

The Problems and Some Suggestions in the Current System Reform of Teacher Education in China

YANG Tian-ping

Wuhan University, Hubei, China

Thanks to China's reform and opening to the world over the last three decades, the conventional normal education system, which is characterized by independent orientation, is now being challenged by a comprehensive and multi-faceted modern teacher education system that has taken shape. It is high time that we attached great significance to the solution of the ensuing problems. As far as pre-vocational teacher education is concerned, we should improve the training mode, prolong the educational time and strengthen the practice. As for post-job teacher education, we should promote the integration of teacher education, and concentrate on the improvement of the educator's quality and the legal construction of post-job teacher education. Pertaining to teachers' qualification authentication, we should enhance the vocational requirements, update the test content and test form, and innovate the teacher certificate system and updating system. With regard to teacher educational evaluation, we should build special evaluation system of teacher education quality, and improve the accreditation system of teacher education institution. On the aspect of teacher education security, we should further open the teacher education, strengthen the subjectivity of normal colleges and universities, and maintain a relatively independent teacher education organizational system. As for free education for students in teacher education program, with a view to keeping abreast with the time, we should offer more privileges to invite more excellent students to choose education as their primal majors, and to encourage normal students to treat teaching job as a lifelong vocation.

Keywords: normal education, teacher education, system reform

Introduction

Teacher education system is a kind of system that unifies policies, regulations, programs, standards, principles, modes and mechanisms. It is based upon the integration of pre-vocational teacher education and post-job teacher education with teacher's qualification authentication, with the construction of professional teaching as its core. Since the implementation of the policy that advocated "an open teacher education system that ensures the subjectivity of normal colleges and universities" in 1980s, Chinese teacher education reform has made a breakthrough. The traditional normal education system that is characterized by independent orientation has been challenged by a comprehensive and multi-dimensional modern teacher education system. However, such a comprehensive and multi-dimensional modern teacher education system is far from immaculate. Some problems still exist. This paper attempts to enumerate such polemical problems from six aspects, i.e., pre-vocational teacher education, post-job education, teachers' qualification authentication, teacher educational evaluation, teacher education system security and free education for students in teacher education

program, with a view to making a negotiation with the scholars who are interested in this field.

Problems in Pre-vocational Teacher Education System

The top task for pre-vocational teacher education is to improve the training mode, prolong the educational program and strengthen the practice. For a long time, Chinese normal colleges and universities have been taking such general training modes as “4 + 0”, “3 + 1”, “2 + 2” or “3 + 0”, “2 + 1” and “2 + 0”, which combines basic knowledge teaching with skill training. Students are supposed to get the enough credits in science and engineering or arts and humanities respectively and to live up to the requirements of the teacher training curriculum at the same time. As the old Chinese saying goes, “If we want to get fish and the bear’s paw both, we get none”. Students would fail to lay a solid foundation in their major while trying in vain to get well-trained in teaching skills. Students have been trapped in a condition of professional deficiency, formatting profession, semi-profession or under-profession. The mixed teacher education mode may be as well taken as an impassable step in historical development and a special phenomenon in a particular historical period. However, with the decrease of birth rate and school-age children, the rapid development of primary and secondary school education requires high level professional teachers. With the improvement of teacher education quality, the traditional four-year, three-year and two-year normal education should be reformed.

