

# *Comparing the Secondary Education in UK with the High School Education in China*

Ziye Zhang<sup>1,a,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Business English, School of Foreign Languages, Hefei Normal University, Hefei, Anhui, 230000, China*

*a. 2002421050@stu.hfnu.edu.cn*

*\*corresponding author*

**Abstract:** In modern society, education belongs to a highly developed stage, and China's education is also constantly developing and improving. High school education in China has always been a focus of social concern, and so far, exam-oriented education still dominates high school education. Compared with the secondary education in the UK, there are significant differences in the types of high school education in China, as well as in the educational models and historical backgrounds of development. In China, high school education has developed over a comparatively short span of time, and through comparison, it was found that there are some problems in current high school education. In order to change the current situation of high school education in China, the Chinese government has proposed the concept of quality education and the dual reduction policy, which requires continuous efforts to ultimately be implemented. Teachers need to change teaching methods, improve teaching concepts, promote and help students increase confidence, enhance cooperation and innovation abilities. Students should also make independent changes, diverge their thinking, use dialectical methods to see problems, and think about multiple aspects of the problem, in order to improve their logical thinking ability and innovative cooperation ability, and maintain a positive attitude towards learning.

**Keywords:** background information of China and UK, influence on students, reflection

## **1. Introduction**

With the progress of society and the development of China's education industry, the importance of high school education has become increasingly prominent. From 1979 to the beginning of the 21st century, China has continuously improved its policy guidance for high school education. In the Chinese education system, high schools can be divided into regular high schools, adult high schools and vocational high schools, etc. The high school level in China is comparable to secondary schooling in the UK in terms of educational systems. British secondary education can be traced back to the British Bourgeois revolution, when British secondary education began to sprout. After continuous development, the secondary education system in the UK was officially established in the 20th century and it is still evolving and improving. In the UK's secondary education system, schools include grammar schools, technical schools, modern schools, and comprehensive schools. This article's major goals are to examine the state of high school education in China today, to find the shortcomings of Chinese education by contrasting it with secondary schooling in the British educational system,

and to offer possible solutions to the issues. Due to different educational systems, the impact on students also varies. Due to the influence of exam-oriented education, Chinese students often lack innovation and collaboration abilities, and anxiety brought on by the stress of the college admission exam. In the education system of the UK, most students receive encouraging teaching, which greatly increases their confidence and helps them develop their own thinking and cultivate dialectical thinking abilities. Under the active guidance of teachers, students in the UK are more creative and collaborative.

To consider the current issues with Chinese education, the two educational systems are compared. In identifying some of the problems in Chinese high school education, this article provides some suggestions to address these issues from the perspectives of the government, teachers, and students.

## **2. Background Information of China**

### **2.1. Historical Background**

High school education in China began after the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1979. Since its inception, it has been an elite education, with the main function of providing reserve talents for universities. In 1980 and 1983, the Ministry of Education successively proposed the “Decision on Running Key High Schools in Stages and Batches” and the “Several Opinions on Further Improving the Quality of Ordinary High Schools”, both emphasizing the importance of running key high schools well and the exemplary role of key high schools [1]. Li Lanqing made the following recommendation in June 1994 at the National Education Work Conference: “Basic education must transition from ‘exam focused education’ to the track of quality education, fully implement educational policies, and totally improve the quality of education”. Implementing quality education is an inevitable requirement and necessary path to improve national quality and utilize human resources to establish a powerful nation [2]. The idea of quality education has begun to influence the development of high school education. As more students enrolled in higher education in 1999 and the achievement of the “two basics” goal in basic education in 2000, the demand for high school education continues to increase, and China’s high school education has begun to develop in a balanced manner. In 1998, the Ministry of Education formulated the Action Plan for Revitalizing Education in the 21st Century, the plan proposes: “By 2010, on the basis of fully realizing the ‘two foundations’, cities and developed areas will gradually popularize high school education [3].” The “Decision on Deepening Education Reform and Comprehensively Promoting Quality Education” was released by the State Council in 1999. The decision expressly calls for broadening the scope of study in high school and promoting high-quality education throughout.

