



# Research on the Influencing Factors of English Teaching in Compulsory Education in China

Sihan Li<sup>1, †</sup> and Qianai Zhang<sup>2, \*, †</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Foreign Languages, Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan, Guangdong, 523000, China

<sup>2</sup>International Business Foreign Language Institute, Shanghai University of International Business and Economy, Songjiang District, Shanghai, 201601, China.

<sup>†</sup>These authors contributed equally.

\*21061012@suibe.edu.cn

**Abstract.** Education is a hot topic in modern society and a stage that everyone has to go through. Education is not stagnant but constantly evolving, and English education has gradually become a focus in the field of education. Nowadays, people pay increasing attention to the improvement of English education level. In view of the influence factors of Chinese compulsory education stage of English teaching, the paper finds many different aspects in various literature, news and Internet. At the same time, the corresponding measures from the perspectives of individual, family, school and society are put forward as well. The factors affecting education are numerous and complex, including long-term factors and transient factors, which are personal, family, school, social education administration department and so on. This paper chooses to analyze from the perspectives of gender, family background, urban and rural differences and educational ideas, and combines the reality with the perspective of the future development of Chinese students' learning and English teaching progress, so as to conduct better teaching.

**Keywords:** Compulsory education, English education, Influencing factors.

## 1 Introduction

English is a language which is in common use. With social life information and economic globalization developing rapidly, the status of English keeps rising. As one of the most essential information carriers, English has become the most widely used language in all fields of human life. Given that people have the desire to keep pace with international standards and learn advanced international scientific and cultural knowledge, it would undoubtedly be better for people to master the English language.

In China, the boom in English learning has never abated. English has been listed as one of the major subjects in the process of the compulsory education of students for long, through which the importance of English in Chinese's hearts can be seen. Under

China's current education system, foreign languages are compulsory courses in basic education, among which English is the most important one in the foreign language curriculums. Whether a student has the ability of learning English well is even linked to whether he or she can go to a higher school. In the stage of compulsory education, students in China not only have to take numerous tests and examinations, but they also have to pass unified English examinations administered by local education committees or the National Education Examination Authority in order to enter senior high schools and universities of higher quality <sup>[1]</sup>. In the case of exam-centered education mode, which is extremely typical and universal in China, the increasing widespread of the tendency of parents' as well as teachers' attention being paid on the academic performance namely the test scores of students instead of what the students have learned indeed can also be served as the result of that. Additionally, this circumstance may lead to students' consideration that their learning of English would be used only for acquiring satisfying test scores, which would not only influence students' interests of learning English negatively but also reduce the practicability of English for them, where the adverse impacts of Chinese exam-oriented education are reflected <sup>[2]</sup>.

The evolution path of compulsory English education in China will be long and prospective <sup>[1]</sup>. In the implementation process of exam-centered mode of education in China, diverse kinds of issues do occur as well. For instance, the problem of the disequilibrium of the distribution of education resources caused by the urban-rural difference in China is undoubtedly obvious. Due to the imbalance of educational resources in China, the learning and living conditions of students in rural areas have been the reasons leading to long-term lag in English education and learning <sup>[3]</sup>. After all, the economy development as well as the extent of opening to the outside world in rural areas is inferior to the one in urban areas. Besides, in China's nine-year compulsory education, the phenomenon of educational inequity is still prominent because of the extremely uneven distribution of educational resources. Whether students can obtain qualified English education is closely related to their families' economic strength, parents' social status and social privilege <sup>[4]</sup>. Some problems relating to various aspects such as gender, education background, educational philosophy, the attitudes of students also exist, all of which would be further discussed in the following part of the paper and suggestions regarding to these fields would be given as well.

This paper is aimed at the research on the influencing factors of English teaching in compulsory education in China based on the mean of literature research method. The paper is divided into four parts. In the following part of this paper, the six influencing factors of Chinese compulsory English education would be discussed in detail. In the third part of the paper, several targeted advice and suggestions relating to the six contributing factors mentioned in the former part would be put forward. The conclusion of the research in regard to would be drawn in the final part of the paper. From this paper, the reader would have a preliminary understanding of the influencing elements in the process of English compulsory education in China. On the condition that every student in the society gets education as much equal quality as possible, the society would step forward without any doubts, including the development of economy as well as the advance in the fields of science and technology owing to the fact that the compulsory education plays the role of laying the solid foundation of talents cultivation. In order to

achieve this significant purpose, the influencing issues that may cause obstacles ought to be found out and pertinent practical solutions should be offered, both of which are of vital significance regarding to the overall progress of compulsory education in China.

