Identify and Critically Examine Some of the Main Contemporary Issues and Challenges Facing Secondary School Leaders in China

Li-na ZHANG
Teachers’ College, Shenyang University, Shenyang City, Liaoning Province, China
1402678739@qq.com

Keywords: Challenges Strategies Teaching Quality Education Fund Recruitment

Abstract. This study is about issues and challenges of secondary school leaders are facing in China. It is seen as presenting the following features: lack of efficient funds in a secondary education which has become the sector of rapid growth with a decentralization of the Ministry of Education administration; run-off of high quality teachers in a competitive market economy; lower quality of teaching and learning between dilemmas of the traditional exam–oriented education and the new quality-oriented education that is being implemented as the Programme on Quality Education in the New Century which aims at developing quality of education. It is also seen as presenting the strategies in educational managements for principals as means to alleviate the problems in Chinese secondary schools.

Introduction

This paper is discussed in the subsequent sections. Section 1 describes insufficient secondary educational funds and analysis of the reasons for that as well as the relevant strategies of solving this issue for secondary school leaders. Section 2 tells US the issue about recruitment and retention of teachers and how it merges as well as how to tackle it. While Section 3 traces another issue of lower teaching and learning quality and why it happens and how to solve it. The last section comes to the conclusion.

1. Insufficient Education Funds

1.1 The two Vital Factors Related to the Lack of the Schooling Funds

Firstly, limitation of public expenditure on education.

According to official statistics, in 2003, the national government fund for education was 349.14 billion Yuan, accounting for 3.41 percentage in the GDP, (Ministry of Education, PRC, 2004) although it is an increase of 0.22 percentage point from the previous year, the level of that is quite low compared to the world average of 4.8 percentage of GDP in 2000. It is also low compared to the average of 3.9 percentage for the less developed countries. (UNESCO, 2004). In addition, public expenditure on education as percentage of total government expenditure is only 13 percent, which is much lower than the average of 22.4 percentage in OECD countries in 2001. (UNESCO, 2004)

Secondly, decentralization of education administration

Over the past two decades, China has experienced a major education policy transition from a highly centralized system to a more decentralized administrative one. Central to the reform is decentralization of finance and administration and the introduction of market mechanism in the education system. Policy increased the responsibilities of local governments for financing secondary schools, and schools only have one-half to one third of the salary bill paid by local governments, the remainders must be financed from fund-raising activities at the school level.(Keith Lewin and Francoise Caillods, 2001). So principals have to be accountable for raising funds through their own efforts. The improvement of school facilities and welfare of teachers actually depend on principals themselves. And this part of the extra budgetary contributions amounted to one-half to one third of the total secondary education expenditures.
1.2 Challenges and Strategies

The decentralization of finance management has encountered different difficulties in individual schools. Along with the decentralization of that, principals have to pay much more attentions than ever before to raising money for running a school from their normal pursuit of the school management and elevation of teaching quality, such as hardware reconstruction issue of teachers’ bonus, but where is money come from? As a consequence of inefficient funds, in rural poverty areas, many crumbling school buildings cannot be rebuilt; necessary teaching equipments and materials, textbooks and documents have not been updated and replenished; more serious problem is teachers’ salaries often are delayed, even unpaid. As a principal of the school, how he or she will be doing with the complexion in such dilemmas is being related.

First of all, aiming at the growing gap between the expansion of enrollment in secondary schools and the limitation of the budgetary expenditures on secondary education, the active action for the state is to set a goal of trying to make educational investment accounting for 4 percent of the GDP in the short time. (Ministry of Education, PRC, 2004). The increasingly invested funds can improve conditions of middle schools all over the country. In addition, central government should strengthen the responsibilities of all the levels of governments to largely invest in secondary education, through rapid development of economy to meet the demand for the education and further alleviate the tensions.

Secondly, aiming at the big gap between lack of funds and the ability to finance capital construction expenditure, individual school principals will need to tighten up their management and improve administrative efficiency, increasing knowledgeable strategies and skills of producing effective outcome with the continued payoff investment in education, make schools greater progress with fewer resources. Facing the shortage of resource, they also will need to catch hold of opportunities at any time to increase the proportion of non- governmental extra budgetary income through expanding varieties of fund- raising channels, and make school economy, capital resource rich. Under this policy environment and the social milieu in which schools develop, principals should become the executive of the school property; at the same time have to become public communicators again. Creative entrepreneur type of secondary principals is expected.

2. Recruitment and Retention of Teachers

The public problem in China that secondary school teacher’s troops run off is a one of the outstanding problems of that teacher troops developments meet in recent years, it is also crucial issue school leaders are facing during their teaching management.

