

# An overview on the impact of the exam-oriented education in China

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**Abstract.** With the development of time, society has a higher and higher demand for education. Some researchers have found that the concept of exam-oriented education has a huge impact on students' creativity, but there is no a highly summarize of these impacts. Therefore, this paper will explain the importance of the concept of exam-oriented education, combine the knowledge related to philosophy, and analyze the reason why it could make an impact on students' creativity, and may lead to mental health problems for a student. The study found that the concept of exam-oriented was suitable for most students, but not for the top students because it leads to a loss of creativity and vitality. What's more, too many exams may also lead to students' mental health problems. Failure in the exams will make students think that they will be blocked in future learning, which could lead to depression, anxiety, and other emotions. In order to avoid these adverse effects, educators can start by discovering their own life diversity, running schools in a non-bureaucratic way, and increasing teachers' incomes.

## 1 Introduction

In today's education system, the point of exam-oriented education still exists. With the change of times, more and more people realize the disadvantages of exam-oriented education and try to replace it with quality education. Many Chinese feel that their educational system stifles independent thinking and creativity, and they admire the self-reliance encouraged by the American educational system and its efforts to make learning fun rather than merely work. [1]. This paper is to explain the importance of the concept of exam-oriented education, analyze the reasons why the concept of exam-oriented education will lead to the loss of students' creativity and possible problems of students' mental health from the philosophical level, and propose some constructive solutions according to these problems.

## 2 The characteristics of exam-oriented education and quality education

The difference between exam-oriented education and quality education is that people want all students to become builders and successors of the all-round development of the socialist cause, or to cultivate few "elites".

### 2.1 Exam-oriented education

Exam-oriented education regards examination and dealing with examination as the purpose and goal of education.

Examination is one of the ways that could test students' knowledge and ability, including written, oral, practical, and other abilities. The meaning and extension of "dealing with the exam" are deeper and broader than "exam". The term not only refers to the exam itself but also includes the preparation students do before the exam. Exam-oriented education refers to a certain educational system that was developed over a considerable amount of time and does not just mean "dealing with the exam." It includes a certain educational philosophy, a particular set of educational objectives, a few particular educational principles, and particular metrics. In the development of the specific content and constructive process of "coping with exams," the educational idea and tenets of "exam-oriented education" play a central and important role. The aims of "exam-oriented education" are furthered by "dealing with the examinations."

### 2.2 Quality education

Instead of viewing exams as a means to an end or a method of evaluation for education and teaching, quality education views exams and exam preparation as a way to provide knowledge, feedback, and evaluation [2]. The concept of exam-oriented education is a unique educational mode concept formed under the influence of "diploma first", "score equals ability" and academic entrance examinations such as Gaokao. Quality education pays attention to result and process, intellectual factors and non-intellectual factors, teachers' guidance and students' learning, and emphasizes the cultivation of students' comprehensive ability and

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innovative quality. In addition, quality education in the classroom emphasizes good moral qualities, the ability to learn independently and conduct independent research, the equality of theoretical learning and research, practical learning, in-class learning, and after-class learning. Quality education is a type of education that cultivates students' moral and ideological principles, cultural traits, and aesthetic sensibilities, as well as their physical and cerebral abilities. [3].

### **3 Negative performance, influence, and defects of exam-oriented education**

The phrase "quality education" refers to a range of educational ideas that can be summed up as a more all-encompassing strategy for educating future citizens. Exam-focused education significantly restricts students' desire to learn, which limits their prospects for overall development. As a result, rather than catering to students' needs, the majority of educational activities are created to satisfy the requirements of standardized examinations. Since test scores are still essentially the only method to enrol in college and determine whether a student attends a top national institution or a less esteemed local college, exam-oriented education predominates in most schools. The severe struggle for jobs, the unequal development of urban and rural areas, and the pervasive use of hiring quotas are all tied to this. The concept of exam-oriented education leads students to dare not challenge new courses and have no ability to plan their own lives. The fear of being marginalized by the system prevents them from learning the most important lesson of all: knowing their selves. Such an exam-oriented education concept might produce professionals in various fields, but it is difficult to cultivate an energetic and creative life. When people are driven just by the external goal of outperforming others on a certain track, they are unable to achieve their own vision for their lives and hence are unable to feel the internal drive to reach their own unrestricted potential.

