

A Comparative Study of Compulsory Education Between China and France

Jiaqi Zhou*

Business French, Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, Shanghai, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 21009012@suibe.edu.cn

Abstract. Compulsory education is the embodiment of a country's soft power. Only by strengthening compulsory education can people improve the overall level of education. Due to historical reasons, China is facing with huge difficulties. Therefore, learning from the advanced is of much necessity. As one of the first countries to implement compulsory education, France has a high level of national education and can be used as the object of the study. Therefore, in this article, by comparing both countries on their financial systems, teachers' salary system, poverty alleviation policies and laws and regulations, several conclusions are gained so as to find the direction for the future improvement of China's compulsory education. China still lacks legal systems in quite many fields, while the establishment of regulatory bodies and departments is still in need of improvements. Meanwhile, it is also necessary that China increases the social status of the teaching and administrative staffs.

Keywords: Compulsory education, China, France, Education system.

1. Introduction

Education has always been the focus of national attention, and compulsory education bears the important responsibility of improving the overall quality of the people. Since knowledge is the basic foundation of all fields, after improving the level of education for all, it shall be easier to make future developments. China's compulsory education is a newly born system, which is still exploring a system suitable for the development of its own conditions. As one of the first developed countries to adopt compulsory education, France's system has remained unchanged for many years, which shall be relatively stable and thus has a high reference value. Therefore, this paper will compare the compulsory education between China and France. This paper uses the method of comparative analysis to compare China and France from four aspects: the financial system of compulsory education, the teachers' salary system, the poverty alleviation policy in compulsory education and the legal provisions related to compulsory education. After comparing, the author drew some conclusions thus providing some new angles to consider as well as some reference for the current situation of compulsory education in China.

2. Current Situation of Compulsory Education

2.1. Current Situation of Compulsory Education in China

The length of compulsory education in China has always been nine years since 1986, including six years of primary school and three years of junior high school. The Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Reform of the Educational System on May 27, 1985, stipulates that school-age children and adolescents must accept it. Since the promulgation of the Compulsory Education Law in 1986, China has achieved comprehensive popularization in 25 years. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, it has also used about 10 years to achieve basic balanced development in the county, and the popularization and education quality are at the forefront of the world. However, at present, China's compulsory education is facing problems of unbalanced development (regional, urban and rural, inter-school, sexual, etc.), low efficiency of rural compulsory education, and neglect of quality education.

2.2. Current Situation of Compulsory Education in France

The length of compulsory education in France is twelve years, including three years in kindergarten, five years in primary school and seven years in junior high school. Against the background of the failure of the Franco-Prussian War, France promulgated two laws to make primary education free and compulsory in 1881 and 1882 respectively, and since then compulsory education has been adopted. Therefore, France has a long history of compulsory education and has built a very mature system. As a centralized country, France attaches great importance to the unification of educational governance. The education administration system of Imperial University founded by Napoleon has become the biggest feature of the French education system, which also breeds great bureaucracy and restricts and restricts the role of local governments in education.

3. Comparison of Financial System of Education

3.1. China

The evolution of China's educational financial system is divided into several stages. Between 1949 and 1957, due to the shortage of central finance, the government was unable to invest more funds in education, so it implemented the policy of "highly centralized, unified income and expenditure". In 1958-1977, when the national finance turned better, it became possible for the government to invest more in education. Therefore, the policy changed to "the combination of the central and local governments, and the focus on local governments". From 1978 to 1993, "local responsibility and hierarchical management" was promoted. From 1994 to 1995, the "tax sharing system" was introduced, which led to an increase in the gap between urban and rural education funds. Since 2000, it has been a financial system under "public finance", gradually transforming the highly decentralized system into centralization, and shifting the focus of financial expenditure upward. The proportion of education expenditure to GDP is also increasing year by year, from 1.22% in 1949 to 2.46% in 1978 and 4.22% in 2022 [1]. This shows the whole country is laying emphasis on gradually building its own financial system.

3.2. France

For a long time in France, education has been comprehensively managed by the state, except for primary schools, which are in the charge of municipal governments. In the early 1980s, France began to implement decentralization and decentralization reform. The state continues to be responsible for higher education (but will still be responsible for the management, training and wages of teachers and administrators in all public schools). The regional government is responsible for senior middle schools; the provincial government is responsible for junior middle schools; and the municipal government is responsible for primary and preschool schools. France's investment in education accounted for a relatively high proportion of GDP, from 6.3% to 8.8% in the 1970s and 1980s to 7.4% in 1996 [2].