Entering the 21st century, high school education in China is still developing rapidly, transitioning from primarily serving elite education to a universal stage. The Chinese government published the “National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan Outline (2010-2020)” in 2010, and it featured recommendations to reorient high school education development away from quantitative growth and toward qualitative improvement in order to encourage the diverse development of high school education to fulfill the demands of students with different potentials [1]. In the 19th National Congress report of the Communist Party of China, “Popularizing High School Education” was written in October 2017.

### **2.2. Classifications of Chinese High School Education**

China’s high school education includes ordinary high school, adult high school, vocational high school, secondary vocational school, etc.

Ordinary high school education is a non-compulsory education based on nine-year compulsory education. Ordinary high school is the later or advanced stage of secondary education and also a

transitional stage for students to enter higher education institutions or society. Ordinary high schools mainly teach students the basic knowledge of language, mathematics, foreign politics, history, geography, and chemistry, mainly for academic learning. After graduation, students participate in the college entrance examination and enter higher education institutions to study. It should be noted that the key high schools we often refer to also belong to ordinary high schools.

The task of adult high school education is to enable the employees and young people with junior high school graduation education to basically reach the level of senior high school graduation after systematic study. The adult high school curriculum consists of two parts: cultural courses and professional courses or vocational and technical courses. After graduation, an adult high school diploma will be awarded.

Most vocational high schools are renovated from ordinary high schools and generally admit junior high school graduates, with a 3-year academic period. The training objectives are similar to those of secondary vocational schools. Vocational high school belongs to junior high school and can be admitted after graduation. After graduation, one can take the corresponding college entrance examination to continue their studies.

The difference between vocational high schools and ordinary high schools lies in the fact that vocational high schools are divided into various majors, while ordinary high schools are not divided into majors. Simultaneously, vocational high schools demand that students have technical theoretical knowledge, professional knowledge, and operational skills that allow them to directly engage in a specific profession; For cultural foundation courses, it is necessary to have a level equivalent to that of an ordinary high school.

### **3. Background Information of the British**

#### **3.1. Historical Background**

The period from 1640 to 1660 was the British Bourgeois revolution. In Britain, the growth of modern education was significantly influenced by this revolution. Leaders and thinkers of the egalitarian and digger factions in the revolutionary camp view education as a tool and primary means for radical social reform. They believe in the concept of “pan intelligence” and advocate for thorough educational reform, including popularizing primary education, reforming teaching content and methods; advocating that the state should intervene in education and establish a national education system.

In 1779, restrictions on education for non-denominational individuals were lifted. A large number of private schools have been established in London and some major industrial centers. They imitated non-denominational schools, freely offered new courses, experimented with new ideas, and created a new blueprint for future secondary education reform.

The first industrial revolution in human history occurred in Britain in the late 18th century. Great changes have occurred in society; the population has grown dramatically; vast industrial cities have evolved; the factory system has expanded; and the capitalist economy has grown swiftly. Britain has advanced to the level of a highly industrialized country. In terms of secondary school education, before the British Industrial Revolution, secondary schools were basically grammar school and public schools handed down from feudal society. With the increasing development of the capitalist system, the Parliament passed the Public Schools Act in 1868, reforming the constitution of public schools, increasing the number of representatives representing national interests on the school board, expanding the authority of the board of directors to run schools, and relaxing the identity of enrolled students. However, the restrictions on family property continued unabated, and public schools were still reserved for the children of nobility, large capitalists, and the wealthy. The hierarchy of grammar school is also very obvious [4].

The “Fischer Act” of 1918 emphasized the need for local authorities to vigorously develop middle level schools, widely opening technical schools, night schools, art schools, commercial schools, as well as family schools and two-year industrial and commercial specialized courses attached to industrial schools. In this way, secondary technical schools and secondary vocational education in the UK substantially expanded under the slogan of “universal secondary education” at that time.

At the same time, a new type of middle school -modern middle school has emerged, but its level is very low, and its graduates are not eligible to sit for the college admission exam. The students in these schools mentioned above are mostly children of working people. Young people from affluent families still receive family education or preparatory schools to enter public and grammar schools, preparing for their future entry into universities. Obviously, during this period, the education system in Britain still implemented a dual track system. Due to the significantly different economic backgrounds of young people and children studying on different tracks in many capitalist countries at that time, this system of education was criticized from various aspects. The UK established a public secondary education system through the enactment of the Education Act of 1902 and the Education Act of 1944 [5].

