

## Research on Problems and Solutions of Quality-Oriented Education in China's Rural Primary and Secondary Schools

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### Abstract

Quality-oriented education in China's primary and secondary schools started in recent 30 years, during which some achievements were made and also some problems were experienced, especially in rural regions. The problems and reasons of quality-oriented education in China's rural primary and secondary schools were analyzed from the perspective of teachers and education management, and some solutions were proposed.

**Key words:** Rural primary and secondary schools; Quality-oriented education; Problems; Reasons; Solutions

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### INTRODUCTION

Quality-oriented education, a special term in relation to exam-oriented education, was put forward to correct the trend of primary and secondary schools' pursuit of enrollment rate and universities' over-specialization under exam-oriented education. Adhering to "promoting the students' all-round and initiative development", it emphasizes that education should focus on improving the individuals' overall quality, shaping healthy personality, and developing good characteristics and creativity.

In the mid-80s, people strongly realized the bad consequences from exam-oriented education, and all circles appealed for reform of exam-oriented education. As a result, the problem of improving Chinese national quality was firstly put forward in the *Decision of the Reform of Education System of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China* in 1985, and further pointed out in the *Decision of Deepening Education Reform and Comprehensive Promotion of Quality-Oriented Education of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council* on June 13, 1999, "comprehensive promotion of quality-oriented education should face the modernization, the world and the future". To this end, quality-oriented education was in full swing in China.

This is a far-reaching reform to shift from exam-oriented education to quality-oriented education in China, reflecting the objective requirements of realistic society development and a call of future knowledge-based economic society. Recent 30 years witnessed the growth of quality-oriented education. However, despite of great improvement and some achievements, there are still some dissatisfactory aspects and many pending problems, especially in rural primary and secondary schools. Nowadays, new curriculum reform of primary and secondary schools under quality-oriented education is in full swing in China, so it's necessary to analyze and resolve practically existing problems of quality-oriented education, thereby promoting the new curriculum reform successfully.

### 1. PROBLEMS IN QUALITY-ORIENTED EDUCATION OF RURAL PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

On account of economic backwardness and information blocking, it is more difficult to put quality-oriented

education into effect in rural areas than urban areas. There are many problems in both cognition and actual operation of quality-oriented education in rural primary and secondary education.

### **1.1 One-Sided or Even Wrong Understanding of Quality-Oriented Education**

In rural primary and secondary schools, most school leaders, teachers and parents have the following one-sided or incorrect understandings of quality-oriented education: (a) setting up interest and special skill groups to develop students' personalities and know-how; (b) adding courses of "music, PE and art" and cutting down intellectual education; (c) implementing smoothly optional courses and activity lessons; (d) absolutely protecting students' personality and developing freely without criticism; (e) reducing or even cancelling exams; (f) easing the burden of the students without any homework.

The above-mentioned first three understandings contain a few contents of quality-oriented education, but they are one-sided; hence, some mandarin, mathematics and English teachers consider the quality-oriented education nothing to do with them. The last three are incorrect understandings of quality-oriented education. The quality-oriented education is intended for protecting students' personality, but the personality here refers to students' differences in ability, temperament and character, etc., requiring teachers to teach their students in line with their aptitude based on their personality, characteristics, but not to simply protect all their individuality without considering if it's good or not. And it is an incorrect understanding that the teachers dare not criticize their students even if they make a mistake, this will result in students' bad classroom discipline, weak legal consciousness and lack of responsibility to other people and things. Moreover, examination is always an important means to test teaching efficiency, while the examination system, contents, objectives and forms of exam-oriented education shall be transformed. On this background, only a few examinations are conducted during one semester in many rural primary and secondary schools, so the teachers work lazily and students study slack. Last but not the least, the requirement of reducing burdens of quality-oriented education was put forward against the exam-oriented education's emphasis on examination, scores, and excessive assignments, but not to free the students from all school performances and homework; actually, certain burden and academic stress play positive role in improving the learning efficiency, relying on whether the burden is proper or not. In view of above-mentioned sixth incorrect understanding, many rural primary and secondary schools teachers dare not leave homework to students, some even assign homework once a week, resulting in students' academic failure and weak basic knowledge.

