as percentage of GNP: 2%
Public current expenditure by level of education (1996)
pre-primary: 1.3%
primary: 36.1%
secondary: 32.2%
tertiary: 15.6%
Gross enrolment ratios by level of education (1997)
pre-primary: 28%
primary: 123%
secondary: 70%
tertiary: 6%

Source: UNESCO statistical yearbook, 1998 and 1999; [...] data not available.
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National Curriculum for Basic Education in The People’s Republic of China

YUQUAN QIAO
The paper mainly introduces and analyses the situation and developmental trend of China’s national curriculum for basic education, which is part of the analysis of the national curriculum for basic education in East and Southeast Asia.

BRIEF INTRODUCTION ON THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Pertinent laws and policies bearing on the national curriculum for basic education

The general purpose and goals of education in China has been cited in the National Constitution and the Education Law of 1996, which provides the fundamental basis for curriculum policies. The National People’s Congress promulgated the Compulsory Education Law in 1986, and 9-year compulsory education was implemented nationally, which directly resulted in the design and implementation of the current “Curriculum Planning for Full-time Primary and Secondary Schools” in 1992. The development and reform of the national curriculum is usually initiated and directed by the central government.

Since the 1980s, the most important four documents issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the State Council specifically related to the curriculum:

1. “Decisions on the Reform of Educational System and Structure” in 1985, which establishes the system of schooling and administration of basic education, and lays down the principle that “local governments should mainly be responsible for basic education and the national curriculum” shows it is still centralized;
2. “Guidelines for the Reform and Development of Education in China” in 1993, clarifying the directions and basic policies for the development of basic education until the early years of the twenty-first century;

“The Action Scheme for Invigorating Education Towards the Twenty-first Century” was issued in 1999. The “Project of Curriculum Reform of Basic Education” is regarded as one of the key projects. The mission of the project is to design a new basic education curriculum system for the twenty-first century.

4. “Decision on the Deepening of Education Reform and the Full Promotion of Quality Education” was issued by the central government in 1999. An effort is made to reorient and improve the education system through innovative curricular reform.

Curriculum policies are usually set out by the Ministry of Education (MOE) through documents, such as curriculum planning, syllabi, textbooks lists, recommendation, as well as regulations. For example, MOE is developing the document on “Guidelines for the Reform of the National Curriculum in Basic Education” which will direct the reform and development of the national curriculum in China.
The underlying philosophy and rationale for the national curriculum

The underlying philosophy and rationale for the national curriculum is reflected in the Education Law and other key documents issued by the central government, and is aligned closely with the major goals and objectives of basic education. They respond to national priorities and contribute to the achievement of socioeconomic development goals. In the future, it will focus on promoting development through the integration of scientific and technological upgrades, and educational development. The principal motivating factor for curriculum reform is providing the human resources necessary to ensure sustainable national development.

China has formulated and implemented the strategy of “revitalizing the country through science and education” and put the development of education as a strategic priority in its socialist modernization drive. China constantly pushed forward the development and reform of education directed towards the principle of “Education should be oriented towards the modernization drive, the world and the future,” and carries out the philosophy and policy of “Education must serve the socialist modernization drive and must be combined with productive labor in order to support builders and successors with all-around development—morally, intellectually, physically and aesthetically—for the socialist cause.” Essentially, to improve the quality of education means to develop a new generation with an innovative spirit and practical ability to meet the challenges of the future. The development of education will be realized through reform and innovation. The general direction for ongoing curriculum reform is towards achieving the nation’s vision to prepare children to become knowledgeable, trained and skilled individuals able to meet the growing needs and challenges of the millennium.

