

Analysis of the Difficulties Caused by the Low Quality of High School Students in Ordinary County to Chinese Teaching

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ABSTRACT

With the rapid urbanization in China, the uneven distribution of educational resources has left county-level high schools at a disadvantage in competing for top students, resulting in a widespread decline in student quality. As a foundational, interdisciplinary, and highly humanistic subject, Chinese language education demands students to build a solid foundation, cultivate critical thinking, and develop effective learning habits. The low quality of incoming students has created significant challenges for Chinese language teaching, affecting goal-setting, content delivery, methodological approaches, evaluation systems, and teacher development. This paper analyzes the specific manifestations of low student quality in county-level high schools, examines the practical difficulties it poses across all aspects of Chinese language instruction, and proposes solutions through teaching strategies, evaluation reforms, teacher development, and school-family collaboration. The aim is to enhance the quality of Chinese language education in county-level high schools and promote educational equity.

KEYWORDS

County high school; Quality of students; Chinese teaching; Dilemma; Countermeasures

1 Introduction

General high school education constitutes a vital component of the national education system, playing a pivotal role in talent development. County-level high schools bear the crucial responsibility of providing secondary education to students in rural and county areas. However, in recent years, the influx of top-performing students into key high schools in cities at or above the prefecture level, driven by urbanization and selective enrollment policies, has led to a noticeable decline in the quality of students in county-level high schools. This "student quality crisis" manifests not only in lower admission scores but also in broader deficiencies across academic foundations, study habits, critical thinking skills, and learning motivation.

Chinese language education, by its very nature, is highly sensitive to student quality. It emphasizes accumulation, reflection, and application, requiring solid foundational knowledge, good reading habits, and a certain depth of thinking. When facing students with uneven foundations, lack of learning motivation, and insufficient reading exposure, Chinese teachers often find themselves in the awkward situation of "being unable to teach effectively, delve deeply, or engage students." Traditional teaching methods struggle to adapt to new learning conditions, leading to significantly reduced teaching effectiveness. Therefore, thoroughly analyzing the specific challenges posed by low-quality student intake to Chinese language education and exploring effective strategies are of great practical significance for improving the quality of county-level high school education and ensuring educational equity.

2 Main Manifestations of Low Student Quality in Ordinary County High Schools

The student body of county-level high schools primarily consists of graduates from township and county junior high schools within the same administrative region. Their subpar academic performance is not solely attributable to low test scores, but rather stems from deficiencies in comprehensive competencies, which are predominantly manifested in the following aspects:

(1) Weak academic foundation and fragmented knowledge systems. This is the most evident manifestation. Many students barely meet the passing score in the high school entrance exam, with shaky grasp of basic Chinese knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, literary fundamentals). Their classical Chinese reading skills are inadequate, they fail to identify key points in modern texts, and their writing is riddled with typos, incoherent sentences, and hollow content. The knowledge gap between junior and senior high school is severe, forcing high school teachers to spend considerable time "catching up on missed lessons."

(2) Poor study habits and lack of self-directed learning ability. Good study habits are crucial for academic progress in daily learning. However, many students in county-level high schools lack the habit of pre-class preparation and post-class review, resulting in low classroom learning efficiency. They fail to take notes during lectures and complete assignments merely to fulfill requirements. Additionally, they lack time management skills and are unable to engage in autonomous learning.

(3) Insufficient reading and underdeveloped language skills. The core of Chinese literacy lies in reading comprehension and critical thinking. However, influenced by exam-oriented education and internet culture, many students engage in severely inadequate extracurricular reading, rarely accessing classic literature. This directly results in a narrow knowledge base, weak linguistic intuition, and limited vocabulary. In terms of critical thinking and expression, students often remain superficial, lacking clear logic and profound ideological depth. They struggle with in-depth reading and critical analysis, typically interpreting texts only at a literal level. Consequently, they fail to uncover the cultural depth, emotional value, and logical structure embedded within the texts.

(4) Insufficient learning motivation and vague goals. Some students enter high school not by choice but under family pressure or following trends, lacking clear academic objectives and long-term life plans. Confronted with the increased difficulty and density of Chinese language studies, as well as the pressure of college entrance exams, they often develop a fear of challenges and disinterest in learning, lacking proactive spirit. In class, they passively absorb knowledge and handle assignments perfunctorily, rarely extending their learning beyond the classroom, which naturally hinders effective improvement in Chinese proficiency.