2.1 Two Main Reasons for the Run-off of the School Teachers

The first one is lower wages and worse welfare.

According to China statistic yearbook in 1998, primary and secondary school teachers are the lowest-paid professionals. Secondary school teachers’ average wage is only 6663 Yuan, which is about$832, 0.97 GDP per capita, which is only higher than the farming and wholesale Sectors. (Liang Xiaoyan, 2001). Though in the last few years the teacher’s treatment is continuing to improve, contrasting to those newly arisen professions in society, the treatment of the secondary school teachers is still low. Another factor is teachers themselves have higher knowledge level which is a necessary condition to urge teachers to migrate the other professions that is with higher salaries and better welfare. In addition, the unbalance of economy development in China is also one reason for teachers’ run-off. The eastern coastal region develops more rapidly than western inland region. The result of secondary school teacher’s treatment of the eastern is higher than that in the western is inevitable. So this becomes a phenomenon of talented persons flying towards the southeast’ every year. Last but not least, because of the market competitive system introduced into education administration, schools in same areas even in the same city have a quite unbalance development. So, the movement of teachers from weak schools to reputable schools is emerging immediately.

The second one is greater pressures and overload work.
Because of the expansion of the secondary education and lag of the school basic construction, class sizes are usually very large in secondary schools. Secondary school teachers have to not only finish teaching missions regulated in the teaching plan, but also devote a great deal of time in preparing lessons, correcting a lot of homework, doing research on their own, providing individual instruction to problem students in their offices. (Liang Xiaoyan, 2001). On the other hand, the only son and daughter is more and more in classes, parents’ expectation to the child is higher and higher, simultaneously; the request for the secondary school teachers is becoming more and more rigorous. Moreover, the current society hasn’t become an objective and fair standard to the teacher evaluating, usually blaming students’ failures of tests on the teachers. Therefore, to do well in lots of varieties of examinations for entering higher schools, secondary school teachers are always under much greater pressure on physiology, mentality, spirit and body. In addition, in some rural schools, many teachers have to bear the economic pressure due to the delayed even unpaid salaries. So secondary school teachers once have the opportunity of changing the profession or moving to better school, they will not hesitate to make a choice of transform.

2.2 Challenges and Strategies

The teacher ‘run off’ has caused a shortage of high-quality teacher's resources in each school, bringing the current education reform and school development negative influences. This phenomenon also perplexes the principals of the schools. Under the new situation of the market economy, how to keep the positive stability of teacher's troops, how to draw on excellent teachers, and how to establish a high-quality teacher's troops has become principals’ new challenge faced in the process of their school management. Some suggestions are given here.

Firstly, building the ‘high gold set’ to train and attract talents. It is clear that the treatment inside the competition for talented persons is an equilibrium mechanism that talented persons flow. Along with the quick progress of modern market economy society, as well as increasingly deep reformation of the school personnel system, the teacher’s freedom fluxion has been the reality, simultaneously the material treatment as an evaluation standard of the talent oneself value and the social worth, its weight is more and more heavy. Therefore, at this time, whether the leaders build ‘the gold set’ to recruit and retent the talents will decide the situation of schoolteachers on the certain degree. Obviously, the key to resolve this problem doesn’t lest on schools or school leaders but the positive effort the leaders make for exaltation of teacher’s treatment is an important content of teachers’ choosing the leader.

Secondly, loving deeply to ‘swift horse’

It is obvious that leaders’ words and actions to put talents in a very important position and attach importance to them are a great encouragement and respect for teachers. Once teachers feel the leader’s comprehension, respect with trust, they will devote all their hearts to their work with biggest enthusiasm and creativity, regardless of the hard conditions. The leader, from the 80th secondary school in Peking City, regards “help others with the success” as the motto of the school, aiding more teachers to step on the road of the success in their work. So, the school where teachers cannot exert their practical abilities to the work will lose attraction to talents. Therefore, school leaders should further show their concern and consideration to respect the teacher’s labor, creating the good environment which can help teachers display their talent as well as creating the wide development space for each teacher in order to remain and attract high-quality talents. In actual management work, secondary principals with high level of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ management are also quite necessary and important. Sometimes the ‘soft’ management which is to affect the crowd with leaders’ own personality magic power looks more effective than the ‘hard’ management which is to do management with the job-power strict regulation system.

3. Lower Teaching Quality

3.1 The two Main Reasons or the Lower Teaching Quality in China

Firstly, teachers’ professional quality is not high, which directly affects the quality of teaching and learning.
In China, junior secondary school teachers are requested to be at least graduates of three-year sub-degree in teacher training. Senior secondary school teachers are requested to be at least graduates of four-year degree programme from normal universities. However, these qualifications are not always met. According to official statistic, in 2003, only 91.3 percent of junior secondary teachers met the requirement, the other 8.7 percent had only completed secondary education or even lower. At senior secondary level, only 75.7 percent of teachers have required bachelor’ degree. (Ministry of Education, PRC, 2004)

Secondly, exam-oriented education seriously influences the quality of teaching and learning.

