

Analysis on the Duration of Compulsory Education in China

--A Study on the Necessity and Urgency of 12-year Compulsory Education

Siyuan Su^{1,*}

¹Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affair, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, the United State, 13210

*Corresponding author. Email: ssu106@syr.edu

ABSTRACT

Nine-year compulsory education refers to the education system implemented in China to guarantee the right of school-age children and adolescents to receive education, which includes six years of primary education and three years of junior high school education. However, China has not given high attention to the education system after the nine-year compulsory education. This paper focuses on the shortcomings of China's current compulsory education system and why China needs to integrate high school studies into its compulsory education system. This paper is analyzed by applying a literature review with data from the Chinese Ministry of Education and the Chinese Bureau of Statistics. It can be concluded that the inclusion of high school education in compulsory education will enhance the number of high-skilled workers in different Chinese industries as a major step in China's globalization process to achieve its development goals.

Keywords: *Compulsory education, education policy, education system in China, high school education, education policy analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION

The general improvement of per capita education level is the general trend of today's global development. The development of educational level has an inseparable relationship with economic and social changes. Many developed countries have responded to the fast-paced development of globalization by strengthening education focusing on improving the quality of the labor force.

In China, many efforts and attempts to improve the level of education for all have been carried out. China officially began to implement nine-year compulsory education through the issuance of the "compulsory education law" in 1986. In addition, china started to expand the enrollment of higher education institutions in 1999. However, there is still a gap between china and the developed countries in the world in terms of educational concepts and educational policies. This study will analyze the shortcomings of China's current educational concepts and policies, discuss the importance and necessity of including high school education in compulsory education. The study will help promote the

extension of compulsory education years in China and improve the educational attainment of the population.

2. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN CHINA

2.1 The Education System of China

2.1.1 Nine-year compulsory education system

The nine-year compulsory education refers to the education system implemented by China to guarantee the right of school-age children and adolescents to receive education. On April 12, 1986, China passed the "Compulsory Education Law" at the Fourth Session of the Sixth National People's Congress. On July 1, 1986, the nine-year compulsory education was officially launched [1]. Compulsory education has been implemented in China for 35 years. Compulsory education has four characteristics: mandatory, free, universality and publicity [2].

2.1.2 Senior secondary education system

China's senior secondary education is divided into regular high schools and secondary vocational schools. In order to further improve the quality of its citizens and labor competitiveness, China issued the "Senior Secondary Education Popularization Plan (2017-2020)" in 2017. The plan puts forward the goal of universalizing senior secondary education across the country by 2020, which requires that the gross enrollment rate of senior secondary education from all provinces must reach 90% or more. However, universal high school education is not the same as compulsory education since it has no free and compulsory characteristics. Currently, many regions in China are trying to develop free high school education [3].

2.1.3 Higher education system

Higher education in China is divided into general universities/colleges and higher vocational schools. Universities are mainly responsible for cultivating research-oriented talents with high academic qualifications, while higher vocational schools focus on cultivating technical talents. In 1999, China began to expand the enrollment of higher education institutions with the goal of "stimulating domestic demand and consumption, promoting economic growth, and alleviating employment pressure" [4].

2.2 Full Coverage Of Nine-Year Compulsory Education

Compulsory education has achieved full coverage in China. The nine-year compulsory education has raised the level of education per capita in China, and in particular has completely eliminated illiterate among Chinese youth.

The definition of non-illiterate by the State Council and the Ministry of Education of China is: Farmers can learn 1,500 Chinese characters; employees of enterprises and institutions, and urban residents can learn 2,000 Chinese characters; every person can read newspapers and articles and can do simple calculation; every person can do simple practical writing [5].

According to China's national census data, the illiterate rate in 1964 was 33.58%, and in 2020, the illiterate rate was only 2.67% (Figure 1). The illiterate rate has fallen sharply every year since the implementation of the 9-year compulsory education law. It can be clearly seen from Figure 1 that since the nine-year compulsory education was formally implemented in 1986, the illiterate rate dropped by 9.16% from 1990 to 2000.

