

Comparison of Basic Educations in China and the United States and Its Enlightenment to China

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Abstract: There are great differences between China and the United States in education, especially basic education. These differences have led to different states between China and the United States in terms of education quality and talent training. Comparing the basic education situation in the two countries, it can be concluded that we should neither blindly follow tradition nor completely deny tradition. We should objectively summarize the experience and lessons of China's education and deepen the education reform. Globalization requires that the formulation of education policies should start from an international perspective, reflect on the domestic education model, concept, content and means, and learn from the successful experience of other countries.

Keywords: China, the United States, basic education, comparative research.

1. Introduction

In recent years, Chinese media have publicized many such examples: a Chinese child received exam-oriented education in China, and his nature and intelligence were depressed. After reaching the United States, he received heuristic education, and his interest in learning increased greatly, from his mental outlook to his academic performance. These examples may be true, but they are not universal phenomena. In fact, the basic education in the United States is not as good as some Chinese media publicize. On the contrary, the quality of China's basic education is recognized by the Chinese people and the government, and the United States has to take compulsory measures through law and allocate a large amount of money to change the status quo. Bush's education bill was passed by Congress by 381 to 41, indicating the national popularity of the bill and the severity of basic education problems in the United States [1].

The existing researches have identified the gaps between the education systems in the two countries and suggested to change the exam-oriented education in China to talent-oriented. However, the exam-oriented education is sourced from the Confucian culture and the imperial examination system, which have been deeply penetrating the Chinese culture over thousands of years. Given the surging Chinese economy and the rapid globalization, it is worthwhile for China to recognize the development of basic education in China and re-visit our education strategies by further comparing the differences in two countries, aiming to develop its comparative advantages.

In this regard, China can learn from the success of basic education in the United States, but should not blindly follow the trend or completely accept the basic education experience in the

United States. China should learn to "take doctrine", select useful parts, digest and absorb, then apply domestically.

2. Comparison of Basic Educations in China and in the United States

2.1. Comparison of Curricula

Since the 1980s, the reform of primary and secondary school education in the United States has adhered to the curriculum reform as the core, proposed strengthening the basic curriculum of primary and secondary schools, and taken a series of measures. *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* lists English, Mathematics, Science, Social Research, and Computing as "new basic curriculum". *The National Education Objective*, issued by President Bush, also sets out specific requirements on core courses in primary and secondary schools: English, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, History and Geography. The Clinton administration proposed *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* in 1993, which expands the core of basic education by adding two disciplines: foreign languages and Arts to the original basis. Ultimately, English, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, foreign languages, and Arts have become the core courses in the American mind.

In the *2001 Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline (Trial)*, China emphasized to "change the curriculum content of 'complex, difficult, partial, outdated' textbook knowledge and strengthen the connection between the curriculum content and students' life, modern society, and the development of science and technology." Based on the relationship among subjects, society and students, new principle of the selection of the new course content opposes the past tendency to pay too much attention to the subject standards, and advocates the consideration of the three [2].

2.2. Comparison of Curriculum Standard Management

From the aspect of basic administrative system of education, China is basically adopting "vertical" education administration, namely the centralized education administration. In China, the central level has the department of education and direct intervention in education, the central unified plan leadership of education, education funds mainly by the state budget, China's education administration under the centralized leadership principle of hierarchical management. In 1985, the State Education Commission and the Ministry of Education were established, making the central administrative educational institutions streamlined. According to the Decision of the Reform of Education System of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1985, local governments own the management authority of basic education. Except for major policies and macro planning by the central government, the formulation and implementation of specific policies, systems, and plans, as well as the responsibility and power of leadership, management and inspection of schools, are entrusted to local governments. Provinces, cities, and districts determine the division of management responsibilities of provinces, cities, counties, and townships.