Exam-oriented education, which is the traditional patterns of education, focuses on centralized textbooks and exams, faces to a handful of students, over-emphasizes knowledge teaching, uses disciplinal method of mechanically repetition memory and exam results is the unique way to evaluate teaching and learning, even evaluate a school, a principal, a teacher, and a student. So, teaching and learning is completely driven by exams. Therefore, to gain the highest score possible, most students are expected to do homework for several hours each day. One teacher, who has worked in the middle school for seven years since graduating from Guangzhou Normal College, said: “Endless exams and homework were the biggest nightmare in my teens, and it’s frustrating to see my students suffering the same nightmare.” (China Daily June 16, 2003). Secondary students are therefore often overloaded with homework and have no time to develop their own interests and potential talent, also no time ‘to think and to explore’. Moreover, this has also resulted in teaching and learning going very deep in exam subjects, simultaneously neglecting the other subjects. An old vice-minister of education described this situation as: In present day middle schools, exams inhabit teaching rather than promote it. A profusion of questions join together to form a wave in a sea of exams, tests and final examinations deluging teachers, students and even parents. In general, middle schools the pursuit of higher transition rates ties the hands and feet of the teachers and students like an invisible rope”. (Liang Xiaoyan 2001). It is clear that the exam-oriented teaching contents and teaching method cannot adapt to the development of knowledge-based economic society, because the comprehensively developed students or employees are more demanded than ever before.

3.2 Challenges and Strategies

Quality is the lifeline of education. Teaching quality concerns not only student subsistence but also school subsistence. And curriculum and evaluation system reforms are the key to improve teaching quality. These reforms are also the greatest challenge facing secondary school leaders.

‘School leader is a soul of a school’, he or she is responsible for school management and also have to be accountable for curriculum and evaluation reforms, contributing to developing the quality of teaching and learning in such a way that it meets the needs of each student. So principals should firstly enhance teachers’ training to improve their professional quality, because teacher quality is the basic to improve teaching quality. Secondly, principals should regard ‘lay the foundation of lifelong development of each student’ as the motto of school development to improve teaching quality. Curriculum and evaluation system management is the means to ensure the teaching and learning to move onwards. Thirdly, principals should also encourage teachers to adopt new teaching methods and teaching contents, abandoning exam-oriented education model, teaching knowledge which is useful for life, and lifelong development, in order to cultivate students’ different kinds of abilities, such as ability of obtaining new knowledge, ability of dealing with information, ability of analyzing and solving problems as well as ability of communion and co-operation etc., building up the educational thought of ‘student development is fundamentality’.

4. Conclusion

The major issues and challenges associated with the new era of 21st century and the new systems of educational reform in China can be summarized under a number of dimensions. The new freedoms to manage secondary schools from a variety of aspects for school leaders have resulted in several problems emerging. There are increasing differences in funding between schools, which arise from regions, original assets, academic reputation, and management level, and quality.

In conclusion, it can be seen from the paper that an unusual degree freedom has been given to
school leaders to raise money and manage the resources of schools, to appoint personnel and practice curriculum reform. And school leaders who have some or all of the following characteristics are able to manage schools increasingly: governor, reformer, liaison offer and investigator.

References


[8] Edited by Judith Bell and Bemard T. Harrison 1995 *Vision and Values in Managing Education Successful Leadership Principles and Practice* Typeset by The Harrington Consultancy Ltd Printed in Great Britain by the Cromwell Press Ltd. Melksham


[12] Izhari Oplatka 2004 *The Principalship in Developing Countries: Context, Characteristics and Reality* Comparative Education, V01.40, No.3, August 2004

[13] NPQH Development Stage: *Strategies direction and development of the school* unit 1.1, Developing a strategic Vision, PP. 1 4-2 1


[16] R. Govinda 2002 *Challenge of Transforming Secondary Education in the Context of The Emerging Knowledge Society* National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration

[17] Liang Xiaoyan 2001 China: *Challenges of Secondary Education* Education The World Bank

[18] *Basic Education* C:\Documents and Setting\ZLN\My Documents\DEVELOPMENT GATEWAY-Basic Education. Htm

142
[19] *Planning Overview*  
C:\Documents and Settings\ZLNL\MyDocuments\DEVELOPMENT\GATEWAY-Overview.htm


[22] UNESCO 2004, *Public expenditure on education as %of GNI, GDP*  