First, we should draw on the experience of the medicine colleges and universities’ cultivation of advanced professionals and to summarize our experience of the “Master of Education for Rural Teachers” (The Teaching Department’s Document, 2006) cultivation mode and Beijing Normal University’s “4 + X”, “4 + 1 + 2” bachelor-to-master teacher cultivation mode. We should keep up with the development of international teacher education and integrate it with our regional situation. With a view to facilitating teacher-education school system reform, we should prolong the pro-vocational years, and to separate professional education and teacher professional education from general education into art and science. The general education may be put in the three-year college education stage or undergraduate education stage, and the teachers professional education may be postponed to the undergraduate education stage or even in the post-graduate education stage. Then, the 1957-edition “Provisional Guideline of Higher Normal Colleges and Universities Educational Practice” ought to be revised so as to promulgate a new educational practice guideline, standardize teacher education’s professional practice or probation, improve the curriculum plan, strengthen practice teaching and upgrade the requirements for practice. Student’s professional skills and teaching skills should be attached great significance to. On the basis of the fulfillment of the four-year or three-year general education in art and science and professional education, the teachers’ professional education time should be divided into two parts. The first part should be used for teaching basic theories and professional knowledge, while the second part should be used for taking educational practice and research practice in the primary and secondary schools. The evaluation and guidance of students’ educational practice design will be strengthened and students’ performances in the subjects related to teaching practice should be emphasized so that the students’ ability to solve the real problems on the spot may be much reinforced.

Problems in Post-job Teacher Education System

As far as the main problems of post-job teacher education are concerned, the top task is to promote the integration of teacher education, and attach great significance to the improvement of the educator’s quality and

the legal construction of the post-job teacher education. Modern teacher education is the lifelong education that combines the pre-vocational education and post-job education. Therefore, the post-job training is one of the basic contents of teachers' lifelong education. Compared with pre-vocational teacher education, the post-job education is more closely related to teacher's career and professional development. The post-job education is more enduring and commanding. But for a long time, China has carried on a two-way normal education system, in which the pre-vocational normal colleges and universities and the post-job training institutions belong to two parallel and separated systems. Moreover, the so-called "two peels" phenomenon always exists. More attention was paid to pre-vocational education other than the post-job education. Conditions of school administration are not in conformity with school administration level, and the quality of continued teacher education was restricted by the out-dated and overlapped educational contents. The rigid and unitary teaching form, the old and inflexible management style and the poor quality of teacher resources combine to restrict the further development of continued teacher education. In 1999, China's Ministry of Education promulgated "Primary and Secondary School Teacher's Continued Education Regulations", which has made some regulations on the aim, contents and requirements of the primary and secondary teachers' continued education. However, the actual implementation of the regulation is not so gratifying that the above-mentioned problems have yet to be solved. The integration of pre-vocational education and post-job education, the proper connection between teachers' conscious and autonomous development and their well-being still has a long way to go.

Therefore, we should take a lifelong education idea and have a systematical reform thought and optimize the teacher education resources by taking the educational time, students' major, educational level and educational category into consideration. The career development plan and the curriculum standard for teachers' lifelong study should be designed from a comprehensive perspective. Moreover, the gradual serialization of teacher education and the transformation from a two-way teacher education system to a single-track and united one should be paced up. By doing so, we can build learning and lifelong teacher education system, which may combine pre-vocational education and post-job education, include diploma education and non-record education, and integrate school education with distance education. Meanwhile, we should pay more attention to the opening and cooperation of the post-job education and the pre-vocational cultivation, optimize education resources, accelerate the integration process, strengthen the education of educators, and improve the theoretical and practical ability of the teacher/educator. The low-efficiency of post-job teacher training may be overcome in this way. Then, the legal construction of continued teacher education, the culmination of which is the legislation of "Continued Teacher Education Law" will be realized in the near future. The teachers' rights and obligations in continued education may be guaranteed by legal means. What is more, drawing on the experiences of foreign countries' continued teacher education plans and training systems is also important. The relevant provisions and detailed regulations on the aim, level, content, method, time, reward and punishment pertaining to continued teacher education should be enacted, so as to improve the effective fusion of post-job teacher education and professional development at the institutional level.