The growth of an "inclusive personality" is viewed as a means of assisting students in making their own space. It has to do with perception and self-awareness of oneself. The development of interest must occur through participation in activities. It is a product, a sense of self, rather than a way to continue doing something. A unique pleasure that can only be experienced by the "individual himself" is brought on by interest when it reduces the gap between the "individual" and the "world," but it can also result in anguish or suffering due to challenge and uncertainty. Individuality has a deep meaning because of this distinctive experience of joy and misery. Thinking about "who I am" and "what I want to be in the world" forms self-identification. According to Dewey, it alone justifies the struggle in creative activity and affords the opportunity for the emergence of something truly new." In addition to realizing their true passions and resolving issues that have been discovered, people need to learn how to find a relatively stable self in the face of unanticipated difficulties. The inner self's motivational energy prompts feelings and emotions in the person, leading to the development of compassion and respect for life. Self-enlightenment can endure in the midst of tremendous social

upheaval, even when it seems that the person has little control over the circumstance. [4]. High-stakes testing, the outcomes of which can have a significant impact on students' lives for decades, is one of the most crucial components of education. Test results in particular determine which universities students can enroll in. This makes it simple for students to concentrate on preparing for the college admission exam, which frequently results in students losing their originality and inventiveness. Exam-focused education undermines critical thinking, which is the ultimate goal of education. In China, the majority of people—including educators, parents, and students—believe that attending college is the only way to succeed. According to survey findings, 70% of Chinese high school students who score poorly on the Gaokao believe they have little job prospects, which significantly lowers their motivation. The most common cause of anxiety is exams.

A significant portion of pupils exhibit inadequate psychological development, personality repression, and self-hatred as a result of the exam-oriented education approach, although other skills are typically improved [1]. The idea of exam-oriented education is crucial for aiding students with weak foundations and can make sure they learn some fundamental concepts. One of the characteristics of exam-oriented education is strict management and the high-density control of students' learning time and behaviour. Knowledge by itself does not automatically lead to increased creativity, but creativity does require some basic knowledge. Under the overall exam-oriented education system, the creativity of top students is curbed to a certain extent. The top students may be less creative. Therefore, the main problem facing society today is not that most students cannot introduce education, but that there is still a need for considerable development in the cultivation of creativity.

The most creative and innovative students are more likely to cross exam-oriented education's institutional bounds, to be more aware of its limitations and restraints, or to be directly and significantly impacted by its many negative aspects. The influence on creativity consists of three internal individual components, namely, expertise and skills related to the field, cognition and personality related to innovation, and internal motivation of individuals out of interest and enjoyment. Professional knowledge and skills should be both solid and open; The characteristics of a creative personality mainly include daring to question, daring to take risks, and being able to tolerate uncertainty. Drive, curiosity, and devotion are the key sources of motivation. The Gaokao findings are reliable for choosing average students, however, they are insufficient for choosing top students. The idea of exam-oriented education emphasizes the determination of answers and the determination of paths, which is incompatible with personality traits like questioning and taking risks. However, one of the fundamental aspects of schooling that is exam-focused is the requirement for certain objective responses. And this "black and white" way of thinking has greatly destroyed the curiosity of learners. The intensification of utilitarian motivation in exam-oriented education restrains the intrinsic motivation of top students. The strengthening of external utilitarian motivation will weaken internal motivation. The concept of exam-oriented education

determines that the orientation of students is “avoiding shortcomings is more important than promoting strengths”. In China, national performance assessment can and does determine a student’s educational destiny. As a result, Chinese students typically place a greater emphasis on performance on standardized analytical tests than on developing their originality. In previous agricultural and industrial societies, the biggest impact of education on a country’s economic competitiveness was “average”. The higher the quality of the average workforce, the faster value is created. Under the circumstances that the average quality in China has reached a certain level, the full development of top-ranking talents is an important entry point for the construction of a high-quality education system in our country [5].

Exam pressure can have a negative impact on students' mental and emotional wellbeing. Students who attend schools that emphasize exams experience significant levels of stress and anxiety. Their emotional capacities, such as motivation, self-esteem, and emotional intelligence, may be adversely impacted by this stress. Students can get demotivated, bored with their studies, and fearful of failing, which would further impede their growth. Students who received exam-oriented education showed lower levels of creativity and higher levels of anxiety. Students struggle to

acquire critical thinking and problem-solving skills and to apply their knowledge to the real world. Exam-oriented education encourages students to memorize information rather than using their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Additionally, exam-focused educational systems prioritize memorizing data over comprehension and application, which retards students' cognitive development. Students who are disengaged from studying and lack the motivation to follow their personal interests and passions may result from an educational system that is exam-focused. The exam-focused educational system denies pupils the chance to cultivate their emotional intelligence, creativity, and social skills. This could lead to a lack of competence and confidence in real-world scenarios requiring physical aptitudes and capabilities. Learning environments that emphasize exams may be detrimental to students' physical aptitude and capabilities. Teaching to the test impedes critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Students showed lower levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem. [6]. Moreover, the impact of examination on students’ affective competence is shown in Table 1. Test results lose their significance as a helpful measure of the quality of education when they are used as a measure of teaching success, and this can result in unwarranted distortions in educational practices.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics for Affective Competence [6]

