

# A Comparative Study of the Teaching Models of Basic Education in China and the United States

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**Abstract.** In the context of globalization, the issue of the differences between the education models of China and the United States has received widespread attention, but there are still deficiencies. This paper analyzes the differences between Chinese and American basic education in terms of teaching content, teaching methods and teacher-student interaction. The analysis of this paper concludes that the differences between Chinese and American education in terms of cultural background, educational philosophy and historical background have led to different educational models and practices. Based on this, the paper makes the following recommendations. First, it is necessary to increase student engagement, promote practice and innovation, and foster critical thinking. Chinese and American education are as different as their cultures. But both sides also have advantages that the other can learn from. By learning from U.S. educational experiences, China can improve the quality of education and teaching and develop more creative and competitive students.

## 1 Introduction

In today's context of increasingly frequent global economic and cultural exchanges, education is not only related to the development of the country, but is also directly related to the well-being of families. Since reform and opening up, China has experienced rapid economic growth and urbanization, and education has been highly valued as an important tool for promoting modernization and talent development. The education system needs to adapt to the rapidly changing economic and social needs. China and the United States, as major education countries, have many differences in teaching models. Under the economic development, China is facing the challenge of education popularization and standardization. The United States, on the other hand, is coping with the state of multiculturalism and technological innovation's push for individualized education and academic freedom. These two different socio-economic and cultural contexts have shaped the unique characteristics of the two countries' education systems.

Studying the differences in education between China and the United States is of great significance and covers a number of dimensions, including education reform, policy making, cultural exchange, international cooperation, global competitiveness enhancement, and the improvement of educational equity and quality. By comparing different education models,

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countries can learn from each other's successful experiences and optimize their own education systems. Such research contributes to the innovation of education policies, provides a global perspective, and enables policymakers to formulate more forward-looking and innovative education policies and promote regional education reforms according to local conditions. Studying educational differences between China and the U.S. also promotes cultural exchange and understanding, enhances people's knowledge of each other's culture and educational philosophy, promotes cross-cultural exchange and cooperation, and fosters talents with a global perspective and cross-cultural communication skills. The sharing of educational resources and cultural integration can be achieved through international educational exchange programs, such as mutual visits of teachers and students, student exchange programs and cooperative schooling. On the other hand, such research is also crucial to enhancing global competitiveness. By learning and drawing on the educational advantages of different countries, the education department can cultivate talents with innovative abilities and comprehensive qualities, and enhance the country's competitiveness on the global stage.

The differences and disparities between Chinese and American education are a complex issue involving many factors, including history, culture, politics and economics. Based on this, the purpose of this paper is to explore in depth the different responses of the education system to students' development and social needs in the context of the different cultures and educational philosophies of the two countries, as well as the insights that may be brought about by educational policies and practices. By exploring several specific issues in the development of education in the United States, this paper analyzes the current situation of education in China, reflect on the management styles and practices in the development, and reform the ways and means of higher education development.

## **2 Analysis of the differences and problems in the teaching models of basic education in China and the United States**

### **2.1 Teaching content**

Differences in the content of basic education taught in China and the United States reflect their different cultures, social values, and educational philosophies. The Chinese education system focuses on students' deep understanding of systematic learning in basic subjects, which reflects the high value society places on academic achievement and standardized testing. Teaching methods are teacher-centered, focusing on knowledge transfer and test-taking skills training in the classroom, and the testing and evaluation system is rigorous, with, for example, the college entrance exams having a significant impact on students' future college and career development. In contrast, U.S. education places greater emphasis on the personalized development of students and the cultivation of their overall qualities. In addition to core subjects, the U.S. curriculum covers a wide range of elective courses, such as arts, physical education, and social sciences, encouraging students to explore and develop interests in a variety of fields. Teaching methods emphasize student participation, cooperation and practice, and assessment methods are diversified, not only limited to test scores, but also including project assignments, oral presentations, etc., with emphasis on the cultivation of students' comprehensive abilities and practical application skills. However, the differences in these educational models also bring about some common challenges and problems. Educational equity is a common concern, and China faces challenges in the unequal distribution of educational resources between urban and rural areas and regions, while the United States faces the problem of unequal educational opportunities due to racial and economic disparities [1]. In addition, the test-based education model may suppress students'

creativity and critical thinking, while comprehensive quality education in the United States faces the challenge of how to cultivate students' comprehensive quality and practical ability while maintaining academic standards. Teacher training and development is also an important topic, and how to train teachers with high-level academic and educational skills to cope with changing educational needs and the diversity of students' backgrounds requires in-depth research and study [2] .