The United States is typical of the local decentralized educational administration, namely the parallel educational administration. The Federal Ministry of Education does not have the administrative power of education or directly interfere in the educational cause while local autonomy dominates. The federal and local governments are in a relationship of guidance and consultation. Thus, the educational administration of the United States has been developed from the bottom up. The school district is the basic unit of educational management in the United States which undertakes the main responsibility for the daily work of the school. The primary responsibility of the state is to formulate educational policies, formulate regulations, etc. Therefore, decentralization in the United States is marked by state centralization and public participation education.

The federal government was not allowed to interfere in state and local education affairs. For a long time, the management mode of the curriculum was easy and flexible, which has led to a decline in the quality of education in the United States. To this end, in the curriculum reform from the 1980s to the 1990s, the US federal government, to compensate the lack of unified planning and standards and ameliorate unbalanced development of basic education, increased the control of education by the federal government, and set up the national unified curriculum standards [3].

2.3. Comparison of Teaching Modes

American basic education information teaching adopts the "personality education" and "independent learning" mode. Under the guidance of teachers, students may choose related topics for inquiry learning based on teachers' in-class explanations, assignments, and personal interests, which improves the learning interest of students, and cultivate the students' ability to find problems and solve problems.

The essence of education informatization in China is information education, which is not only a new education mode, but also an important educational practices. Promoting education reform is the main purpose of education informatization, and the reform of education mode is the surveyor's pole of education reform.

So far, primary and secondary schools in China have completed from the transformation of traditional education to quality education. Nowadays, teaching mode is dominated by "the teacher, students as the main body" of "network inquiry teaching", "discovery "teaching", "multimedia combination teaching" and "group collaboration teaching" and a series of new mode, realize the integration of information technology and subject curriculum. However, it must be noted that the "network inquiry" teaching in many primary and secondary schools in China have fallen into the trap of formalism. Due to the poor ability and self-control of computer network, the so-called "network herding" phenomenon of information travel and even students play games while teachers interfere. The curriculum integration in some schools is mechanical, with only the "electronic move" of book knowledge rather than effective deep content integration, and cannot play the advantage of " $1 + 1 > 2$ ", which seriously affects the teaching effect and quality [4].

2.4. Comparison of Teaching Staff Construction

To improve the quality of primary and secondary education, both China and the United States attach great importance to improving the cultivation of teachers in the reform. In China, it is mainly manifested to strengthen the pre-service training of novice teachers and pay attention to teachers' vocational skills training. In the United States, it is mainly manifested in reducing the requirements of professional skills in teacher qualification certification and attaching greater importance to teachers' subject knowledge.

Chinese primary and secondary school teachers are mainly trained by normal education. In October 1983, to realize modernization and adapt to economic globalization, Deng Xiaoping proposed that education should be oriented to modernization, the world and the future, which put forward new and higher requirements for education work and pointed out the direction for the development of China's education. In November 1985, China's State Education Commission also proposed to vigorously reform and strengthen the normal education at all levels. Under the guidance of the goal of "Deepening Foundation, Widening Caliber, Extending Capability", the cultivation of normal university students attaches great importance to the setting of courses related to teacher occupation, such as Pedagogy, Psychology and teaching method. At the same time, it has always been a fine tradition of normal education to strengthen the connection between universities and basic education and pay attention to improving the practical teaching ability of normal university

students. For new teachers, adhere to the principle of "training first, then post; no training, no post", authorities at all levels conscientiously would organize trainings on new courses for teachers.

It is worth mentioning that the teaching and research section system plays a very important role in the growth of Chinese teachers, the improvement of teaching level and the cohesion of teachers. Experienced teachers can help novice teachers of the same teaching material, performance, and teaching progress, not only to adapt to their roles and improve their professionalism as soon as possible, but also more conducive to the cooperative development of teachers' team. It is a valuable experience of China's education and for reference for foreign education reform.

In 1986, the Task Force on Professional Development of Teachers published a report on "National Preparations for Cultivating 21st Century Education", a sign of the shift shifting teaching from profession to profession. The focus of US policy is on enhancing teachers' expertise and skills in the subjects they teach and reducing related requirements on other courses. The trend of emphasizing knowledge and neglecting technology is fully reflected in the teacher qualification certification.

