



The Research Summary of Promoting Twelve-Year Compulsory Education in China

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Abstract. China's compulsory education system, first introduced in 1986, has been implemented until now for almost four decades. In recent years, scholars and policymakers proposed the plan of expanding the current nine-year compulsory education to twelve years to include senior high school in the compulsory years. By investigating past research on the topic, this paper summarizes the main aspects of the twelve-year compulsory education system. First, manifestations about including high school, and giving priorities to rural areas and ethnic minorities are presented. Then, the foundation, past exemplary experiences, and significance of twelve-year compulsory education are demonstrated. Lastly, various possible dilemmas of the system on the inadequate educational awareness, potential increase in unemployment and social immobility, and the insufficient educational resources are discussed. It is found that twelve-year compulsory education could be feasible according to the reform proposal, demonstrated by many regions in the country. However, the problems would also be concerning in terms of bringing conflicting and damaging effects to the country, or mainly to the students. This paper concludes with indications and concerns raised to the government when implementing twelve-year compulsory education.

Keywords: Twelve-year compulsory education · Universal high school education · Rural education · Education inequality

1 Introduction

The topic of the paper is the research summary on promoting twelve-year compulsory education in China. Compulsory education must be implemented by the state for all school-age children and adolescents in accordance with the law, which is compulsory, universal and free. In the current state, with nine-year compulsory education having developed for decades and reached great achievements and universal high school education has been carried out for several years, some experts raise the concept of “twelve-year compulsory education”, which lasts from primary school to senior high school. They

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consider promoting twelve-year compulsory education as a matter of great significance for the development of China's education system, especially in rural areas and ethnic minorities. In terms of rural areas, solving the difficulty for rural children to go to school, making the conditions for running schools and financial resources better are inevitable requirements to improve the comprehensive cultural quality of the population, and an important driving force for them to get rid of poverty and get out from the mountains [1]. In terms of ethnic minorities, it is helpful for them to not only integrate with the Han nationality, but also learn advanced technology and culture to help themselves out of poverty. However, there exists a lot of problems and economic issues are acute, which can be an essential reason for many areas to step back. As a result, it has been carried out only in a few regions with financial abundance or state grants. Besides, the lack of education awareness and perception in rural areas, the potential increase in unemployment and social immobility, and insufficient educational resources are the main dilemma for its implementation.

2 Reform Proposal of 12-Year Compulsory Education in China

Educationists have proposed the concept of 'twelve years of compulsory education', arguing that China should follow the example of developed countries and implement policies to make education universal. The importance of compulsory education as the basis for improving national literacy cannot be overstated. As a result, they have proposed the following ideas: High school being included, giving priority to rural areas and giving priority to ethnic minorities. The following are concrete manifestations of the three scenarios.

2.1 High School Being Included

The first point in the twelve-year compulsory education scenario is the inclusion of upper secondary school in the nine years of compulsory education already previously in place, thus constituting twelve years of compulsory education. Universal upper secondary education, meaning that the vast majority of students at school age receive upper secondary education, where the state provides sufficient conditions to meet demand [2]. Senior secondary education is an important part of the national education system and is a crucial period for students to move from being minors to adults, forming their personalities and developing autonomously. The state coordinates teacher resources in the implementation process to promote balanced access and educational standards, thereby alleviating the pressure to move from junior high school to high school. In terms of educational content, senior secondary education has enhanced the selectivity and professional appeal of the curriculum compared to junior secondary education. It focuses more on students' ways of thinking and practical application skills, and it is relatively richer in content. Therefore, universal high school education can achieve a balanced education, build a quality curriculum and provide a solid foundation for students' future work and research.

The inclusion of high school in compulsory education will help to further improve the quality of the nation, accelerate the promotion of educational equity, alleviate the pressure for further education, promote excellence in adaptive education and contribute

to the further improvement of China's comprehensive national power and technological level.