## **2.2 Teaching methods**

There are significant differences between China and the United States in the way basic education is taught, reflecting their different educational philosophies, cultural backgrounds, and social needs. Basic education in China focuses on the traditional test-taking education model. Teaching methods are mainly teacher-centered, focusing on the transmission of knowledge and students' mastery of basic subjects [3] . Classes usually emphasize listening and note-taking, and students are commonly assessed by standardized tests, such as the gaokao, which to some extent limits students' creativity and critical thinking development. In addition, the education system is more uniform in terms of content and pace, and the primary goal of schooling is to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed for high-stakes testing for college and career advancement. Basic education in the United States, on the other hand, pays more attention to students' individualized development and comprehensive quality training. Teaching methods emphasize student participation and interaction, and encourage students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills through exploratory and cooperative learning. Teachers usually play the role of mentors and motivators in the classroom, and emphasize guiding students to think and learn independently. Diversified assessment methods, including project assignments, oral presentations, group discussions and other forms in addition to traditional exams, help to comprehensively assess students' comprehensive and practical application abilities. These different teaching methods also bring some common problems and challenges. In China, Chinese education has shown problems of single curriculum, traditional teaching methods and insufficient teacher-student interaction in terms of students' personalized development, which has led to the restriction of students' interests and customized development. Unequal distribution of educational resources between urban and rural areas, lack of extracurricular activities, and insufficient teacher training further limit opportunities for students' personalized development. In the United States, despite the emphasis on individualized education and comprehensive quality development, there are also challenges related to the academic achievement gap among students and how to achieve the goals of equity and inclusiveness in education while maintaining educational standards.

## **2.3 Teacher-student interaction**

There are significant differences in teacher-student interactions in basic education between China and the United States. In China, teacher-student interactions are usually more traditional and hierarchical. Teachers usually play the role of authority and knowledge transmitter in the classroom, focusing on the transmission of content and the digestion of knowledge by students. Students are generally passive recipients of knowledge, focusing on teachers' guidance and explanations, and classroom interactions are dominated by teachers' questions and students' answers, with little open-ended discussion and exploratory learning, and the education system emphasizes academic performance and test-taking ability. In contrast, U.S. basic education emphasizes teacher-student equality and interaction. Teachers usually act as guides and facilitators, encouraging students to actively participate and interact in the classroom. Interaction in the classroom relies more on cooperation and discussion

among students, and teachers are more inclined to guide students to think and learn independently, rather than just imparting knowledge. Assessment methods are also more diverse, focusing on assessing students' general and practical application skills. These different ways of teacher-student interaction also bring some problems and challenges. In China, the traditional teacher-power-dominated model may limit students' independent learning and creativity development, leading to a lack of flexibility and innovation in the educational process. In the United States, despite the emphasis on teacher-student equality and interactivity, there are also challenges in how to effectively assess student engagement and academic achievement, as well as how to maintain the quality and standards of education in a diverse teaching and learning environment.

### **3 Analysis of the reasons for the differences in the teaching models of basic education in China and the United States**

#### **3.1 Historical background**

China's education system has a long history and has been deeply influenced by Confucianism. Traditionally, education was seen as the cornerstone of social progress and governance, focusing on inculcating students with basic knowledge morals, and ethics. Between the early and mid-20th centuries, China experienced war and political turmoil, and the education system was reformed on several occasions. The establishment of the country in 1949, and the implementation of an education policy that provided universal access to education and emphasized collectivism, have profoundly influenced the formation of the contemporary education model. Since the reform and opening up, China's education has developed rapidly, emphasizing the need for scientific technological, and economic development, and promoting the modernization and standardization of the education system. The United States has a younger history of education, originating in religious schools and homeschooling during the colonial period. Its socio-cultural diversity and tradition of local autonomy determined the decentralized and diverse nature of its education system. From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, U.S. education went through universal education and educational reforms during the period of industrialization, which emphasized individual freedom and equality of opportunity in society. From the late 20th century to the 21st century, technological innovations and globalization have made U.S. education focus more and more on innovation, critical thinking, and pluralism. and educational policies focused more on individualization and holistic development of students [4]. Therefore, under the influence of the different historical backgrounds of the two countries, there is a big difference between the teaching mode of basic education in China and the United States.

#### **3.2 Cultural traditions**

Traditional Chinese culture focuses on the values of collectivism, respect for authority, and filial piety, which are reflected in education by respect for teacher authority and emphasis on family and social responsibility, and the goal of education is usually centered on academic achievement and test-taking ability, and the pursuit of the acquisition of knowledge and the enhancement of social status [5]. In contrast, American culture tends to favor the values of individualism, freedom, and individual pursuit of happiness, and education pays more attention to the overall development and self-realization of the individual, emphasizing the cultivation of individuality, independent thinking, and creativity, to cultivate students to become citizens capable of living independently, think critically and participating in a democratic society. Therefore, under the influence of the different cultural traditions of the

two countries, there are big differences in the teaching mode of basic education between China and the United States, which are not only reflected in the educational goals and values but also the specific teaching content, teaching methods and assessment system, which in turn affect the learning experience and growth path of students.

