

UNIT 1 TOPIC 6 CHINESE EDUCATION SYSTEM AND SCHOOLS

Pre-knowledge

Before class, students should read Unit 1 Topic 6 to have a basic understanding of the education system in China. Student should also have knowledge of the traditional Chinese philosophy of education from previous topics.

Aim and Objectives

Topic 1 aims to provide students with some knowledge of the structure of the education system in China. It will also equip them with some knowledge of the pros and cons of this system in modern China, including the differences between public and private schools, uneven opportunities for education across the different regions of China and Project Hope. Students will also learn about the challenges Chinese students face in their Tertiary Entrance Examinations and the expectations from their parents.

Teaching and Learning Activities

Activity 1

Ask your students to draw a chart comparing the timetable of a Chinese student and their own timetable on a school day.

Have a class discussion using these questions as scaffold:

- A. Do you believe that Chinese students learn more knowledge and skills than you? Why is that so?
- B. Do you believe that Chinese students have an advantage when competing with students from Australia? Why do you think so?
- C. Do you think that Chinese students are creative? Do you think creativity is important to a person's career development and why?

Activity 2

Have a class discussion on this topic: should schools stream students into the humanities track (under which they study only humanities) and sciences track (under which they study only sciences)?

Use these questions as scaffold:

- A. Do you think that students in Australia should be streamed into the humanities track and the sciences track separately and why?
- B. Do you think that studying only humanities or sciences will be beneficial to students in preparing them for their future?

Activity 3

Watch the video *Are Our Kids Tough Enough?* presented by the BBC.

Have a class discussion on these questions:

- A. Do you agree with the educational model used in China? Why or why not?
- B. Do you think the educational model used in China can be used in Australia? Why or why not?
- C. Do you think the educational model used in Australia can be used in China? Why or why not?
- D. What kind of students will do well in their studies in China?

- E. Do you think that students in China can receive a high-quality education and good long-term development?
- F. Some people may have argued that students in China learn more, but do you think they can apply the knowledge effectively to the projects they are tasked to do?
- G. Do you agree that students in China face a lot of pressure in their studies? Do you think this pressure will affect their well-being?

Activity 4

Building on their observations from videos they have watched in class or on their own, have your class role-play as a class in China, behaving the way Chinese students do.

Ask your students to write a short reflection of these things they have had to do during the lesson:

- Sitting properly
- Not talking at all
- Standing up to greet you at the start of the lesson and to thank you at the end of the lesson
- Taking notes when you are teaching

Activity 5

Divide your class into two groups to prepare for a debate on this topic: Chinese students will receive a better education in a public/private school. Have your students research online for evidence to support their opinions. Each group will then select four members to take part in the debate.

Activity 6

Have your students do Exercise 6 of the Workbook according to your teaching needs and progress.

Resources/Materials

Apart from those listed in the activities, you may also consult these resources/materials:

1. "Are Our Kids Tough Enough? Chinese School". BBC [Online]. September, 2015. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06565zm>
2. "Students in Denmark vs China: who are more innovative". Lee Cris [YouTube video]. 15 December, 2016. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcqDgk0wb-Q>
3. "China Education". China Education Center Ltd. [Online]. 4 February, 2017. Available at: <http://www.chinaeducenter.com/en/cedu.php>
4. Hornby, L. (2013), "International Schools in China Point Students to the West". *The New York Times* [Online]. 14 January, 2013. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/15/business/global/international-schools-in-china-point-students-to-the-west.html>
5. Siegel B. (2007), "Stressful Times for Chinese Students". *Time* [Online]. 12 June, 2007. Available at: <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1631854,00.html>

Assessment

1. Collect the notes taken by your students during all group and class discussions.
2. Prepare one or two quizzes.
3. Each student is required to write a 600-word report on one of four topics: the Chinese school system, challenges faced by Chinese students, uneven education opportunities in China, quality of education in China.

Workbook Answer Key

1. Pair Work

With a partner, write down the key characteristics of the modern Chinese education system.

Students should consider these points:

- State-run system of public education though private schools have been emerging in large numbers in recent years
- All schools are funded by the government except private schools
- Compulsory education law
- Key schools
- Six years of primary school starting at the age of 6 or 7
- Three years each of junior and senior middle schools
- Special education for gifted children or slow learners
- Senior middle school entrance examination
- Vocational and technical schools
- Curriculum and textbooks prescribed and published by the state

2. What is the nine-year compulsory education programme of China? What are its components?

Students should consider these points:

- The Law of Nine-Year Compulsory Education took effect on 1 July, 1986.
- This law established requirements and deadlines for attaining universal education tailored to local conditions.
- It guarantees school-age children the right to receive at least nine years of education (six in primary and three in secondary).
- Provincial authorities develop plans, enact decrees and rules, distribute funds to counties and administer directly a few key secondary schools.
- County authorities distribute funds to each township authority, which will cover any deficiency themselves. County authorities also supervise teaching and manage their own exemplary primary and junior middle schools, senior middle schools, agricultural vocational schools and teacher training schools. The remaining schools are managed separately by county and township authorities.

3. Pair Work

With a partner, write down the key differences in curriculum for primary and middle schools in China and that in Australia or the West.

