

# Controversial Issues of ‘Happy 30 Minutes’ After-School Activities Policy in Shanghai

Yan Du

Department of Education in East China Normal University, Shanghai, China

Email: dualisa@163.com

**Abstract**—Most countries have after school programs for children. Such as America, Britain, France etc. Though Shanghai’s primary schools have good infrastructures, they don’t establish a system for after-school activities. In order to enrich pupils after school life and promote all-round development, Shanghai education committee issued the document of Notice on the trial implementation of ‘Happy 30 minutes’ after-school activities in Shanghai primary schools on June 20th, 2017. Not only can each school make full use of the school playground, dedicated classrooms, libraries and other places, but also integrate school resources or share resources with school districts and group member schools, to provide optional activities for pupils. After-school activities include letting students do their homework, calligraphy, art, reading, games, physical exercise, scientific experiments and other interesting activities. There are advantages and disadvantages for Shanghai primary schools to carry out the ‘Happy 30 minutes’ after-school activities. The core controversial issue is whether it is worth to have 30 minutes for after-school activities. Through interviews and literature analysis, the researcher analyzed the controversial issues from four aspects, and provided some suggestions for the ‘Happy 30 minutes’ after-school activities policy.

**Index Terms**—Happy 30 minutes, Shanghai, controversial issues, after-school education

## I. INTRODUCTION

In order to enrich pupils after school life and promote all-round development, Shanghai education committee issued the document of Notice on the trial implementation of ‘Happy 30 minutes’ after-school activities in Shanghai primary schools on June 20th, 2017 [1].

‘Happy 30 minutes’ is an after-school activity for pupils. Primary schools, based on the needs of pupils and parents, carry out diversities of activities by integrating multiple resources to promote the growth of pupils. ‘Happy 30 minutes’ after-school activities are free for pupils. Schools will arrange four days a week, and at least 30 minutes every day. Pupils have rights to choose whether to participate in activities or not. Teachers can’t use ‘Happy 30 minutes’ to teach students new lessons or review lessons.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on after-school education in China. These studies are

mainly about how children spend their time after school and how children spend their time in after-school classes. So far, there has been little discussion about Shanghai’s after-school program.

The aims of the paper is to explore the controversial issues of ‘Happy 30 minutes’ after-school activities and analyze problems encountered in policy implementation. Then give some suggestions for the policy.

The research questions in this paper include: What are the controversial issues for ‘Happy 30 minutes’ policy? What are the problems when implement ‘Happy 30 minutes’ policy? How can the policy be implemented better? In order to answer these questions, data were collected through interviews and literature analysis.

This paper is divided into four parts: first part is the context of after school programs, second part is controversial issues and problems encountered when implement policy, third part is suggestions, the finally part is summary and conclusions.

## II. CONTEXT

In Shanghai, many primary schools finish at 3:30P.M. At that time, parents are working in the company. So it’s difficult for parents to pick up their children at that time. More and more parents have to send their children to after-school tutorial classes. Studies find if parents don’t send their children to after-school classes, TV watching and unstructured activities relatively common [2]. And these activities are negatively correlated with school achievement (Posner & Vandell, 1999) [3]. Participation in structured extracurricular activities, including athletics, drama, hobby clubs etc., in contrast, have been positively associated with academic and social – emotional functioning for school students (Marsh, 1992) [4].

Most countries have after school programs for children. Such as America, they have School-Age Child Care (SACC) and After School Programs (ASPs). In Britain, they have Out of School Care (OSC) and After School Care (ASC). In France, they have Extracurricular Reception. In Japan, they have After School Classrooms and After School Clubs.

In China, our government doesn’t set up after-school programs as other countries. But primary students and their parents actually need such kinds of programs. The researcher used SWOT analysis (a strategic planning technique used to help a person or organization identify

strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to project planning) to analyze Shanghai's primary schools and got the following results.

Shanghai's primary schools have the following strengths.

Firstly, most primary schools' infrastructures are good. So schools can use those infrastructures for after school activities.

Secondly, collectivize schools are very popular in nowadays Shanghai's primary schools. So group schools can share resources for after school activities.

Thirdly, most schools in Shanghai have their school-based curriculum. It is easier for them to design after school curriculum.