2.2 Giving Priority to Rural Areas

The second point in the twelve-year compulsory education scenario is to give priority to the development in rural areas. Professor Liu Yongming and Researcher Cao Xiao of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics (UFE) published the eighth national "Thousand Villages Survey" by UFE. This survey found that 83% of adults in poor rural households had less than nine years of education, and nearly half of poor household members had at most a primary school education. Therefore, they wrote an article in the Jiefang Daily on 13 September suggesting that 12 years of compulsory education should be introduced in rural areas first [3]. One of the main reasons for the low literacy level of the rural population is the high cost of education. With the support of the nine-year compulsory education policy in recent years, the exemption of primary and junior secondary school fees has effectively reduced the burden of expenditure on education on rural families. However, the cost of education is not only in terms of school fees, but also in terms of transport, communication and teacher resources, so schools in rural areas are often concentrated in one or two schools due to the problem of educational resources. As a result, students also bear a considerable amount of expenses such as transport, accommodation and living expenses. In many rural families, due to this considerable expense, parents and students are often forced to end their education and go to the city to earn money with physical strength. Nine years of compulsory education is not sufficient to support the level of knowledge required by a normal brain worker in contemporary society, but because of this perverse development, enrolment in high school in rural areas is considerably lower than in lower secondary schools. The priority given to the development of 12-year compulsory education in rural areas allows rural students who need to learn to get the stage of study they deserve, to reach the level of education they need and to help them to be able to use what they have learned for pay, rather than purely manual work.

It follows that implementing 12-year compulsory education for students in remote areas is of great significance in enhancing universal basic education, increasing the comprehensive quality of talents and realizing the policy of strengthening China's human resources [4].

2.3 Giving Priority to Ethnic Minorities

The third point in the twelve-year compulsory education scenario is to give priority to the development of ethnic minorities. Most of China's ethnic minorities have their own language systems and their own cultures. On the one hand, although China has made nine-year compulsory education universal, due to the characteristics of "large diaspora and small mixed communities". Ethnic minority people live in one area, they stick to their own ethnic culture, speak their language and learn Chinese only at the junior high school level or even less than junior high school level, which is very unfavorable to. This is not conducive to the integration of ethnic groups, nor is it conducive to the advanced technology and culture that they are learning, thus leading to the backwardness and

disappearance of ethnic groups. Compulsory education is not only about the Chinese language, but also about the language and culture of the people. By prioritizing the implementation of the 12-year compulsory education policy in ethnic minorities and by developing teaching materials to increase the knowledge and ethnic culture required by high school students, the government is ensuring the quality of education while preserving the traditional culture of the nation. On the other hand, ethnic minorities live mainly in remote areas, similar to rural areas, their economic level may not be sufficient to support their children through high school. Moreover, due to the state policy support, they are relatively conservative in their thinking and present an indifferent or even unwanted attitude towards the aspect of studying and acquiring knowledge.

Therefore, prioritizing the development of 12-year compulsory education for ethnic minorities has a profound impact on both the ethnic minority people and the traditional culture of ethnic minorities.

3 Experience of Twelve-Year Compulsory Education Practice in China

3.1 The Foundation of Twelve-Year Compulsory Education

Compulsory education must be implemented by the state for all school-age children and adolescents in accordance with the law, which is compulsory, universal and free. Twelve-year Compulsory Education has been proposed in recent years, the period of which covers 6-year primary school, 3-year junior high school and 3-year senior high school.

3.1.1 Nine-Year Compulsory Education

Nine-year Compulsory Education has developed into a relative mature state since it was put forward in 1986. It embodies on the increasing investment not only in school building and equipment, but teachers' payment and welfare and assistance with students in difficulty as well. What's more, the policy towards general structure and specific implementer problems is improving. And the encouragement for kids to receive education is continuous. Up to now, nine-year compulsory education has influenced the reducing illiteracy rate and increasing education penetration rate. Besides, it has exerted an influence on the reducing gender differences and improving teachers' qualification and implementation of quality education. What can be strong proofs of these significant results are the popularization of knowledge, the promotion of education equity and the improvement of quality of education and overall quality of people. All above are the cornerstones to develop twelve-year compulsory education. According to scholar research, in 2018, the enrollment rate of primary school children reached 99.95%, the gross enrollment rate of junior high school reached 100.9%, and the retention rate of nine-year compulsory education reached 94.2% [5].