3 Analysis of the Difficulties Caused by the Low Quality of Students in Chinese Teaching

The overall decline in the quality of students has brought systematic and profound impact on the whole process of Chinese teaching, which is embodied in the following four difficulties:

3.1 The Dilemma of Setting Teaching Objectives: The Great Gap between the Uniform Requirements and the Realistic Basis

The "General High School Chinese Curriculum Standards" clearly defines the core competencies of students, and the textbook compilation is based on certain learning conditions. However, in county-level high schools, the significant gap between uniform teaching requirements and students' actual foundations has led to a dilemma in setting teaching objectives.

(1) Challenges in implementing curriculum standards. The four core competencies outlined in the standards—"language construction and application," "thinking development and enhancement," "aesthetic appreciation and creation," and "cultural inheritance and understanding"—often prove unattainable for county-level high school students with weaker academic foundations. If teachers strictly adhere to the standards, most students will struggle to keep up due to their limited abilities, leading to a loss of learning confidence. However, lowering the standards to accommodate students' learning conditions risks failing to meet teaching objectives, ultimately reducing the effectiveness of core competency cultivation. This creates a paradox: "Implementing the standards leaves students behind, while adapting to their learning conditions undermines the standards."

(2) Challenges in Implementing Tiered Instruction. While theoretically effective in addressing individual student differences and catering to learners of varying proficiency levels, tiered instruction faces practical hurdles in county-level high schools. These schools often operate with oversized classes containing students of vastly different academic backgrounds—some with minimal classical Chinese knowledge or vocabulary, while others possess basic literacy for simple text analysis. Constrained by time and resource limitations, teachers struggle to design tailored tiered objectives or implement targeted after-class support. As a result, instruction disproportionately favors weaker students, failing to meet the advanced needs of top performers or ensure struggling learners fully grasp the material, ultimately resulting in suboptimal overall teaching outcomes.

3.2 The Difficulties in the Implementation of Teaching Content: The Double Limitation of Knowledge Connection and Cognitive Level

The teaching content is the core carrier of teaching objectives and core competencies. The quality of students is not enough, which directly restricts the depth and breadth of the teaching content, and makes the teaching content implementation passive.

(1) The transition from junior to senior high school presents significant challenges, particularly in determining the appropriate teaching starting point. The unified edition of high school Chinese textbooks features extensive content, high knowledge density, and steep difficulty gradients. The classical poetry module, especially its classical Chinese knowledge and logical analysis of argumentative texts, demands advanced foundational skills from students. However, most county-level high school students have weak junior high Chinese foundations. Some even lack basic command of classical Chinese vocabulary, sentence grammar, and reading strategies, forcing teachers to frequently revisit junior high content. This includes starting from the basics—word accumulation, grammar review, and cultural background supplementation—which consumes substantial time from new curriculum instruction. Teachers struggle to balance "catching up on old material" with "teaching new knowledge," resulting in slowed teaching pace. This not only makes it difficult to complete

the textbook's teaching tasks on time but also leads to insufficient depth in new lessons and an incoherent knowledge system.

(2) Limited textual interpretation depth and dilemmas in content selection. The core appeal of Chinese language education lies in guiding students to engage in deep textual analysis, fostering intellectual exchange and aesthetic appreciation. However, county-level high school students face constraints in knowledge reserves, cognitive levels, and thinking abilities. When encountering classic texts, teachers struggle to guide students in exploring underlying writing techniques, ideological connotations, and cultural values. Complex symbolic devices, profound humanistic reflections, and rigorous logical frameworks often remain beyond students' comprehension. To ensure classroom effectiveness, educators are compelled to simplify content, cut down on in-depth interpretation sessions, and even abandon discussions, reducing instruction to superficial tasks like word translation and paragraph summarization. This approach fails to achieve the dual objectives of aesthetic appreciation and cognitive enhancement in the classroom.

(3) Writing instruction faces significant challenges, with both material accumulation and expressive skills being severely lacking. As a comprehensive reflection of language proficiency, writing remains a persistent teaching hurdle. The low quality of student intake directly manifests in their limited life experiences and scant reading exposure, resulting in impoverished writing materials and hollow content. Poor language fundamentals further lead to incoherent expression and logical disarray. Teachers are compelled to teach fundamental skills like topic analysis, material accumulation, and sentence construction, investing considerable effort with minimal returns.

3.3 The Dilemma of Teaching Method Application: The Difficulty of Matching Advanced Concepts with Actual Learning Conditions

The new curriculum reform advocates the independent, cooperative and inquiry learning style, but in the county high school Chinese classroom, these advanced ideas are difficult to be implemented, teachers can only return to the traditional teaching mode, and fall into the dilemma of "wanting to innovate but no conditions, using the traditional is inefficient".

