

Similarities and Differences of Primary Education between China and the United States from the Perspective of Cross-cultural Communication–Based on Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory

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ABSTRACT

Primary education plays a decisive role in national education and the cultivation of national talents. There are obvious differences in the practice of primary education between China and the United States. In addition to economic and political differences, cultural differences are important reasons for the diversity. As the trend of globalization and internationalization of education in the 21st century is deepening, international exchanges and cooperation in the field of education are becoming more and more frequent. At the same time, the COVID-19 epidemic brings more challenges to education. This paper will use secondary analysis and qualitative analysis, based on Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory to analyze the differences between China and the United States in the field of basic education. The reasons behind the differences will also be explored. As global develops rapidly, the education policy suitable for the times must keep up with the pace of national development. The differences in basic education between China and the United States will bring us new ideas for the reform of basic education in China. In reform and innovation, it is expected that education can bring Chinese people more vitality, and a better future.

Keywords: *primary education, internationalization, cross-cultural communication, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory*

1. INTRODUCTION

There are obvious differences between the system of primary education between China and the United States. In addition to the differences in policy, the state of the economy, cultural divide can also be seen as a trigger. In the 21st century, the trend of internationalization is deepening, international exchanges and cooperation in education are becoming more and more frequent. Internationalization is considered to be one of the key factors in addressing the many challenges of education in the current era. Under this trend, the reform of basic education is imperative. This paper will focus on the current situation of basic education in China and the United States based on Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory. Hofstede (1994) emphasized that culture is acquired by individuals by means of their membership to a group of people [1]. Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions Theory is a framework for understanding the cultural

differences and similarities between different countries. He identified six categories that define culture including Power Distance Index, Collectivism vs. Individualism, Uncertainty Avoidance Index, Femininity vs. Masculinity, Short-Term vs. Long-Term Orientation and Restraint vs. Indulgence. Nowadays, the framework is used to distinguish between national cultures and analyze their impact on our daily lives. The primary education of China and the United States will be analyzed through a series of comparison based on the cultural theory. After coming to a conclusion, the measures conducive to the future development of basic education in China and the world will be discussed.

2. DISCUSSION

Since the 21st century, the trend of globalization has deepened, and countries have implemented policies and initiatives in the field of education to cope with the trend of globalization and internationalization of education.

There are two hot spots in primary education: artificial intelligence and the COVID-19 health crisis. The epidemic changed a series of aspects of life, including the field of education. From then on, the primary education of the world will be divided into another new era. The trend of primary education in the post-epidemic era is to break the old traditional order and pattern and step into the deep integration of many aspects through systematic reconstruction [2]. The COVID-19 health crisis has affected the educational and cultural exchanges among countries, and also on the development trend of the internationalization of education. Some scholars have shown that the epidemic has exacerbated the trend of "reverse globalization" and affected the willingness to study and be educated abroad. At the same time, the initiatives and policies of various countries for primary education have also changed, resulting to the innovation and change of primary education. In an era of epidemics plus globalization, what policies will countries set about primary education has become a new issue and challenge for us.

There is no denying that the competitiveness of a country originates from the talent reserve of all areas. As the foundation of the comprehensive competitiveness of the country, education not only plays a profound role in people's life, but also profoundly affects the fate of a nation. Primary education, as a fundamental and foremost right, is crucial for every child and their future study. It is not only the government's but also parents' responsibility to ensure the accessibility of primary education for all children. The main objective of the primary education is to bring awareness among the children, opens avenues of opportunities along with self-development and reduces inter-generational poverty [3]. Due to the different political, economic and cultural backgrounds, there are great differences between the policies implemented and the system adopted by China and the United States in the field of primary education.