Major goals and objectives of basic education

Based mainly on preparing the younger generation with appropriate moral, intellectual accomplishments, physical fitness, and the ability for esthetic appreciation, particularly the spiritual and also the ability to think and act independently and creatively, and learning throughout one’s life, the aims/objectives of curriculum reform mainly consist of the following shifts:

- **Curriculum structure**: shift from disciplinary segregation to well-balanced, integrated curriculum that is more adaptive to learners’ choices;
- **Curriculum contents**: shift from systematic presentation of individual disciplines and excessive emphasis on traditional knowledge to loose integration among modern society; technological development and the learners’ life;
- **Teaching/learning materials**: shift from unified materials to alternatives for meeting the different needs of the schools and students;
- **Teaching/learning processes**: shift from passive learning modes, e.g., rigid memorization, imitation to active learning, e.g., participatory observation, actual practice, hands on, peer-group work;
- Curriculum evaluation: shift from excessive emphases on memorization of facts and competitive examination to the integrated assessment to
dual focus not only on the outcomes but also on the learners’ development and teaching improvement;
- Curriculum management: shift from highly centralized to a shared management with responsibilities distributed among the nation, localities
and schools.

In revisiting the goals and objectives of basic education, emphasis is given to equipping pupils with the basic knowledge and skills needed to
be self-sufficient and productive citizens in an increasingly globalized, rapidly changing, competitive and highly technological economic
environment; improving the quality and scope of student’s development-based education; strengthening science and technology education,
developing competence in information technology (IT); developing the capacity for flexibility, adaptation, problem-solving, creativity, critical
thinking, initiative and lifelong learning, emphasizing international awareness and foreign languages teaching/learning. Of special emphasis, is
the development of creative thinking that should cover the entire process of learning/teaching.

UNESCO’s four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together, are the basic considerations
in trying to explore and empower the potential and talents of children, and to reform the national curriculum.

Generally speaking, in China, there are two major goals and objectives of basic education: (1) implementing the 9-year compulsory
education in order to realize the objective of education for all, and to improve the quality of all citizens; (2) to improve the quality of education
in order to achieve the aims of developing citizens with the spirit and ability of innovation/creativity, who will play a key role in the social-
economic progress, and advance in science and technology.

The basic education curriculum covers pre-primary, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels, ranging from 12 to 15 years in
duration. The objectives of the curriculum is expected to foster the learners’ commitment to the socialist nation, formulation of appropriate
values, awareness of one’s social and legal responsibilities, readiness to engage in productive work and to continue learning throughout life, to
be a responsible citizen. Such a curriculum is designed to enable the learners: (1) to understand China’s history and her current status, and thus
be ready to assume responsibilities for their personal and national development, and at the same time to respect other nations and their cultures
and to be ready to participate in international development and communication; (2) to master the basic skills for reading, writing and arithmetic
operation, basic knowledge for culture and science; to express themselves, to communicate with others, to process information, to learn basic
labor skills, so that they can adapt effectively to the learning society; (3) to develop, through observation and experience, a scientific
understanding of the environment, sustainable development and ecological ethics, and to be able to identify, analyze and solve problems in their
daily life; (4) to understand and care for the society, to form appropriate moral values and behavioral habits, ready to serve the people and the
community; (5) to develop sound self-awareness and independent personality and to take good care of life, learn to rationally plan for and assess
one’s own development and to cope with disappointments in social life; to be accustomed to regular physical exercise and proper living habits; (6) to develop healthy interest in appreciating the beauty of nature, society, science and art; to be inclined to join in different cultural activities. It is envisaged that this can be achieved by emphasizing science and technology, using information technology, encouraging critical and creative thinking, broadening scientific and technological knowledge and promoting vocational efficiency. These goals have been translated into educational policies and further elaborated on as the basic education framework.

Changing structures and organization of learning content:

The process of curriculum development is based on a needs-analysis of the person and nation, followed by planning, development, piloting, dissemination and implementation, evaluation and then back to the identification of needs and revision. Usually, the faster the socioeconomic environment change, the shorter cyclical time for the development of curriculum. Now, the integrated approach is the main focus in the design of the Integrated Curriculum for Primary School and Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School.

The Ministry of Education is organizing the design and experiment of the new curriculum. The process is divided into three stages: design, experiment and extension. In the design stage, the new curriculum building consists of three parts: (1) “Guidelines for the Curriculum Reform of Basic Education,” which includes the direction, principles, objectives, policies and strategies, and general arrangement of the curriculum reform, which will be issued by the middle of 2001; (2) development of National Curriculum Standards. Using curriculum standards that replace the syllabi clearly shows the shift from subject-centered, teacher-centered to student’s development-centered, and shift from one-way of knowledge to the all-round development including value and attitude. The curriculum standards for basic education represent, by nature, the basic requirements of a nation for the development of its younger generation in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and social values. In addition, the curriculum standards may also serve as the criteria of curriculum assessment as well as guidelines for materials development; (3) developing the new teaching materials based on two parts mentioned above.