In recent years, the United States has implemented apprenticeship in an effort to adapt novice teachers to their professional roles as soon as possible. Experienced teachers help novice teachers to improve their teaching skills. However, in comparison to the teaching and research model in China, the apprenticeship model in the United States is more easy, without forming a stable cooperation mechanism, mainly manifested in: the American teachers are more independent, novice teachers and their instructors less communication with each other; often do not teach the same subject or grade, or not in the same teaching point, etc. These factors influence the communication and connections between novice teachers and experienced teachers. However, with the expansion of the influence of the national curriculum standards in the United States, the reform of the quality of education promotes the more and more obvious discussion of teachers on the subjects they teach, and the close cooperation structure of the Chinese teaching and research section is increasingly forming.

2.5. Comparison of Educational Systems

American educational system is flexible with less intervenes from the government in teaching. The US implements the model of combining public and private educations, and introduces a competition mechanism in the teaching system, allowing the market and students to choose schools freely. The government only subsidize and reward those schools and teachers achieving high teaching quality and being able to cultivate talents, so that poor schools will be naturally knocked out. The competition mechanism spurs schools and teachers on to constantly enriching their knowledge, improving the teaching methods and maintaining the permanent vitality of teaching.

On the other side, Chinese education system is relatively rigid and lack of competitions, where administration dominates everything. Once the administrative order is formed, good or bad only resigned, ten years to turn around, it is difficult to adapt to the knowledge of the continuous innovation for education needs. Cumbersome administrative constraints on schools and teachers make it difficult for teachers to give full play to their personalities and creativities.

3. Enlightenment to Basic Education in China

The market-oriented reform of basic education in the US breaks the government monopoly in the field of education, having successfully introduced the market competition mechanism into the education field, gave parents and students more options, cracked the traditional teaching mode, organization and operation mode, enriched the American basic education theory and practice, promoted the teaching quality, and invigorated the development of basic education in the US.

At present, China is at the stage of socialist market reform. The exploration and practice of basic education marketization in the US has important enlightenment and reference significance for the reform and development of basic education in China. By summarizing and reflecting on the success and failures of the market reform of basic education in the US, China may avoid detours in the reform, avoid bad mistakes and waste of limited resources, so as to promote the improvement of China's education [5].

3.1. Optimizing the Curriculum Structure Should Become the Primary Task of Curriculum Reform and Development

Since the 1980s, the United States has been optimizing its curriculum structure by increasing the compulsory courses while reducing elective courses, and giving students the flexibility of selecting course to a certain extent. Compulsory courses and elective courses, theory courses and vocational courses are kept in due proportion, forming a group of primary and secondary school curriculum structures.

The curriculum structure proposed in the curriculum reform plan of primary and secondary schools issued in China in the 1980s and 1990s subverted the dominance of Core Curriculum, listed activity courses as an important part of the curriculum plan, set up elective courses, adjusted the proportion of theory courses and vocational courses, and added computing courses. Under the Fused Curriculum, there are not only courses stipulated by the state, but also locally specialized courses offered by local governments, which enhances the flexibility of curriculum. Comparatively speaking, due to the ingrained influence of the traditional curriculum view, China's curriculum reform is not effectively executed. The setting, and implementation of primary and secondary schools' curricula is more than unified, yet without sufficient flexibility. The reality is that: proportion of compulsory courses is large, and proportion of elective courses is small; proportion of mathematical courses is large, and proportion of humanities courses is small. All in all, the curriculum structure needs to be further optimized.

The direction of future work is to balance between unity and diversity. The curriculum reform in the US gives us an significant enlightenment. On the one hand, the proportion of elective courses, but attention must be paid to the appropriate proportion of elective courses in the whole course structure, to prevent the failure of the education; on the other hand, the need and possibility to strengthen the guidance for students and improve the level of teachers [6].

