

## **Innovative Initiatives of Teacher Education for Development:**

### **A case study of China**

FENG, Jiping

REN, Younqun

East China Normal University, Shanghai

Quality is at the heart of education and teachers play a crucial role to provide quality education. Since the 1980s, there has been a dramatic educational reform in China and teacher education is referred to "the manufacturing tool" of education. Currently, China has more than 10 million school teachers, supporting the world's largest education system. After more than one hundred years of development, teacher education in China, as a changing system, has come a long way and is now experiencing a crucial transition period in the context of globalization and China's social and economic reform. This article first reviews the new developments of teacher education in China, then it examines the emerging challenges, discuss the major problems with the existing teacher education for development. Finally, based on its analysis, the article argues about the policy implications for strategic reform.

### **1. New Developments of Teacher Education in China**

#### **1.1 Gradual structural optimization of teacher education institutions**

Teacher education institutions in China are mainly composed by four-year normal universities and colleges, three-year teacher colleges and secondary normal schools (the three-level teacher education system), which train teachers for senior and junior secondary schools and primary schools respectively. So far, teacher education institutions at all levels have not only prepared millions of qualified teachers for secondary and primary schools but also have trained thousands of teachers through in-service means. They have made historic contributions to basic education, especially for the development of nine-year compulsory education and upgrading the quality of education in the country.

Ever since the Fifth National Conference on Education was held in 1999, China's teacher education has been focusing on the quality of teachers rather than quantity, on the structural adjustment and institutional efficiency. With the demand for improved teacher's professional competence, the structure of teacher education institutions has gradually been changed. The old three-level system has moved on to a two-level teacher education system and is advancing to one-level (the normal university). Graduates from teacher education institutions are moving to a higher level. For example, the ratio of graduates from normal universities and colleges to those from secondary normal schools changed from 10:90 in 2001 to 68:32 in 2005. Statistics show that between the year 1997 and 2005:

—The number of four-year normal universities increased from 74 to 117;

—The number of three-year teacher colleges declined, from 151 to 65;

—The scale of secondary normal schools is gradually shrinking, from 892 to 244;

—The number of educational institutes declined from 229 to 80 while that of teacher training schools from 2142 to 1703 (2002).