3.1.2 Universal High School Education

The senior high school stage is included in twelve-year compulsory education. With the great improvement of nine-year compulsory education, the fifth Plenary Session of

the 18th Communist Party of China Central Committee clearly put forward “universal high school education” and then raised “The Plan for the Popularization of Senior High School Education (2017–2020)”. It aims to gain more than 90% in the gross enrollment rate across China in 2020 by deepening the reform of curriculum and enhancing its selectivity and suitability. And establishing a student development guidance system for their doubts about college and directions for employment is one of the hypothetical ways. Moreover, advancing the reform of evaluating education quality to a more all-rounded one and improving teachers’ quantity and quality are supposed to be effective too.

In addition, vocational-technical schools are also covered in the policy, owning the same position as senior high schools. When the Chinese government manages to carry out a “universal high school education” policy, hard and soft conditions will be ready for “twelve-year compulsory education”, whether the facility or the awareness of people in the backward areas.

3.2 The Implementation of Twelve-Year Compulsory Education

In China, few areas have sufficient financial support for twelve-year compulsory education. Although nine-year compulsory education has made great progress and developed relative fully, there is hardly a qualification for implementing twelve-year compulsory education. Examples of which compulsory education years are up to or even more than twelve years can have reference value. In the following part, compulsory education in the Tibet autonomous region, Xinzheng city in Henan province, Futian district in Shenzhen city, Guangdong province, Shanxi province and Zhuhai city, Guangdong province will be mentioned.

3.2.1 The Tibet Autonomous Region

Since 2012, Tibet has fully implemented 15-year compulsory education from kindergarten to senior high school, which is fully free. And much earlier, the children of farmers and herdsmen in Tibet have begun to enjoy the “three guarantees” policy of free food, free housing and free tuition fees since 1985. Tibet is also active in the construction of various educational supporting facilities, such as libraries, museums, digital systems and so on, working hard to carry out diversified education.

3.2.2 Xinzheng City in Henan Province

In 2011, Xinzheng City took the lead in realizing the twelve-year compulsory education in Henan province. For the students, as long as they and their guardians have Xinzheng household registration for more than two years, if admitted to Xinzheng regular high schools, they will be exempted from tuition, accommodation fees and enrollment expansion; for those admitted to vocational schools, they will be free from tuition and accommodation fees and receive grants according to policies. In the future, for Xinzheng students, there will be no expansion of enrollment, and the government will delimit the shoreline unified admission.

3.2.3 Futian District in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province

Since 1st September in 2015, the beginning of a new semester, senior high school students in Futian, Shenzhen have enjoyed “zero” tuition-free. That is to say, it begins to carry out twelve-year compulsory education basically. It is said “basically” because schools are divided into public and private ones and public schools can be directly free of charge, while private schools adopt subsidies. The government subsidy is a unified standard, with 1,131 yuan per student per semester, but the tuition fees of private schools are different. Therefore, students studying in private schools may not enjoy the “zero tuition fees” completely. Besides, there is a bright spot in this implementation, namely whoever meets the “1 + 5” document in Shenzhen, regardless of whether he or she is local person and registered permanent residence in Futian or not, can still enjoy zero tuition fees or subsidies.

3.2.4 Shanxi Province

In a proposal, the Shanxi government announced that it will fully implement 13-year compulsory education and expand the public education before the end of 2011. They will expand public and inclusive private preschool education resources, and accelerate the standardization, improve educational conditions in weak rural schools, and promote the development of primary and secondary schools which are in urban areas and above county seats [2].

3.2.5 Zhuhai City in Guangdong Province

In 2007, Zhuhai government declared that from the start of the semester that fall, twelve-year compulsory education would be implemented, about 197 million yuan increased as government subsidies, and one hundred and sixty thousand students were able to enjoy free education. In fact, since the autumn of 2006, the policy of free miscellaneous fees has been implemented for students with rural registered permanent residence in Zhuhai. Besides, in the autumn of 2007, free compulsory education integrating urban and rural areas was extended to books and miscellaneous fees to all primary and secondary school students who had city household registers. Except for general senior high school students, this policy was also valid for vocational-technical school, technician school and technical secondary school [6].

