

# ***Difference of Teachers' Teaching Objectives Between Chinese High School and American High School***

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**Abstract:** In this paper, the researcher explored the factors associated with different teaching objectives of American and Chinese high school teachers. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with a group of teachers who have rich experience teaching in American or Chinese high schools to understand (1) their teaching objectives, (2) the educational goals of the school, (3) their teaching styles and (4) why they want to be a teacher. Results concluded three key factors: (1) the effect of the school's educational goals; (2) the importance of students' reactions and classroom environment; (3) how personal values and interests influence teachers' goals.

**Keywords:** high school, teaching objective, America, China, teachers, difference

## **1. Introduction**

With globalization and cultural diversification, more and more educational exchanges occur among countries around the world. Educational comparison has been gaining importance in recent years. "Teachers differ substantially in their instructional performance in the classroom. [1]" Education varies between country and country due to its unlike culture, such as educational system and teaching-student relationship [2].

The educational difference is obvious among countries. People who want to study in another country's system in the present country may go to an international school and this circumstance is very common in China. More and more parents are keen on sending their children to international schools or Western countries. This is one of the reasons that can explain the increasing number of international schools in China. According to the data, up to 2023, there are 148 international schools in six different cities in China [3]. Apart from going to international school, going abroad is another common choice for Chinese students. The accurate statistics pointed out that there are 262,992 Chinese students studying in the USA up to January 2023 [4]. The enormous number of articles, society news and mainstream media gave the fact that the ascending number of Chinese students turn to international education or study abroad, they tend to prefer the Western educational system, especially in the US and Australia [5], rather than Chinese educational system. With the popularity of international schools, the educational difference between Chinese and America is enlarged in a further step.

From the perspective of cultural diversity, China tends to focus more on the general situation in order to improve the quality of the people, while America aims to develop student's individual talent.

In China, teachers usually are the leaders: they strictly follow the textbook and give lecture [6], the only thing students need to do is listen carefully and take notes. Since the Chinese view teacher as a serious and solemn job, being too closed with students is inconsistent with traditional Chinese teachers' impression. On the other hand, American teachers are more like a participant, they prefer students to share, to raise questions, to doubt; interactions between students and teachers are very common [2].

In the viewpoint of educational system, in China, applying for a university needs the grade of Gaokao. That is the reason why Gaokao is a very significant process in Chinese students' lives. Senior high school graduates who want to go to universities must take National Higher Education Entrance Exam (Gaokao) [7]. Unlike China, America follows GPA (grade point average) system to grade a student [8]. Applying for a university in America not only needs academic requirements such as GPA and SAT, overall profile such as personal essay, a reference letter is also required.

Apart from cultural and systematic differences, educational goals are also distinctive from China to America. [9] According to Graaf and Kolmos [10], "it is important to consider the objectives when planning the teaching." Although national education aims may have an influence on teachers' teaching objectives, each teacher's teaching objective is more or less various from person to person due to the distinctive individual experience. Not only national education aims, but also the goal of the school may affect teachers' teaching objectives. A facilitator in research commented lots on the relationship between teachers' objectives and the objectives of the school [11]. Different teachers advocate different teaching objectives, leading to disparate effects on students. As AY Ni [12] indicated that different level of emphasis in teaching objectives "could have biased the students' self-evaluate of learning effectiveness."

Albeit a huge number of previous literatures has been focused on the China-America educational differences among mathematics [13], science [2], kindergarten [14] and family [15] to the author's best knowledge, very few papers focus the key factor upon the teachers' teaching goal. Adding the fact that, high school is a significant phase for students worldwide and teachers play a key role in it, it is necessary to pay attention to high school teachers. Therefore, based on the approach presented in Su, Z., Su, J., and Goldstein, S.' paper [2], the aim of this paper is to identify, compare and analyze the goals of high school teachers in China and America, by interviewing a number of teachers who work in China private high school and international high school. This paper cannot provide a comprehensive review of high school teachers' goal due to its limitation in the quantity of interviewees and its high subjectivity, but by collecting the data and analyzing it, an overall trend will be provided which can be used to predict and further understand different educational systems.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Procedure

The participants' background was drawn from the school websites, showing the teaching experience of teachers [16]. After selecting the aimed participants, the researcher sent emails to all of the participants asking for the interview permission. Initially, the participants were asked to answer one simple question about their teaching experience through email to further ensure that they met the requirement. The second section of the study is the interviewing. The semi-structured interview was followed to investigate the teaching objectives of the participants. There were 8 participants in total, both males and females. The interviewees completed the interviews conducted face to face in the empty teachers' office and over phone in the dormitory, which took 15–20 minutes. The researcher is trained before and have much experience of interviewing.

