

Comparing and Contrasting Differences in the Educational Systems of China and the United States

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Abstract: Since the educational quality of China is still not developed enough nowadays, it would be better for China to learn from the United State especially its advanced educational system. From this perspective, it would be necessity to analyse differences in their educational system so as to develop some recommendations to future educational development of China. The research aim is to compare and contrast differences in educational systems between China and the United State. There are three main research objectives, the first is to analyze differences of teaching methods in their educational systems. The second is to analyze differences of educational policies and learning curriculum in their educational systems. The last is to analyze effects of attitudes of students on leading to differences in their educational system. The research method is to take the qualitative research. Researchers would review 5 papers that are of high impact and representative of the larger literature. These five papers would be selected to use further. In terms of results of findings, the first is difference in educational approaches. The American students embrace more freedom to select their curriculum based on their preferences due to cultural difference. The United States follow the individualism which emphasizing the democracy and freedom. By contrast, China follow the collectivism, which emphasizing the family bonds. So, there are more democracy and freedom for American students compared with that of Chinese students in their learning. The second is differences in the educational system. The American education pays more attention to the all-round development, but, the Chinese education emphasizes the intelligent development due to the Confucian culture. The third is differences in attitudes of students on studying. The Chinese students would like to achieve higher scores in their studying, but, the American students emphasize the innovation in their studying. Besides, the American students are allowed to freely express their thoughts and ideas in their studying, but, Chinese students are afraid about expressing their ideas in studying. This research contributes to putting forward to some insights and recommendations on improving educational quality in China by comparing and contrasting advantages and disadvantages of educations between China and the United State. Firstly, Chinese teachers could encourage students to actively and freely express their thoughts and ideas on learning so as to stimulate their interests and enthusiasms in studying. Besides, it would be better to enable Chinese students to embrace more autonomous rights on what curriculums they would like to learn in the future.

1. Introduction

Policymakers are increasingly realizing the importance of education in China. Education has significant impacts on society not only because it increases an individual's general knowledge but also because it improves practical skills (Baum et al P14, 2007; Bynner and John P 34-40, 2002). In thinking about the importance of education, the Chinese government, for decades, has been setting up policies to ensure that the majority of people have the opportunity of being educated (Zhong Yang P4, 2005). For example, children in China get the chance for nine years of free, compulsory education (Tiedao, Zhang, et al P5-6, 2004). Also, the government and universities impose several policies in order to give subsidies and scholarships to students who need money to study. (Tiedao, Zhang, et al P12-13, 2004). In sum, educational attainment has improved rapidly and greatly in China. Now, it the focus of policymakers has shifted towards improving the educational quality in China.

However, the educational quality of China is still not developed enough nowadays (Ji, Hong, and Jianguang Qiu. P179, 2019). A large proportion of Chinese students, especially those living in poor areas, cannot go to high school and instead decide to work (Cai, An. P.1403, 2017). Moreover, the average academic performance of students, especially those in poor, rural areas, is not always excellent. These students are often trapped in a vicious circle of underdevelopment (Zhang, Huafeng P7, 2017). Statistics shown in China suggest that for people who are 15 years old or more, the average amount of schooling is 9.91 years, even though the compulsory education policy tries to ensure that people get at least 9 years of schooling. This means that lots of students end schooling after the compulsory period, and relatively few students decide to continue their studying (E Learning P1, 2021). Students and their families from disadvantaged backgrounds further consider schooling as a huge burden (Cai, An. P.1403, 2017). As such, several policies have been set up to ensure not only that kids can go to school but also so that they can learn.

Despite the educational significance has increasingly gained great attentions by both policymakers and the public, research shows that the Chinese education is not always so effective. The most serious problem is the uneven distribution of education resources at present. Even though the Chinese government manages to help distribute the education resources evenly, there are still huge disparities between urban and rural areas. Especially for most students in rural areas, due to different reasons like not having chances to go to college, or simply not wanting to go to high school, they have to drop out as soon as the compulsory education ends (Kihwele et al P.59, 2019). Also, students living in rural areas commonly show weaker cognitive ability comparing with their urban counterpart. Based on a unified cognitive ability test in the CEPS data, urban students get approximately 1.41 points higher than students living in rural areas (Zhao, Guochang, et al P.27, 2017).

In addition to the uneven distribution of education resources, Chinese students have to suffer from greater studying pressures. In order to enter into the leading university, lots of Chinese students have to spend quite a long time in focusing on their school textbooks. The intensified learning pressure also leads students to lower health conditions.

Taking these two problems—the uneven distribution of educational resources and tremendous study pressure—together, the effectiveness of education in China can still be improved. From this perspective, it would be better to learn from other countries in terms of how they improve educational quality. Towards this end, the goal of this research study is to compare and contrast differences of China's educational system with that of the United States with the hope of deriving some insights with which to improve the educational quality of China in the future.

