

A Comparison of Educational System of UK and China

By Li Lei (李磊)

What does “education” mean? According to the dictionary, “to educate” means “to bring up and train the mind and way of thinking”. And “education” means “the act or process of educating”. So education is quite an important thing which can brighten people’s mind, enlarge their knowledge and lift their ability of some certain areas. The educational systems of two big countries in the world, UK and China, are very complicated in some degree. There are a lot of similarities and differences between them. They both have advantages and disadvantages in each phase of education.

In UK, the educational system is more complicated. Generally speaking, there are two parallel systems of primary and secondary education, the state school and “public school”, of which the former is in the majority. For higher education, the case is even more complex. There are four main sorts of universities, in addition to some open ones. So we may say that the system of educational system in UK is one of the most complicated in the world.

In China, the system is less complex compared with Britain. There are also public and private schools in each level. But generally there is one system. We have compulsory education for nine years, after which some students stop school, but much more go on with studying in higher schools. In the old days, the education in China is completely designed for exams. But that is not suitable for students to get knowledge. Now we have designed a new system called “education for quality”. That makes students develop in every field. Students no longer sit in the classrooms reading books all day. Some new subjects, or “activity classes” have come into work. Unlike the old system, it has achieved the real goal of education.

1. Primary Education

The pre-school education is not very popular in UK. There are only a few nursery schools in Britain. In recent years, the government has set more nursery schools and there are also some private nurseries. But still only less than 50% of all children of 3 to 4 years old go to nurseries. 20% of the children in Britain start school before the age of five. In the nursery school, children learn singing, dancing, P.E., reading, calligraphy, arithmetic, science stories, etc.

The system of state primary school education is from the age of 5 to 11. In the state primary schools, there are two sections - infants’ school and junior school. The former is from the age of 5 to 7 and the latter 7 to 11. Pupils start infants’ school at the age of five and they can choose what they are to study according to their interest. English people consider this the most successful point in their educational system. The hours for study is from 9:00 a.m. till 12:00 noon, and then 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday. Pupils are free on Saturdays and Sundays. One academic year begins in September and is divided into three semesters, with holidays at Christmas, Easter and in the summer. After the two years in the infants’ school, the children enters junior schools, in which they study arithmetic, reading, writing, science, society, foreign language, arts, music, dancing, P.E., etc.

Most primary schools are wholly maintained by the local government. The teachers’

salaries and many of the operating expenses are paid by the local education authorities which get most of the money for this purpose from the central government. The schools also provide religious instruction besides general education.

For China's part, the pre-school education is more popular than the UK. Most children go to a nursery school at the age of 3, before which the parents usually have taught them some "basic knowledge" at home.

The period for primary school in China is mostly from 7 to 12, but many parents let their children go to school earlier, usually at 6. There are also some primary schools which provide a course system of five years instead of six. Pupils study reading, writing, arithmetic, foreign language, basic science, basic society, arts, music and P.E., etc. The hours of course is usually from 8:00 to 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays are for resting. But many parents make their children study dancing, drawing, calligraphy, etc on their "free" days. One academic year begins at September and is divided into two terms, with winter and summer holidays. Also, in these two holidays, many parents make their children to study some subjects that the children don't like.

Most primary schools in China are maintained by the country, from where they get the teachers' salaries and money for equipments for education. The primary school is the first phase of the compulsory education in China.

In my opinion, the primary education systems in UK and in China have both an advantage and a disadvantage. In Britain, children may choose the things they like to study at school, then they can be more active in studying and more suitable. But the knowledge provided in each course is too limited. Children can only learn very simple things. In this way they lose to China. In China, children can learn things more deeply in primary schools, so if they attend international competitions in certain fields they will win. But the time for primary education in China is too long. Children are able to learn the basic rules in 3 or 4 years. The other two or three years are almost wasted. This is the best time for children to learn more useful things. So I think that's quite a pity.