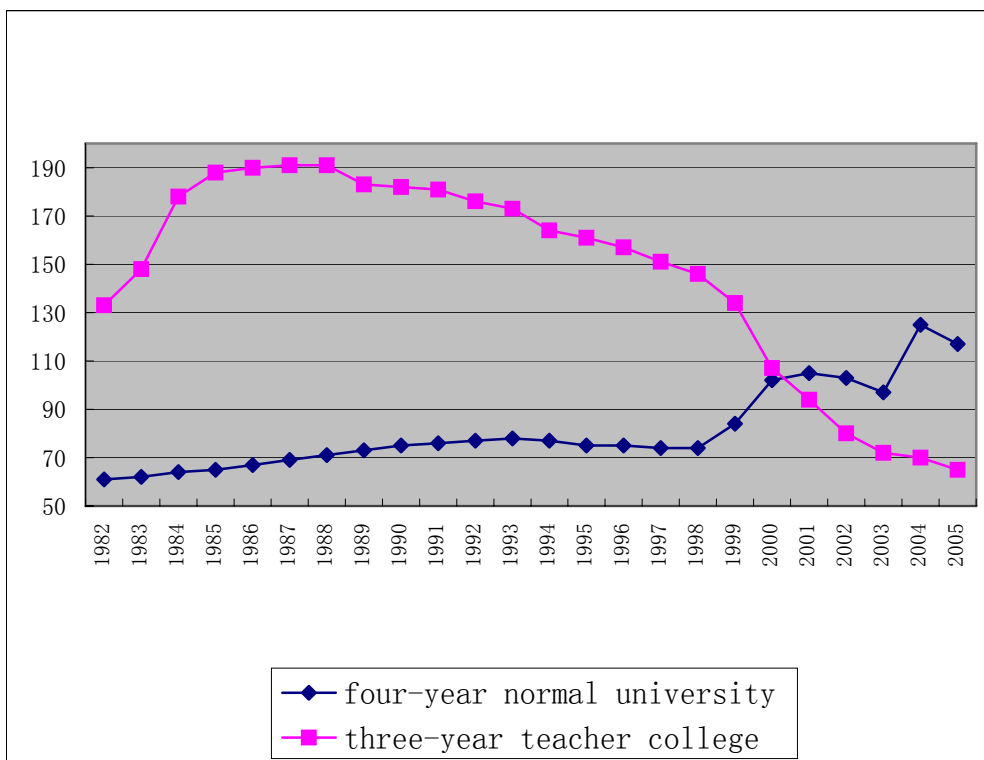


Figure 1: Changes in the number of general normal universities and colleges

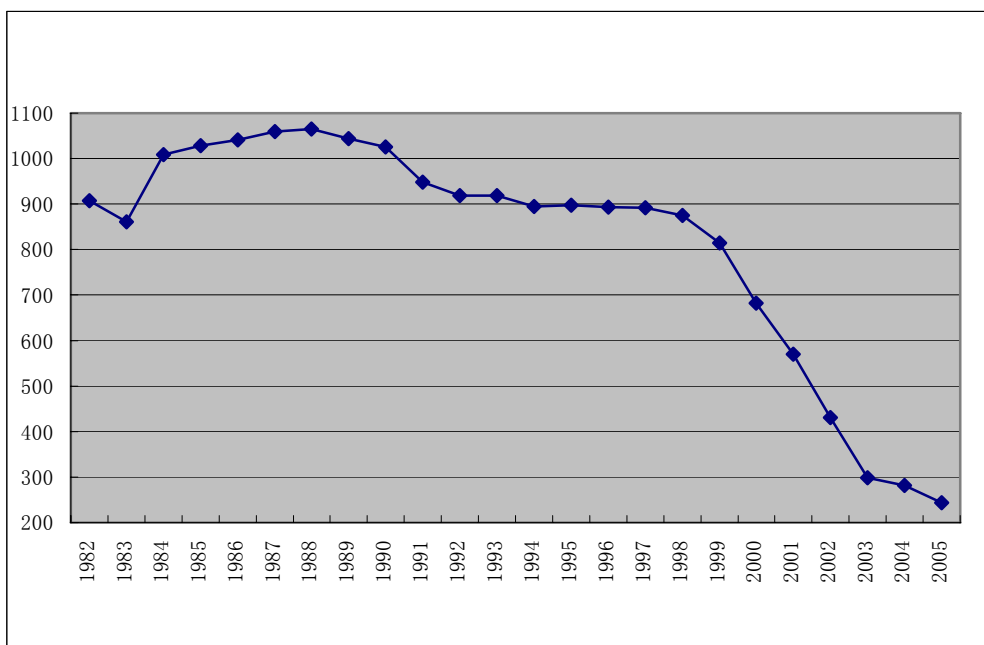


Figure 2: Changes in the number of secondary normal schools

### 1.2 Transition from a closed normal education system to an open teacher education system

To the educational community and the public, the term “teacher education” used to be referred to normal education, which was closely related to the fact that it was the independent normal university or school that borne the responsibility of training teachers.

In the 1950s, higher education in China went through a large-scale school adjustment, thus comprehensive universities, engineering colleges, normal colleges and other kinds of colleges with single department taking shape. What’s more, the main tasks of each kind of higher education institutions were also clarified. During the 1980s, with the gradually enlarging scale of basic education, there was a great demand for more teachers, which resulted in the fast development of normal education. A large closed and directional normal education system was established, including the normal university, the teacher college and the secondary normal school engaged in preparing new teachers together with the educational institute and the teacher training school providing in-service training.

In 1999, the State Council issued the document “Decisions on Deepening the educational reform and improving quality-oriented education in an all-round way”. The document encouraged comprehensive universities and other non-normal higher education institutions to set up schools of education and teacher education programs. With the implementation of teacher qualification system (in 2001) and the reform in the teacher appointment system, teachers are not only trained in the normal university and colleges, but in those which are qualified to train teachers. In 2005, there were 296 non-normal universities and colleges with teacher education programs, whose graduates of teacher education accounted for 37.9% of the national total number of graduates of teacher education programs.