Finally, teachers in schools have a good grasp of education and psychology. And they have been the core of school improvement and success. Shanghai teacher leaders have critical contributions in supporting their schools' improvement. Their contributions to the education reform in Shanghai and school success in the PISA 2009 and PISA 2012 are indispensable. It is much easier for Shanghai's teachers to develop after-school activities and curricula.

Shanghai's primary schools have the following weaknesses.

During the interview, one teacher, who is a Chinese teacher and head teacher, working for 3 years, told me that her salary was about 5k-6k per month deducted tax. Another teacher, who is a P.E. teacher and work for 5 years, told me that his salary was about 4k-4.5k per month deducted tax. Teachers' salary in Shanghai is very low, and parents pay no fees for 'Happy 30 minutes'. So teachers may receive just low subsidies. Teachers are very tired after a whole day's work. Two interviewed teachers told me that they didn't want to work for 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities. Maybe most teachers don't want to continue to teach students after school.

Besides, most schools close time is regular. If we have after school activities, it will be difficult for security guard to ensure students' safety.

The opportunities are:

Young people in Shanghai are busy for work. Most of them don't have time to take care of children or tutor children's homework. Many pupils need after-schools program.

Besides, every district in Shanghai has libraries, museums and art galleries. Most communities have activity rooms. These resources can be used for children's after-schools activities.

Most primary school students are the only child of the family. They don't know how to collaborate with others. So the group cooperation activities in 'Happy 30 minutes' are good for pupils team-work ability. Through team learning as dialogue and skillful discussion, small groups of people transform their thinking, learning to mobilize their energies and actions to achieve common goals and drawing forth an intelligence and ability greater than the sum of individual members' talents.

Finally, China wants to realize equity in education. Most schools in Shanghai are good. But extracurricular

tutorials create a gap between students. Rich parents will spend about 10 thousand RMB per month for their children's extracurricular tutorials. Poor parents can't provide good after-school education for their children. 'Happy 30 minutes' after school will be a good way to promote education equity.

The threats are:

The threat is that frequent incidents of child abuse and sexual assault by teachers results parents misunderstandings and distrust for teachers. If extend time that pupils stay in schools, parents may have more conflicts with teachers.

Furthermore, 'Happy 30 minutes' in school will preempt the resources of extracurricular tutorials. It will do harm to the development of socialist market economy. Alisa Du (2018) said that, 44.7% surveyed families spent about 3.5k-4.5k per month for their children's extra curriculum tutoring. And extra curriculum tutoring institutions need teachers and administrative staffs. It not only promotes employment, but also promotes the development of socialist market economy. Especially large extra curriculum tutoring institutions, such as New Oriental and XRS, have contributed a lot for China's tax revenue. So, if widely promoted 'Happy 30 minutes' in primary schools, it will affect source of institutions' students, which indirectly do harm to the development of socialist market economy.

All in all, under the context, there are advantages and disadvantages for Shanghai primary schools to carry out 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities.

### III. CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

When the researcher interviewed parents, teachers and students, some of them said it was good to have 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities, while others thought it was bad. So the core controversial issue is whether it is worth to have 30 minutes for after-school activities.

For schools:

Firstly, time to back home will be disorder. It's difficult to ensure students safety. 'Happy 30 minutes' will actually increase the workload of security guard. Then security problems may appear inevitably.

Secondly, we don't have laws to protect the legitimate rights and interests of schools. If safety issues happen or parents have conflicts with teachers, it will be difficult to solve.

Thirdly, Shanghai education committee does not have a clear subsidy standard for each student, so the subsidy may not be able to make up for the loss of schools 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities. One principal told me that if school only have one after-school activity, playing badminton. Students may wear out 10 badminton and 4 battledores every day. After one month, students will wear out 200 badminton and 80 badminton rackets. The wear and tear is not low. So the principal thought it is not worth to have 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities, if the committee doesn't give school enough subsidies.

For children:

On the one hand, 'Happy 30 minutes' Notice doesn't allow teachers to teach new lessons or review lessons for children. Parents will find tutors to help their children on Chinese, Math or English after students come back from after-school activities. One of the students told me that she had extracurricular tutorials every day. After extracurricular tutorials, practice the violin and finish homework, it is about 10 o'clock. It will increase her burden, if she takes part in 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities.

