

A Comparative Study of the Features of Extracurricular Activities in China and the UK

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Abstract. Extracurricular activities are gaining increasing attention all over the world, which is helpful in developing various aspects of students' capacities. In recent years, China has accelerated the development of extracurricular activities so that appropriate and quality means are needed to reform the original model. The target of this study is to compare the characteristics of extracurricular activities between China and Britain. This study is aimed at finding out the similarities and discrepancies between them and finally obtaining the approach to develop the level of Chinese students' extracurricular activities. The results show that the features of extracurricular activities in China and England are similar in dimensions, such as the variety of activities and corporation with organizations and cultivating the all-around development of people. However, there are differences between characteristics in schools in China and the UK. For instance, auxiliary teaching of textbook knowledge and voluntary attendance. Based on the results of the study, this paper suggests China that more focus should be put on teaching occupational skills, talent and life skills and strengthening cooperation between schools and institutions.

Keywords: Extracurricular activities; features; compare.

1. Introduction

Extracurricular activities are a necessary supplement to the formal curriculum and are organized and guided by schools or educational institutions outside the school. These activities meet the requirements of educational policies as indispensable ways to cultivate the all-around development of talents and enrich students' spiritual life. It can be concluded that taking part in extracurricular activities cultivates a stronger tendency of belonging peer group. Through a variety of activities, such as fine arts, sports competitions, familiarity with communities' customs, and educational clubs, students' skills in solving real-world problems are strengthened and their creativity increases [1]. So, what exactly is the impact of extracurricular activities? Attending a reading session enhances students' communication competence, and taking part in outdoor activities is conducive to strengthening the physique and relaxing the mind. Finally, community service or volunteering might help a student project a caring and compassionate attitude toward others [2].

Arguably, what students learn in class is mainly textbook, while extracurricular activities provide students with a broad space for practical activities. According to the content of extracurricular activities, extracurricular activities mainly include political-ideological and moral literacy activities, social practice and voluntary service activities, science and technology activities, and cultural and artistic activities. There is growing interest in the developmental consequences of extracurricular and after-school programs for youth [3]. The favorable influence of extracurricular activities on the growth of students is prominent. Darling's research shows that during years when adolescents were involved in extracurricular activities, it can be observed that lower levels of smoking, marijuana use, and use of other drugs as well as higher grades, a more positive academic attitude [4]. Therefore, in recent years, the Chinese government has put forward the concept of core literacy for Chinese students to guide schools and off-campus educational institutions to reform the original system of extracurricular activities and build a system of extracurricular activities that suits students' development and needs.

Although there have been many studies on extracurricular activities in various countries, it can be found few studies on the discrepancy of extracurricular activities between China and the UK in

academic circles. In this study, modern British education developed early, with a relatively mature and complete extracurricular activity system. China is carrying out curriculum reform, trying to promote extracurricular activities and build a new system to urge students to grow balanced. This research is comparative from the angle of method and applied in terms of purpose. The researcher presumed that different educational orientations and basic national conditions in the two countries have different manifestations and outcomes in terms of extracurricular activities. In this paper, the author compared the distinguishing characteristics of extracurricular activities such as corporation of organizations and voluntary attendance. Then, find the similarities and differences between them. The purpose of the paper is to find out the excellent methods suitable for China's national conditions to reform the original model by studying the differences between the characteristics of extracurricular activities in China and Britain.

2. Description

2.1 China

In recent years, China has paid much attention to extracurricular activities. In September 2016, "Chinese Students Develop Core Literacy" was officially released. This sets a "benchmark" for students' growth and development. In the following, it will be argued that extracurricular activities in China pursue diverse goals, including:

- Consolidating a generous cultural foundation and scientific literacy
- Having higher spiritual pursuits and living a healthy life
- Studying independently and taking social responsibility
- Strengthening national belief and cultivating the spirit of patriotism
- To cultivate the "all-around development of people" [5].

China has a large number of students, and focus groups of employment pressure are still large [6]. In order to gain advantages in the job competition, they need to go through fierce competition to get admission to the top universities. In addition to the children's parents, the school also attaches great importance to the enrollment rate, which is related to the educational standard of the school. As the dominant holder of Chinese students' extracurricular activities, the school has a great influence on the content and form of extracurricular activities. Therefore, getting good grades in examinations has become the most important orientation for the education of curriculum and extracurricular activities in China.