Actually, the cultivation of students' qualities is the core idea of quality-oriented education. Here, quality

refers to people's own development or the general term of quality in biology and psychology, knowledge and intelligence, morality and good behaviors, aesthetic taste, life attitude, and competence. It can also be the referent of people's certain development or quality such as moral quality, psychological quality, political quality, citizen quality, teacher quality and so on. Yet the real quality-oriented education focuses on the degree and level of all the above qualities, pursuing the improvement and efficient guidance of people's development, and the meaning of development include: comprehensiveness and harmony of people's development; difference and diversity of people's development, which does not underline identical or require people's development in fixed models, but attaches importance to development of personalities. Based on the quality-oriented education of this concept, we need to follow these points: as an education, quality education focuses on the formation of people good qualities, meanwhile, it can not neglect the overcome and correctness of poor qualities, which makes people's qualities have the connotation of healthy cultivation; quality-oriented education can not stay at the formation but emphasize the consolidation and improvement, which enriches people's qualities gradually; combine expected quality and actual quality. Expected quality is the present state of quality, for example, that we generally say someone has a good or bad psychological quality is judged by people's psychological manifestation. Actual quality is the exact state of quality, for example, that we say someone should practice or improve psychological quality or moral quality. While implementing quality education, we can not only underline actual quality neglecting expected quality, because expected quality is essential to the development of quality-oriented education, expected quality could not be improved without emphasizing actual quality. However, nowadays the leaders, teachers, students and even parents in China especially in rural areas do not have a good understanding of these concepts of quality-oriented education, which causes a series of issues in it.

### **1.2 Formalized Superficial Problems Existing During Implementation of Quality-Oriented Education**

Because of these one-sided and incorrect understandings, rural primary and secondary schools implement quality-oriented education superficially and formally: (a) Blindly adding "music, PE and art" courses and cut down intellectual education without caring about quality. (b) Taking quality-oriented education as a mode by just focusing on the formality.

Quality-oriented education calls for students' integrated development and "five aspects of education". It's not intended to unrealistically add "music, PE and art" courses and cut down intellectual education when developing quality-oriented education; but it shall match corresponding teaching facilities and teachers,

and emphasize teaching quality. Nowadays, many rural primary and secondary schools make large changes on courses setting and courses adjustment based on original teaching facilities and teachers, so the students may attend computer theory courses without computers, and mandarin or mathematics teachers without any knowledge of music and art are transferred to teach music and art etc., resulting in bad quality of quality-oriented education. For example, quality-oriented education proposes heuristic education, so many teachers ask questions during whole class to show he/she is conducting heuristic teaching without considering if the questions are valuable and heuristic; quality-oriented education focuses on students' ideology and morality education, so many teachers permeate ideological education into each class, making all classes as "ideological education". This kind of action fails to get quality-oriented education's desired effect. Quality-oriented education is an educational idea but not a simple mode, it relies on educators' taking corresponding educational measures in line with specific educational object, environment and content, so it is a dynamic, opening, ever-changing process. However, the rural primary and secondary schools' over-superficialization and formalization of quality-oriented education bring about abnormal development of quality-oriented education.

## **2. CAUSE ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEMS OF QUALITY-ORIENTED EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS**

### **2.1 The Leader's Unclear Thought of Implementing Quality-Oriented Education**

School leaders' quality is not very high. They lack relevant theoretical knowledge of quality-oriented education and fail to understand what quality-oriented education really is, or their superficial understanding is even wrong, which could make the implementation of quality-oriented education inappropriate. How to implement the quality-oriented education in primary and secondary schools? What should we pay attention to? When should we start? Many leaders with fuzzy thinking and unclear method in rural primary and secondary schools don't form a special work plan, letting alone orderly organizing the education and teaching or scientifically guiding teachers' implementation of quality-oriented education.