## 2 Influencing Factors

### 2.1 Gender

Swedish educationist Thorsten Husen pointed out that educational equity includes starting point equity, process equity and result equity. According to this dimension, the phenomenon of gender gap among students in compulsory education can be analyzed from the three aspects of enrollment, process and result, which respectively correspond to guaranteeing equal enrollment opportunities for boys and girls, providing equal conditions for boys and girls to achieve the same progress in learning, and making boys and girls achieve the same graduation conditions and output results.

Equality at the beginning of education means that school-age children are not affected by gender, ethnicity, economic status, living environment and other conditions, and should enjoy equal rights and opportunities to go to school. Access to education is mainly access to school.

"Gender discrimination" and "educational injustice" began to appear in ancient China. But today in China, these two problems are not completely solved. There are still families where boys go to school and girls work, especially in some remote, backward areas and ethnic minorities. The preference for sons over daughters still exists. This does not guarantee that boys and girls have the same educational base from the start.

The first manifestation is the gender inequality of educational opportunities, which is the inequity at the starting point of education. There is no great difference in the urban center of our country, but in the urban fringe and the rural areas where our economy is relatively backward, the girls' dropout rate is relatively high<sup>[5]</sup>. Statistics from the Program for the Development of Chinese Children (2001-2010) show that the enrollment rate of school-age children in China is 98.8 percent, and the dropout rate of primary schools has decreased from 2.77 percent in 1990 to 1.01 percent in 1997, but this is only the overall situation of children. In fact, the dropout rate of girls is significantly higher than that of boys. About 70% of the total loss and dropout<sup>[6]</sup>. In fact, not only girls, some middle school girls have to drop out of school to go out to work to earn money, some in order to reduce the family burden.

The process of students in school is the greatest embodiment of the process of education. As the premise of the continuation of education starting point equity and outcome equity, education process equity refers to that students can receive educational influence in accordance with their knowledge and ability level in the school education process, and can enjoy school education resources and participate in education and teaching activities in a fair way in the classroom and teaching level. The influence of gender on the academic achievement of junior high school students does exist. Gender is an important way to influence junior high school students' English learning achievement. Boys' English learning is more difficult, their self-evaluation value is lower and

they are less frequently asked questions by teachers in class, all of which are important reasons for boys' poor English learning performance. Among the above three mediating effects, learning difficulty has the greatest contribution to the influence of gender on English learning performance, followed by self-evaluation value, and the least contribution of teacher questioning [7]. It should be noted that the low self-evaluation value and the low frequency of teachers' questions and praise may lead to the weakening of boys' motivation in English learning, thus resulting in low scores.

## 2.2 Family

Only two levels of headings should be numbered. The influence of family on children's academic performance and non-cognitive output is mainly reflected at the individual level. The total effect of family income on education is 57.02%, accounting for more than half of the total difference. Children from higher-income families receive more and broader levels of education than children from ordinary families. In the simplest case, most children of families will choose to go to public schools, while most families with high assets will send their children to private schools or even international schools. This is enough to open up the level of education, and the most obvious difference between international schools and ordinary schools is English education.

Burstall et al. (1975) argued that a successful early language learning experience not only promotes later language learning success, but also stimulates a more positive attitude towards language learning. Higher-income families are better able to send their children to bilingual kindergartens, which provide children with multiple forms of English learning opportunities and are therefore more likely to provide excellent learning conditions and environments for children in the early years of English learning.

Families with "high" and "medium" social power have better economic status, more social resources distribution, and more ability to provide better conditions and environment for children's English learning. However, the higher the parents' social power, the better their English scores. Students whose parents had "high" social power spent the most on English learning, but scored lower on average than those whose parents had "moderate" social power. This can be explained by the difference in interest of students from different parents' social power groups in English learning.

English learning expenses are positively correlated with English test scores, that is to say, on the whole, the higher the English learning expenses, the higher the English test scores. Families with "high" social power and families with "medium" social power spend little difference on children's English learning, while families with "low" social power spend much more on children's English learning [4]. It can be seen that the influence of families on children's English learning is not only reflected in the economic investment in English learning, but also reflected in the care, support and encouragement of parents for children's English learning.

