Chinese-style Off-campus Education: Research on the Popularity of After-school Training Institutions

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Abstract—This paper is mainly about the status quo and long-lasting problems of off-campus education in China. There is no doubt that education should be student-oriented. However, most of Chinese after-school training institutions are carrying out the exam-oriented courses crazily, which ignores the differences of individuals, the rules of their mental and physical development, not to mention the study interests tend to withered away. Various factors are no strangers to this phenomenon, from the educational system, educational needs of every family to the atmosphere created by the training institutions. As a result, a large quantity of people are accustomed to judging the achievements of adolescents down the road simply by predicting their test scores, linking the needs of education with the good jobs and high incomes rather than self-realization. The Education Evaluation System has gradually simplified in a disapproving way, and young people are equal to nothing but an index on their transcripts. People who find themselves embroiled in this ever-spiraling situation feel progressively anxious about score and time, which corrodes the very foundation of Chinese education.

Index Terms—after-school training institutions, off-campus education, scores, time

I. INTRODUCTION

An article called Crazy Huangzhuang and a Korean TV series called Sky castle inspired me to pay attention to the popularity of After-school Training Institutions. They all reflected fundamental problems of education in China or South Korea, such as the pressure of College Entrance Examination, Educational Anxiety and parent-child contradiction. So, I focus on the institutions which carry out various educational courses for students outside school life. Two research methods, literature research method and qualitative research method, are mainly used. And my research started with the following four questions: What are the similarities and differences between China and other countries? What are the status quo and impacts of off-campus training in China? Why is there such a craze for attending extracurricular exam-oriented courses in China? With reference at home and abroad, how should we deal with this problem?

According to the report on the development of new formats of education in China (2017), the overall participation rate of students in after-school training in primary and secondary schools in China is 48.3%. And their average expenditure is about 5616 yuan [1]. So, the director of the ministry's Basic Education Department said, China has been carrying out comprehensive inspections of all after-school training institutions, more than 400,000 after-school training institutions from across the country had been inspected. Among them, 273,000 training institutions were not up to the standards. The Ministry of Education urges those who failed to cut the mustard to make corrections. 248,000 training schools have their programs changed already at the end of 2018 [2].

There is a craze for attending extracurricular exam-oriented classes in China. After-school training institutions have become an important factor in the education market. There are many types of these institutions, such as subject knowledge training institutions, potential development training institutions and hobby training institutions. The representatives among them, New Oriental, TAL and Gaosi Education Group are developing rapidly. Currently in practice, the after-school training is a double-edged sword bringing positive and negative effects simultaneously.

By the case study of the art specialty students, a study found that some training courses play a positive role in the development of students’ specialties [3]. Extracurricular training courses provide a learning platform for students. It plays a positive role in meeting the selective learning needs of students, cultivating potential and developing their various interests, creative abilities and comprehensive quality. The numerous facets of a student are said to be discovered when engaging with these teaching methods. In this way, the after-school training may promote the development of quality education.

However, most of Chinese training schools are carrying out the exam-oriented education crazily. After-school training institutions are rushing to capitalize on the admission policy to pinch their classes. Advanced learning, competition learning, all are the courses they promote to attract students and parents to sign up for. They not only launched many courses, but also created a trend. Students involved in this trend attend classes spontaneously or compulsively. These training
institutions utilize students' needs for further education skillfully, so students in primary school make up the greatest part of people who are learning Olympic Mathematics and students in secondary school are the most populated group learning Olympic Physics and Chemistry Competition [4]. Thus, more and more students begin to participate in these training courses to avoid themselves lagging behind others. As a whole students rush to attend sundry extra-curricular classes on weekends, and parents tighten their belts for their children's extra-curricular classes. So on the other hand, after-school training institutions are affecting the normal order of school education and teaching, increasing students' extracurricular burdens and family financial burdens.

This has destroyed the good educational ecology and has prompted a large number of people to strongly appeal to government for adjustment.