## 2.2. Participants

The objective sampling strategy will be utilized to select participants who have experience of being a teacher in Chinese high school or American high school. To be eligible for the study, participants are all work in high school at the present and they are very experienced in teaching. Also, the selection cogitated a range of factors in order to make the study as purposive as possible. For instance, the teaching age, gender, culture, religion, nationality, educational background and other factors were considered in the selection.

The researcher looked up the background of a large number of teachers in the school website, finally invited 10 participants in total, who were suitable for the study, with no age or subject limitations. All participants are worked as a teacher in the high school now and they worked at American high schools or Chinese high schools before. Three different high schools' teachers were investigated, improving the diversity of the results.

Participants were divided into two categories:

1. Taught in American high school before, now is teaching in the most famous international high school in Shenzhen China.
2. Only have the experience of teaching in Chinese public or private high school.

The participants in Group 1 includes three American and one Chinese, they all initially taught in American high school for more than a year, then came to Chinese international school over ten years. The participants from Group 2 contains four Chinese teachers, who involved in teaching at Chinese high school for at least 5 years. Half of them is now working at public high school and rest of two work at private high school. Due to their diverse and abundant experiences, all participants had strong feelings of teaching in American and Chinese high schools.

## 2.3. Measure

### 2.3.1. Qualitative Interview

In this research, qualitative research design has been conducted to identify the teaching objectives of Chinese and American high school teachers and to delve into their differences. The researcher had a semi-structured interview which is about 15-20 minutes. Although there was a list of fixed questions, the interviews had the structure of open interview because the interviewers were the leaders during the conversation, they expanded the topic if they wanted to. Unlike the traditional semi-structured interview, the researcher combined it with coffee chat (an informal meeting which helps establish connections with other professionals) [17], ensuring the ecological valid. Before starting the interview, the researcher looked up more than a hundred of teachers, wrote a list of candidates and then sent emails to 10 teachers asking for their permission. There were 8 participants in total and the interview was one-to-one. The researcher let the participants talked about their teaching objectives (eg. What's your teaching objective), teaching experience (eg. What do you feel when teaching in American high school), job choosing (eg. Why do you want to be a teacher), etc. These questions were easy to expand, following the interviewers' answer was crucial when they shared the extra ideas.

During the interview, the researcher gave the main topic of the conversation and then let participants guide it and feel free to talk and share as much as they want. While the interview was proceeding, a phone was placed on the table to record the entire conversation, it would be convenient for the researcher to take notes and analyze datas later. For ethical purposes and politeness, the participants were notified by the recorder before the interview.

By using qualitative interview design, there will be more comprehensive and detailed viewpoints of the participants, leading to a deeper understanding of the topic.

### 3. Results

To compare the difference between American and Chinese high school teachers' teaching objectives, semi-structure interviews were used to 8 participants. Further analysis shows that, three overarching aspects with regard to teachers' teaching objectives. All teachers in the interviews discussed (1) the effect of the school's educational goals; (2) the importance of students' reaction and classroom environment; (3) how personal value and interest influence teachers' goals. Participant variables exist, such as characteristics and financial situations, but these factors play a small role in this research. It is necessary to note that capital letters are used to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

#### 3.1. School: the determining factor in teachers' teaching objectives

Teachers choose which school to work at for several reasons: location, school history, working conditions, salary and educational goals. The more the educational goals of the school resemble teachers', the more teachers want to work there. According to the statistics, all the participants stated that their teaching objectives were very likely to the schools', when choosing the school, 7 out of 8 teachers considered the educational goal of the school. For example, Mrs. A, who taught in an American high school for more than 1 year and now works at an international high school in China for about 11 years, said:

*As a literature teacher, I hope my students to learn what the writer is describing, to search the history context of the novel and to think about the formation of our society based on what they learn in the literature class in a wider perspective, like the global citizens. When I teach the language, I want my students to share their thoughts about the articles, developing critical thinking and creativity..... the school I work at now, aims to develop students critical thinking and international thinking, like what I mentioned [before], global citizens. The school encourages students to talk and to share, so I often learn lots of new things from my students.*

In addition, when talking about personal teaching objectives, Mr. B, who worked as a substitute teacher in an American high school before and now is an economics teacher in an international high school in China, stated:

*I enjoy helping students to know how things really work, because there is a big difference between [what] we tend to do and the effect of what we do... and the real thing is, can you communicate? Can you think critically?*

Speaking of the educational goal of the school, Mr. B mentioned:

*...building an international environment, encouraging creativity, be a global citizen.*

The statements from Mrs. A and Mr. B clearly highlight the close relationship between personal teaching objectives and the educational goals of American high schools and international high schools. Creativity and critical thinking play a significant role in the education, both teachers and the schools have an agreement on it. Apart from these two participants, rest of them from Group 1 all showed the same idea during the interviews.