## 2.3 Education Background

Most students in China receive a period of nine-year compulsory education under the background of test-centered education pattern. During the process that students are

being educated, their mother tongue, Chinese, is an indispensable medium, which can definitely play an active role in teaching, especially in language teaching. To further illustrate, the interaction between English teaching and mother tongue teaching in compulsory teaching would be taken as an example.

Nowadays, teachers might be faced with the dilemma of whether it is necessary to use mother tongue flexibly in foreign language teaching. This issue has become a topic that many teachers who teach the subjects that relate to language lay increasing emphasis on. As a sort of attempt, they are keeping an eye on applying mother tongue to the education of English teaching to some extent and balance the usage of the two kinds of language as well. With the compulsory English education in China continuously progressing, the positive role of mother tongue in foreign language teaching has been much more commonly recognized. However, students would be likely to fear the difficulties that may occur in their studying, serving as a result of teachers' too much persistence on teaching in English and push students to read English passages or even original English texts [8]. Therefore, chances are that in English classes, instead of teaching in English alone, the teaching effect of assisted teaching with mother tongue will be better.

The feasibility of using mother tongue to assist English teaching can be seen in the following aspects.

First and foremost, students would be benefited from the positive transfer of mother tongue so that they are able to acquire relevant foreign language knowledge more readily. Negative transfer or interference of the mother tongue is not the main cause of errors in English learning [8]. Actually, errors caused by mother tongue interference can be solved by comparing mother tongue with foreign language.

Moreover, in terms of the influence of the thinking pattern of mother tongue on foreign language mindset, applying mother tongue to assist teaching will not hinder the cultivation of learners' English learning mindset [8]. It is inevitable for students to let their thinking patterns of their native language come into their minds when learning a foreign language for the first time. This moment, the impact of the thinking pattern of mother tongue would take effect so that students are able to construct English knowledge system more efficiently.

Last but not least, the feasibility of applying mother tongue to the teaching of English also lies in the learning characteristics of Chinese students in compulsory education [8]. If students have the desire to understand the content of English class more thoroughly, namely grammar, or other component of the English language system, the teacher should at least explain it again in Chinese on the basis of English explanation due to the fact that students may not have learned English in a relatively systematical way in the process of the beginning of compulsory education. What's more, rather than just letting the students get informed of the knowledge itself, for example, how to use a certain grammar point correctly, teachers ought to lay more emphasis on training their English language ability so as to help build their interests in English learning and guide the students to find their own methods as well as paces of acquisition of English studying.

## 2.4 Educational Philosophy

Almost all schools in China are now "exam-oriented education". The content and purpose of learning are all for the examination, layer by layer. The lack of practicality in class, weak hands-on ability and creativity of students, passive following the steps of teachers, and no learning methods of their own. In the aspect of English teaching, both speaking and writing are the weaknesses of students. Because the long-term study is for exams, students have no chance to apply what they have learned and put it into the real environment. Therefore, the English knowledge they have learned is far from that of native English speakers.

## 2.5 Urban-rural Differences

Education balance is an important condition for building a harmonious society, whereas regional difference is regarded as one of the reasons that causes the inequality in English compulsory education. Inequality exists between regions in English compulsory education. For instance, a gap of English education in Zhejiang and Shanghai does exist. To illustrate, Shanghai places more emphasis on communication and oral language in the period of compulsory education than that of Zhejiang<sup>[3]</sup>. To have the point illustrated more detailly, speaking ability would be taken as an example. Various degree of attention is paid on this ability in different regions in China, leading to Chinese education patterns' regional differences in English teaching. In big cities in China such as Beijing and Shanghai, teachers and parents tend to pay more attention to training students' spoken English, which lies in the fact that the economy in Shanghai is more developed and citizens in Shanghai are more likely to go abroad or send their children overseas, hence speaking ability is laid much emphasis on, whereas in underdeveloped areas, owing to the fact that the economy is far less developed compared to that in developed areas, where few opportunities of overseas exchanges or international communication are provided, resulting in the students tendency of thinking about taking the test as well as having their test score improved only<sup>[3]</sup>.