2. Secondary Education

In Britain, there are also state schools and independent schools in this stage. For the state schools, since 1944, there have been mainly three kinds. They have grammar schools, comprehensive secondary schools and secondary modern schools. In the past, after graduation from primary schools, good students go to grammar schools, in which they can have the college-entrance exam. Students who are less good enter comprehensive schools and, worse students, secondary modern schools. Grammar schools required an exam called "eleven plus", which is now totally abolished. At present, students may choose any school they like. They usually study English, French or German, maths, two sciences and history at secondary schools. These schools are all paid by the government.

There are also independent schools in UK. These schools aim at shaping characters as well as individuality. Their income is partly from profits and endowments, mainly from fees paid by parents. There are also some public boarding schools in Britain. Now these two kinds of schools are becoming more and more popular, even more popular than state schools.

In China, the secondary education is divided into two phases, the junior and the senior ones. Students who graduate from primary schools can choose a junior middle school by

themselves and take the entrance exam of that school. If they pass, they can enter the school chosen. At this stage, students study reading, writing, foreign language, physics, chemistry, history, politics, arts and music, P.E., etc. This is the other part of the compulsory education. They only need to pay for their own books and other studying tools. After studying in junior middle schools, students take an exam for graduation. Then some students stop school or go on to have vocational education, but most of the students take the examination to enter senior middle school, and then go into colleges or universities.

In senior middle schools, students spend most of their time studying, in order to enter the college they admire. These three years are considered the busiest years for Chinese students. The courses are Chinese, foreign language, maths, physics, chemistry, biology, history, politics and geography. They are much more difficult than before. After these three years, students take the national college-entrance examination. Some of them can go to universities or colleges, and some stop studying here and start working.

I think students in China are suffering much more from their study than students in Britain. In China, entering a university or college is very hard. Students have to struggle in order to enter a university. In Britain, the exam G.C.S.E seems easier. That may be because China has a large population. The condition in China is better in recent years, but still worse than in Britain.

3. Higher Education

In Britain, the higher education has a long history. There are two world-famous universities, Oxford and Cambridge. The system of higher education in UK is even more complicated. Generally speaking, there are four types of universities. They are old universities, Scottish universities, the middle-aged universities and the new universities. Apart from them, there are also the Open University, polytechnics and colleges of higher education.

The two famous universities, Oxford and Cambridge, are “old universities”. They had been the only two universities until the nineteenth century. In these two universities, students are taught in complete credit system. Each student can choose the lectures they like. Apart from lectures, teaching is by means of the “tutorial system”, which is a system of individual tuition organized by the colleges and has been one of the chief foundations of the greatness of the “old universities”.

With the two famous universities and other kinds of universities, almost everyone in Britain can receive high education. After studying in the universities, they get different kinds of degrees. But it's a little more difficult for them to get the degrees than Chinese students.

In China, we also have many kinds of universities and colleges, but the Chinese system of higher education is not so complicated as the system in Britain. We have comprehensive universities, science universities, vocational universities, normal universities and various kinds of colleges. There are also two world-famous universities in China, Tsinghua and Peking University. In most of the universities in China students must observe the “set courses”. So we have many specialties. But it's more difficult for Chinese students to enter the universities. The college-entrance examination is not very hard, but the amount of students is very large. So every students must try his best to be better than the others in order to gain the chance of entering a university.

I don't think the full credit system is very good or suitable. We have to keep the

specialties. If one knows a lot of things, but only the surface, then what can he do? So we may say the credit system provides the society with some “know-alls”. They are not beneficial to the society. So I prefer the set-course system. It can provide the students with deeper knowledge in some certain fields. But in this system, I’d like to have some courses that we can choose. In this way we are more active in our study. We can have the “semi-credit system”.

Through the comparison of educational system in UK and China, we can find both of them have advantages and disadvantages. In all, education is one of the basic things of a society. A country must try to improve its educational system. That is one of the most important things for a country.

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