### **3.2. Classifications of Secondary Education in UK**

The schools implementing secondary education in the UK include public secondary schools and independent school systems known as “public schools”. Public secondary schools include grammar schools, technical schools, modern schools, comprehensive schools, and intermediate schools considered secondary schools [5].

Grammar Middle School is the oldest type of high school in the UK, with a focus on academia. Students are mainly enrolled in universities, with a study period of 7 years. Grammar middle school is divided into two stages: the basic stage (5 years) and the subject stage (2 or 3 years). According to the provisions of the new national curriculum implemented in 2000, the secondary school curriculum will enable schools to focus on improving quality, expanding selectivity, and research. In the first three years, the main courses offered were English language and literature, modern foreign language, classical language, history, geography, mathematics, chemistry, physics, biology, art, music, religion, sports, etc. However, starting from the fourth grade, some subjects were canceled and some elective courses were added. Upon graduation, students can take the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) exam, which is a national unified examination [6]. This certificate serves as a substitute for a high school diploma, and if they do not want to continue their studies, it can serve as the main diploma reference for employment.

Technical secondary schools provide general education and technical education, mainly for cultivating technicians in agriculture, commerce, and industry, but the number is relatively small, with a duration of 5-7 years.

Modern high schools mainly focus on practical subjects and vocational education, with students mainly focused on employment. Nowadays, many modern high schools with multiple different courses have merged or been renamed comprehensive high schools, with a duration of 5 years.

Comprehensive middle schools are a combination of grammar schools, technical schools, and modern schools, offering both general education and vocational education. Students do not need to take exams to enter comprehensive middle schools. Children who have completed primary school at the age of 11 can enter. The organizational forms of comprehensive middle schools include consistent comprehensive middle schools, two-level comprehensive middle schools, comprehensive middle schools composed of intermediate and senior middle schools, and comprehensive middle schools including the “sixth level”. The courses offered in comprehensive high schools are similar to those in modern high schools, with a duration of 7 years.

## **4. The Influence of Different Education on Students**

### **4.1. The Education System's Influence of Chinese Students**

Exam-oriented education is an effective educational method that promotes students' learning. It is believed that this method of evaluating students' abilities based on uniform standards is fairer, and there are fewer situations where inaccurate evaluations are made due to the preferences of individual evaluators [7]. Although there are many drawbacks to exam-oriented education, based on China's national conditions and a large population, it is indeed the fairest selection method compared to other subjective so-called "qualities". It is the most objective and effectively prevents favoritism and fraud. The emergence of unhealthy tendencies such as engaging in relationships has safeguarded social justice.

In order to pass the final college entrance examination, students need to learn a lot of knowledge and write a large number of exercises every day. This is beneficial for students to acquire a large amount of knowledge in a short period of time, and to master the knowledge proficiently. Students can make the most of their time to obtain more knowledge and lay the foundation for the professional courses they study in university.

### **4.2. The Education System's Influence of British Students**

For students in the UK, due to the small class size, teachers can more easily pay attention to each student and provide sufficient care for each student. In the entire education system in the UK, children are most influenced by individualism, and students do not have such a strong concept of collectiveness. British education primarily places an emphasis on critical thinking in the hopes that students would acquire the skill of dialectical reasoning during the learning process. In the classroom, the teacher plays a guiding role, allowing students to explore and cultivate their practical and innovative abilities, allowing them to find their own interests. It is beneficial for students to pursue their own future and determine their future path.

## **5. Reflection on Chinese Education**

For exam-oriented education in Chinese high schools, excessive exam-oriented education can cause students to memorize and simulate exams in school, but they lack practical learning and research abilities, which may lead to a lack of deep understanding and application ability of knowledge, innovation awareness, and hands-on ability. Due to the importance of the college entrance examination, students and parents may experience excessive anxiety and stress, which may lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and inferiority complex [8]. In current China, the college entrance examination enrollment system is largely the "baton" of high school education, where students may be required to study subjects, they do not have interest or talent in, which may lead to students losing interest in learning and even affect their personal development [9].

Chinese high schools could neglect students' moral education, mental and physical growth, focusing only on their college entrance examination scores, which may affect their overall development [8]. When faced with the college admissions test, which is particularly important for Chinese students in their lives, there may be situations where they work alone and have poor social adaptability. Due to the fact that exam-oriented education is a closed, conservative, and isolated form of education, there is a lack of communication and exchange between teachers and students in the classroom, as well as between classmates [10]. In addition, it may also lead to a lack of awareness of unity and cooperation among students, which may result in their inability to adapt to work in society.