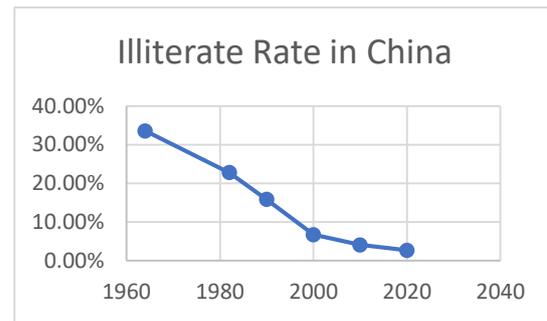


Figure 1 Illiterate Rate of China [6]

After the implementation of the nine-year compulsory education in 1986, the illiterate rate has dropped significantly. The results of the fourth census released in 1990 and the fifth census released in 2000 showed that the illiterate rate dropped by 9.16% in 10 years. The 2020 census shows that the illiterate rate is only 2.67%. At the same time, nine-year compulsory education has been fully covered. The sharp drop in the illiterate rate has an inseparable relationship with the full implementation and development of nine-year compulsory education.

China's nine-year compulsory education has developed at a rapid pace. According to the 2019 "China Children's Development Program (2011-2020)" statistical monitoring report, compulsory education has been fully popularized. Based on the data, there are 212,600 schools providing compulsory education in China, including 160,100 primary schools and 52,400 junior high schools. In 2019, the net enrollment rate of primary school-age children was 99.94%, and the gross enrollment rate of junior high school was 102.6%. At the same time, the consolidation rate of the nine-year compulsory education in 2019 (referring to the percentage of the number of students graduating from junior high school to the number of students entering the first grade of elementary school in that grade) is as high as 94.8%.

2.3 Popularization Of Senior Secondary Education

According to data from the National Education Development Statistical Bulletin in 2019, there are 24,400 senior secondary schools in China, with a gross enrollment rate of 89.5%. Including 14,000 regular high schools with 7,892,500 graduates; 10,100 secondary vocational schools with 4,934,700 graduates. The enrollment rate of senior secondary school has been increasing in recent years. However, compared with the junior high school gross enrollment rate which maintained at around 99%, the enrollment rate of senior secondary school is still low. In figure 2, more than 10% of junior high school graduates choose not to continue

their education after graduation, but directly enter the job market every year.

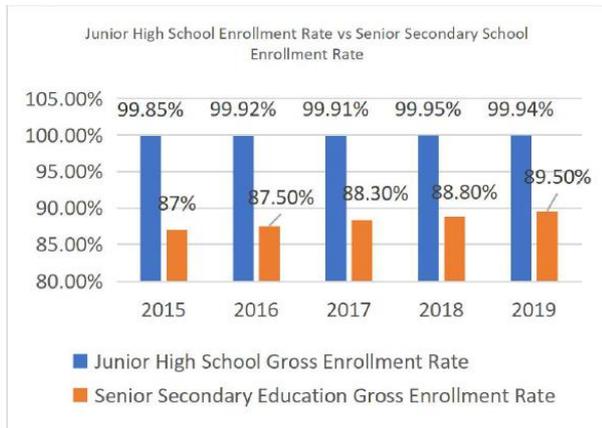


Figure 2 Junior High School Enrollment Rate VS. Senior secondary school enrollment rate [7]

At present, some cities in China, such as Zhuhai City in Guangdong Province, Ningbo City in Jiangsu Province, and Guilin City in Guangxi Province, are gradually launching 12 years of free education, which includes nine years of compulsory education plus three years of free high school education [8]. Three-year high school education is exempt from tuition and miscellaneous fees, but not mandatory compulsory education. At the same time, China promulgated a policy in 2009 to waive tuition for three-year secondary vocational schools.