Besides, a teacher from Chinese high school, Miss. C, who teaches in the public high school for 2 years, pointed out that:

*Personally speaking, I want students to inherit Chinese culture and understand the Chinese history, let them fall in love with the Chinese characters and traditional cultures, and teaching them in a very logic and organized way, instead of fragmented knowledge.....the school, of course, aims to achieve best score in Gaokao, so my teaching goals are based on this.*

Although the statistics shows that both American and Chinese high schools have a closed relationship between teachers' and schools' objectives, the relationships are different. To be more specific, a figure is shown below to illustrate the difference. (See Figure1)



Figure 1: The difference of the relationship of teachers' and schools' objectives between China and America

In Chinese high school, the educational goal of the school is the leader of teachers' teaching objectives, everything that teachers do should follow the biggest goal—Gaokao. The higher the score, the better. On the other hand, the teaching goals of teachers and the American schools complement each other, teachers can teach under the effect of teaching objectives of either personal or school. It does not mean that teachers in American high schools do not care about students' score. In short-term, score is important; in long-term, they more want students to develop something wider such as critical thinking and global citizen.

### 3.2. Students: Acts as a Short-term Variable to the Teaching Objectives

Consider of cultural difference, the reaction of students in class varies as well. From the answers of 8 participants, the results show that students in Chinese high schools tend to be quiet and passive, while American high school students mostly are talkative and active. Therefore, students in Chinese high school usually do not share their ideas or feel nervous when the teacher is coming nearby; unlikely, American students feel comfortable to share any idea in the lesson, they like sharing and talking. The evidence is supported by Mr. D, who taught in the American high school for 6 years then works at the international high school in China for about 12 years:

*The students I taught in the U.S high school were very active, they talked a lot, but too much.....the first high school I worked at is in Shanghai, also an international school, the students there were so quiet, at least couple of weeks in the beginning. They did not talk, sat there and did their own things.....some people are introverted, and others are extroverted, people like to say being an extrovert is the best, but we cannot judge one's personality, there is no good or bad.*

This quote demonstrates that students affect the environment of the class and may cause some troubles to teachers, resulting a change in their teaching objectives. For example, Mr. D again, shared that:

*I want to make the introverted students to talk more, so I will give them group discussion and presentation because they need to talk in these tasks.*

Another example given by Miss. E, who teaches in Chinese private high school for 5 years:

*Students here seldom share their ideas, so I aim to use constructivism to let them more engage the class and I also aim to talk less in the lesson, giving more chance to students instead.*



These quotes show that the students' reaction in class actually changes the short-term objective of teachers. The goal of achieving the expected classroom atmosphere is added and teachers use several methods to reach that goal. Therefore, students have some influence on teachers' teaching objectives which in turns affect students themselves. In other word, students and teachers complement each other, they are in the bidirectional relationship.

### 3.3. Personal value and interest

It is noteworthy that teacher's value and interest also influence the teaching objective. The most direct question relates to this aspect is: why do you want to be a teacher? By searching the reason of being a teacher, the cause that differs the teaching objectives can be concluded. Mrs. A explained:

*...this all started when I was three. I thought that kindergarten teachers were so cool because they could manage so many students, I wanna be a teacher in the future as well. After became a teacher, I really love sharing my knowledge to students and students always teach me back, I actually learn many new things from them. Also, I'm an extroverted person, I like talk to people, so I want to be a teacher.....every day I get up, I feel excited to work because I like teaching and I also like knowing new things from my students.*

What's more, Miss. C stated:

*the reason why I want to be a teacher is I like sharing things to people very much, such as my students and my colleagues. My strong desire to sharing, my outgoing and humorous personality and my good logical thinking make me become a teacher, and I also like Chinese, so I am a Chinese teacher now. And being a teacher in public school is a stable job, some social factors make me work as a teacher, too.*

Additionally, Miss. E said:

*I graduated from Normal school, so I became a teacher as soon as I graduated. Maybe because I found teaching is very suitable for me, but actually I wanted to be a nurse at first. I plan to work at the public high school in later years, because it is more stable.*

Comparing these quotes, two kinds of person value and interest that differ the teaching objectives can be inferred: (1) personality; (2) social factors.

#### 3.3.1. Personality

Mrs. A is an outgoing person, she loves sharing information with students and she views teaching as a tool to share and also learn. In her perspective, being a teacher has little relationship to the stable income or other social factors, it is due to her interest and dream. As mentioned in the pervious section, Mrs. A aims to let students learn the context of the novel and find correlation to our society; she also wants students to talk more and think critically, acting as a global citizen. In short, the teaching objective of Mrs. A is to build a bidirectional relationship between teachers and students, then learn from each other. Obviously, her personality matches her teaching objective partially: her desire of sharing encourages students to share as well. This conclusion can also be inferred from Miss. C, who also loves sharing things to others. Apart from that, Miss. C aims to teach in a logic and organized way, this could be explained by her strong logic thinking ability. For Miss. E, who is purposeful, she becomes a teacher not for dream or preference, but for the best choice. For example, as she said, "I graduated from Normal school, so I became a teacher as soon as I graduated." To her, being a teacher is her best choice, so she did it. As the paper mentioned formerly, Miss. E aims to help students achieve the higher score in Gaokao. It is reasonable because Gaokao is the best choice for every high

school student in China. Her purposeful personality can be seen in her teaching objective. Therefore, it is convincing that personality is relevant to the teaching objective.