2. Literature Review

Ziklová (2014) compared and contrasted differences of the Primary and Secondary education between the United State and China. This research mainly focuses on three significant aspects in the

educational quality, that is, the teaching methods, school relation and school curriculum. Results of this research showed that the Chinese educational system tend to be more rigid and firm form especially at the elementary level. In other words, students have to strictly follow the school regulation and school curriculum regulated by the school. By contrast, the American educational system tends to be more relaxed and flexible (Ziklová, p. 46. 2014). In other words, students commonly have rights to make decisions on what subjects and school curriculum they would like to take part into. Similarly, Zhao and Zhang also conducted a comparative research on analyzing the teaching and educational status between China and the United States in 2008. Results showed that American educational researchers would like to focus on curriculum assessment, structures of schools and foundational theories, Chinese researchers would like to focus on educational reform and policy of the education system (Zhao and Zhang, p. 14. 2008).

In these years, Donnellan and Edmondson also took a research by taking the comparison of Pedagogy in China and USA educational system in 2019. This research mainly focuses on higher educational level of students and results showed that Chinese students tend to be more reserved compared with American students. In other words, Chinese students are not willing to share their thoughts and ideas actively only if they are asked to answer questions (Donnellan and Edmondson, p. 8., 2019). By contrast, American students are more willing to actively express their ideas and thoughts when taking classes. So, Chinese students are commonly regarded as being much quiet and reserved in their studying. Although there are numerous researches which analyzing various aspects of education differences between China and the United States, there is limited researches that holistically summarizing how education quality differs between the two countries.

The purpose of this paper is to holistically and systematically examine how education quality differs between China and the United States.

The research aim is to compare and contrast the differences in education system between America and China, and then showing respective advantages and disadvantages of educations in both of them.

Generally, the research objective is to analyze the differences in education between China and America so as to put forward to some recommendations and insights on effective measures of improving the educational situation of students in China in the future.

There are three specific objectives:

1. Describe the education situation in China and the United States – specifically differences in teaching methods in education system.
2. Analyze differences in educational policies especially on educational systems and school curriculum.
3. Examine how students' attitudes and mindsets may contribute to differences in the education in China and the US.

By comparing the description of the education situation, the policies, and the attitudes/mindsets across the two nations, this research would propose some insights and recommendations that can help enhance the education quality in China.

3. Research Method

This research would take the qualitative research method. The qualitative research method is commonly used to develop some new insights in researching fields (McDonough, p.5, 1997). Since one of research aims is to put forward to some insights and recommendations on improving educational quality in China by comparing and contrasting advantages and disadvantages of educations between China and the United State, the qualitative research would be more appropriate. The case study is one of significant qualitative research method (Stake, p.1, 1995). This study would mainly focus on five cases by collecting the second-hand data from some professional researches and

academic studies. In terms of the data collection process, firstly, since the research location is at China and USA, researchers would select three main key words, that is, “educational quality”, “China”, “USA” online. After reading the majority of researches and studies based on the searching results, the second step is to screen the appropriate researches and studies which could be used in the case study. The screen standard would be the fitness of research aims and research objectives in this study. After the stringent screening process, five main researches are selected to be used in the case study and they are showed below.

Table 1 Selected Case

No.	Authors	Name of Cases	Research Themes
1.	Donnellan, J. & Edmondson, M. (2019)	A Comparison of Pedagogy in China and USA Classrooms	Students’ attitudes and mindsets on the education
2.	Ziklová (2014)	Primary and Secondary education in USA and China: comparison of approach and purpose	The teaching methods, school relation and school curriculum.
3.	Zhao and Zhang (2008)	A comparative study of educational research in China and the United States	The Pedagogy
4.	Sang (2017)	A Comparative Study of Differences between Chinese and American Family Educational Approaches,	Educational approaches
5.	OCED (2016)	Education in China	Educational curriculum, educational contents, educational supports

4. Findings

In terms of differences of educational approaches between China and USA, Sang thought the Chinese education put too many pressures on children, they would not offer students sufficient freedom to make their own decisions on studying. Even words, they prefer to intervene their learning (Sang, p. 72, 2017). By contrast, students embrace sufficient freedom to make choice based on their preferences and intentions in America since educators would like to develop the independence and interests of students on learning. It is supported by Donnellan and Edmondson (2019), they analysed education between China and USA from perspectives of Hofstede’s Cultures dimensions, they said that the individualism is in American society and the individualism emphasized the democracy and freedom. So, American students also have more free rights to decide their own education (Donnellan & Edmondson, p. 3, 2019). In the contrary, China follow the collectivism, which emphasizing the family bonds. So, Chinese students do not have too many rights to make their own decisions on education and they merely have rights to make choices in studying when they enter into the college.