At the first meeting of the 13th CPPCC National Committee in 2018, the proposal on the gradual implementation of 12-year compulsory education was put forward but got rejected by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education believes that the current conditions for the development of 12-year compulsory education are still immature. There are still large gaps between urban and rural areas, regions, schools, and groups. Problems such as prominent financial revenue and expenditure contradictions still exist. Therefore, some areas are currently exploring the development of free education, but it will take more time to implement compulsory education. [9]

3. WEAKNESSES OF CHINA’S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Throughout the world, countries with successful industrial upgrades and high economic development, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, etc., have compulsory education that has reached or exceeded the 12-year system. According to the data from OECD, all developed countries have a large population of high school or above diploma. Besides, in China, more than 60% of 25-34-year-olds have got only high school education or less education.

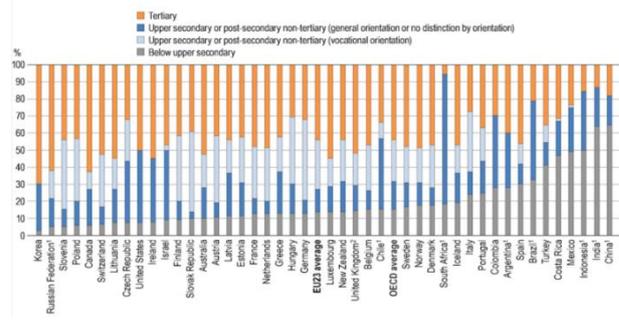


Figure 3. Educational attainment of 25-34 year-olds (2019) [10]

Senior secondary education should be an extremely important part of the education hub. While ordinary high schools carry the work of linking basic education with higher education, the secondary vocational education provides pre-employment education for students who do not plan to study in higher education, so that graduates could have good professional skills and can quickly integrate into the job market. However, according to the current national policies and regulations on education, senior secondary education has not received much attention.

3.1 Imperfect Laws and Regulations Related to Senior Secondary Education

At present, China has not issued any clear regulations on senior secondary education. China promulgated the "Compulsory Education Law" in 1986 and subsequently revised it to improve the enforceability of nine-year compulsory education. This has become the guarantee of nine-year compulsory education from the political and legal levels. At the same time, China promulgated and revised the "Regulations on Academic Degrees of the People's Republic of China" and the "Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China" in the 1990s to regulate and supervise higher education in accordance with laws. However, China lacks policy guarantees for high school education. Senior secondary school as a link between compulsory education and higher education, it in fact become a bottleneck that restricts the development of education.

3.2 Inequality in Educational Funding Allocation and Financial Investment

According to the data provided by the Ministry of Education in 2019, the national GDP in 2019 was 990.86.51 billion yuan, and the national fiscal education expenditure accounted for 4.04% of the GDP [11]. However, according to the data given by the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report in 2019, education expenditures of three-quarters of the countries in the world accounted for 4.0% or more of their GDP. Among them, high-income countries, such as the United States,

the United Kingdom, and Switzerland, all have more than 5.0% of education funding, and many middle-income countries like China also have about 5.0% of their education funding [12]. Therefore, China's expenditure on education funding is relatively modest.

At the same time, due to the popularization of nine-year compulsory education and the expansion of ordinary colleges and universities since 1999, China's senior secondary education funds account for the lowest proportion. It can be seen from Table 1 that the average public budget education expenditure for primary school, junior high school, high school, and vocational high school students is lower than the average public budget education expenditure for higher education students. It is clear that there is a certain imbalance in China's investment in various types of education funds. The importance of general high school education as a bridge connecting nine-year compulsory education and higher education has not been reflected.

Table 1 Expenditure of Educational Funds per Student [11]

Education Category	Education Expenditure per Student in the General Public Budget
Elementary School Education	11940.08
Junior High School Education	17319.04
High School Education	17821.21
Vocational High School Education	17282.42
Higher Education	23454.39

3.3 The Financial Difference in Regions and Schools

According to China's current GDP of 31 provinces, there is a significant gap in economic development, which leads to a significant gap in the investment of education funds in each province. There are great differences and unfairness between the quality of school running and the quality of students' learning in different regions. Compared with developed provinces and cities, attending high school is extremely difficult for students in poverty-stricken areas. Compared with high schools in developed areas, senior high schools in poverty-stricken areas generally have problems such as insufficient education funds, shortage of outdated educational equipment, lack of teachers, and serious shortage of high-quality teaching resources. According to statistics, in 2016, the average gross enrollment rate of high school in China's 14 deeply impoverished autonomous prefectures was 73.83%, which was 13.67% lower than the national average gross enrollment rate. In contrast,

the admission rate of ordinary senior high schools in the 14 deeply impoverished counties in Guizhou, where ethnic minorities live, is only 43.6% [13].