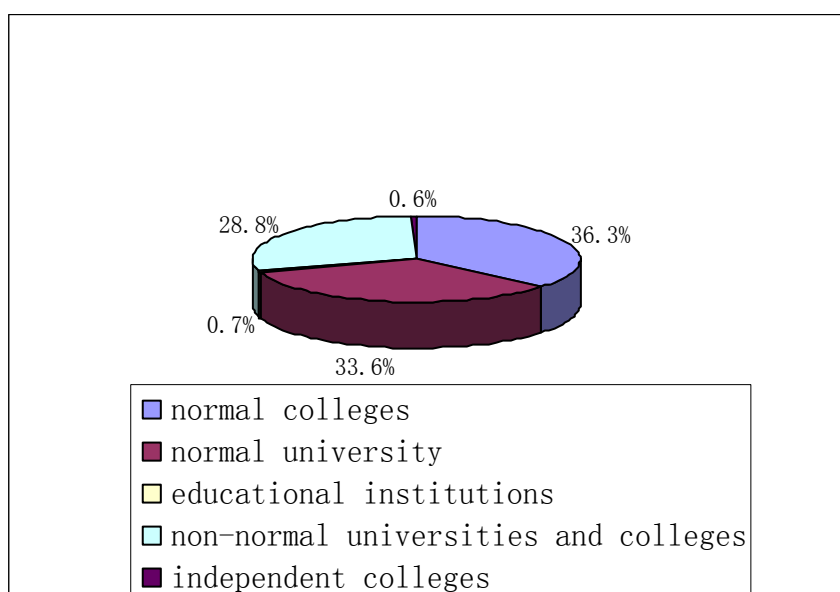


Figure 3: Distribution of graduates of teacher education program (2005)

### 1.3 Expediting the integration of teacher preparation and further education for teachers

The traditional normal education is divided into pre-service diploma education and in-service professional training. Pre-service education used to be provided by normal

universities, colleges and schools while in-service training was organized by the educational administrations and implemented in educational institutes and teacher continuing education schools.

To meet the demands for teachers' lifelong education and professional development, the pre-service education and in-service training have to be integrated into a continuous system. This has helped to solve the problems with the separated teacher education system, such as inconsistent teaching programs,, each institution doing things in its own way, overlapping contents, and unreasonable resource distribution etc. Henceforth, the in-service teacher training in China is now shifting from diploma compensation education to renewal of knowledge, teaching and researching, and professional ability training education. This has involved a wide range of trainees, a high demand for quality and needs to adjust or amalgamate higher normal colleges and universities, educational institutes and continuing education schools so as to make them possess the function of pre-service and in-service training and realize the integration of pre-service and in-service.

Statistics show that at the provincial level, independent educational institutions are gradually diminishing from 31 to 18, with some merged into normal universities; at the district level, from more than 200 to around 70; at the county level, through the integration of institutional resources, the former independent single-functioned teacher training schools (there were 2,400, now integrated into 600) are being replaced by new teacher training institutions engaged in teacher training, educational research and ICT education.

#### **1.4 Enlargement of the teacher education system**

In recent years, the expanding scale of teacher education institutions at all levels has developed considerably, which on the whole can meet the basic demands for basic education. In terms of teacher preparation, between 1997 and 2005, normal universities and colleges nationwide educated 1.59 million undergraduates and 50 thousand educational masters while the secondary normal schools educated 1.83 million graduates. In terms of in-service training, between 1997 and 2003, more than 400 thousands secondary school teachers received degree-training in teacher training institutions at all levels and over 830 thousand primary school teachers received degree training. In addition, hundreds of thousands of secondary and primary school teachers received non-degree professional training.

#### **1.5 Enhancement of the quality of teacher preparation**

Great achievements have been made in the development of new disciplines, the capacity-building of teaching force as well as scientific researches. Innovative initiatives in curriculum and teaching were taken through reforming training mode, adjusting curriculum structures, promoting the modern teaching methods and improving teacher professional development. Thus, some normal universities and colleges have become comprehensive universities, which can be reflected from the improved institutional capacity. For example, six major teacher universities are among the list of "211 Project"(National project which aims to construct 100 world-famous universities); there are now nine teacher universities with 39 state key programs; quite a few teacher universities have developed into high-level

comprehensive universities;36 teacher universities each have an average of 50 disciplines, compared to traditional 9 disciplines.

### **1.6 Great progress in in-service training**

In order to set up the continuing education system, in Sep, 1999, MOE issued “Regulations on Continuing Education for Secondary and Primary School Teachers”, prescribing that every school teacher should be provided with 240-hour in-service training every five years and governments at all levels should take initiatives to ensure the implementation of the training.

To improve teachers’ qualities, between 1999 and 2003, MOE initiated the “Continuing Education Project for Secondary and Primary School Teachers”. The project engaged 85% of all the teaching staff in the training focusing on professional morality, ICT education and increasing capacity in promoting the quality-oriented education. In the framework of the project, about one million key teachers from different parts of the country were trained

In February, 2004, MOE initiated the New Training Plan for Secondary and Primary School Teachers (2003-2007). The training plan focuses on new concepts, new curriculum, new technologies and professional values in the principles of innovation, integration, openness and effectiveness. By 2005, more than 7 million teachers received 40 teaching hours of training in new curriculum, In addition, a Plan of Capacity-Building in Educational Technology and training in professional values are under way.

