

The Effect of Chinese Dual-education System on Students and its Improvements Based on Paulo Freire's Education Framework

Jingyu Pan^{1*}

¹Wahaha Bilingual School, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 310000, China

Abstract. Two education systems in China, the public and private education system seems to resemble two ends of education, one encouraging creation and one aiming for the grade students score on their standardized examination. By analyzing the effects of education on students from a psychological perspective and a utilitarian perspective, it will be demonstrated why certain strategies that seems oppressive are applied in the public education system and what psychological consequences could them be associated with. Simultaneously, the strategies that the private education system utilize will also be comprehended to show why are it is also problematic regardless of its innovation. Then, it will be proven that in reality, both systems risk becoming the banking concept of education criticized by famous educator Paulo Freire and analyze why under such circumstance, the public education system is being criticized substantially more than the private education system and can still prolong its dominating status in Chinese education. By illustrating the method of education that substantially benefits students and prepares them for their career life, the problem-posing method of education, this paper will eventually attempt to hew out a method to ameliorate the present situation with the help of modern technology.

1 Introduction

The public education system and the private education system in China seems to have different characters in the eyes of parents. A conception that the public education system is associated with standardized curriculum and stressful course can be extracted from the common belief within the society. On the contrary, the private education system establishes its competence by teaching through its individualized curriculum system, and offering students the unique project-based learning experience. As a result, although it is commonly believed that the private education system release students from the heavy schoolwork burden, in reality, one might not expect, but observe that students busy taking notes in the public education system and students from private education system who seems to engage in group activities and projects might face the same challenge: how to become an eligible receptor of static and fixed knowledge [1].

* Corresponding author: Pandora0720@outlook.com

2 The banking concept of education

The banking concept of education that Paulo Freire criticizes precisely illustrates this similarity [2]. In both cases, knowledge is a static asset that is transferred unilaterally between teachers and students. This essay hopes to reveal that such phenomenon is not the result of coincidence, but is tightly related to the governing rationale that aims at filtrating eligible candidates for higher education. Under such circumstance, the public education system promotes inclusiveness, offering students of the appropriate age the equal opportunity to attend school though standardized; on the other hand, the private education system synthesizes teaching philosophies from the West and conform to the education market. However, neither the two systems evaded the trap of considering students as knowledge receptors. Their similarity in nature and differences in the surface provides the key to understanding the dilemma of education reform and the psychological issues that are present.

The mainstream Chinese education system can be depicted from the perception of the critique Paulo Freire established towards the concept “banking concept of education”. To be specific, what Freire criticizes is not solely the process of memorizing knowledge, but the education power structure: teachers are identified as the possessor and the distributor of knowledge, while the role of students are to passively accept and store the knowledge that teachers pass on to them.

3 Application of the banking concept of education in China

Take the secondary school period as an example, the teaching time is usually the time when teachers unilaterally transfer knowledge to students. The only role of students are memorizing the knowledge they were taught and reproduce them on the exams, which is presumably the only method of evaluating the student’s academic performance. Specifically, in subjects that will be tested - Chinese, mathematics, social studies, science, and English - the classes usually aimed at mastering the type of questions that will be tested and increase the accuracy of answers. When sometimes students ask questions in class that are related to the subject but irrelevant to the tests, they are usually guided back to learning “what will be tested” rather than understanding the origin and the nature of the concept and the practical significance of the concepts taught. This phenomenon is exactly what Freire criticizes: knowledge taught are decontextualized and learning has therefore become a functional process rather than a process of denaturing the world.

Despite of the presence of deficiencies of the banking concept of education, it can be justified why it is still the core of Chinese education system. With the fact that China has a huge population in mind, the education system has long undertaken the role of selecting eligible people to attend higher education and distribute opportunities. Under this circumstance, standardized testing can then be seen as a tool of evaluation that is relatively equitable, easy to replicate, and easy to manage. Therefore, the application of the banking concept of education is not because of the guiding theory of education is outdated, but is a demonstration of the governing logic.

Specifically, the national college entrance examination, Gaokao, is commonly known as the fairest ascending channel. Especially common is this mindset in the rural areas or low-income families. At the same time when this mindset enhanced social consensus, the education methodology of utilizing memory and repetitive training is also consolidated. The prioritized aim of public system of education is then made clear: to offer opportunities to the general public but not to encourage diversified development.

Under this system, the high stress that students experience is not a coincidence [3,4]. Though the banking concept of education is not the only cause of the burden students bear, it is the primary hinge that transform the need of selection into teaching practice. When the

idea that “knowledge is asset” is combined with “grade is the currency”, the notion that more practice and the absorption of additional knowledge definitely leads to a better grade becomes the criterion that simultaneously introduces the excessive assignment tactic, which makes the nature of additional practices changing from optional to mandatory. When the opportunity is offered to the general public, students’ performances are quantified so that measurements could be carried out easily. This exactly conforms to the banking concept of education. In order for students to improve their grades, the direct method is to increase the amount of practice, which teachers usually propose that the more one practices, the better they will be able to master on the questions that will be tested. In other words, this logic framework links “practicing more” directly to “better grades”, leading to the prevalence of heavy workload and after-school lessons within the society. Middle school students are demanded to wake up early in the morning but are forced to go to bed late at night due to their massive amount of homework, sleep insufficiency has become a universal phenomenon [5]. Furthermore, though the government has promulgated the burden alleviation policy, parents and schools still tend to utilize extra homework and extra lessons as tools to maintain competence. This societal situation has demonstrated that the burden on students cannot be easily resolved, but is an issue that is rooted within the evaluation system [6].