When it comes to differences of the educational system and school curriculum, the American education pays more attention to the all-round development, including social competence, communication skills, the critical thinking capability and so on (Sang, p.73, 2017). By contrast, the Chinese education pays more attention to the intelligent development, which would be attributed from the Confucian culture in ancient China. Ziklová (2014) also agreed with effects of Confucian culture on Chinese education. Confucian culture emphasizes personal enrichment and the personal fulfilment is inseparable from the society (Ziklová, p. 3, 2014). Thus, Chinese education does not pay more

attention to the development of social abilities and communication skills compared with American education. American educational researchers would like to focus on curriculum assessment, structures of schools and foundational theories, Chinese researchers would like to focus on educational reform and policy of the education system (Zhao and Zhang, p. 14, 2008). From this perspective, the Chinese government has promoted the Basic Education Curriculum Reform Outline (Ministry of Education, 2001) (OECD, p.24, 2014). This regulation contributes to improve the all-round development of Chinese Students in the contemporary age.

As for students' attitudes and mindsets towards the education, due to effects of the Confucian culture, main intentions of studying of Chinese students are for the family honor. So, they would like to achieve higher scores in their studying (Sang, p.75, 2017). In the contrary, the American students emphasizes the innovation in their studying. So, there are lots of the tertiary education systems in China so as to assist students to improve their studying scores (OCED, p. 11, 2014). Ziklova found that Chinese students do not many have adequate opportunities to express their attitudes and enthusiasms on education since they are oppressed by teachers, educators and even their parents (Ziklova, p.24, 2014). By contrast, American students are allowed to freely express their attitudes towards learning knowledge and educational contents and so on.

5. Discussion

Based on findings of this research, firstly, in terms of the differences of teaching methods between China and USA, the American education allows students to openly express their thoughts and ideas on the knowledge when studying and thus they would like to actively learn. But, Chinese students are too obedient and they have to strictly follow requirements of teachers on learning and thus they lack sufficient opportunities to express their own thoughts and ideas in the education. Brown thought it would be significant for teachers to offer more rights for students to learn so as to develop their critical thinking capability (Brown, p.12, 1998). Secondly, as for differences in the educational system and studying curriculum, American students could make their own decisions on what specific learning contents or studying curriculum they intend to learn. So, there are lots of selective curriculums allowing them to select. But, Chinese students could not make decisions on the studying curriculum especially in the elementary education. Kennedy said that it would be indispensable to allowing students to make decisions on learning contents and studying curriculum by themselves so as to stimulate their interests and enthusiasms in the education (Kennedy, p.48, 1952). In addition, the American education pays more attentions to the all-round development of students and thus they could learn some practical capabilities and skills such as social skills, communication skills, innovative abilities and so on. Kidder thought all these capabilities and skills are significant for students when they enter into the society in the future (Kidder, p. 219, 1989). However, the Chinese education merely pays more attention to the academic education such as mathematics, physics and so on. Luckily, the Chinese government has already developed related policies on the education reformation in these years so as to improve the all-round development of students in the future. Lastly, in terms of students' attitudes and mindsets on the education, Chinese students would like to pursue for higher scores in their studying due to effects of the Confucian culture. Since the Confucian culture commonly regards the personal fulfillment to be the family honor, Chinese students commonly think that achieving higher scores in their education would bring about more family honor. By contrast, American students merely think learning is an effective way to improve themselves. Also, they are allowed to freely express their insights and opinions in their studying (Sowell, p.62, 1993).

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this research aims to analyse differences of educational quality between China and the United State and it mainly focuses on analysed teaching methods, educational systems and studying curriculum, and students' attitudes and mindsets on the education. Three main research objectives have been achieved. According to findings, Chinese students do not have sufficient freedom and rights to make their own decisions on the education due to effects of the Confucian cultures and the collectivism. Also, they pay more attention to achieve higher scores in their studying. By contrast, the American education pays more attention to the all-round development of students and thus they could develop social capabilities, innovative abilities, communication skills, the critical thinking ability and so on.

However, there are still some limitations in this research. Since this research merely takes the qualitative research method, it would be better to take the quantitative research method in the future. The main advantage of the quantitative research is to analyse relationships between dependent variables and independent variables by some mathematic methods (Trochim, p.3, 2007). The future research could analyse the extent of attitudes of students on educational quality by taking qualitative research method and then compared and contrast various attitudes of students between China and USA.

Based on results of this research, there are two main recommendations and insights to improve the educational quality in China in the future. Firstly, Chinese teachers could encourage Chinese students to actively and freely express their thoughts and ideas on knowledge no matter they are right or wrong so as to stimulate their interests and enthusiasms to learn. Besides, it would be better to enable Chinese students to embrace more rights on making decision on what curriculums they would like to learn so as to improve their interests on school curriculums.

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