### **2.2 Poor Quality of Teachers**

Firstly, the teachers lack of expertise. In many rural primary and secondary schools, the teachers for Chinese, math and English also teach music, PE and art, however, they don't have the expertise due to lack of specialized training. Other teachers of Chinese, English and math subject also lack in-service training opportunities or fail to improve themselves due to their own laziness; these

teachers' existing backward knowledge can follow the development of professional knowledge. Under such situation, permeating the latest knowledge is impossible. Secondly, the teachers' teaching standard is lower and their teaching basic skills are not qualified. The quality-oriented education has been implemented nearly 30 years, but lot of teachers still follow the trite teaching model of "Man Tang Guan" (Chinese old teaching method whereby the teacher is just teaching in the whole class and the students just should listen). If they just want to show the quality-oriented education's contents under pressure, they are unable to use the advanced teaching method, not to mention teaching art. In addition, the teachers' research capability is poor. According to the author's field investigation, most teachers don't know how to do research and they also don't realize the importance of research to their own development. Whereas, the biggest difference between teachers' research and theorists' research is that teachers' research is based on practice. This is conducive to improving teaching efficiency, solving concrete teaching problems in practice. Teaching without reflection and research is nothing but to stand still and refuse make any progress. Therefore, implementing quality-oriented education in the new era is not realistic. At last, rural teachers' team is not stable. School gap between urban and rural areas is very obvious. Driven by interests, most rural teachers do not concentrate on their work or even try their best to transfer into urban schools. With the fast development of urban schools, their needs of many teachers make them take a lot of excellent teachers from the rural schools. It is obvious that the left teachers who insist working in the rural schools have comparatively low qualities. Consequently, they have difficulties in understanding and practicing quality-oriented education.

### **2.3 Not Establishing a Scientific Evaluation System of Quality-Oriented Education**

Under the exam-oriented education, the leaders and teachers are just evaluated based on the students' scores, channeling the leaders and teachers to put their full energy on improving the students' scores. When quality-oriented education requires people to neglect the evaluation function of exams, the related educational administrative departments don't develop corresponding evaluation system of quality-oriented education in time. This results in lack of supervision of the teachers' education and teaching work. And it's the major reason that the teachers work lazily, lack responsibility to implement the quality-oriented education.

Quality-oriented education emphasizes the diversification of students' evaluation not the single summative evaluation- scores in the final exam or entrance examination paper. In Chinese basic education, there always exists the saying that "one examination decides one's whole life", that is, an examination score decides the

fate of students' life, this is obviously not scientific, there is a consensus that the summative evaluation is harmful to the healthy growth of students' life and also has a bad influence on the development of the country, because so-called "high score, low competence" talents are cultivated in this way of evaluation. Therefore, quality-oriented education on student evaluation advocates formative assessment, which focuses on students' thinking, ability, attitude, habit in the process of learning. Such evaluation way sounds very nice, but it is very difficult to practice. It needs relevant department reform system of entrance. At the same time, only connecting with teachers' job evaluation system does the assessment has the real meaning to the teachers. However, we lack a scientific evaluation system of quality-oriented education in Chinese rural areas.

#### **2.4 Inadequate Investment in Education Funding**

In order to ensure rural compulsory education funds, the Chinese state council issued *On New Mechanism to Ensure Funding for Rural Compulsory Education* in 2005. One statistics shows that rural education attached and all kinds of education funding accounts for 45% in almost the whole of the rural compulsory education funds. Based on field investigation, inadequate investment funding in rural primary and secondary education results in insufficient teaching facilities, for example, the computers, pianos and some laboratory equipments are insufficient, making it impossible for implementation of quality-oriented education. Moreover, teachers' salaries are too low or even in arrears, resulting in teachers' lack of enthusiasm for work, which makes the launching of quality-oriented education be just a trade-off.