3.3. Comparison

Both China and France pay more attention to compulsory education, and their financial investment in education is also increasing year by year. However, the proportion of China's investment is still far lower than that of France. Considering that the establishment of China's education system is still very young and the foundation is relatively weak, and the gap between the rich and the poor in urban and rural areas is large, it is difficult to catch up with France in the short term. France has always been a highly centralized financial system, which will also lead to a certain degree of redundancy and deprivation of local power. Perhaps in future development, more attention should be paid to local power. In China, it is gradually moving from local management to central responsibility, which can reduce the difference in education level caused by regional differences.

4. Comparison of Teachers' Salary System of Education

4.1. China

In China, the wage system for primary and secondary school teachers has undergone a fundamental change from market-oriented to public welfare-oriented. Since the socialist market economy system was just established in 1993, teachers' wages implemented the "principle of distribution according to work". The establishment of "allowance" reflects that more work is more, but the decentralization has led to the quality competition between primary and secondary schools and the phenomenon of arbitrary charges [3]. After the reform in 2006, the teacher's salary is dominated by finance, and the school funds are also completely from finance. After 2015, the wage system of public institutions was reformed again, and the salary of primary and secondary school teachers was increased by 10% on the basis of the increase. In 2018, the document issued after the 19th CPC National Congress clearly proposed that the salary of primary and secondary school teachers should not be lower than or higher than the average salary of local civil servants. By linking the salary of teachers with that of civil servants, the salary of teachers can be better guaranteed. In addition to the basic part of teachers' wages, the local government will pay performance wages according to the living costs caused by local prices. By 2021, teachers' salaries had reached 61% of the education funds.

4.2. France

In France, teachers of compulsory education are all civil servants. Before the end of the 19th century, because primary school teachers were hired by the municipal government, their social status was low, and their salaries were low. And because many religious people were teachers, the teaching content was full of religious color, which violated the principle of compulsory education. Therefore, the 1889 law stipulated that religious people should not be public primary school teachers, and public primary school teachers were civil servants, and their salaries were borne by state finance. Today, the length of compulsory education has become longer, and the basic principles have not changed. Teachers' salaries account for 75-80% of education funds, accounting for about 3% of GDP. In the 1980s and before, the salary of compulsory teachers in France was at a low level. However, since 1989, the government has comprehensively raised the salary of teachers and increased the subsidies beyond their salaries [4]. Now, the salary level of teachers is basically the same as that of civil servants with the same academic qualifications in national government agencies. The teaching qualification of compulsory education teachers in France is under the unified management of the whole country, and its requirements are very strict. Teachers need to have the required qualifications for higher education and professional training of teachers.

4.3. Comparison

Both countries have shown the importance they attach to primary and secondary school teachers in terms of improving the welfare and wage treatment of teachers. France has guaranteed the salaries of teachers in compulsory education by including them in the national civil service, but China is difficult to do so because of its large population. The adjustment of teachers' wages in China has returned from excessive marketization to institutionalization, and has made major adjustments to the wage mechanism. On the basis of linking with the wages of civil servants, more indicators have been added (such as length of service, and teacher qualifications) to evaluate and adjust wages. Both countries have realized that only by improving the social status of compulsory education teachers and ensuring their welfare treatment and wages can it be possible to improve the strength of teachers in compulsory education so as to improve the effectiveness of compulsory education and ensure the education level of the whole people.

5. Comparison of Poverty Alleviation Policies in Compulsory Education

5.1. China

The Education Planning Outline issued in 2020 mentioned that it is necessary to ensure that school-age children do not have difficulties in school due to family economic difficulties and do not drop out of school due to learning difficulties. Efforts should be made to eliminate the dropout phenomenon in rural and remote areas. In 2018, a comprehensive education poverty alleviation policy was launched to provide accurate assistance and management. In 2019, the number of dropouts from compulsory education has decreased from 290,000 to 23,000 [5]. At the same time, the policy has shifted from focusing on infrastructure construction to giving consideration to infrastructure construction and individual development, and targeted at rural teachers and students in poverty-stricken areas with a precise policy preference. At the same time, students in poverty-stricken areas are also provided with subsidies for living expenses, free textbooks, nutrition improvement plans, etc., forming a pattern of government-led and extensive participation of the school community.

5.2. France

France has formulated special policies for remote rural areas and disadvantaged groups in society. For rural remote areas, single-class primary schools have been established to promote rural compulsory education. After World War II, the government adopted collective education in rural areas to provide more modern educational facilities. In areas with underdeveloped education, priority education zones have been established to increase the salaries of teachers in the zones, control the number of students and provide policy support in all aspects. For children from poor families, the state provides a financial aid system, a school transportation subsidy system, a free textbook system, and a lunch subsidy system [6].