## 6. Conclusion

China currently advocates quality education, which has had a significant impact on education in some developed regions of the country, although it has not achieved universal results so far. The secondary education in the UK attaches great importance on students' self-development, while China has implemented quality education, it has also reformed the high school education by changing the format of the college entrance examination, conducting diversified talent selection, and examining multiple aspects of students. It values students' exam scores but does not entirely judge their quality based on their grades. China has also issued a dual reduction policy, primarily to successfully lighten the load of the students' extensive homework and off-campus training. The implementation of the dual reduction policy allows students to have more autonomy time and more time on weekends, rather than being occupied by various tutoring classes, allowing them to pursue what they want to do.

In the classroom, teachers should change their teaching methods, change the cramming style of teaching, and provide more heuristic teaching to students. Teachers should carry a people-oriented learning perspective, teaching with the central idea of everything for the development of students, independently change teaching methods, mobilize students' initiative in learning, and enhance their cooperative ability. When evaluating students, one should not only look at their academic performance, but also see the highlights in their daily lives. In secondary education in the UK, most teachers provide encouraging education, expressing praise and encouragement for the progress made by students. Even if students give incorrect answers to some questions, teachers will first acknowledge the students' thinking process and then explain the correct answer. This is undoubtedly worth learning for Chinese teachers, as it is conducive to cultivating students' confidence, promoting them to actively speak in the classroom, allowing them to develop their own thinking and dare to express their ideas.

For students, they need to independently change their learning habits in class, from passively instilling knowledge in the classroom to actively learning knowledge, from being accustomed to solving their own learning problems to being willing to communicate with classmates and teachers and solving their problems and difficulties through their help or inspiration. Students should take the initiative to change their thinking patterns, actively divergent their thinking in the class, think in multiple ways about problems, and learn to use dialectical methods to see problems. The attitude towards learning should also be changed, and students should actively face their own learning life, not put too much pressure on themselves. It is excessive anxiety, and if encountering problems, actively communicate with teachers, parents, or friends to maintain a good and stable attitude.

In summary, in an effect to change the state situation of high school education in China, it not only requires the support of national policies, but also requires the joint efforts of teachers and students. While carrying out educational reforms in the country, the government can actively learn from the advantages of education in Western countries and draw on useful experiences. China's high school education will gradually improve in the future, producing a wider range of talents for China's development.

## References

- [1] Chu Zhaohui (2020). *Senior High School Education Development in China: Characteristic and Enlightenment*, *Journal of Hebei Normal University (Education Science Edition)* (02), 29-36.
- [2] Zhao Zuobin (2021). *Quality Education - The Era Flag of Chinese Education*, *Higher Education in China* (05), 33-35.
- [3] Yang Jianchao and Sun Yuli (2014). *A Historical Change of the Senior High School Education*, *Journal of Hebei Normal University (Education Science Edition)* (05), 46-51.
- [4] He Yu (2019). *Cultural implications and implications for the development of secondary education policies in the UK* *Teaching and Management* (06), 118-120.

- [5] Wang Kai (2006). *The Historical Evolution and Value Core of High School Education in the UK*, *Global Education Outlook* (02), 50-54+28.
- [6] Shi Li (2020). *Comparative Analysis of Middle School Education Assessment Systems between China and the UK*. *Shanxi Education (Teaching)* (12), 79-80.
- [7] Liu Fuxiang (2019). *The Reasons and Countermeasures for The Ineffective Quality Education*, *Guangdong Chemical Industry* (12), 216-217.
- [8] Feng Yaping (2019). *Gains and Losses in the Development of Comprehensive Education in China*. *Fudan Education Forum* (06), 12-17.
- [9] Yu Kai&Xie Shan (2020) *Institutional Obstacles and Policy Suggestions for Diversified Development of General High School*, *Chinese Journal of Education* (02), 40-45.
- [10] Wei Xiaoya (2002). *Challenge of Knowledge Economy to Examination-Oriented Education in China*, *Journal of Zhengzhou Economic and Management Cadre College* (01), 67-69.