## **2. Emerging Challenges and Major Problems**

While great achievements have been made in teacher education in China, there remain new challenges and major problems in the new era.

### **2.1 Emerging challenges**

New demands for teacher education from both the acute international competition and rapid development of China’s economy and society, which has posed great challenges to teacher education. The new century highlights the human resources as the most important strategic resource, and education is playing a critical role in international competitions. Hence teacher education is among the national top policy priorities. At present, China has entered the new era of comprehensively constructing a better-off and harmonious innovative country along with the building of new rural areas. The demands for high quality workers, professionals and elites have posed new challenges for teacher education.

The improvement and perfection of a market economy system has diversified the way the human resources are deployed, which has resulted in the reform in the traditional teacher training modes and teacher education operating mechanism.

The implementation of quality-oriented education in an all-round way, improvement of moral education and the nationwide promotion of curriculum reform in basic education have created higher demands for teacher’s quality. Since 1999, China has initiated the national

curriculum reform movement in basic education. New curricula design should take into account the life experiences of students in order to cultivate their surviving, practical and creative abilities, as well as enable them to grasp information technology and acquire the consciousness and necessary abilities to contribute to the development of both the community and the society. It is widely recognized that teachers have been the leading role in implementing successfully the curriculum reform.

## **2.2 Major problems**

In general, the existing teacher education falls short of economic reform and the educational development, the objectives of comprehensively constructing a better-off and harmonious innovative country and the implementation of quality-oriented education, especially in terms of curriculum reform movement in basic education.

- **The ability of teacher education system to attract better than average individuals can't meet the demands for high quality teachers**

The relatively low status of teachers among all the occupations requiring similar qualifications has made teaching profession less attractive. Many surveys have shown that few top secondary school students except the average choose to become teachers.

The special scholarship awarded to teacher education students, which had successfully attracted generations of excellent high school graduates from poor families under the system of planned economy is now considerably low. Investigations in 36 normal universities and colleges show that each teacher education student enjoys a special scholarship of only 67 Chinese yuan (US\$8), much lower than the annual tuition fee of 3,500 Chinese yuan (US\$437).

- **Teacher preparation cannot fully satisfy the needs of basic education reform**

The open teacher education system has resulted in the involvement of some unqualified secondary teacher training schools in teacher training. The transition from three-level normal education to two-level teacher education and the involvement of non-normal colleges in teacher education is to improve the quality of teacher education by making full use of more high quality educational resource. However, owing to the lack of a sounding mechanism of admission, evaluation and monitoring, the quality of teacher education cannot be properly guaranteed.

Unidirectional mode of teacher training failed to adapt to the change in job markets. In the past, under the system of planned economy, the closed planned normal education system gave no impetus and was less competitive.

Curriculum reform in teacher education is lagging behind. The problems lie in: (a) the courses, mostly compulsive ones such as pedagogy, psychology and educational technology, tend to be subject-centered and short of integrity and flexibility; (b) there are great variations in the offering of courses between different teacher universities and colleges; (c) teaching practice reflects weakness, investigations show that the amount of time allocated for teaching

practice adds up to no more than 12 weeks in most schools. Often, several teacher students are working in the same class and their tasks or assignments involve teaching, class management and education research.

Teacher-centered approaches and subject-centered teaching are more limited to classrooms in universities and colleges rather than practical teaching contexts in secondary and primary schools. Some teacher institutions haven't established cooperative relationship with secondary and primary schools. Students' needs are paid little attention to.

- **The job market for the teacher education graduates has a negative impact on the quality and efficiency of teacher education**

There have been great changes in teachers' demand and supply and China's teaching force reflects an unbalanced structure, with an overstock of primary teachers but a shortage in high school teachers. Meanwhile, there is an overstock of teachers in urban areas but a great shortage in rural areas. On the one hand, there were a huge number of substitute teachers, e.g. about 450 thousand in 2005 nationwide; on the other hand, a great number of teacher education graduates can't find their jobs due to local financial problems at the county level. All this has directly influenced the quality of the new enrollment and the efficiency of teacher education.

- **In-service training can't meet the needs of teachers in terms of lifelong learning and professional development.**

At present, the government hasn't yet promulgated laws and regulations on in-service training for primary and secondary school teachers. Though MOE has issued its *Regulations on Continuing education for Primary and Secondary School Teachers*, but they are not powerful enough to ensure the enforcement of teacher continuing education;

No financial guarantee systems are in place to ensure the in-service training. The central government hasn't stipulated the definite proportion of financial input in in-service training until recently MOE and the Ministry of Finance stipulate that 5% of the annual budget for each school should be invested in in-service training.