On the other hand, for some pupils, whose family are poor or parents are busy for working, think it is worth to have 'Happy 30 minutes'. One student told me that she wanted to learn to play the piano; however, her parents couldn't pay for the lessons. So 'Happy 30 minutes' can help her parents to save money. And it is interesting to play with schoolmates than go back home to do homework alone.

For families:

It is difficult to popularize 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities. High-quality educational resources maybe occupied by special families, whose parents are teachers or government officers. One mother told me that her daughter's school only permits whose parents are both busy, no grandparents to pick up children and family is poor, have the right to take part in 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities. Such policy will expand educational inequality.

For teachers:

On the one hand, 'Happy 30 minutes' extend teachers work time, and violate the policy of alleviating teachers burden (Ministry of education of China, 2019)[5]. On the other hand, subsidization for teachers in the Notice is ambiguity. So it can't enhance the enthusiasm of teachers. Teachers would rather go home to have a rest than get the low ambiguity.

#### IV. SUGGESTIONS

First, establish regulations and laws for after-school activities.

The United States has formed a series of regulations and laws for after-school activities. In 1971, the United States Federal Government introduced Comprehensive Child Development Act, which made it clear that the government should ensure all children can have quality care regardless of their parent's social-economic status. In 1997, the United States federal government spent a lot of money on family care, and they implemented Head Start and Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. Under the guarantee of law, American after-school activities have become very important parts of public service system.

In 1995, the United Kingdom enacted Children Act. It stipulates that local government must provide a series of care services for school-age children to ensure the safe and healthy growth of children.

In 2006, France adopted amendments of Social Conduct and Family Act, which made all kinds of after-class activities been collectively called 'minors after-class collective reception'.

The governments of developed countries have actively introduced various laws and regulations to regulate children's after-school education. No relevant laws and regulations in China. So we should establish regulations and laws for after-school activities.

Second, enhance principal's leadership in providing characteristic service for after-school activities.

Principals are perceived to be the main source of leadership in schools because of their widespread impact. A framework for principals' roles in leading teachers' professional development include sharing vision, building trust, promoting collaboration, securing resources, motivating professional learning, and monitoring effectiveness. Principals should provide staff with the information, training; be knowledgeable about and open to the innovation; continually monitor the impact of the innovation (Hord & Sommers, 2008) [6]. Besides, principals should support collaboration, including finding time for teams to work together without overloading teachers (Michael Fullan, 2006) [7].

Due to the traditional concept of hierarchy, many principals lack communication with teachers. Some idea and practices of school leaders often stop abruptly at the middle level, which is difficult for teachers to perceive, recognize and understand (Jia, Z., & Pang, 2014) [8]. So principals should strengthen the communication with teachers and use principals leadership to make 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities much better.

Third, set up teachers' professional learning community for after-class activities.

Hord (1997) initiated the term of 'professional learning community' (PLC) and defined it as 'teachers in a school and its administrators continuously seek and share learning, and act on their learning' (p. 1). The basic characteristics of PLCs are five domains: shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions (including structures and relations) [9]. And there are three kinds of teacher groupings in Chinese schools that can be understood as the forms of PLCs, including Teaching Research Groups (TRGs, jiao yan zu), Lesson Preparation Groups (LPGs, bei ke zu), and Grade Groups (GGs, nian ji zu) (Jia, Z., & Pang, 2016) [10], [11]. So we can set up teacher professional learning community for after-class activities, which includes Teaching Research Groups, Lesson Preparation Groups and Grade Groups.

Fourth, build up 'teachers-volunteers' PLC to promote 'Happy 30 minutes'.

In Hubei province, they have 'half past four schools', which make full use of the strengths of the 'five old' teams, including retired cadres, soldiers, experts, teachers and paragons. 'Half past four schools' have relieved parent's worries and achieved remarkable results.

In order to reduce teachers burdens, the government should recruit volunteers, including parents, retired teachers, retired paragon and normal university students, to set up a full-time and part-time PLC team for 'Happy 30 minutes'. And they should also receive pre-service training, and regular examination training.