II. CAUSALITY ANALYSIS

A. Causes

With the expansion of higher education, the rate of high school enrollment has been increasing and the scale of students in colleges and universities has been expanding. But the pressure on students for enrollment has increased steadily, and the competition has become increasingly fierce. First, the severe employment situation is to blame[5]. With the increasing number of college graduates and the declining quality of college graduates, employers find that students' academic degrees don't match their abilities. So, they tend to choose higher educational qualifications or better colleges and universities to select candidates quickly and efficiently. Therefore, this promotes the demand for academic degrees higher and higher in the job market. Second, according to China's admission policy for college entrance examination, students with higher scores have more chance to choose their universities and majors, in which case, social inertia make people believe that students with higher scores are more successful. Thus, in such an atmosphere, most parents hope their children can enter famous schools and get high academic degree.

1) Parents and students

Influenced by the imperial examination tradition, most families still believe that further education is a byword for entering better universities, finding better jobs and living a better life. They believe that academic success can help their children get rid of manual labor and bring long-term economic returns.

Therefore, under the education system where score is the main evaluation factor, parents and students regard high score as the premise of a famous school, a good job and a wonderful future. In one case, parents want to send their children to attend extracurricular lessons when they don't have enough time to help their children do homework or their children can't keep up with the school curriculum. In this way, the after-school training is really helpful to some of them. So some training institutions and parents persuade others that attending after-school training is a great way to make progress. Therefore, another situation has arisen. Although children’s performance is not bad, parents are worried that their children were left far behind by other children because of being absent from these after-school training. They believed that no matter what the result is, their children could not be lost to others. So when other children go to attend classes, their children must go too. Only in this way can they feel at ease.

It’s like a theatrical effect. When the audience in the front row stands up, it will leave other audience no choice but to stand up as well. Even if they are unwilling to do so. Fearing their children will lose competitiveness and go backwards if not participating in extracurricular training, many parents and students joined this trend. Trapped in the atmosphere caused by these training institutions and surrounding families, more and more families are joining this crazy tutoring trend.

In order to get higher scores, the regular courses of training institutions cannot satisfy their needs. Parents even begin to open courses themselves. They try to look for the best teachers in the country, form their own classes, and contact those famous teachers outside the training institutions to teach their children.

Institutions

Thirty or forty percent of the annual income of middle-class families is spent on their children's education, what we care about is who can earn it, an entrepreneur of a training institution said. The primary purpose of these training institutions is to compete for the money in the market and to make profits. They make great efforts to understand the admission policy and the needs of parents and students.

In order to achieve higher profit growth, the curriculum system of these after-school training institutions is becoming larger and larger. One of them is to learn ahead of time. Many parents send their children to attend this courses early in order to get a place of well-known junior high schools, senior high schools or colleges as soon as possible. It is said that some children have completed all the math courses of the high school before they graduate from primary school so that they can be ready to take part in the Olympic Competitions which can give them a direct admission opportunity of these well-known schools. It is based on the independent enrollment system of the top universities, such as Tsinghua University and Peking University. So these training institutions have also launched many Olympic Competitions training courses, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry and so on. Getting the self-enrollment quota of top universities ahead of time has a huge attraction to many parents and students. In addition, these training institutions strive to accumulate famous teachers and try to cooperate with some primary and middle schools. At the end of their after-school training the institutions organize graded examinations or conduct competitions for primary and secondary school students. And the results can be used as criteria for future enrollment of these schools.

In our daily life, we can see advertisements of these institutions everywhere, on the websites, on the television, in the station. Sometimes, even though there is still a long
time leading to winter and summer vacation, we can see these training institutions enroll students by organizing various activities.

To win students’ trust and peg their interest to their financial investment [6], these training institutions try their best to create business opportunities and provide the high-quality service.

Overall, from the educational system, these training institutions to the anxiety of many parents and students, there are many stakeholders who make it difficult for this education problem to be completely cured in a short period of time.

B. Process

This crazy tutoring trend is invisible but powerful. Countless families are involved in this trend. They fight for higher test scores and try to make full use of their time. People involved feel more and more anxious about scores and time.

1) Scores

Although the Ministry of Education has mentioned Multivariate Evaluation many times in the educational reforms, the actual enrollment is still determined by test scores of College Entrance Examination.

The students’ scores always weighs on family’s mind. When they don’t do well in the exam, they will be depressed, guilty or angry; when they do a good job in the exam, they should still be nervous, because it doesn’t mean they can do well in the College Entrance Examination.

Examinations and their scores are meant to test the effectiveness of knowledge learning, but now it has gradually become the whole purpose of education. Because the reality shows that only those students who stand out in the scores have more opportunities to choose their future schools and majors. Countless people begin to pay more and more attention to the scores. Scores have gradually become the primary goal pursued by many students, parents and schools.