Problems in Teacher's Qualification Authentication System

As for the main problems of teacher's qualification authentication, we should enhance the vocational requirements, update the test contents and test form, and improve the teacher certificate system and updating system. In China, teacher's qualification authentication started from the "Compulsory Education Law" of 1986,

in which the 13th provision declares that the state should establish teacher's qualification examination system, and grants the qualification certificate to the qualified teachers (Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China, 1986). Then, it has been improved through the following paths: "Teachers Law" of 1993, "Teachers Qualification Regulation" of 1995, "The Implementing Method of Teachers Qualification Regulation" of 2000, and has been implemented completely in 2001. The 30th provision of the "Compulsory Education Law" of 2006 regulates again that "It should establish unified teacher vocational system of compulsory education" and "teachers should qualify the teacher qualification certificate authenticated by the state" (Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China, 2006). In the past 20 years, the teacher's qualification authentication system has not fit the professional education well and its requirements on teacher's educational background are the same as that in 1990s. Moreover, no systematic criteria for teacher's vocation and teacher's profession, no evaluation standard for specialty, curriculum or quality of teacher education exist now. No operative evaluation for teaching ability and practice level has been made, either. The bodies of teacher qualification authentication are confused, and the provincial, municipal and county's education administration departments are entitled to conferring teacher's certificate with their own criteria. The contents of authentication test are easy and the form is inflexible. There is no unified national qualification standard as well as no difference in grades, types, specialties and ages. By contrast, America's vocational guild, such as doctor, lawyer and architect, etc., has a strict and comprehensive test system. Teacher's qualification certificate of different levels has different time limit. As compared with the American counterpart, China's teacher's qualification system is still in its embryo.

Firstly, in line with the trend of international teacher education development and combining with China's unbalanced development situation of regional economy, society and education, we should revise the "Teachers Qualification Regulation" and its implementation provision, modify and raise the standard of teacher's educational background, so as to accelerate the scientific development, normalization and standardization of teacher's qualification authentication. Secondly, drawing upon the experience of China's Bar Exam, the state should make national test system and build a national teacher's qualification test committee that undertakes the obligations of making test guidelines, policies and regulations, examining test syllabus, determining test subjects and principles, organizing national teacher qualification test and standardizing teaching requirements. Thirdly, we should make a probation period system to strengthen the applicants' actual teaching ability. After passing national teacher qualification test in theory, the applicants must have the experience of probation or practice in a school for one or two years and get teaching certificate finally by passing the comprehensive test organized by the education administrative department and the school they work for. Fourthly, we should build multiple and diversified evaluation systems, in which the university is in charge of specialty degree examination, the country is in charge of the vocational qualification test and the municipal and provincial education administration departments are in charge of grade-setting test. And we should also authenticate the teacher's qualification step by step and renew the certificate gradually, so as to build a classified and dynamic authentication system. The teacher's qualification authentication should also be integrated with teacher's professional title and promotion as well as teacher's continued education, which could make continued education a necessary condition of regulating teacher's qualification authentication and make regular authentication an important driving force for teachers' pursuit of continued education.

Problems in Teacher Educational Evaluation System

As far as the main problems of teacher educational evaluation system are concerned, we should build a special evaluation system of teacher educational quality and improve the accreditation system of teacher education institution. At present, the state evaluates the quality and performance of teacher education institutions in terms of “Undergraduate Teaching Assessment Plan for Common Higher Education Institutions (Trial)”. The non-governmental university evaluation institutions usually treat normal colleges and universities equally with others, and implement equal evaluation and sorting. A few evaluation institutions like China Scientific Evaluation Research Center of Wuhan University have made a classified index system; however, their research results have not been popularized. Normal colleges and universities also remain to be treated as the same as other kinds of universities, such as comprehensive universities, humanistic colleges, technological colleges, financial colleges, political and law colleges, physical education colleges, art colleges, medical colleges, agricultural and forestry colleges, ethnic colleges, etc., and the index system is also identical, which could not reflect the different evaluation standards and different features of every university’s peculiarity. Thus, without the considerations of teacher education’s professional features, we can not adopt, guide or promote the idiosyncratic and multiple developments of teacher education. The qualification authentication of teacher education institutions is an important part of opening teacher education system in all countries. In Japan, the pre-vocational education of primary and secondary school teachers has been generally carried out in the higher education institutions accredited by Japan Education Ministry. In America, the training institutions for primary and middle school teachers are usually those education colleges in common universities that are accredited both by regional and national professional organizations. Comparatively speaking, the evaluation of Chinese teacher education is relatively backward, and no quality evaluation system of professional teacher education has been built yet. In 1999, China’ Ministry of Education issued “Undergraduate Teaching Assessment Plan for Normal Education Institutions on a Trial Basis”, but it has yet to be put into practice.