The prevailing organizational structures and mechanisms of consultation processes

The national curriculum is developed centrally by the MOE, which is responsible for the design and development of the school curriculum from preschool to upper secondary based on governmental educational policy. The national curriculum promotes unity through the use of a single syllabus and the provision of the same core subjects for all pupils in all schools. Three main departments take part in the process within the MOE: the Department of Basic Education which plays the main role in the design and development of the school curriculum; the Department of Teacher Education which is responsible for the teacher training of pre-service and in-service; the Department of Vocational and Technical Education which is responsible for the secondary schools of vocational and technical schools. Some other departments within the MOE, for
example, the Department of Students Management for Higher Education, take part in policymaking for basic education because they control the University Entrance Examinations. The Department of Basic Education also cooperates with the State Higher Education Examination Center, which is responsible for designing the higher education entrance examinations. Higher education entrance examinations influence the implementation of the school curriculum, especially for senior secondary school, which often focuses on preparing students for these exams rather than on the prescribed secondary school curriculum. These examinations tend to be very difficult due to the interests of top universities to select only the best candidates. Matters that have macro policy and financial implications need to be approved by a higher committee or even by the State Council. New curriculum development usually begins with a policy directive from policymakers or national planning for socioeconomic development.

The network of national curriculum development mainly consists of three parts. Part one is the administrative system, which includes the Department of Basic Education of MOE and Divisions of Basic Education in provinces and cities as well as country/district level. The Department of Basic Education plays an important role in directing and organizing the national curriculum development. Part 2 is the system of the Teaching Research Institutes or Education Research Institutes/Education Colleges with a different administrative function. There exist similar organizations from country to province, which assist the division of basic education of the same level to implement the curriculum such as the measurement of students’ achievement, the entrance from junior school to senior school, implementation of national curriculum planning, teacher training for the use of new teaching materials. The personnel of these institutes are usually teachers or principals who are good at learning the local situation and have teaching experience. They play a key role in implementing and providing feedback on the national curriculum from local to MOE.

Part 3 consists of 11 Curriculum Development and Teaching Material Centers (one is national level—the National Center of Curriculum and Teaching Material for Basic Education, and ten are regional agencies located at teacher universities, such as Fujian Teacher University, Nanjing Teacher University. The National Center assists the Department of (MOE) to coordinate and organize the process of curriculum development. The ten centers play an important role in wider participation in the curriculum development process, particularly for getting the involvement of professional forces, such as subject specialists and curriculum experts, for guiding the piloting program of the new curriculum for the areas around the center, and for listening to parents and social groups. China has developed a curriculum network involving all regions of the country in elaborating and implementing the national curriculum according to local realities and needs. Principals and leading teachers from all school levels participate in this network, along with staff from regional educational offices.

**Promoting interdisciplinarity and reconceptualizing subject matter content**
The structure of the proposed curriculum will be integrated, balanced and adapted to involve disciplines in learning areas, more focus on integrated courses rather than well-defined subjects. Besides curriculum content and distribution of instruction, time should adapt to the learners’ readiness, development of disciplines, social changes, and subculture differences as well as the differences between the individual learners.

The new curriculum will be composed of disciplinary subjects and integrated courses so that the learners may have more time for self-directed studies. The integrated courses will play the main role in primary school. In junior high school, there are disciplinary subjects as well as integrated courses but encouraging the experiment of integrated courses. For senior high school, disciplinary subjects still play the key role but the model and content need to be revised. It will be relevant to society, technologies/sciences and students’ development by introducing “integrated practices” through supervised research, community services, labor-skill training and other trainings necessary for the promotion of the students’ problem-solving capabilities. Reconceptualizing subject matter content into interrelated themes or topics (as against dividing these into separate subjects or fields of studies) and highlighting their coherence and connectedness as well as reorienting instructional methods and pedagogies towards interdisciplinary and holistic approaches.