If the score-only evaluation system persists, then there is no hope for China’s education, a famous Chinese scholar commented on the College Entrance Examination system.

Score supremacy not only serves a dangerous way of thinking, but also leads china’s educational landscape on a slippery slope. It has a tremendous negative impact on our basic education so that education narrowly becomes knowledge learning and study mechanically becomes a question about how to get high marks in examinations. As a result, the teachers fall into the pattern of pandering to test-takers’ wishes, and the students continued to do the examination from the past to accumulate examination skills. It not only increase students’ excessive academic burden, but also make China’s basic education gradually distorted.

2) Time

People involved in this phenomenon feel more and more anxious about time. These students are overwhelmed in large number of homework exercises every day, struggling for high grades under great mental pressure.

During every weekend and holiday, Chinese students rush to attend excessive academic courses. What is more, even half of the day during mid-term or final examinations wouldn’t go amiss. All relaxing days have descended to nothing more than a counter timer with mountain-piled study tasks. Apart from endless homework and various training courses, students have little time for themselves.

What is more, many training institutions carry out ahead-of-time courses and Olympic Competition courses. Especially when these training courses will be linked to the quota of the enrollment, parents and students can’t help participate in these extracurricular exam-oriented courses. Because they are so afraid that they will be left far behind the others and miss the well-known schools.

As a result, a narrow window which is designed specifically for a few students with competitive ability was crowded with these crazy families. It can only make more and more people disappointed.

Actually, being anxious about the past or the future is meaningless and it sacrifices the happiness of the present.

C. Effects

Nobel laureate Shuji Nakamura once said that education in East Asia is a waste of life. This kind of life-wasting education harms students invisibly but irreversibly, which is the greatest sadness of Chinese education.

1) Rent-seeking

The rent-seeking are revealed in some teachers in the School System. Some teachers give most of their students an extra paid lesson after school instead of doing their best in daily school teaching. To make things worse, some teachers even give cold shoulders to those who aren’t willing to attend the so-called courses. More often the result is that parents are left with no alternative but to bow to pressure.

In view of the fact that some primary and secondary school teachers coax students into extracurricular trainings, the Ministry of Education has introduced many relevant regulations and policies. This policy is aimed at curbing the fact that editorial teachers devote more energy to out-of-school training institutions compared to normal teaching activities in schools. So nowadays we seldom see teachers in the school system organize after-school training. Although the Ministry of Education has issued a series of measures that teachers who disobey the regulations will be dealt with seriously or even stripped of their teaching credentials, some of whom still find ways to get benefit from conducting after-school training. Some teachers teach in the places where it’s hard to find or teach online.

Some schools which have close cooperation with these after-school training institution can capture better students by training institutions, which will be conducive to the sustainable development of them. The training institutions can also help schools to make their students achieve better grades. It's a great thing for these school to sit back and enjoy it.

In addition, the rent-seeking phenomenon can also be showed in parents [7]. Most parents are very concerned
about their children's school performance, but most of them are busy with their work so they have no time to urge their children to study. Thus, these parents immerse their children in extracurricular classes and large number of homework exercises, hoping their children to grab the scarce school resources earlier. But the cultural background, values and love [8] rubs off more on children over the course of time.

Apart from school education, family education is also of great significance. Parents should be more aware of their importance to their children, rather than relying on various training institutions.

2) Anxiety

The Report on Parent Education Anxiety Index in China launched a survey through the Internet, and collected 3205 valid questionnaires from all over the country. The final conclusions were drawn through statistical analysis, comparative validation and so on. And it shows that the Education Anxiety is not only for children, but also for parents of these children.

It’s like a mirror, reflecting many fundamental problems of education in China. This anxiety begins early in their kindergarten choices. Some Kindergartens in China are teaching young children primary-school-level Chinese language, mathematics and English lessons. Kindergarten Education Primary tendency is very common in China. Although Parents are also reluctant to shoulder their children with heavy educational burdens at an early age, they should worry about the concomitant problems if their children fall far behind their classmates when they enter primary school. Therefore, many parents are concerned about whether the kindergartens teach Pinyin and Mathematics, some of them also pay attention to whether the kindergartens have foreign English teachers.