3.3 The Significance of Implementing Twelve-Year Compulsory Education

In the first place, twelve-year compulsory education can improve the overall quality of people and reduce the crime rate of teenagers in backward areas. In terms of both knowledge reserve and character concept, adolescence is a key period of growth. During this period, making children receive more, longer and more active education is conducive to enriching knowledge reserve, improving skills to deal with affairs, and forming a correct outlook on life and values. In addition, it can effectively reduce criminal behavior in backward areas. Whether it is for individual growth or social development, the implementation of twelve-year compulsory education is certainly helpful.

What's more, twelve-year compulsory education can promote the development of the vocational education system and the development of poor areas and even China. Lacking income, many poor families will let their children work early after the end of nine-year compulsory education, instead of choosing vocational and technical schools that do not earn money but need to pay for the tuition. The implementation of twelve-year compulsory education means that there is no need to pay tuition fees in high school, which reduces the financial burden and concerns of poor families, so that a large number of students will flood into vocational colleges, which will arouse the attention of the Ministry of Education to vocational education. After that, vocational schools will train plenty of technical personnel for poor areas. For individuals, they can receive higher salaries for their techniques; for poor areas, poverty alleviation can be expected soon for positive cycles between the people out of poor and their help for these areas in turn; for the whole country, the emergence of more technical personnel from all walks of life can greatly improve the comprehensive national strength.

4 The Dilemma of the Twelve-Year Compulsory Education Implementation

4.1 Inadequate Educational Awareness

The Compulsory Education laws in China required all children to complete at least nine years of education starting at the age of 6 or 7. However, the influence of inadequate educational awareness could be undermining the purpose of the Chinese educational policies, demonstrated by the high dropout rates of primary and secondary school students in China, especially by that in the less economically developed regions of the country.

A study of 24,931 secondary school students found that the cumulative dropout rate was up to 63% [7]. Moreover, more than 51% of secondary school students in rural areas chose not to enter high school [8]. Among those, the boys' dropout rate was twice that of girls in rural China. This was due to the perceived higher opportunity costs for staying in the school of boys as fewer job positions were available in the labor market for girls at that age [9]. This tendency could be explained via the common agreement in rural areas that education was not the ladder for upward social mobility or intergenerational mobility, illustrated by the urban-rural educational disparity. Many students, or parents, chose to drop themselves out of school and enter work or agriculture at relatively young ages as many perceived the education they received as "useless" and an unnecessary burden to the family.

The above demonstrated how the education awareness and perception were lacking in the Chinese rural population in the status quo. Consequently, this dilemma could be hindering the implementation of the twelve-year compulsory education policies as a large proportion of individuals still failed to recognize the importance of formal education, as depicted by the worryingly high dropout rates of primary and secondary students in rural China. Even under the universalization of nine-year compulsory education, many individuals have already chosen to opt out. Hence, it could be argued that putting forward the twelve-year compulsory education would be even harder as the lack of educational awareness would adversely affect the educational policies.

4.2 Potential Increase in Unemployment and Social Immobility

In the status quo, there was a growing number of college graduates looking for suitable job positions in great difficulties. This was primarily due to the extensive expansion and universalization of compulsory education, providing an increasing number of opportunities for higher education [4]. This, however, did not mean that education inequality was reduced. In fact, the competition for college enrollment could be becoming increasingly dependent on students' socioeconomic status instead of their actual self-agencies as there could be seen an increase in competition and anxiety when neoliberalism ideologies emerged, commercializing education at the same time. Mok's paper argued that students' family background would be advantaging their competitiveness for entrance to higher education in China as they tend to have more educational resources and capital [10]. This would result in decreased upward social mobility as the already privileged groups benefit increasingly more while the others become increasingly vulnerable and stagnated in their disadvantaged positions.