The notion and ability of learning and knowledge are more important and essential:

In the time of knowledge explosion and rapid advance in science and technology, particularly for ICT to be quickly popularized, first of all, we should be aware of what knowledge is most useful and common to human beings. It is essential, for curriculum reform to shift from the overload of knowledge and teaching/learning to benefit the students’ development. Pupils should foster basic knowledge and skills that have been carefully chosen. It is more important for students to foster the scientific spirit and methods, and the ability of collecting and dealing with knowledge or information. That is, learning to know, which not only needs fostering the basic knowledge but also including the development of values and attitudes as well as methods. IT education will be more important, and introduced and expanded in primary and middle schools across the country in the next five to 10 years.

Making the learning/teaching more relevant to students’ development

The practical application skills and work-related experiences and competencies will be similarly developed among students (learning to do). In addition to the State-prescribed compulsory courses, schools at the grassroots will be able to arrange more elective learning programs according to the particular needs of the learners and the local community. In practice, primary schooling is mainly organized around the core curriculum. The elective courses are to be introduced in secondary schools.

Technical education will be strengthened as a means to foster the students’ vocational orientation. Technical contents in rural secondary schools should be designed to correspond with the community’s economic development. Upon completion of such technical training programs,
students may obtain a “Green Certificate” together with their graduation certificates for general education. Urban secondary schools should also introduce relevant vocational or technical training programs to introduce competency-based programmes at both primary and secondary levels.

Let students become more independent and creative

This is an attempt to transform traditional approaches of teacher-centered and subject-centered curriculum in which students play a largely passive role, and which stifle both the pupils’ and teachers’ creativity. Not only do basic knowledge and skills function as the major objectives, but also critical and creative thinking, reasoning faculties, emotional skills and qualities, creative/aesthetic sense, spiritual well-being, or self-knowledge, discovery and development, will be encouraged among students (learning to be). The underlying theoretical principle of national curriculum formulation now is that of general education, using an integrated approach in curriculum planning. The curriculum includes content and skills, with emphasis on the development of basic skills, the acquisition of knowledge and thinking skills. Each subject must also incorporate the inculcation of moral values and attitudes.

The proposed national curriculum standards should accommodate the different stages of children’s development. At the pre-primary level, the curriculum focus will be on health care, proper habits formation and orientation for formal schooling. The learning modes are primarily playing games, hands-on activities. During the nine-year compulsory education cycle, the standards should reflect the functional qualities necessary for citizenship and should be attainable by all children. The curriculum at upper secondary level should prepare students either for post-secondary learning at college level or for enterprising competencies. Special education should enable handicapped children of school age with literacy, life skills and, in possible circumstances, income-generation skills so that they could adapt to the social life. Efforts to develop curricula that will more effectively prepare young people to meet the demands of contemporary and future society are reflected in the growing trend.

In order to realize the objective of more independence and creativity among pupils, the curriculum needs reforming in its contents and methods of learning/teaching as well as in improving relationship between students and teachers. The new curriculum will be improved in terms of curriculum planning and curriculum standards. For example, integrated practice (as in the proposed curriculum planning above) is arranged from primary to senior high school. The curriculum mainly consists of research studies, district service, social practice, and technical education. It is emphasized that students develop creative awareness, to learn scientific learning methods, and to cultivate abilities of using knowledge into practice through the curriculum of comprehensive practice. It can also contribute to forming a close relationship between school and society, and developing students’ sense of responsibility.

Basic education becoming more open to the outside world
With the development of a global economy and the advance in science and technology, the shared rooms are becoming larger. China will be a member of the World Trade Organization, and learning something about foreign countries does not mean knowing something strange, but becoming a necessary part for daily life and the economy in the long run. The areas of concern in educational content relating to issues of global significance include environmental change and degradation, population control, gender issues, and international understanding and cooperation. Importantly, it indicates a preoccupation with developing curricula fostering respect for, and preservation of, cultural traditions and indigenous values and ways of life, while preparing young people to be part of the modern global society. China tries to find a balance between traditional/national and modern/global elements in the curriculum. Attitudes and values are imparted to students that characterize both their immediate societies and the broader global society. In both primary and secondary schools, the theme of learning to live together is also taught through selected contents of several topics, such as global education, population education, education for environmental protection, technical education, peace education, HIV/AIDS prevention, etc.