China's primary education includes three stages: pre-school education, compulsory education and general high school education. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the development of basic education has gone through three historical stages: the recovery and development period of the "17-year" period, the difficult period of setbacks in the "cultural revolution", and the period of strategic development since the reform and opening-up. With the development of education in China, the scale of primary education has been expanding, the quality of education has been improved, and the management system is becoming more and more complete. A series of policies in the field of primary education has also been implemented, ameliorating the problems of educational equity, quality-oriented education, legal guarantee and so on. In China's primary

education, the relationship between teachers and students is more like the relationship between superiors and subordinates. The focus of primary education requires students to well master the basic subject knowledge. However, if it is over corrected, the development of students' creative thinking will be ignored. At the same time, China's primary education goals are planned for a longer period of time: making the country a top performer in education in the next 15 years, and creating high-quality development in the next 5 years. Confronting the success of primary education in China, there is still a long way to go in order to improve a lot of manifest problems.

The United States has adopted elite education since the primary education. America's elite education is successful, for not only producing a large number of science and business elites, but also a large number of Nobel laureates. For many years, the United States has maintained a leading position in science and technology in the world. The success of elite education in the United States is related to its relaxed, non-competitive educational environment. This kind of educational environment protects children's curiosity and creativity. However, this relaxed and uncompetitive educational environment has also made a large number of "left behind" students. To change this situation, President Bush pushed for an education reform and launched the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act. Ostensibly, NCLB was designed to raise overall student educational achievement and to eliminate achievement gaps among varying subgroups of students. However, the unintended consequences of the law, engendered by its enforcement mechanisms and the incentives it created to boost reading and math test scores by any means possible, have stirred debate among in-service teachers, school administrators, policymakers, and the educational research community [4].

Subsequent presidents have enacted measures such as Race to the Top act to close loopholes in previous measures, but there is still room for improvement in primary education in the United States. To sum up, American primary education pays attention to cultivating students' innovative ability and creative thinking. It has great flexibility in the teaching process and the American students enjoy a more equal relationship with their teachers.

China and the United States have great differences in politics, economy and culture. According to the differences in the background of the two countries, the characteristics of primary education of the two countries have also been greatly different. These differences will be analyzes based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory from several aspects.

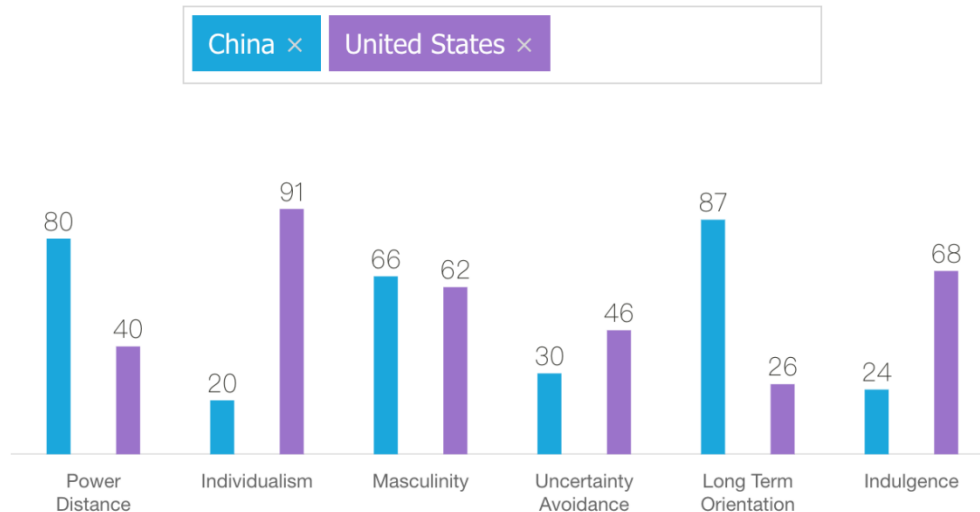


Figure 1. Comparison of index between China and the United States by Hofstede Insights

2.1. Power Distance Index

The power distance index considers the extent to which inequality and power are tolerated. In this dimension, inequality and power are viewed from the viewpoint of the followers – the lower level [6]. In the countries with high power distance index, national culture has a high tolerance for ranking and authority. Within the country, a top-to-bottom hierarchy is usually formed. On the contrary, countries with low power distance index tend to form a flat organizational structure and place emphasis on power distribution. According to the data from Hofstede Insights, China’s PDI index is 80, while the United States is 40.