### **3.3 Educational philosophy**

China's educational philosophy emphasizes academic achievement and the development of test-taking skills and views education as the primary means of acquiring knowledge and improving social status. The education system selects talents through standardized tests such as the gaokao (college entrance examination), and students and parents generally value test scores as an important indicator of success, leading to a high degree of concentration on test preparation and score improvement in educational practice. To a certain extent, this model neglects the development of students' personalities, interests, and creativity. In contrast, the U.S. education philosophy pays more attention to the overall development of the individual and the realization of personalized learning, with education goals that include not only the improvement of academic performance but also the cultivation of students' innovation, critical thinking, social responsibility, and practical problem-solving skills. The U.S. education system adopts diverse assessment methods and encourages students to demonstrate their abilities and strengths in a variety of activities and programs, thus fully supporting students' personalized development. These philosophical differences have a direct impact on the design and implementation of the two countries' education models, which in turn shape different student growth paths and educational outcomes. The different philosophical approaches to education in the two countries have resulted in different models of basic education.

## **4 Recommendations**

### **4.1 Increase student engagement**

Education in China needs to focus on increasing student participation and interaction to enhance their learning experience and motivation. Experience in the United States illustrates that students' interest and autonomy in learning can be significantly increased by introducing interactive teaching activities such as group discussions, project learning, and role-playing. These methods not only stimulate students' thinking and creativity but also develop their teamwork and problem-solving skills. In addition, the use of clickers, online polling tools, or field trips can provide real-time insights into students' level of understanding and feedback, effectively promoting classroom interaction and learning outcomes. This practice not only helps students apply what they have learned in practice and enhances their practical skills but also personalizes attention to each student's learning progress and needs and promotes the overall improvement of education quality [6]. Therefore, Chinese education should learn from the U.S. experience and respond to today's complex and changing social needs through teaching methods that increase student engagement and interactivity.

### **4.2 Practice and innovation**

Education in China should focus on strengthening practice-oriented learning and the cultivation of innovation ability to promote students' in-depth understanding of knowledge and practical application ability. Experience in the United States illustrates that through practical teaching methods such as laboratory experiments, field trips, and project

assignments, students can apply abstract theoretical knowledge to practical problems, thus developing their sense of innovation and problem-solving ability [7]. These practical activities not only enhance students' practical ability but also stimulate their learning motivation and interest, making the educational effect more significant. Strengthening the construction of laboratory facilities and setting up practical courses help to provide students with more practical opportunities and enhance their hands-on ability and practical application ability. Through practice, students can not only understand subject knowledge more deeply, but also develop innovative thinking, to better adapt to future professional and social needs [8]. Therefore, China's education should focus on actively promoting the practice-oriented teaching mode, and cultivate students' innovative ability and practical problem-solving ability by strengthening the construction of laboratory facilities and setting up practical courses.

### **4.3 Developing critical thinking**

Education in China should focus on developing students' critical thinking skills to enhance their ability to think independently, analyze problems, and evaluate information. Experience in the United States has shown that students' critical thinking can be effectively cultivated through teaching methods such as classroom discussions, debates, case studies, and open-ended question-and-answer sessions. These methods not only stimulate students' active thinking but also promote their in-depth understanding of complex issues and their ability to analyze them. Through the training of critical thinking, students can grasp knowledge more comprehensively and can assess the validity and applicability of information more accurately [9]. Introducing activities such as classroom discussions, debates, and case studies into educational practice helps develop students' logical thinking skills and critical thinking, enabling them to analyze and solve complex problems more rationally and independently when faced with them. This teaching method not only enhances students' academic level but also develops their self-confidence and problem-solving ability, laying a solid foundation for their future studies and careers. Therefore, Chinese education should learn from the successful experience of the United States and actively promote the cultivation of critical thinking skills, through classroom discussions and case studies, so that students can be more academically excellent and well-rounded, and at the same time better adapt to the complex challenges and changes in the future society [10].

To sum up, by learning from the experiences and practices of American education, China can improve and optimize the aspects of increasing student participation, promoting practice and innovation, fostering critical thinking, enhancing the quality of education and teaching, and cultivating students with more creativity, adaptability, and competitiveness.

## **5 Conclusion**

Differences in the teaching models of basic education in China and the United States reflect different cultural understandings of and emphasis on educational goals, teaching methods, and assessment approaches. These differences not only affect the way the education systems are structured and operate but also provide rich opportunities for comparison and learning through global educational exchanges and cooperation. A comparative study of the differences in educational models between China and the United States is particularly important when considering the ongoing challenges and impacts of globalization and technological advances on education. Through in-depth understanding and comparison, the strengths and limitations of each educational system can be better recognized, thereby promoting educational reform and innovation. In the face of the challenges of globalization and social change, China and the U.S. can learn from each other, explore the best practices

of education reform, jointly promote the improvement of education quality, and cultivate globally competitive future talents. In the future development of education, China and the U.S. can carry out in-depth cooperation and exchanges in the application of educational technology, the cultivation of students' innovative abilities, and the transformation of teachers' roles, to jointly meet the educational challenges brought about by the era of globalization, and to provide students with a broader space for development and a more competitive educational experience.

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