Chinese parents are eager to take shortcuts and Chinese students are eager to find the examination skills. And it has become a trend in China. It leads to intensive training in knowledge intelligence and examination skills, sacrificing sound personality, healthy mentality, social responsibility and love for others.

Actually, the anxiety will continue along with school choosing or entrance examinations at all stages.

3) Insignificance

A psychological consulting data shows that 30.4% of the freshmen hate learning and think that learning is meaningless and 40.4% of them think that life is meaningless. Some of them have even given up themselves. These psychological barriers are essentially insignificant.

Gradually, students' spontaneous tendency to acquire knowledge is suppressed, instead they achieve the kind of success that other people expect. Therefore, these students would like to pay more attention to the results rather than the process, focusing on the scores rather than the knowledge. This will have a great negative impact because once students have achieved the external goals, they will soon feel lost and meaningless after a moment of satisfaction. And this is the common spiritual crisis for many college students in China.

III. Conclusions

The research found that education in China and South Korea has similarities in the pressure of College Entrance Examination, Educational Anxiety and parent-child contradiction.

Seoul National University, Korea University and Yonsei University in Korea, are collectively known as SKY. Tsinghua University and Peking University in China, are collectively known as QINGBEI. Similarly, many parents in China and Korea believe that degrees from these universities are the ticket to good jobs, high social position and better relationships and that being at the top of the College Entrance Examination is the only way to get into these universities. So, a large number of students who try to prepare for this exam get up at six in the morning until midnight, spend all of time studying, and only set aside time for lunch and dinner. As a result, similar training institutions gathering areas have emerged in China and Korea, such as Gangnam District of Seoul and Haidian District of Beijing.

The research also found that some countries have gradually moved towards the education of low competition and low pressure. Denmark and Finland emphasize less homework and less exams because they think that learning naturally occurs in playing. And the popularity of charter schools in America, free schools in Britain and global universities (MINERVA) have all demonstrated the change in the direction of modern education. Even Korea which has something in common with us has made some effective changes. Korea has made efforts to develop happy education in recent years. They have reduced the difficulty and standard of the curriculum and has abolished the middle school and high school entrance examination, and has set up a free semester or a free year. At the same time, Korea has introduced many relevant policies to pursues education equality. On the one hand, the number of schools in the country as a whole has increased sharply. On the other hand, all of the schools are adopting the teacher rotation system. It has greatly reduced the worry about choosing schools for Korean parents.

Some scholars have pointed out that education in China has get many students’ head around the meaning of receiving education. So, how and why the students in China’s education are bewildered and depressed. China has been advocating human-oriented education for a long time. But actually some schools and after-school training institutions completely ignores the diversity and nuances between people which make students different. In reality, most educators can't understand what the human-oriented education really mean. How far will we go before we reach the real human-oriented education? The answer remains elusive. But we can be sure that education is not just knowledge learning. A German educator whom I respect said that the ultimate goal of education is not to impart what already exists, but to induce people’s creative power and awaken the sense of life and value [9]. Another Japanese educator also pointed out that the quality of life is not fixed things, such as score, achievement and ranking, but something flowing [10]. If
we only focus on scores and ignore these things, it will not be conducive to the development of children in a long term. We should also pay more attention to some non-intellectual factors, such as personal motivation, emotion, personality and concern for others and the society at large. Our education hope to bring up people with prowess[11], the kind that can determine the focus of learning by himself, measure the mastery of his knowledge and manage his own learning time, that are creative, curious, and self-guided lifelong learner and who can come up with new ideas and put them into practice.

To solve this problem, we must address both its symptoms and the root causes and combine blocking and dredging. On the one hand, the government need to build a database of after-school training institutions across the country. And make all of them submit their course curricula, enrollment targets and class hours to local education authorities for registration. The government should carry out special rectification and try to build a long-term mechanism, such as establishing a black-and-white list system and reinforcing punishment against irregularities. And we also have to make joint efforts in school management and family support at the same time. I hope these schools, parents and students involved in this trend can take a long-term view and think about the significance of education and the whole life, instead of just staring at score, ranking and achievement.

I sincerely hope that one day, we can learn excellent education from abroad and overcome our drawbacks of the score-only evaluation system, and our education will help students to be themselves, show the glory of life ceaselessly and realize their own value of life ultimately.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author conducted the research, analyzed the data, wrote the paper and had approved the final version.

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