Affective Competence	Mean	SD
Encounter feelings of anxiety or nervousness	2.83	1.03
Have low self-confidence	2.67	1.04
Are fatigued and have zero motivation	2.76	1.02
Are feeling an increase in stress level	2.96	0.97
Encounter panic attacks	2.57	1.09
Feel agitated for a difficult question which requires in-depth analysis	2.63	1.09
Leave some questions on the examination as a result of stress and anxiety	2.81	1.04
Perturbed due to incessant questions	2.69	1.06
Are stuck by uncertainty and self-doubt	2.77	1.05
Miss/skip some questions/ parts due to stress unintentionally	2.72	1.08

Exam-focused education is within the area of education that is merit-based. Teachers always give the few kids who can advance to higher-level schools their full attention, with higher demands and greater consideration. Exam-focused education expands the achievement gap across schools,

resulting in unequal student learning opportunities and school development, as well as an inefficient use of educational resources [7]. The following generation of students performs better when their parents are more educated, and the effect of parental education changes as a child's academic progress picks up speed. Social disparities

or injustices can be made worse by investments in different social classes, school infrastructure, teachers, and curriculum reform initiatives. The primary and secondary school curriculum structure has been seriously compromised by the emphasis placed on exam-oriented courses and the disregard for or even elimination of non-exam-oriented courses. As a result, students' cognitive, knowledge, and ability structures are incomplete and seriously out of balance. Academic achievement alone does not determine whether a student is developmentally capable [8]. A rigid examination system is likely to create students with high scores and poor ability, which will frustrate students' motivation.

The purpose of the examination is to improve the quality of teaching and to cultivate students' exam-oriented education ability and flexible adaptability. At the same time, the examination content can cultivate students' comprehensive interpretation, judgment, choice, analysis and reasoning ability. Examinations can promote and train students' cognitive ability and practical ability. The current exam emphasizes evaluation and choice, but ignores review, education, stimulation and innovation, so it can be obviously concluded that the exam is not effectively encouraging students. Examinations sometimes become a heavy burden for students, who always play a passive role in their studies. The talents cultivated under the exam-oriented education will not adapt to the development of time and hinder the improvement of talent' ability and quality. Students should learn a set of learning methods. Although it is difficult for students to fully grasp the most effective learning methods, they can also learn. Therefore, examinations need to focus on students' learning abilities [9].

## 4 Suggestions and prospects

From a philosophical standpoint, if educators and learners are ready to take on the challenge of an uncharted learning environment and pursue their actual passions inside it, they must learn about the diversity of students' personalities. Teachers must recognize the depth of their own lives in order to accomplish this. Since developing teachers' strong personalities is an essential component of reforming the quality of education, this calls for a radical overhaul in teacher education. For instance, teachers can inspire students to find these significant moments by using storytelling. Students aren't compelled to think critically about things they might have taken for granted in life until they come across these instances. By considering their own life experiences, students might identify their own challenges. Talking and learning become vital to them when contemplation becomes necessary. Teachers must take the initiative to start the discussion and nudge students to comprehend their own life experiences. When concerns arise, teachers must assist students in making connections with others and learning more about topics crucial to their own growth. As mentioned earlier, when students discover personal development issues and recognize the importance of these issues, they will develop an internal self-promoting force, which will arouse personal feelings and emotions to respond. This kind of self-enlightenment is conducive to

students' independent learning, so as to reduce the adverse impact of the concept of exam-oriented education [4].

Teachers need to focus more on the holistic and harmonic growth of children, which can only happen if the educational system is gradually opened up. By opening schools and managing them in an unbureaucratic manner, educators can foster healthy competition and support the reform of established institutions [1].

The implementation of high-quality education does not imply that existing educational ideas should be totally disregarded. All the beneficial and reasonable elements of the current educational system, such as the systematic and effective basic knowledge instruction, the classroom-based learning environment, the appropriate number of exams, the advantages of culture, and the appropriate level of students' exam-taking proficiency, can be preserved and maintained. In order to solve the problem of unequal educational resources, people can increase teachers' income and reduce professional costs, which will help strengthen teachers' awareness of complying with and implementing the new teaching program of communicative competence [10].

## 5 Conclusion

This study suggests that the concept of exam-oriented education is suitable for most students, but it is not suitable for a small number of top students, because the top students need to develop more creativity, and the concept of exam-oriented education is easy to cause the loss of creativity and vitality. What's more, dealing with exams can also lead to mental health problems for students, because failing an exam or getting a poor grade is likely to make students think it is harder for them to get a higher education, which can lead to feelings of disappointment and anxiety. Modern Chinese people have created the current economic miracle, but as the current population reaches saturation and the economy tends to stagnate, China's education is facing new challenges. Chinese education should not only carry forward the traditional culture but also set up new ideals to deal with education in a better way.

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