Fifth, build a cost-sharing mechanism for after-school activities.

Fees should be shared by the government and families. Shanghai has a large number of primary school students, if the costs of after-school activities are entirely borne by the government, the educational expenditure will soar. Therefore, we can learn from the after-school policy in France, who implemented a ladder price that all families can afford, especially the children who have poor families (Hongxia Zhou, 2015) [12].

However, we cannot copy foreign policies directly. If pupils' parents are both busy, schools can charge certain fees. If pupils have poor family, schools can provide after-school services in the form of social welfare. Each district education bureau should unveil appropriation plans for 'Happy 30 minutes', and allocate funds timely according to schools condition. If so, school expenditure and teachers subsidies are ensured. Schools and teachers will be willing to promote the development of 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities.

Sixth, design APP for after-school activities management.

Technology had many applications in supporting schools improvement. 'We think of technology as only a tool and a means to an end-how to use it as an accelerator of change.' (Michael Fullan, 2006).

If schools implement 'Happy 30 minutes' policy, they have to implement 'flexible school-close timetable'. Then it is difficult for parents to pick up their children. Besides, if students go to community libraries and museums, it will be much difficult to manage students. So it is very important to design APP for after-school activities management. Then students can choose their favorite after-school activities on APP. The APP can also help parents to know the quitting time and classroom number. We can also use the APP to record students' performance on after-school activities.

All in all, it is very necessary to design APP for after-school activities management.

Seventh, the quality evaluation standard of after-school activities should be established.

In 1991, Canadian Child Care Federation(CCCF) issued The National Statement on Quality Child Care, which made detailed provisions on seven aspects, including the environment of after-school institutions, facilities, safety, health, curriculum, student-teacher ratio, personnel relations, to ensure the quality of after-school education( Jing H. & Zhonglian Y.,2015) [13].

Shanghai education committee has decided to implement 'Happy 30 minutes' policy. So they should establish relevant quality evaluation standards for after-school activities. Only in this way can we avoid the phenomenon that 'superior has the policy, inferior has the countermeasure'. It means that some primary schools only have doing homework as the after-school activities, and can't ensure all students to enjoy preferential policies of 'Happy 30 minutes'.

Besides, when establish the quality evaluation standard of after-school activities, we should combine self-evaluation and peers-evaluation together.

Eighth, establish growth portfolios for after-school activities or record student performance into existing 'growth portfolios'.

Since 2004, schools in Shanghai began to use 'growth portfolios' in evaluating students' performance. The major aims of adopting a 'growth portfolio' as an assessment tool is to encourage teachers and parents to pay continuous attention to students' all-round development, special talents and abilities, as well as to arouse students' potentials based on the knowledge of their merits, demerits, and needs for further development (SMEC, 2004) [14]. However, the items listed in the growth portfolio, that areas and activities outside the school, and other potential and intelligent activities are still very limited. We can establish growth portfolios for after-school activities or record student performance into existing 'growth portfolios' to consummate the appraisal system.

## V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The core controversial issue of the policy is whether it is worth to have 30 minutes for after-school activities. According to the interview, it is worth for parents, who are busy for work. Because not only can it solve the problem that parents cannot pick up their children in time, but also teach pupils some knowledge or skills in 30 minutes. However, some students don't have the right to participate in 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities, because of schools requirement is different from policy.

For teachers, two interviewed teachers thought it was not worth to have 30 minutes for after-school activities. Because it not only extend teachers' working hours, but also cannot support teachers with enough subsidy. Besides, it may increase the conflicts between teachers and parents.

For students, some students are the only child in family. They felt boring and lonely when they go back home early. If schools have 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities, they can not only meet new friends, but also learn new skills. For pupils, who have poor family, it is also worth to have 'Happy 30 minutes' after-school activities. Because they can learn some knowledge or skills for free. But one student thought his after-school time has been arranged fully. She didn't want to sleep later.

For schools, time to back home will be disorder. It's difficult to ensure students safety. Besides, we don't have laws to protect the legitimate rights and interests of schools. If safety issues happen or parents have conflicts with teachers, it will be difficult to solve.

