterns, and the absence of formal bilateral agreements on educational access, revealing that what appears as openness at the border is in practice fragile and contingent.

Paper 2: Educational Permeability along the U.S.–Mexico Border: Transborder Schooling and Policy Dynamics (Katsura Ichikawa, Kaeko Suzuki)

The U.S.–Mexico borderlands are home to a substantial population of transborder families whose children may hold dual citizenship or reside in one country while attending school in the other. This paper investigates the institutional and socio-legal conditions shaping educational access across this border, with particular attention to how federal and state-level policies in the United States interact with community-level practices in border cities. The authors analyze how educational permeability fluctuates in response to immigration enforcement regimes, language policies, and bilateral relations, offering a nuanced account of high-permeability pockets within a heavily regulated border zone.

Paper 3: Educational Permeability across China's Borders: Cases from Neighboring Countries and Regions (Jing Liu, Ken Kusuyama)

China shares land borders with fourteen countries and maintains intricate boundary relations with several territories, making it an exceptionally rich case for studying educational permeability. This paper focuses on selected border zones where cross-border schooling has been documented or is emerging, examining how China's domestic education policies, ethnic minority education frameworks, and diplomatic relationships with neighboring states shape the permeability of its educational borders. The authors explore how economic integration initiatives and historical minority ties create differentiated permeability across China's diverse borderlands.

Discussant remarks will be offered by a member of the research team (Minoru Morishita), synthesizing cross-case findings and reflecting on the theoretical and

methodological implications of the educational permeability framework for the future of comparative and international education research.