At the current stage, the extracurricular activities that Chinese students take part in are mainly related to school subjects or activities related to ideological and political education. Parents often consider that extracurricular activities are a waste of time. Students' excessive participation in high culture is seen as leaving less time for test preparation and consequently having negative returns for academic performance [7]. Students also do not understand the true meaning of participating in extracurricular activities. For example, many students have an incomplete understanding of the history of extracurricular activities. They think that the main purpose of history learning is to get a good score on the history exam and then get a good ranking in the rankings [8].

There are some descriptions of China's extracurricular activities:

1. The variety of cultural edification activities: Visiting history museums and art museums; Visiting the Science and Technology Museum; Attending reading sessions, and more

2. Ideological education: Reminiscing the martyrs; remembering the history of the revolutionary commemoration activities; deepening the spirit of patriotism, developing moral virtues based on Chinese ideology, and more

3. Compulsory attendance (but which activity he chooses can be selected within a certain range): Volunteer activities about environment protection or community service, and more

4. Cultivation of interests: Join the school club, including sports, arts or other non-academic activities, develop talents, and more

5. Professional teaching: Professional teachers teach specialized community courses.

2.2 England

The characteristics of extracurricular activities in England can be concluded, including:

- Supporting the development of 'scientific literacy' for all students [9].
- Supporting commonweal organizations and institutions to invest and participate in extracurricular activities
 - Focus on cultivating students' practical ability and independent thinking ability
 - Provide students with opportunities to get in touch with art, music and sports
 - Provide students with vocational skills training

The English school system has a long tradition of schools offering extracurricular activities outside of normal school hours-- a tradition which stretches back many decades [10]. Considering educational differences between social classes, the English government has introduced programs to provide services for children and families in cooperation with communities [11]. Generally, students have access to non-academic school-based activities such as sports, drama, and craft activities. Many non-academic programs designed specifically to provide young people with lifelong skills not only provide a platform for them to learn skills but also provide a social platform for young people and their peers to gain social capital. In addition, youth organizations supply the demand of students to conduct community programs at schools.

There are some descriptions of Britain's extracurricular activities:

1. Voluntary attendance: Students can choose whether to participate in the activity or not.
2. The variety of activities: Music club, sports clubs and cultural club, debating, speech, drawing, and more
3. Extensive cooperation: Voluntary organizations and institutions are encouraged to invest and involve in extracurricular activities.
4. Thrive in a comforting environment: Try to achieve language, social and thinking skills growth; Try to improve students' confidence, independence and interest in learning; Provide a safe and loving environment to learn to get along with peers.
5. Involvement of teachers: Teacher's participation in extracurricular activities is necessary and significant. Teachers need to take responsibility for activities and ensure the safety of extracurricular activities and facilities.

2.3 Juxtaposition and Comparison

This study selected and compared five outstanding features of extracurricular activities in China and Britain with respect to activity types, objectives and content, hoping to find the similarities and differences between extracurricular activities in China and Britain.

Table 1. Juxtaposition and Comparison of Extracurricular Activities of China and Britain.

Ncharacteristics of Extracurricular activities	China	England
Cultivate "all-around development of people	√	√
Voluntary attendance	x	√
Variety of activities	√	√
Corporation of organizations	√	√
Auxiliary teaching of textbook knowledge	√	x

In the Table 1, similarities and discrepancies between characteristics of extracurricular activities in China and England will be described and explained:

1. Cultivate all-around development of people: Foster well-balanced people are an essential feature of extracurricular activities. China's official education document indicates that cultivating a balanced people is the core of the education of students. British authority does not expressly put forward this goal, but its extracurricular activities are promoting students balanced development indeed.

2. Voluntary attendance: Since the diversity of extracurricular activities, whether students can choose or attend or not is notable. In England, students can determine whether or not to participate. In China, students are required to take part in extracurricular activities proposed by schools, but the kinds of extracurricular activities can be chosen.