(1) Inquiry-based and self-directed learning remain impractical. These approaches require students to possess foundational knowledge, independent thinking skills, and self-directed learning habits. However, students with weaker foundations often lack the necessary knowledge reserves and self-directed learning capabilities to conduct explorations. When teachers assign inquiry tasks or encourage self-directed learning, classroom silence frequently occurs, or the process becomes a mere formality. Students are left uncertain about where to begin, ultimately relying on teachers to deliver a complete explanation from start to finish.

(2) Cooperative learning has become a mere formality. While the initiative was meant to engage more students in classroom activities, high schools in county towns generally struggle with students' self-directed learning abilities. The process often degenerates into a one-sided dynamic where top performers lecture while underperformers passively listen. In some cases, underperforming students simply rely on others without engaging in independent thinking. Group discussions fail to delve into substantive exploration, let alone foster mutual inspiration or generate innovative ideas. Ultimately, cooperative learning proves to be ineffective in practice.

(3) The application of information technology in teaching proves ineffective. While tools like multimedia and online resources are designed to enhance instructional outcomes, they often overwhelm students with information, making it harder for them to identify and grasp key concepts. Many struggle with slow reading comprehension, rendering these resources ineffective. Consequently, multimedia teaching fails to achieve its intended purpose and may even distract students, impairing their focus during lessons.

3.4 The Difficulties of Teachers' Professional Development and Professional Attitude: More Work, Less Results, No Confidence

Students' poor academic foundation not only disrupts classroom instruction, but also significantly hampers teachers' professional development and work morale.

(1) Despite the heavy teaching workload, teachers often feel little sense of accomplishment. When working with students who lack foundational knowledge, educators must devote significantly more time and effort to lesson preparation, after-class tutoring, and grading assignments. They are not only required to teach high school-level content but also to review and reinforce material from junior high or even elementary school. Despite their considerable efforts, students show little improvement, and academic performance remains stagnant. This "high input, low output" scenario severely undermines teachers' motivation, and over time, it can lead to burnout.

(2) Insufficient motivation for professional development and lack of focus in teaching research activities. The heavy teaching workload consumes teachers' time for professional learning and pedagogical research. Many teachers are preoccupied with daily teaching tasks, and school-organized teaching research activities often become mere formalities due to the absence of effective methods to address learning difficulties, failing to meet teachers' practical needs. Teachers lack the drive for innovation in teaching methods and strategies, easily falling into repetitive and mechanical teaching

patterns.

4 Countermeasures and Suggestions for Solving the Difficulties in Chinese Teaching in County High Schools

Faced with the reality of low-quality student intake, county-level high school Chinese language teaching cannot passively wait or complain; it must proactively seek solutions. This requires systematic reforms in multiple aspects, including teaching strategies, evaluation systems, teacher development, and home-school collaboration.

4.1 Transform Teaching Concepts, Implement Precision Teaching and Tiered Guidance

(1) Establish the concept of "teaching based on learning." Teachers should completely abandon the notion of "only referring to textbooks and teaching references," and instead develop teaching starting points and objectives that align with students' actual cognitive levels. Acknowledge individual differences among students, accept their shortcomings, and provide patient guidance to advance instruction step by step.

(2) Implement precision stratified instruction. Scientifically stratify teaching objectives, content, assignment design, and after-class tutoring. For instance, assignments should be divided into mandatory foundational tasks and optional extension exercises. During lessons, tailor questions to students' proficiency levels. For after-class support, provide one-on-one or small-group targeted assistance to struggling learners, focusing on reinforcing core knowledge and building their confidence in learning.

(3) Strengthen the transition teaching between junior high and senior high school. At the beginning of the first year of senior high school, dedicated time should be allocated to systematically review and consolidate key Chinese language knowledge from junior high school, such as classical Chinese real words and function words, basic grammar, and reading methods, to bridge knowledge gaps and lay a solid foundation for high school studies.

4.2 Optimize Teaching Content and Construct School-based Curriculum System in Line with Students' Learning Conditions

(1) Implement school-based adaptations of the unified textbooks. Instead of blindly copying the textbooks, appropriate content selection, reorganization, and simplification should be conducted based on students' comprehension abilities. For texts with excessively high difficulty, the interpretation requirements may be reduced or they may be designated as supplementary reading materials. For content that students find challenging to understand, necessary background knowledge and supplementary materials should be provided.