The modern teacher education is both a process of authenticating teacher professional qualification and improving teacher comprehensive vocational abilities and a process of the systematization, normalization and standardization of teacher profession. Firstly, we should build a national teacher education evaluation system whose basic content includes the standards of the teacher education curriculums, the profession criteria of primary and secondary school teachers, the qualification norms of teacher education institutions and the evaluation standards of teacher education qualification. Meanwhile, we should also establish a teacher education qualification evaluation measure and index system that is characterized by classified guidance and strengthening the service for basic education orientation and set up a performance-based authentication system which emphasizes the effect of teacher education, tests teacher cultivation quality and pays attention to teacher’s actual teaching performance. Secondly, by drawing on the experience and operational models of some professional organizations, such as America’s NCATE (the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) and TEAC (Teacher Education Authentication Committee), and Britain’s TTA (Teachers Training Administration Bureau), we should build a third-party teacher education quality evaluation organization like NTEEC (National Teacher Education Evaluation Center) which is authorized to authenticate teacher education institutions, identify teacher education curriculums and evaluate teacher education quality. Thirdly, we should strengthen the qualification authentication and evaluation of mass teachers’ training schools and non-normal

universities which are involved in teacher education, and impel them to speed up their construction, promote school running condition, and improve school running level and education quality.

Problems in Teacher Educational Security System

As for the main problems of teacher educational security system, we should further open the teacher education, strengthen the subjectivity of normal colleges and universities, and maintain a relatively independent teacher education organization system. Since the former State Education Commission issued “Opinions on the Plans of Basic Education Teachers and Normal Education” in 1986, teacher education has been opened up, and China’s traditional normal education has preliminarily fulfilled its strategic transformation to modern teacher education. However, problems still exist, of which the loss of excellent resources in teacher education, the scarcity of student source of normal colleges and universities and the loss of popularity of teacher profession are most prominent. As it is known to all, the independent and up-down normal education system has a 100-year cultural foundation. In 1897, SHENG Xuan-huai established the Normal College of Nanyang Public School in Shanghai; in 1902, Peking Imperial University set up a normal college. In its early time, it was mainly modeled upon Japan’s up-down training mode. Later, it learned from America and changed into a pluralistic and integrative training mode. After 1949, a specialized normal education system was set up by imitating the former Soviet Union’s mode and the construction was completed in the middle of 1980s. After that, it has been opening up gradually. However, the numerous normal colleges and universities have always been the main bodies of cultivating primary and secondary school teachers. The Internet survey showed 144 higher normal colleges and universities and 56 city-level education colleges in China by the end of 2007, which, together with the special normal colleges in comprehensive universities, were still the pillar of teacher education.

To further open up the teacher education system and improve the structure of teacher education, the first and foremost, we should enhance the strategic priority of teacher education development, and try our utmost to put normal colleges and universities into full play. The state should focus on the constructions of the six normal universities under the direct leadership of the Ministry of Education. Besides, the provincial governments or municipalities should spare no effort to build one or two normal universities, so that a relatively stable and sophisticated teacher educational security system with a leading role of key normal universities may be established. Second, the input towards normal colleges and universities should be increased and people from all walks of life should support the constructions of normal colleges and universities. For instance, we should give priority to the constructions of “985” and “211” projects, state-level key laboratories and other key subjects and established the appropriate evaluation system for such projects. Third, we should take effective measures and make corresponding policies and laws to guide normal colleges and universities to improve their school running force as a whole and optimize the teacher education resources. Moreover, it is important to guide normal colleges and universities to “hold high the banner” of teacher education and do their duties of cultivating teachers and take advantage of their teacher education. The idiosyncrasy of their teacher education should be strengthened while the teacher education quality is being improved, so that we can provide excellent services for the reform and the development of basic education in China.