Extending compulsory education to twelve years would mean that more resources were inclined into the education sector, aiming to improve the quantity and quality of educational access. The direct result of this would be that more individuals will acquire higher educational background, potentially leading to an inflation in educational background. This could lead to potential growth in the unemployment rate when more skilled labor forces enter the labor market, enhancing the supply of skilled labor forces and the competition in the market. As a result, it would become even harder for high school and college graduates to get employed in a suitable job position to them.

Moreover, as mentioned before, many rural students chose to go to manufacturing factories as simple labors after or even before they finished the nine-year compulsory education as required by the state. Consequently, this added another layer of burden to the labor market competition as the graduates of vocational schools would sometimes also need to compete with these students, making secondary sector employment even harder in China.

Therefore, extending the nine-year compulsory education to twelve years could potentially increase the unemployment rate in China and worsen the social immobility as the increased competition and anxiety for college enrollment could hardly advantage the students with lower socioeconomic status due to their lack of additional educational resources, making them less able to compete with students with more advantaged family background.

4.3 Insufficient Educational Resources

Although China was able to reach high penetration rates of the nine-year compulsory education, there are many regions in the country that are provided with insufficient educational resources. This was primarily shown in the lack of teachers and the inability to retain young teachers in rural China. This problem was recognized by the central government in the "The Country's Long-term Educational Reform and Development Outline 2010–2020" where it was mentioned that there is an urgent need to strengthen the cultivation of the primary and secondary teachers in rural areas in order to achieve education equality [11].

The tendency for rural teachers to migrate to urban cities became increasingly popular year by year [12]. In doctor Yang Meng's investigation of 210 teachers in 6 rural schools, 33.5% of them wanted to leave for certain and 43.3% wanted to leave occasionally. From this data, the teachers who do not want to leave are minorities. Of the teachers who were unwilling to stay, most of them are either experienced or young teachers and teachers with higher degrees of educational background are even more likely to leave [11]. The insufficient funding that leads to low salaries and bonuses, poor infrastructure, and inconvenient transportation made these teachers unable to satisfy their needs for their living standards, thereby choosing to leave for urban schools. This could be problematic as it seemed that rural students are gaining access to proper education due to compulsory education, but in fact, the quality of the education could be hardly guaranteed, hence undermining rural development as a whole and again hindering upward social mobility of these students.

If China were to extend the nine-year compulsory education to twelve years, the limited resources would be an upsetting dilemma as it would require more educational resources when the compulsory school year is extended, needing more teaching resources and school infrastructures or classrooms. Even if the government was able to manage even distribution of resources, the system would still be at stake as when the quantity is guaranteed, it would be questionable if the quality of teachers and infrastructures could be ensured at the same time.

5 Conclusion

This paper examined the reform proposal, past experiences, and the possible dilemmas of twelve-year compulsory education in China. By examining past research done on twelve-year compulsory education in the above aspects, it was found that the policy should be designed with priorities given to certain groups like rural China and to ethnic minorities. Moreover, this paper found several successful examples of the implementation of twelve-year education in China, such as Tibet, Shanxi, Xinzheng, Futian, and Zhuhai, providing referencing significance for future full-country coverage. However, it was also noted that there are problematic aspects of this educational system, including a lack of educational awareness and resources, and the potential increase in unemployment and social immobility. Based on the research and analysis of the current situation, needs, and inadequacies in China, it would be crucial for the government to be aware of the negative consequences brought by the implementation of the policy if not enough preparations were done to ensure sufficient educational resources like the quality and quantity of teachers in rural areas. That being said, the government would need to raise funds that are exclusively allocated to rural or less economically advantaged areas. The government would also need to pay special attention to the lack of educational awareness, possibly resolving this via advocating measures or campaigns. Lastly, the government should be concerned about giving extra employment support to college graduates, especially the ones with lower socioeconomic status as the problem of unemployment might be exacerbated with the implementation of the twelve-year compulsory education. This paper would set a foundation for future research on the possible resolution dealing with the current dilemmas that are hindering the universalization of twelve-year compulsory

education. There are, however, limitations within this research that there was a lack of analysis on the policy's influence on parental roles and duties, which should be a major aspect of consideration. It was hoped that this paper could provide an applicable reference for the government's implementation of the twelve-year compulsory education.

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