As for the management system in in-service training, the existing big problem is the overlapping management between the personnel sector and educational sector. The former may stipulate some compulsory courses such as computer training, creativity development and WTO-related knowledge for teachers in terms of professional development and demand that teachers' promotion depend on these courses. This has increased teachers' workload.

In some areas, in-service training is not a key factor in assessing teachers' performance and appointment. Teachers are not very much motivated to participate in in-service training. Administrative department of Educational at all levels haven't included in-service training as an integral part of educational supervision so that many local districts take in-service training as unimportant. In addition, normal universities and colleges are not actively involved in in-service training as there is no sufficient financial support.

In recent years, the traditional separation between teacher preparation and teacher training is abolished and we can see a trend of integration of pre-service education and in-service training. The problem is that these teacher education institutions should focus their attention on basic education researches and take the responsibility of in-service training. In this regard, it's desirable that more and more teacher training bases should be set up or reconstructed in different areas

In-service training of teachers in primary and secondary schools can be divided into degree and non-degree education. Most teachers take their degree training through part-time learning, such as adult-self study, TV education and correspondence or distant education. According to Teacher Education Association, most teachers in rural areas obtain their degree by compensation education. But in fact, much training reflects little effect and efficiency. Learning is not related to teaching, and what is learned is separated from what is applied.

- **In terms of quality ensurance system, regulations and operating mechanisms concerning teacher education are not available yet to adapt to the market economy.**

With the establishment and improvement of China's market economy, the way human resources are distributed has been fundamentality changed. While the traditional normal education system characterized by directional enrollment, training and job assignment is being reformed, a new system hasn't been created. Teacher education in the transitional period is in some sort of disorder.

For example, the existing teacher qualification system cannot meet the needs of the development of basic education as the nationally defined qualification requirements for entry into the teaching profession are relatively low. In addition, there has been an inadequate financial input in teacher education as well as inefficient management of teacher education and training.

### **3. Policy Implications**

- **Promoting the institutional innovation of teacher education**

This can be done through strengthening the construction of laws and regulations on TE by revising Teacher Law, implementing teacher certificate systems, establishing and implementing national teacher training certificate systems, creating teacher education standard systems and establishing teacher education supervision and evaluation systems

- **Pushing the innovation of teacher education system**

This involves improving the level of teacher education institutions with the teacher universities and colleges as the main body, top-level teacher universities playing the leading role and local teacher training institutions serving as regional teacher learning centers and resource centers; transforming teaching structures of teacher education and establishing new teacher professional development platform; constructing distant teacher education platform in the framework of "National Teacher Education Network Coalition" (NTENC);

- **Developing the innovative modes of teacher training**

This includes reforming the training modes for secondary school teachers by training



postgraduate educational masters and doctors and pushing the reform of training modes for primary and preschool teachers;

- **Promoting the curriculum and teaching reform** by adjusting and optimizing the curriculum development, upgrading teaching contents, improve teaching quality and reinforce teaching practice
- **Promoting the mechanical innovation of teacher education** by reforming teacher education management system and developing the financial guarantee system of teacher education.
- **Strengthening teacher moral education** by building up teachers' awareness of professional values, reforming the teaching contents, professional laws and rules and instruction methods.
- **Implementing the flagship programmes of teacher education reform and development**

This can be done through establishing comprehensive reform experimental areas, implementing the programme of national teacher education bases, promoting the programme of NTENC, to realize the systematic integration of teacher education system, satellite TV network and Internet (namely human network, air network and ground network), launching the programme of interns teaching practice in support of rural education, extending the implementation of the programme for cultivating educational masters in rural secondary teachers, reinforcing and improving teacher training for rural secondary and primary schools.

- **Creating a favorable environment for teacher education reform and development**
  - Government at all levels should place high priority on teacher education and establish an effective teacher education accountability system to satisfy the local needs of basic education. Powerful measures should be taken in improving developmental planning, financial input, infrastructure, technological equipment and the building of teaching force;
  - The structural adjustment of teacher education should not weaken teacher training; and the integration of teacher education resource should prevent quality resource from draining away;
  - Creating a sounding institutional environment and guarantee conditions, such as deepening educational personnel reform, standardizing teacher employment and appointment procedures, improving the status of teachers and their working conditions, including the performance of teacher training in the academic evaluation of teacher trainers.
  - Establishing a close social dialogue among all stakeholders. More NGO agencies or organizations such as the National Committee of Experts on teacher education and the Committee of Experts on Curriculum Resources should be involved in teacher education policy-decision.

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