At present, with the change of family structure in modern society and the continuous increase of female employment rate, after-school care and education for children in China have become a universal family problem and social problem. Not only can children's after-school education allocate high-quality educational resources reasonably, but also promote the further development of quality education, which is an important way to promote educational equity. However, schools must put the policy in place. They can't do as

‘Government has its policies, while cadres have their own ways’.

The limitation of this research is that the interviewees are few. In the future, the researcher will increase the number of interviewees to provide more detailed suggestions for Shanghai ‘Happy 30 minutes’ after-school activities.

All in all, Shanghai should build a kind of after-school education service that the education department as the leading role, schools and communities as the practitioners, parents cooperate with schools and communities. Making full use of the advantages of school-based curriculum, principal’s leadership and teachers’ professional learning organization of Shanghai primary schools. Absorbing and drawing on foreign experience, to make Shanghai ‘Happy 30 minutes’ after-school activities more effective. Looking forward to ‘Happy 30 minutes’ can really promote students’ all-round development.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Yan Du conducted the research, analyzed the interview data and wrote the paper, the author had approved the final version.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Yan Du thanks Professor Sun-Keung Pang’s help and guide.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Shanghai education policy. Notice on the trial implementation of ‘Happy 30 minutes’ after-school activities in Shanghai primary schools. Shanghai: Shanghai Education Committee, June 2017.
- [2] U. Ullmann, “10 strong claims about successful school leadership,” *Infection*, vol. 11, pp. 10-12, 1983.
- [3] J. K. Posner and D. L. Vandell, “After-school activities and the development of low-income urban children: A longitudinal study,” *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 35, pp. 868-879, May 1999.
- [4] H. Marsh, “Extracurricular activities: Beneficial extension of the traditional curriculum or subversion of academic goals?” *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 84, pp. 553-562, Sep. 1992.
- [5] Ministry of education of China. (Feb. 2019). Work highlights of ministry of education in 2019. [Online]. Available:

[http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_xwfb/gzdt\\_gzdt/s5987/201902/t20190222\\_370722.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/201902/t20190222_370722.html)

- [6] S. M. Hord and W. A. Sommers, *Leading Professional Learning Communities: Voices from Research and Practice*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press; National Association of Secondary School Principals: NSDC, 2008, pp. 15-17.
- [7] M. Fullan, “Implementation dip familiar feature of reform lands landscape,” *South China Morning Post*, vol. 32, pp. 15-16, April 2006.
- [8] Z. Jia and P. Sun-Keung, “Exploring the nature and development of professional learning communities in mainland china: A survey on schools of shanghai,” *Teacher Education Research*, vol. 26, pp. 11-21, May 2014.
- [9] M. H. Shirley, *Professional Learning Communities: Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement*, Change Strategies 1997, p. 71.
- [10] Z. Jia and S. K. Pang, “Exploring the characteristics of professional learning communities in china: A mixed-method study,” *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, vol. 25, pp. 11-21, Jan. 2016.
- [11] Z. Jia and N. P. Sun-Keung, “Investigating the development of professional learning communities: Compare schools in shanghai and southwest china,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, vol. 36, pp. 217-230, Dec. 2016.
- [12] H. Zhou, “Domestic primary school after-school care policy and related research review,” *Basic Education Reference*, vol. 9, pp. 7-10, Sep. 2015.
- [13] H. Jing and Y. Zhongliang, “The content, characteristics and enlightenment of Canadian school-age children’s trusteeship education,” *Foreign Primary and Secondary Education*, vol. 3, pp. 28-33, March 2015.
- [14] SMEC. Suggestions on the Trial Implementation of Student Growth Portfolios in Elementary and Secondary Schools in Shanghai, Shanghai: SMEC, Promulgations on Sep. 2004.

Copyright © 2021 by the authors. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License ([CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)), which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided that the article is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.



**Yan Du**, born in Xinxiang, Henan Province, China, September 9th, 1996. Studying for Master Degree of Education in East China Normal University, Shanghai since 2018. Got the Bachelor’s Degree of Education in Shanghai Normal University. The author’s major field of study is education policy and teachers development.

She was an intern Chinese Teacher in Shanghai United International School. Now she is the Chairman of Students Union of

Faculty of Education in East China Normal University.