In China, "respect for teachers" is an important part of traditional virtues. China is a country with high power distance index, so the relationship between teachers and students in primary education tends to be between superiors and subordinates. This teacher-student relationship leads to a more orderly classroom order, which can save time for teaching. At the same time, respecting teachers also means having a reverence for knowledge.

Philosopher Michel Foucault once proposed the social theory Panopticism in Discipline and Punish. Many scholars believe that this theory is also applied to modern education, where teachers look at students from a panoramic perspective at higher levels, while each student has only teachers in his or her eyes and is located at a lower level. This theory expounds the disadvantages of such classroom display. There is no doubt that harmonious classroom atmosphere is the paradise to train student's creative thinking. In classroom discussion, the teacher often normalizes some forms of expression over others, reducing opportunities for pluralistic and agonistic engagement [7]. With the deepening of the relationship between teachers and students, class

atmosphere will be affected, effectiveness of class will be greatly reduced. Compared to China, the United States is a country with a lower distance index. On one hand, it can be seen from the research of comparative studies of primary education in China and the United States, that the multi-curricular approach of U.S. elementary schools has resulted in American students leaving behind at least two grades below their Chinese peers' basics (especially language and math) by the end of the fourth grade [8]. On the other hand, in the field of education, the United States has a small class system, with a smaller number of people in one class. The relationship between teachers and students is more equal. In the classroom, teachers tend to let students express their ideas freely, discuss with others in class, explore problems, and draw conclusions. American class atmosphere is more relaxed than China, which stimulates students to think more by themselves. Currently, American classrooms have introduced more diverse teaching methods, such as PBL teaching methods, which provide more ideas for how to design teaching in the future. The purpose of PBL teaching method is to enable students to improve their learning and develop their interest and ability to learn independently by participating in learning tasks, including learning skills such as cooperating with others, making autonomous decisions, gathering information, and solving problems, so as to promote the sound development of students' personality [9]. In the future, more innovations will be made in the field of primary education to adapt to the trend of the world.

2.2. Uncertainty Avoidance Index

The uncertainty avoidance index considers the extent to which uncertainty and ambiguity are tolerated. This dimension considers how unknown situations and unexpected events are dealt with [10]. According to the data from Hofstede Insights, China’s uncertainty

avoidance index is 30, while the United States is 46.

People in the country with high uncertainty avoidance index tend to control the future and had a low tolerance for uncertainty, ambiguity, and risk-taking. On the contrary, other countries with low uncertainty avoidance index always have a “let it happen” attitude.

The uncertainty avoidance index affects the country's acceptance of innovation and new things. China is a country with a high uncertainty-avoidance index. Therefore, in the field of education, Chinese teachers seem to be more conservative. They tend to teach students with more traditional method, and prefer to test whether students have possessed the basic knowledge. This kind of teaching will lead to the lack of innovation and critical thinking of students. Compared with China, American teachers pay more attention to cultivate students' innovative thinking ability, for the United States is a country with low uncertainty avoidance index. American students lack the process of dominating knowledge systematically, but they are likely to find more new discoveries and breakthroughs in innovation.

2.3. Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Orientation

The long-term orientation vs. short-term orientation dimension takes into account society's view of its time frame. Long-term positioning indicates a focus on the future, including delaying short-term success or satisfaction in order to achieve long-term success. Long-term orientation emphasizes persistence, perseverance and long-term growth. Short-term positioning shows a focus on the near term, including short-term success or satisfaction, with a greater emphasis on the present than on the future. It also emphasizes rapid results and respect for tradition [11].