Problems in Free Teacher Education System

Pertaining to the main problems of free education for students in teacher education program, we should give

more priority to attract more excellent student sources to take teaching as their first choice of future career and encourage normal college students to take teacher as a lifelong vocation and love teaching. Since the birth of modern normal education, the government has been giving preferential treatments for normal students, such as free from tuition and other fees, offering the living subsidies and supporting grants for students in financial difficulties. These policies have provided a protection system for ensuring the poor but outstanding students who have been enrolled in normal colleges and universities to continue their study, so that the resources of high-quality teachers for the basic education will never become exhausted. However, since the college tuition mechanism had been reformed in 1997, normal colleges and universities have been restructured from partial to full charge, which has spoiled normal education in a way. A large number of high-quality teachers and students drop out, which has constrained the quality improvement of the teachers for basic education. Therefore, on March 5, 2007, in the “Government Work Report” on the Fifth Session of the Tenth National People’s Congress, Chinese Premier WEN Jia-bao declared that normal universities that directly under the Ministry of Education would offer free education for normal students. On May 9, the 176th Executive Meeting of the State Council discussed and approved the “Measures for the Implementation of Free Education for Students in the Normal Universities Directly under the Ministry of Education on a Trial Basis”. After that meeting, the General Office of the State Council issued “The Notice of the Ministry of Education and Other Departments on Measures for the Implementation of Free Education for Students in the Normal Universities Directly under the Ministry of Education on a Trial Basis” (the General Office of the State Council Document, 2007), to declare that normal universities directly under the Education Ministry will offer free education for students from the autumn of 2007.

The series of policies and demonstrating actions are an indication of CPC (The Chinese Communist Party) Central Committee and the State Council’s decisions of developing education and their determination of revitalizing teacher education. Meanwhile, they suggest their positive roles in encouraging excellent youths to engage in teaching, ensuring perfect student resources, cultivating outstanding teachers, and creating a strong atmosphere of respecting teachers and teaching. They have promoted the equal and harmonious development of education in a further step and have got lots of extensive and enthusiastic responses from society. Certainly, some problems still remain unsolved. For instance, some schools are short of enrolment impetus, many excellent students are unwilling to participate in, and some provinces or municipalities lag behind in implementing such policies and follow-up employment policies for free education students could not be promulgated on time (YANG, 2008). The urgent tasks in Chinese teacher education system reform are how to summarize the 100-year experience and lessons of free education for normal university students, especially the experience of subordinate normal universities’ implementation of free education for students in 2007 and how to study and solve problems in the implementation process. We can further improve the free education system from a new starting point, popularize the free policy to the whole country and make every normal college and university and their students enjoy its benefit. The Party’s strategic decisions to develop normal education and its location of developing teacher education preferentially should be implemented without any reservation.

First of all, in order to solve normal student resource problem effectively, we should take more preferential policies to attract excellent candidates to be normal students and encourage them to be excellent teachers. With a view to knowing the affect of the free education for students in teacher education program policy on high school students, we organized a survey of 4,353 high school students in Zhejiang Province in March 2007, which focused on the first level key secondary schools (71.9%), second level key secondary schools (20.9%) and the general high

school (7.2%). In this survey, students of Grade One account for 34.8%, students of Grade Two account for 33.4%, and students of Grade Three, account for 31.8%. The statistics show that most students who are willing to apply for normal colleges and universities are the average students and the ratio is 77.1%. If we take those intermediate students whose school performances ranks from No. 11 to No. 40 in a 50-person class as the major subjects for analysis, even if normal education is not free, there are still 22.8% of those students who will apply for normal education. If the undergraduate program is free, 30.8% are willing to become teacher candidate. If the “Non-stop Bachelor’s Degree plus Master Degrees Program” and free education are implemented, 1,404 in 1,607 students who are originally reluctant to choose free undergraduate normal education will change their minds and become teacher candidates, accounting for 43.7% of the total. This shows that its appeal is limited if only the undergraduate program is free. The “Non-stop Bachelor’s Degree plus Master Degrees Program” and free education is more attractive, which is more likely to be a good solution of the student resources problem.