(2) Develop school-based courses and learning materials tailored to students. By incorporating local cultural elements and students' daily experiences, create engaging and accessible content such as reading works by local authors, learning to write practical documents like leave requests and notices, and reading classic literature. These relatable materials will spark students' interest in learning.

(3) Vigorously promote the whole-book reading and extensive reading initiative. Given students' limited reading habits and insufficient knowledge accumulation, reading should be prioritized as a core educational focus. Develop a systematic reading plan, recommend suitable books for students at different proficiency levels, and teach them efficient reading techniques. Additionally, organize reading discussion sessions and reading note-sharing activities to encourage students to read more and achieve sufficient reading volume, thereby fundamentally enhancing their Chinese language proficiency.

4.3 Improve Teaching Methods to Make Classes More Engaging and Effective

(1) Employ diverse teaching methodologies flexibly to stimulate students' learning interest. Considering students' tendency to lose focus, incorporate situational teaching, storytelling, and role-playing to make the classroom more engaging and captivating. Avoid dry lectures; instead, provide ample opportunities for students to participate, engage in hands-on activities, and reflect.

(2) Refine the group collaborative learning model to ensure full student participation. When organizing group work, plan meticulously: assign specific tasks to each member to prevent idleness; provide guidance and supervision during discussions to help students listen attentively, articulate ideas clearly, and collaborate effectively; establish a balanced evaluation system that assesses both the group's overall performance and individual contributions.

(3) Utilize information technology to enhance teaching and address learning challenges. Effectively employ tools like micro-lectures, short videos, and online learning platforms to transform abstract concepts into intuitive and accessible content, helping students grasp complex material. For example, when teaching classical Chinese, provide audio recordings of text readings, background video introductions, and micro-lectures explaining key vocabulary and phrases. This allows students to review and reinforce their understanding repeatedly after class, ensuring they fully grasp the material not covered in lectures.

4.4 Reform the Evaluation System, Pay attention to Pprocess and Developmental Evaluation

(1) Establish a diversified evaluation system. Shift from the "single test paper determines the grade" approach to incorporating classroom performance, homework completion, reading notes, and practical activities (such as recitation, speech, and textbook drama performances) into the assessment scope, thereby comprehensively evaluating students' Chinese literacy.

(2) Enhance formative and developmental assessments. Focus on students' progress and effort during the learning process, rather than solely on final outcomes. For students with weaker foundations, adopt longitudinal comparison approaches, providing affirmation and encouragement as long as they show improvement. Through positive feedback, help students build confidence and motivate their learning.

4.5 Strengthening the Teacher Team to Enhance the Capacity of Addressing Learning Difficulties

(1) Conduct targeted school-based teaching research. The teaching research activities focus on "effective teaching strategies under the background of low student quality," organizing collective lesson preparation, case study of teaching examples, and thematic discussions among teachers. Successful experiences in transforming underachieving students are shared, and teaching challenges are collaboratively addressed.

(2) Focus on teachers' mental health and enhance professional well-being. School administrators should understand the pressures faced by teachers, implement appropriate assessments, and pay more attention to their physical and mental health. Through humanistic care and incentive mechanisms, teachers' professional well-being and sense of belonging can be strengthened, thereby stimulating their work enthusiasm.

(3) Encourage teachers to engage in teaching reflection and action research. Guide educators to treat teaching challenges as research subjects, actively exploring teaching models and strategies tailored to their students. Encourage teachers to write teaching cases and reflective journals, thereby enhancing professional competence through practice and reflection.

4.6 Strengthening Home-School Collaboration to Form a Synergistic Educational Effort

Students' growth cannot be achieved without the support of their families. Schools should enhance communication with parents through various means such as parent-teacher conferences, home visits, and parent education programs. This aims to guide parents in establishing correct educational concepts, paying attention to children's learning habits and mental health, and cooperating with schools in conducting ideological work and after-school supervision for students. Such efforts will foster a positive atmosphere of collaborative education between families and schools.

5 Conclusion

The low academic caliber of county high school students epitomizes the uneven development of basic education, creating complex challenges for Chinese language instruction. This issue reflects broader societal problems in education. To address this, educators must confront reality, shift mindsets, and embrace innovation. Teachers should remain committed to their educational mission, support every student, and explore tailored teaching methods. Schools and education authorities must create better development environments for county high schools by providing stronger policy support, resources, and evaluation systems. Only through these measures can we gradually improve the teaching ecosystem, enhance educational quality, and ensure county students receive equitable, high-quality education that lays a solid cultural foundation for their future growth. This long-term endeavor demands sustained attention and relentless effort.

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