China is a country with long-term orientation. In 2020, a sudden outbreak of COVID-19 poses a major challenge to education. Both China and the United States have made a series of policies and measures in primary education to adapt to the crisis of the times. In the context of the COVID-19, China has developed a 15-year plan for primary education. Policies and strategies for “the 2035 educational target” will be phased in. On the contrary, the United States is good at implementing short-term goals in primary education. They emphasize real-time results and are not very concerned about the long-term future. In addition, Chinese teachers tend to follow the traditional teaching methods and respect the traditional teaching model, so as to be less innovative in teaching. These are the result of long-term orientation.

2.4. Directions of China's future reform in the field of basic education

It is imperative for China to reform in the field of

primary education. Based on the above analysis and demonstration, a clear target emerged and the author can put forward three directions of China's future reform in the field of primary education.

First and foremost, in the process of traditional teaching method, Chinese educators can pay more attention to cultivating students' innovative thinking. Teachers can properly break the original traditional teaching mode, and guide students to discover more in class. Students can explore a result but not wait teacher's guidance when raising a question. At the same time, the classroom furnishings can be changed. The orientation of the lectern and desk should be adjusted appropriately to make the relationship between teachers and students more equal, which enables students to have more chances to express themselves and discuss with each other. Classroom furnishings can make atmosphere of class more active, which helps improve efficiency of teaching.

Simultaneously, the innovation of breaking through the traditional teaching mode is worth encouraging. China is a country with a high uncertainty avoidance index. In education, teachers' conservatism makes it harder for students to innovate. During the teaching process, teachers can properly guide students to use critical thinking to look at problems, dare to innovate, and break through the original knowledge framework. In addition, teachers should guide students to accept new things with a more inclusive perspective and pursue innovation in the tradition.

Moreover, China's long-term planning in the field of primary education is worth learning from, which not only reflects a country's sense of responsibility for the future, but also reflects China's goals and blueprints in education. However, under the long-term goal planning, small goals that are more suitable for the current educational situation should also be set. The government's education policy can be more time-sensitive, based on the present. Under the guidance of the final target, Chinese educators can firstly achieve one small goal after another, thus completing the ideal blueprint. In the crisis of COVID-19, China should focus on the current situation and implement more in line with the epidemic era of education policy, in order to avoid the declination of education during times of crisis.

3. CONCLUSION

Education is essential to the development of a country. Primary education is the cornerstone of the whole process of education, which is greatly influential to a country. In the field of primary education, countries should aim at cultivating talented people, and formulate educational policies suitable for national conditions.

This paper analyzes the similarities and differences between China and the United States in primary education through Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Theory. Teaching of China's primary education prefers the students to master necessary subject knowledge through a series of methods to test students' learning results. Chinese teachers also tend to use traditional teaching models for the teaching of knowledge, which inevitably leads to a series of problems such as low classroom efficiency. The primary education in the United States focuses more on critical thinking and innovative thinking. Teachers prefer to achieve the teaching goal through the process of exploring problems. Probably, American teaching methods will make students' studying less systematic and specific, but students will be more independent to study creatively and critically.

In the 21st century – an era of innovation, the author expects that a more diverse and advanced education system will be achieved in the future. With the deepening trend of globalization and internationalization of education, an educational model more adapted to the world should be explored. In the field of primary education, China and the United States have their own advantages and disadvantages in education policy and education system. In order to achieve better education and cultivate more talents, countries should learn from each other and make up for their disadvantages, while constantly implementing new policies. At the present stage, our country is in an important period of reform and reconstruction of education, especially primary education. Simultaneously, the COVID-19 is a dividing line. From then on, the world's primary education will be divided into "pre-epidemic era" and "post-epidemic era". The basic trend of primary education in the post-epidemic era is to break the old traditional order and step into the deep integration from all aspects through systematic reconstruction [12]. As the three main body of broad education - school, society, and the family need to take more suitable education, international-oriented measures, so that the field of education continues to progress. The author looks forward to the continuous development and progress of education in reflection, and to a brighter future for our children.

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