It follows that, compared with students in developed areas, students in poor areas are at a disadvantage in terms of the access to education and the process of education. Therefore, there will be serious inequalities in the chances of entering colleges/universities and employment. The probability of students from poor and rural areas entering colleges and universities is eight times lower than that of urban students, while the probability of students entering China's top two colleges is 43 times lower than that of urban students [13]. Under such development prospects, many rural students in poverty-stricken areas and students with difficult families will not choose to go to high school and directly enter the job market.

However, there is also an obvious gap in education investment in the same region. In the same region, the investment of local finances in "key high schools" is significantly higher than that in "weak high schools." Due to the inherent viewpoints of "excellent schools" and "ordinary schools," some local governments have focused on investing funds in key schools in order to increase the enrollment rate of colleges and universities in that region, while ignoring the funding for ordinary high schools. The heavy investment in key high schools and the ignorance of ordinary high schools lead to irrational allocation of educational resources, which affects the imbalance in the quality of students. At the same time, the large amount of capital investment and attention given to ordinary high schools by local governments has weakened the status of secondary vocational schools. As a result, many students and their parents are reluctant to attend secondary vocational schools and instead blindly pursue "key high schools".

4. DISCUSSION

Although "Made in China" is all over the world, China's manufacturing industry is nevertheless not at the top and has always been "big but not strong". Internationally, labor productivity is also much lower than that of developed countries such as the United States, Germany and Japan. Data show that the world average labor productivity is 24,254 USD/person, the United States is 110,800 USD/person, while China is only 13,084 USD/person, which is only half of the world average [14]. Therefore, China needs to strengthen the utilization of skilled personnel to solve the problem of low labor productivity, so as to achieve the transformation and upgrading of new industrialization. From the development of agriculture and heavy industry to the development of modern science and technology, the adjustment and upgrading of the economic structure put forward higher requirements on the quality of the labor force.

In China, basic education, the nine-year compulsory education, is fully covered, and its mandatory, free and public nature ensures that every student receives the same education. In the context of China's current strategy to build a strong education country, higher education has been steadily increasing in recent years in terms of education funding and social attention. However, basic education has no major or vocational orientation, while higher education focuses more on training research-oriented talents. The lack of emphasis on high school education in the Chinese education system has led to a lack of skilled personnel and an insufficient talent pool for higher education. Enhanced training covering the high school education level is urgently needed.

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, high school has been inadequately emphasized as an important hub for talent pooling and delivery, as well as a critical stage for the development of a professional, technical and skilled workforce. The limitation of this paper is that there is no surveys designed to statistically measure whether or not current junior high school graduates are enrolled in high school, instead, all data in this paper are from official records.

The rapid economic and social development of China in the past 40 years is inseparable from the implementation of nine-year compulsory education. The development of education in China has not only contributed to economic and social development, but also to the development of social equity. However, China suffers from the problem of insufficient attention to high school education at the level of its educational structure. Within the framework of vigorous development of nine-year compulsory education and higher education, the development of high school has been greatly restricted. In terms of legal and policy protection, education funding, and local financial differentiation need to be improved. At present, there are still many young people in poverty-stricken areas whose education is stagnant at the junior high school level, which has become a bottleneck to improve the quality of the population.

With the development of science and technology and the change of industrial structure, the global demand for skilled personnel is increasing. For China's goal of becoming a world power and a manufacturing power, a good foundation can help China achieve economic transformation and optimization faster. Therefore, the problem of shortage of skilled personnel brought about by economic development must be solved as soon as possible.

Focusing on strengthening high school education, strongly developing secondary vocational school education, and extending nine-year compulsory education to twelve-year compulsory education as soon as possible is a necessary part to make up for the

shortcomings of China's education system and optimize the structure of China's economy.

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