5.3. Comparison

Both countries pay close attention to the education level of students in poor areas. Both China and France have reduced living expenses, tuition fees, textbook fees and other aspects, and have established a complete support system. By reducing the economic pressure of education on poor families, both countries will try to ensure that poor families also have the opportunity to receive compulsory education. Due to the large number of poor people in China, which also involves ethnic areas and remote areas, only by establishing a sound aid system and carrying out one-to-one accurate assistance can it ensure that the funds are actually spent on the poor students.

6. Comparison of Laws and Regulations in Compulsory Education

6.1. China

In a country ruled by law and a society ruled by law, China needs to use the power of governance to improve compulsory education. If China wants to improve the compulsory education system, it needs to accelerate the establishment of supporting legislation. China has established the Compulsory Education Law, which ensures the fairness of compulsory education in the starting point, process and result with the force of law [7]. Now the compulsory education bill has improved the investment of education financial funds. The students have a heavy burden and do not pay enough attention to quality education; The indiscriminate charging of school fees leads to a heavy economic burden on students' parents and the unreasonable allocation of resources [8]. Through legislative provisions, the gap between regions and schools caused by the inclination of educational resources should be narrowed as much as possible, and more attention should be paid to the safety of students [9].

6.2. France

The French Law on Compulsory Education specifically stipulates the scope of compulsory education, and the French Code of Education also covers compulsory education. At the same time, there are also special provisions in the notice of the decree. France stipulates the age of compulsory education in the regulations of compulsory education and ensures the quality of education in the family by setting up an inspection mechanism. At the same time, France's Criminal Code stipulates that for acts that violate the Education Code and constitute criminal offences, the number of fines reaches 7500 euros and six months' imprisonment [10].

6.3. Comparison

There are still many gaps in China's legislation. Many education-related behaviors cannot be regulated by law. At the same time, compared with France, the legal system of compulsory education still lacks a sense of integrity and long-term deployment. China needs to digitize the standards and clarify the implementation of compulsory education by clarifying the standards of compulsory education more clearly. China's punishment mechanism for failure to comply with compulsory education is not complete, and it has not achieved the strong punishment intensity as European countries. China still takes policy guidance and reducing family pressure in poor areas as the main solution. At the same time, the restrictions on compulsory education in China's laws and regulations are still limited to the national unified. School study and family study is not included in the scope of compulsory education. However, because China has always faced the uneven development of urban and rural areas, in fact, families in rural areas do not have enough capacity to carry out family education.

7. Conclusion

The development of education is important because it determines the talent strength of the country's future development, but the development of education is also prerequisite, and needs to achieve mutual success with economic development. China has not adopted compulsory education for a long time, but has made quite a few achievements. From the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, many practical problems left by the semi-feudal and semi-colonial nature of the country, such as financial difficulties, low productivity, and the general low level of education of the people, have greatly restricted the development of the national education, and now the cultural level of the people has risen sharply. Because of China's national characteristics, such as vast territory, large population, and uneven development in coastal and inland areas, it is very difficult to promote compulsory education on an average basis. At present, China has done a good job in the investment of education funds and put the improvement of compulsory education in a very important position. When China improves the compulsory education system in the future, it should pay more attention to the establishment of a sound legal system, use the law to ensure that every school-age child has the right to education, and improve the policy more so that families in need of help can get help effectively. China should also introduce more outstanding talents in the field of education by improving the social status of teachers, and raising teachers' salaries. At the same time, while helping poor students learn, China also needs to solve the problem of poverty from the source and reduces the economic gap between the east and the west as much as possible.

References

- [1] Li Bo, Wang Bin, Wang Dong. Review and prospect: 70 years of China's compulsory education financial system. *Journal of Central China Normal University (Humanities and Social Science)*, 2019.
- [2] Wang Xiaohui. The financial system of compulsory education in France. *Global education*, 2002.
- [3] Zeng Xiaodong, Zhang Luyun, Zhou Hui. Progress in the reform of the salary system for primary and secondary school teachers and the problems they face. *Teacher Development Research*, 2018.

- [4] Gao Rufeng. Study on the salary system of teachers in compulsory education in France. *Journal of Hebei Normal University (Education Science)*, 1999.
- [5] Zhi Yan. Understanding and policy thinking on supporting the development of education in poverty-stricken areas. *Ethnic Education of China*, 1996.
- [6] Gao Rufeng. Special support for compulsory education in France. *Journal of Teaching and Management*, 2000.
- [7] Qin Yong, Xue Wei. Legal guarantee for equalization of compulsory education in China. *Journal of China University of Petroleum (Edition of Social Sciences)*, 2015.
- [8] Zhang Nan. A comparative study of the legal systems of compulsory education in China and Japan. *Legal System and Society*, 2009.
- [9] Wei Zeling. Research on the current situation and development countermeasures of compulsory education in China. *New West*, 2018 (30).
- [10] Yang Ling. Overview of French laws and regulations on compulsory education. *Journal of World Education*, 2004.