The serious imbalance in the development of urban and rural education can be reflected in the income gap between urban and rural areas as well. The total effect of family income on education is 57.02%, accounting for more than half of the total difference, indicating that education is an endogenous product of social economy. In other words, the urban-rural income gap results in the urban-rural education gap. However, the characteristic effect (-0.0571) of the income gap generated by the transfer payment of families on the education gap even exceeds the impact of the non-transfer income gap of families on it (-0.0512)<sup>[9]</sup>. On the one hand, the figure shows that the impact of transfer payment on the income structure of families is becoming increasingly obvious, which is becoming an essential source of family income. On the other hand, the widening of transfer payment gap between urban and rural areas not only affects the welfare of urban and rural residents, but also impacts families' educational decisions in a negative way.

Correspondingly, the widening of income gap causes a significant gap in educational input, which is obviously inferred from the figure of the characteristic effect as well as

coefficient effect of per capita educational input of families, which respectively accounts for 6.66% and -16.97%. In addition to the intercept term, coefficient effect is viewed as the most obvious method to narrow the gap between urban and rural areas. As is mentioned above, the impact of urban and rural education preference and opportunity cost and other recessive factors on education level is mainly reflected through the indirect adjustment of family income (0.0222) and recessive factors take the roles of narrowing the gap in education input. The characteristic effect of public education input is 2.18% and the coefficient effect is -3.13%<sup>[9]</sup>. Nevertheless, compared with the transfer income which is government policy means, the effect of public input on education is not obvious in our country. It is without any doubt that public education input plays an important role in bridging the gap between urban and rural education.

## 2.6 Attitudes of the Students

According to the essay Exploring the Influence of English Subject Reform in China's Compulsory Education System, the researchers raise the question of the learners' motivations to learn English in China and then demonstrate and discuss the findings of their research which are based from the interview that they organized from the perspective of instrumental motivation. The researchers find that most interviewees have received nine years of compulsory education, and they all chose to study abroad. As for international students from non-English-speaking countries, they are required to pass at least one of the tests ranging from TOEFL, IELTS, GRE, GMAT or other English tests<sup>[10]</sup>. The researchers also find that for most interviewees, English is an indispensable tool for studying abroad and living. What's more, some interviewees consider that English may be used in their future work such as working as a teacher or working in international journalism. Therefore, most interviewees believe that English, as a nine-year compulsory education, is still necessary for students to study. Moreover, when it comes to the various kinds of languages in the world, the difficulty of English is moderate for all learners, which is due to the fact that English has abandoned some of the complicated grammar of continental European languages in the process of its evolution, making the degree of inflection greatly reduced.

## 3 Suggestions

### 3.1 Policies at the National Level

English education plays relatively high personal and social marginal roles in basic education. In particular, Chinese governments ought to put valid measures into effect so as to cultivate more international talents to lead to the further progress in global technological and cultural innovation that China would make in the future. In order to achieve this goal, English compulsory education ought to be developed as a tool by the authorities to motivate the students to get to know about the whole world and globalization gradually, which is able to boost their interests of developing international skills or talents as well. Therefore, English should not be abolished in the nine-year

compulsory education. It can also be concluded that in English education, improving quality and efficiency and fairness are not contradictory but mutually reinforcing.

The government and relevant departments such as the Education Bureau should strengthen supervision. Publishing houses should compile teaching materials that promote gender equality and challenge gender stereotypes. Gender issues should also be included in the curriculum when setting curriculum objectives in schools, and strict examination should be conducted to ensure that teaching materials promote the concept of gender equality. What's more, the government and schools should give teachers more opportunities to go out to study, learn from private or international schools, learn from their excellent foreign language education model, introduce advanced technology model, and give teachers in public school room for progress and students more opportunities to learn. The examination system and examination methods need to get reformed as well.

### **3.2 Measures That Can Be Carried Out from the Aspect of Gender**

Firstly, authorities should build the ability of teachers, school staff and students to solve gender stereotypes, promote the concept of gender equality and strengthen the concept of gender equality in each family. School teachers set more parent-child activities to promote family harmony, communication between different families, communication between parents and children, so as to achieve equal treatment of children of different genders by parents.

Secondly, school interventions include school-wide activities such as language and games, digital technology and ideological education lectures, as well as a focus on guiding students to choose careers based on their interests.

Last but not least, the education sector should further its efforts to promote projects and programs aimed at eliminating gender stereotypes in primary and secondary education. To ensure that policies and interventions can be effective, it is key to consider the diversity of students. Policies and actions that promote partnerships with local communities and other organizations.