3. The variety of activities: Both China and Britain strive to provide various and conducive extracurricular activities for students; they wish that students can have more opportunities to expose to different aspects of knowledge and skills.

4. Corporation of associations: The findings point out that close cooperation between the school and social organizations helps students to carry out activities under more professional guidance. In England, this "team" is common and sophisticated, while such cooperation in China is relatively rare.

5. Auxiliary teaching of textbook knowledge: Extracurricular activities in both China and Britain are a supplement to the formal curriculum. However, China's unique national conditions urge extracurricular activities to be more supportive of textbook knowledge, and England's are focused more on the accomplishment of the subject.

3. Discussion

In brief, the different features of extracurricular activities in China and Britain are the result of many factors.

Firstly, it can be found that the fundamental reason for this difference lies in the different educational guidance for students in China and the UK. Although China has set the goal of cultivating well-around students, based on the current national conditions in China, exam-taking is still the ultimate goal of its in-class and extracurricular courses. Therefore, extracurricular activities are mainly auxiliary to classroom teaching, which always relate to the content of the textbook. However, British education is highly career-oriented. Starting from primary school, teachers will let students know about different jobs in different industries and help those set learning goals. More importantly, students choose their courses at GCSE and A level according to their future career path, which means they have to first determine the learning direction they are interested. Therefore, extracurricular activities are set in various aspects so that students can choose activities that they are interested in.

Secondly, China and the UK have distinct educational concepts. In other words, China prefers cramming education, while the UK prefers to encourage students to explore and practice by themselves. In extracurricular activities, China also pays more attention to the accumulation of knowledge, while British extracurricular activities pay more attention to the cultivation of exploration and innovation ability. As a result, Chinese students have a more solid academic foundation, while British students are more creative and exploratory.

Furthermore, the framework of rights and historical legacies are also important reasons for the discrepancies in extracurricular activities between China and the UK. In 1902, Britain promulgated the "The Balfour Act", which stipulated that the local government had the educational leadership. The act determined the typical characteristics of British educational leadership -- unified national leadership and local decentralization. Therefore, the British local government enjoyed more autonomy in education and was able to allocate resources more reasonably since decision-makers and local stakeholders can best understand the needs of local communities and schools. However, China's educational administrative power is in the hands of the central Ministry of Education. The central education sector has the right to directly intervene in local education activities and instruct local education departments. There are relatively uniform educational objectives, educational plans, curriculum installations and evaluation standards throughout the country. The different polity and historical legacies of China and the UK lead to differences in the leadership of local education. Chinese local education is guided by the central government, while the British local government has greater autonomy and initiative in education.

4. Recommendation

The purpose of this paper is to compare the characteristics of extracurricular activities in China and the UK and then find ways to improve the quality of extracurricular activities in China. By comparison, it can be found that British extracurricular activities pay more attention to the cultivation of sports, art and practical ability, which is worth learning. To cultivate a balanced human being, attention should not only be focused on textbook knowledge but also on other skills or qualities that are useful for lifelong development. Therefore, it is recommended that more emphasis need to put on the teaching of vocational skills instead of textbook knowledge.

It demonstrates that in British, the co-cultivation of schools and institutions provides a more professional and efficient extracurricular activities. Since extracurricular activities are conducted in a real social environment, professional outside institutions can better help students integrate into the social environment, which deserves referencing. There have been some examples in China that integrate local characteristics to develop students' abilities, mainly in the field of sports, but the combination with local characteristic industries is still slow. It is suggested that China's education authorities promote cooperation between schools and local characteristic industries. In this way, not only can the students have access to better resources, but they also promote local culture to the public.

5. Conclusion

The research compares the characteristic of extracurricular in China and Britain. It is aimed at learning from the educational experience of the United Kingdom, which is the leading country in education, to enhance the effectiveness, cooperation and management of extracurricular activities in China. The results of the study reveal that China and England have something in common: the variety of activities and corporation with organizations, cultivating the all-around development of people. Moreover, discrepancy like auxiliary teaching of textbook knowledge and voluntary attendance remains. According to the discussion, it is recommended that China's education department and educators devote more attention to the teaching of vocational and life skills instead of textbook knowledge. In addition, more collaboration between school, community and institutions are suggested.

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