### **3. THOUGHTS AND SOLUTIONS**

According to the analysis of the problems existing in the rural primary and secondary schools and their reasons, it's believed that the following measures should be taken to push forward implementation of quality-oriented education in rural primary and secondary schools.

#### **3.1 Strengthening the Establishment of Leading Cadres**

It's an important guarantee of implementation of quality-oriented education to build efficient leading cadres capable of leading the majority of teaching and administrative staff to make progress.

"To forge iron, one must be strong", the education departments at various counties and cities should take full account of the management level, organization and coordination ability as well as level of education theory when appointing leaders in primary and secondary schools.

Firstly, the ideological construction of incumbent leaders shall be strengthened, building a sense of public service contributing to the cause of education. Secondly,

theoretical training shall be organized regularly, enabling them to accept the influence of advanced management theory and education theory.

Only the leading cadres have excellent skills, their words can speak louder and their works are implemented smoothly, ensuring the implementation of quality-oriented education.

#### **3.2 Strengthening the Construction of Teaching Staff**

It's a key to build high-caliber teaching staff for pushing forward the quality-oriented education.

We should do the work well from two aspects: (a) adjusting the structure of teacher group according to the setting of quality-oriented education curriculum. Introducing a competition mechanism on the appointment of teachers in mandarin, math and English, dismiss surplus and unqualified personnel; recruiting new specialized teachers in computer, music, art and other subjects; (b) Strengthening the training work to in-service teachers. Firstly, educational administrative department should establish the training plan of teachers, and implement special training work, the teachers' cultural knowledge expansion, classroom teaching optimization and strengthen basic training, etc..

Secondly, every primary and secondary school should establish the collective learning system, organize the teachers to learn new educational theories regularly, seriously comprehend the spirit of quality education, encourage teachers to carry out teaching and research; and teachers' attitude towards learning and scientific research should be linked with the year-end appraisal and job classification.

Finally, rural primary and secondary schools should build "brotherly relationship" with the urban schools with top-quality teaching level, insist on the policy of "learning from each other" to learn from their successful experience of quality-oriented education, so as to improve our teaching quality.

#### **3.3 Establishing a Scientific Evaluation System of Quality-Oriented Education**

Evaluation is aimed at judging the value of a certain thing in all human activities. The quality-oriented education requires students to develop themselves comprehensively, harmoniously and actively, so comprehensive evaluation is relied on.

As for students, this includes not only scholastic comprehension evaluation, problem-solving skills evaluation, knowledge evaluation and know-how, but also the evaluation in ideological and moral aspects as well as evaluation in physical and personality.

As for teachers, this includes not only the evaluation of teaching methods, the education outlines and students' scores, but also the evaluation of students' educational ideals and evaluation of guidance activities curriculum and the teachers' own quality.

Moreover, the evaluation methods should be diversified by combining self-assessment with peer assessment, qualitative and quantitative evaluation, periodic evaluation and routine evaluation, school evaluation and off-campus evaluation.

Only establishing a scientific education evaluation system could the quality-oriented education avoid losing the educational direction, or blind or slack education of teachers.

### 3.4 Increasing Funding Investment in Education

Teachers' social role is very enormous. As a mediator of human culture, teacher plays a transitional role in social development; as a creator of social material wealth and spiritual wealth, teacher plays a leading role and directly participates in the construction of material and spiritual civilization through theory construction, knowledge creation, moral shows and consulting; as a main undertaker of talent production, teacher takes responsibility of cultivating the new generation and plays a guiding role in students' development. In terms of social

development and individual development, teachers' social role is irreplaceable, and teachers' labor deserves the respect and recognition of the whole society, meanwhile, teachers' labor value should be reflected in its economic benefits. Therefore, the governments at various counties and cities should increase the funding investment for rural primary and secondary schools, providing a funding guarantee for the teaching equipments or training of in-service teachers, and making it possible to fully implement overall quality-oriented education in rural areas in both hardware and software.

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