3.2. Optimize the Curriculum Structure

Increase regulation on diversity and flexibility on unity. Since the 1980s, the United States has optimized the curriculum structure, expanded the academic compulsory courses and reduced the elective courses, making the American primary and secondary schools not only improve the requirements of compulsory courses, but also give students a certain freedom to choose courses. Due to the decentralization of education system, there has never been a national curriculum standard in the two hundred years. Therefore, since the 2000 education strategy formulated national unified standards, cause people's wide attention, although these standards are not like mandatory and mandatory function, but the guiding role is beyond doubt. In this curriculum reform in China, it has changed the situation of single subject courses unifying the world, set up elective courses, and left certain room for local governments to open local special courses, which somewhat enhances the flexibility of curriculum setting. However, due to the influence of traditional curriculum view, the reform is not enough, the primary and secondary school curriculum setting, and implementation are more unified, but insufficient flexibility, the proportion of compulsory courses is large, the proportion of elective courses is small; the proportion of mathematical courses is large, the

proportion of humanities courses is low. Therefore, the curriculum structure needs to be further optimized to increase its flexibility under the centralized education system.

3.3. Basic Education

The national basic curriculum standard must be based on the basic education. Basic educations in different regions within one country are all basically an activity of cultivating children, so it is not regional in nature. However, basic educations in different nations and countries are subject to the national political and economic system, science and technology, productivity level, national cultural tradition, etc. They all have different service contents, and the differences in this service content are mainly shown through the differences of school curriculum. Therefore, the curriculum standard reform cannot be carried out in isolation, but must be based on the national conditions [7].

3.4. Further Strengthen the Construction of the Teaching Staff

China must make great efforts to strengthen the construction of the teaching staff. Strengthen the construction of teachers' ethics, and effectively improve the professional ethics level of teachers. Seriously implement the Cross-Century Gardener Project, gradually improve the educational level of teachers, and build a team of backbone teachers, academic leaders, and experts in the education field. Implement the Teachers Qualification System, unify payments of teachers, and gradually improve the overall quality and income level of teachers, so that teacher can become one of the most decent profession.

3.5. Establish a Fair Competition Mechanism to Promote the Development of Private Education

Competition is the core of the market mechanism. The market-oriented basic education reform in the United States is to promote the reform of public schools and improve the quality of teaching by introducing the competition mechanism into the field of education. On the market, weak schools cannot adapt to the taste of well-educated parents, and will be abandoned by the market.

How to establish this competitive mechanism? Instead of staying at the public-school level, the competition between public and private schools. No matter public or private, as long as a school can meet the market and is beneficial to students, it will get financial support from the government. In this level playing field, American private schools can be rivals for public schools.

Looking back at the fact in China, we admit that private education is a useful supplement to public education. It shares the surplus students and makes up for the defect of insufficient national investment in education. But how do we treat private education? Whether in respect of policy or finance, private education cannot enjoy the same treatment as public schools. In this way, it is difficult for private education to have the strength and opportunity to compete with public education, let alone become a competitor of public education. Therefore, for the future development, if we want to establish a competitive mechanism in the field of education and culling through competition, we have to let public education have rivals.

4. Conclusion

Through the comparison of primary and secondary educations in China and the United States, we can see that the leading role of countries in education reform is becoming more and more important. Globalization has gradually blurred the boundaries of primary and secondary school education in various countries. The malpractices of a country's traditional education may be exactly the experience that other countries should learn from most.

China should face up to the shortcomings and current situation of Chinese basic education realistically, and gain from the basic education in the United States. There is no system works forever. Reform is the way out. Deep analysis of the crux of China's basic education is the premise of brewing and implementing measures suitable for the status quo, and the public responsibility to optimize the environment for the healthy growth of the younger generation.

Therefore, we should neither blindly follow the tradition nor fully deny it. How to objectively summarize the experience of education reforms in China and other countries is the premise of deepening education reform, and also the key to the success of education reform. Globalization requires that the formulation of education policies start from the international point of view, reflect on the domestic education mode, concepts and practices, and learn from the successful example in other countries. Therefore, education reform is not only a realistic need of the society, but also the response to the challenge of globalization to nation-countries.

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