4 What makes the present education system problematic?

Subsequently, the idea of “judging by grades” has created non-negligible negative consequences on students’ psychological wellness [7]. When the value of students is mainly judged by their grades, in other words their academic performance, their personal identity has then been divided into a good student and a bad student. This unilateral judgement will impede students’ non-academic development, and impair their consciousness about multidimensional development. Moreover, in many public schools, students are ranked based on their academic performance. In many circumstances, the grade a student and whether they will be able to enter a great school has become the main subject of discussions between schools and parents. Grade fluctuation not only influences the school which students will be able to enter, but also the self-esteem and emotional wellness, even leading to the prevalent situation of attending extracurricular courses after school [8]. Such environment can trigger anxiety and even depression [3].

Besides, there are numerous non-academic skills that are as important, or even more important than students’ academic performance, namely critical thinking skills. However, the public education system neglects the cultivation of such immeasurable abilities, since skills like critical thinking, communication, and collaboration can hardly be measured by standardized tests. However, such skills have important applications in the later stages of students’ lives. When they enter their career lives, students are no longer tested based on their academic performances or their ability to find the standard answer. On the other hand, group work is considered as a waste of time in some schools, since the result is hard to quantify and the basis of judgement is relatively subjective, so a unified judgement is hard to achieve. Unfortunately, this has resulted in many students only started to participate in group work and presenting themselves once they enter college or workplaces, which they might suffer from a lack of competence. It is not because of teachers do not want to utilize methods other than testing, but is the nature of banking concept of education that marginalized non-standardized evaluations.

Though some think that the private education system, which is usually utilized within international schools, does a better job on mitigating the pressure students bear and cultivate multiple skills, the innovation of the private education system mostly stopped superficially and failed to make improvements structurally. An attractive aspect that the private education system has is its inclusion of discussion classes and project-based learning, which hugely

differentiates from the public education system. However, if the curriculum is still aimed at entering the higher education, the teaching authority will still be concentrated within teachers and the system, where students are still the receptor rather than the main subject. This could be exemplified by the fact that in some international or bilingual schools, groups discussions and projects are usually relevant to the problem that the teacher proposes. Students are expected to reach the correct conclusion by working collectively. Under such circumstance, group working has become a method of demonstration, but not a channel of exploring the unknown.

Furthermore, in the private education system, pressure and stress are still present, but in a distinct form [9]. The private education does mitigate the stress students have about their academic performances, but they also create new forms of pressure. Under the high tuition fee and the tag of “elite education”, students will undergo extra expectations from their families and friends [10]. The expectation might not solely be the grade one scores, but is persisted in the requirement of continuous excellence and distinction in all aspects. To be precise, students are not only expected to have great academic performances, they are also appraised on their performance in competitions, activities, leadership, and community services. The requirement of integrated development might be as demanding and as stressful as one might experience in the public education system. Under such a community, without the buttress from a healthy mental core, the students’ level of happiness will still be impacted [11].

5 The way out: The problem-posing education model

As a result, the only method of reaching a successful education reform is to restructure the authority and relationship within education. To reach the problem-posing education model, which Freire strongly commends about, classes will have to be restructured from aiming to finish tasks to comprehending real-life issues. Freire’s problem-posing education model emphasizes equal conversation between teachers and students and the process of collaborated knowledge creation. Students are not the receptors of knowledge and the repliers of question, they engage in the process of discovering the problem, analyzing the reality, and then attempt to resolve it. Introducing societal issues and life experiences into the discussions in class and offering students the opportunity to extract from their own experiences will buttress the cultivation of students who could think critically and will be able to detect and resolve issues in the society.

Consequently, regardless of whether it is the public education system that aimed for fairness or the private education system that emphasizes individuality, they both persist the education authority of the banking concept of education under the societal context of China. This structure is not simply the consequence of a concept that falls behind the West, but is the choice of the governing logic that could service the huge population in the society with relatively high efficiency. Though it has enabled China to accomplish its unrivaled reach and fairness of education, there is still a price for its system: learning has changed into repetitive training, and individuals are simplified into quantifiable grades. Under the proposed fairness and innovation, students bear stress rooted in expectation but differs in form. As a result, the dilemma of education reform is not simply making a choice between the public education system or the private education system, it is about transforming the concept of knowledge being a static transformable asset and reforming the relationship between teachers and students into collective investigators rather than the presenting depositor-receptor relationship. The problem-posing education does not revelate any teaching method, but inspires the direction of education philosophy: education should turn from seeking the fixed answer to understanding, questioning, and reforming the reality. This alter in direction is not

solely relevant to the classroom, but is a reform that requires institution, culture, and the society to work together.

6 Conclusion

Eventually, it is then demonstrated that both systems present in the field of Chinese education have their advantages and disadvantages when compared with each other. However, the role of education is not simply cultivating students that are able to attend great colleges or obtain a high score in their exams. Rather, education should aim at preparing students for later stages of their lives and arm them with essential skills that can help them to complete tasks more effectively, which is unfortunately an objective that is systematically subordinated to the imperative selection and the unilateral knowledge transmission. Not only are students not having access to education that are the most beneficial to them, stress caused by the application of inefficient education methodology is also threatening their mental and physical wellness. Therefore, transformation is not needed for the purpose of filling students with additional knowledge, but should be done in order to cultivate individuals that are responsible for their nation and even the world.

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