Students should consider these points:

- Subject offerings and selection
- Teaching and learning plans
- Teaching pedagogy

- Textbooks and teaching resources
- Extra-curricular

4. What do you think of the education system for primary and middle schools in China?

Students should consider these points:

- Curriculum
- Teaching and learning methods
- Teacher-student relationship
- Assessment
- Extra-curricular programmes

5. What is the role of the pioneer movement in Chinese primary and middle schools? Is there a similar political organisation in Australia or in the West? Why is that so?

Students should consider these points:

- A pioneer movement is an organisation for children, operated by a communist party. Typically, children enter the organisation in elementary school and continue being in it till they are in their teens. They then typically join the Young Communist League (in China's case) thereafter.
- In Australia, there is a church-led Pioneer Movement. Leaders of the movement mobilise their members to glorify God among non-believers with the aim of converting them through "church planting movements" with local churches.

6. What is the Tertiary Entrance Examination? How does it affect the life of Chinese students and their families?

Students should consider these points:

- The Tertiary Entrance Examination (高考) is a more commonly known name for the National Higher Education Entrance Examination (also translated as National Matriculation Examination or National College Entrance Examination), an academic examination held annually in China (except Hong Kong and Macau which have their own education systems).
- A prerequisite for entrance into almost all institutes of higher learning, the examination is taken by students in their final year of senior high school. Age restrictions were lifted in 2001.
- The examination is considered a pivotal point in a Chinese student's life as it determines whether he can go to university, the quality of the institution he is admitted to and consequently the career awaiting him upon graduation – many in China view graduating from a better university helps the graduate secure a bright future of good status, wealth and even power.
- For most Chinese, especially those from less privileged backgrounds, a high score in this examination is considered their only means to significantly alter their fate.
- Being successful in the examination is viewed as bringing honour to one's family.

7. How are students from primary to high schools in China impacted by examinations? What do you think of this impact?

Students should consider these points:

- No formal examination for students from primary and secondary schools except for those in key secondary or private schools
- Students who pass the examination will qualify for a key school
- Students who do not pass the examination will not be able to go to a key junior high school and subsequently a key senior high school

8. Compare the timetable of a middle school in China with that of a middle school in Australia or a country in the West. Write down the key differences.

Students should consider these points:

- Different school starting times
- Different daily schedules
- Different number of periods
- Different time for extra-curriculum activities
- Different homework time

9. Internet Search

In China, people generally do not prefer to take up a vocational education. What are the main reasons?

Students should consider these points:

- Chinese parents do not normally like to send their children to vocational schools in place of high schools because they fear that their children would face diminished chances of getting into university after graduation.
- Vocational schools have long been relegated to the B-list of education; they are considered places for those who are not academically gifted.
- The public's perception is that vocational schools provide little more than a dead end to higher education for one's children.

10. Internet Search

What are some of the similarities and differences between private schools in China and those in Australia or in the West?

Students should consider these points:

- Similarities in funding, recruitment, enrolment, curriculum and assessment.
- Differences in sources/pools of teaching staff, student backgrounds and medium of instruction (Mandarin vs English)

11. Why was Project Hope established?

Students should consider these points:

- Project Hope is a public service project organised and managed by the Youth Development Foundation and the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League.
- Started in October 1989, its aim is to bring schools to the poverty-stricken rural areas of China and help children from impoverished families gain access to and complete elementary education.
- The Youth Development Foundation has also sought to improve educational facilities and improve the quality of teaching in the poorer regions.
- According to a 1999 report by the National Research Center for Science and Technology for Development, about 94 percent of residents in 29 provincial capital cities aged above 16 have heard of Project Hope, while about 64 percent of those surveyed have contributed to it in various ways. The report concluded that Project Hope has become the largest and most influential non-governmental welfare project in China.

12. Internet Search

In China, there is a large number of children left behind in the rural areas as their parents go to work in the cities. What is the Chinese government doing to improve this situation?

Students should consider these points:

- Raising the awareness of various levels of government on the issue
- Considering revamping the residency permit system for rural workers in the cities
- Urging local governments to take more care of these 'left-behind' children
- Improving education for these 'left-behind' children in their villages

13. Group Discussion

In China the uneven development across regions has resulted in many social problems. One such problem is the education gap between rural and urban areas. In a group of three or four, come up with some ideas to solve this problem. Explain briefly how each solution can work.

Students should consider these points:

- Channelling more funds for education from various levels of government to the rural areas: Local communities need large sums urgently to build new schools and to improve the facilities of existing ones.
- Building more schools in rural areas: Many children in rural areas cannot go to school as there are no schools nearby. More schools need to be built so these children can receive an education.
- Improve existing school facilities: Many schools in rural areas are so poor that they do not even have proper desks and textbooks, let alone facilities such as libraries, sports complexes and science laboratories.
- Encourage more qualified teachers to take up positions in schools in the rural areas: Many rural schools, particularly in remote areas, are short of teachers. Various levels of government should provide incentives to encourage more teachers join the schools in these areas.

14. Do you think Australia's or Western education system can be used in China? Explain briefly why.

Students should consider these points:

- Each system has its own merits.
- Each system works best under its unique social and economic context.
- Either system can learn from each other in areas such as curriculum design, pedagogy, teacher training and school-level operational procedure and standards.

15. Imagine you are spending a day in a Chinese school in China. What will you do and who will you meet? Write a story on this.

Students should consider these points:

- Day of the week, duration and location of the school
- Their first impression of the school
- The uniqueness of the daily routine of Chinese students
- The people they meet
- Their reflections

Note: All URLs listed herein were ascertained to be accessible on 8 September, 2020.