Secondly, we should solve normal students’ cultivation problem effectively. The controversy between research-oriented and teacher-training-oriented normal colleges has always existed in traditional normal education. In terms of modern teacher education conception, the former focuses on “what to teach”, i.e., on the foundational arts and science subjects, and their professional education, the later focuses on “how to teach”, i.e., on the application of pedagogy to other fields. They are not contradictory. Both are the indispensable components of teacher education subjects. The “Annual Report on the Quality of Teachers in 2005” of US Federal Ministry of Education required that teachers should achieve the first standard (mastering of subject knowledge) and the second standard (application of appropriate teaching strategies). Therefore, to cultivate qualified teachers catering for kindergarten and primary schools, we should draw on the experiences within the framework of the existing system and improve the “3 + 1” model that implements professional teaching and education subject teaching separately or “4 + 0” model that chiefly focuses on the education subjects. Moreover, we should rationally cope with the relationships academic credentials education and qualification education, between quality education and professional education, subject specialty and pedagogical specialty. We should optimize the structure of credits and academic hours. Meanwhile, to meet the urgent need of basic education, we should strive to put the “Non-stop Bachelor’s Degree plus Master Degrees Program” into practice, whether it is “4 + X” or “4 + 1 + 2” model, to cultivate qualified teachers for junior and senior high schools who are specialized in one subject while knowing about the ABC of all the relevant subjects.

Thirdly, we should endeavor to solve the “outlet” problem of normal students. Resuming the free education policy for normal students is an important measure of implementing the “developing our country through science and education” strategy. To carry on this strategy effectively, we should solve the “outlet” problem and try our utmost to offer more opportunities for their job hunting. What is more, we should focus on the overall teacher construction to optimize their security system in a more open-minded way. Normal students’ working conditions, including their marriage, housing and family life, the realization of their professional ideals, education philosophy and professional development, are all closely associated with the implementation of free education policy. We should take a series of supporting policies for those teachers or would-be teachers. We may offer more privileges to improve their economic condition, offer appropriate teaching posts, and provide professional development and occupational promotion. It is high time that we established and improved our human resources management that consists of teachers’ employment system, personnel contract system, two-way selection, period of service, and professional civil servant system which are suitable for the free

normal students' actual condition and the overall teaching faculty, so as to create a care-free working climate in which the teachers may learn and teach gladly.

These six problems discussed above are interdependent and mutually cross-cutting, which constitute a systematical framework of teacher education system. China is a developing country whose teacher education development is not well-balanced. The teacher education in rural areas and underdeveloped areas lags behind that in cities and developed areas. Therefore, based on national conditions and global outlook, we should keep both unity and diversity in mind and explore a modern teacher education system with Chinese characteristics, so as to make our contribution to China's educational development and the construction of powerful human resources.

References

- Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China*. (1986). Retrieved May 25, 2005, from <http://www.gov.cn>
- Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China* (revised in 2006). (2006). Retrieved from <http://www.gov.cn,2006-6-30>
- The Teaching Department. (2006). Master of Education for Rural Teachers" refers to those students who have been enrolled in "master of education for rural schools program. In *The general office of Ministry of Education's notice on the implementation of the plan for master of education program for rural school teachers*. The Teaching Department's Document [2006] No. 7.
- YANG Dong-ping. (2008). *Education blue book: Further promoting the educational equality*. Social Science Publishers, China. Retrieved from http://www.china.com.cn/info/zhuant/08jylps/2008-05/06/content_15086273.htm