### **3.3 Suggestions for Families**

From family aspect, families with low income should keep an optimistic attitude, do not give their children too much pressure, and parents should not pass on negative energy to their children. From student aspect, it would be better for students to develop their own interest in learning. The school encourages and supports students with strong English learning ability or potential to go out to exchange opportunities.

### **3.4 Methods That Can Be Taken at Schools**

As is mentioned in the second part of this paper, the intervention of mother tongue ought to be carried out in compulsory English teaching. The past method of burying the teachers themselves in teaching should be replaced and cooperation of the exploration of more effective and reasonable teaching methods need to be implemented since the



classification of language teaching methods do not exist according to different kinds of languages. Teachers ought to establish active contact between the mother tongue language and the foreign language so as to make students' mother tongue and English development and improvement as a common goal<sup>[8]</sup>. What they need to do is to eliminate the rough and extract the essence as well as effectively and reasonably use these cooperative teaching methods to achieve the teaching objectives.

Owing to the exam-oriented education mode in China, students tend to have few opportunities to think a certain problem in the way they want to. Instead, they are required to think and express their point of views in the way what the standard answers indicate since if they do not think in these patterns, chances are that they may witness a loss shown through their test scores, which might cause negative effects on their study career. To make the condition better, attempts ought to be carried out from various aspects. On one hand, the school should give more opportunities to practice. Teachers should give the school more time and opportunities to learn independently in class, communicate students' ideas, interact more, input and output coexist, and give students more opportunities to think, practice and practice. On the other hand, students should also pay more attention to the cultivation of self-consciousness and the improvement of innovation ability.

## 4 Conclusion

As the economy grows, so does the level of education. English education is a very important part of the education system. The desire of learning English at a favorable degree has also become the pursuit of most students. However, it is still far from enough to rely on students' own efforts. The internal and external environment of family and society is also the key.

The needs of the development of the times ought to be conformed to education. During this process, education should be combined with the characteristics of the development of the times and adjust the pace of the times. After that, the students would better integrate into the process of social economic development, serving as a measure of developing China's socialist modernization. Therefore, in the field of compulsory English education, educators not only need to reflect fully on the value and development of English education as well as promote teaching fairness, but they are also supposed to spare no efforts to make students get the same level of education from the perspective of innovation driven and explore the path of modern development of English education. In this way, English education would better meet the requirements of the new era and promote the all-round growth and development of students. To sum up, the aspects listed are definitely essential. Attentions need to be attracted and all sectors of the active cooperation ought to be carried out for the common progress of education.

## References

1. Shi Jialin. English Language Education in China: Progress, Problems and Reflections. *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, (7), 935-938 (2017).
2. Shen Yang. A Brief analysis of the status quo of English education and learning in Chin. *Campus English (Teaching and Research Edition)*. (03), 63 (2012).
3. Yang Yujuan. An exploration of English learning motivation and teachers' Influencing factors in underdeveloped areas. Unpublished master's thesis, Suzhou University, Suzhou City, Jiangsu Province (2012).
4. Zou Weicheng, Shi Taoyang, Zhang Shaolin, Chen Si. The influence of family background on English learning in compulsory education in Shanghai. *Foreign Language Teaching (FLTA)*, (4), 14-21 (2005).
5. Zheng Xinrong. *Gender and Education IM*: Beijing: Education Science Press, 11(2015).
6. Yu Wei, Hu Jiao. Research on Gender Inequality in the Stage of Compulsory Education in China [U] *Journal of Dongbei Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*. (2005)
7. Sun Lunxuan, Lai Kaisheng, Sun Xiaodong The effect of gender on English achievement of junior middle school students and its mechanism. Unpublished master's thesis, Tianjin Normal University, Zhongshan University, Nankai University, Tianjin City, Tianjin City, Guangzhou City, Guangdong Province, Tianjin City, Tianjin City. (2019).
8. Zhao Yun. A Study on the mutual influence between English teaching and mother Tongue Teaching in Compulsory education. Unpublished master's thesis, Yangzhou University, Yangzhou City, Jiangsu Province. (2008)
9. Wu Fangwei, Zhang Jinhua, Chen Linyan, Shen Yafang. The impact of urban-rural difference on educational development: An empirical study based on the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition technique. *Agro-technical economy*, (07). (2013)
10. Maojia Sun, Kaiyi Wu, Xiaohan Yi, Ruohong Zhang. Exploring the Influence of English Subject Reform in China's Compulsory Education System. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, (637), 548-556 (2021).

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