### 3.3.2. Social Factors

Comparing the quotes from section 3.3, social factor plays a role in Miss. C and Miss. E's teaching objectives. As they both mentioned, "[being a teacher] it is stable". The stability of a job is one of reasons they become a teacher, so when they teach students, they tend to follow the goal of the school and parents first before they consider their own teaching objectives. For example, Mr. F, who works at a Chinese high school for 5 years, stated:

*For me, [students'] parents' wants are very important. What they want is their children can learn as much as possible and achieve the higher score in Gaokao, so I try my best to teach students more knowledge, I give lectures, assign homework, give them mock exams.....all I do is to help students to get an expected score in their turning point in life, Gaokao.*

From this quote, Mr. F highlighted the importance of students' parents in his teaching objective. Parents' wants affect teachers' job partially. For instance, Mr. G, another Chinese high school teacher, said:

*I remember one time, I tried to use a different way to teach, group work or teamwork, because I wanted to stimulate their desire to learn rather than I piled my knowledge in their heads, that's too passive, I think. So, I stopped giving lectures, but guided them to learn by themselves. Here was the problem, I was complained by their parents few days later, as I didn't teacher their kids anything and I was irresponsible. I was almost fired, but I really wanted my job, so I had to change everything back to usual.*

This pitiful experience of Mr. G shows that parents and stability of the job can actually influence one's teaching objective. Mr. G wanted to stimulate students' desire to learn, but giving lectures for most of the time is not a method according to him. In order to achieve his objective, he changed his teaching style which was complained by parents and then directly threatened to his job. Considering of these social factors, Mr. G failed to achieve his teaching objective.

## 4. Discussion

Very little was found in the literature on the question of why there is a difference between American teachers' teaching objectives and Chinese teachers' teaching objectives in the high school. This qualitative study sought to explore the causes of different teaching objectives between Chinese and American high school teachers. This study found that, (1) the educational goals of schools, (2) students' reaction in the classroom and (3) teachers themselves' value and interest are the key factors that influence their teaching objectives.

A possible explanation for different educational goals of high schools is culture diversity and unliked educational systems. In China, the only access to the university is Gaokao or special admission (which is very difficult for most of the students) within three-year-high school study. Each lesson only has 40 minutes and then 10 minutes' break. Within such a short time, giving lectures tend to be the most efficient method to learn knowledge. As a result, teachers in Chinese high school often aim to talk more in class and make student to achieve a higher score. On the other hand, applying for a university in the U.S. not only needs GPA, but also some activities and competitions, so teachers tend to aim to develop individual talents and spend more time on training students' critical thinking.

In addition, students may show boredom to the lessons and react passively or behave incoherently. The previous literature pointed out that, the teacher plays a crucial role in the interaction process

because the teacher will transfer knowledge to students [18]. Building an active class atmosphere is a sign of good interaction. However, students do not always act as the teacher's wish, so during the lesson, the teacher will also aim to build an expected atmosphere in order to teach better. The class atmosphere in American high school tend to be more active, sometimes overactive, so teachers want to learn some skills to manage the class. On the contrary, Chinese high school often has a passive and quiet atmosphere, so some teachers may aim to raise students' passion, others may maintain this quiet atmosphere due to personal preference.

Finally, this research further illustrates the role of teacher's value and interest in their teaching objectives. Teaching objectives and personal values and interests are highly linked. One's values and interests are shaped by primary education and key experience [19], it is subjective and can varied from person to person. This is the reason why people have different opinions of the same thing, such as standards of choosing a spouse, educational concept and teaching objective.

## 5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the cause of different teaching objectives between American high school teachers and Chinese high school teachers. The findings of this study suggest (1) the school's educational goals; (2) students' reaction and classroom environment; (3) personal value and interest influence teachers' goals. These findings reported here shed new light on the difference between American and Chinese teachers, providing valid information for people who aim to improve one's teaching objectives. The key strengths of this study are the authenticity of the interview results and the logic analysis.

A number of limitations need to be noted regarding this study. Firstly, the researcher interviewed 8 participants, which has limitation in the quantity and the result cannot stand for the general. Secondly, the results came from interviews, it contains high level of subjectivity and participant variables.

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