It is realized that foreign languages learning/teaching plays a key role in introducing foreign cultures and in communicating with each other. MOE has just issued the policy document about English language learning/teaching, that is, starting in 2001 the English language will gradually be included in the core curriculum beginning in the third grade.

Reforming the system of curriculum management is powerful and effective

Shanghai’s case inspires the curriculum reform in China. Since Shanghai designed and developed their curriculum and teaching materials in 1992, they have made remarkable progress in the quality of education, and progress in its modernization drive for basic education nationally. That means that it is possible for curriculum reform to quickly change and make palpable progress through the shift in the administrative system of curricula.

In order to make the curriculum relevant to the various contexts, curriculum management responsibilities will be shared at the national, local and school levels. The Ministry of Education will be responsible for macro supervision, in terms of planning, development of the national standards and guidelines for text development, teacher training, regulations for curriculum assessment, as well as management at the provincial and grassroots levels. Local education authorities at the provincial level are expected to coordinate the implementation of the national curriculum and planning and of the local curriculum. Educational administration of establishments at the prefecture and country levels is to play a supervisory and facilitative role for the effective implementation at the grassroots levels.

Schools are the major players in curriculum implementation and transaction. They are eligible for selecting or developing additional learning materials according to the particular needs of the community and the students. It is also the obligation of the schools to provide feedback to education authorities on implementation status and suggestions for further improvement of the curriculum.
In view of the proposed curriculum reform as a long-term systematic project to be carried out in a diversified context, an incremental approach will be adopted for implementation. The concrete principles may include “experiment first on a voluntary basis and no national implementation until the new system is ready.” Next year, the Ministry of Education will experiment on the new curriculum in selected areas. At the same time, the Ministry is working hard to revise the existing curriculum framework, syllabi and textbooks as a transition before the general implementation of the new program.

The central government has allocated the necessary funds for the preparatory work, such as conducting field surveys on the current status of the existing curriculum, drafting new curriculum frameworks and the curriculum standards for different subjects. As a priority project in the overall education development, it will receive extensive administrative and financial support in the forthcoming decade. Another important component is the creation of an accountable monitoring mechanism to oversee the progress and cost-effectiveness of the project.

In response to the demand of the new curriculum implementation, systematic staff-development programs should be launched among school principals, subject teachers as well as project facilitators, e.g., system managers, professional specialists. The proposed strategies will be threefold, namely, to involve the current teachers (around 10 million) in various in-service training programs to upgrade their competencies; to introduce accreditation, operations to measure teachers’ professional qualifications, and corresponding salary system; and, to shape the pre-service teacher training systems of disciplines and curriculum reestablishment.

The existing pedagogic research and development network at provincial, prefecture and country levels reorient their functions and performance and play a facilitative role in the construction and development of the new curriculum. It is expected that throughout the process, a highly professional task force for curriculum reform could be organized.

In recognition of the critical importance and potential impact of curriculum reform on the education system operation, an involving mechanism should be maintained through all channels including mass media to enlist the active participation of parents, local expertise, government officials, and educators themselves. The new program should benefit, by means of intensive exchanges and collaboration, from the useful curriculum development experiences from all over the world.

The central authority is now into more curriculum planning. For example, there are at least two curriculum planning units for junior high school or grades 7–9: one is integrated-based curriculum planning (mentioned above), the other is “subject-based curriculum planning”.

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Lesson timetables: CHINA
Yuquan Qiao

The Current National 9-year Compulsory Curriculum Planning for Basic Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Curriculum</th>
<th>Grade/Hours (per week)</th>
<th>Total Hours</th>
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<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
<td>Primary</td>
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<td><strong>Junior High</strong></td>
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<td>Math</td>
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<td>Foreign Languages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
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The Proposed National 9-year Compulsory Education Curriculum Integrated–based

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<td>4. Science</td>
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<td>6. Math</td>
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Designing and implementing local curricula

*The current national 9-year compulsory curriculum planning*

In order to implement “Compulsory Education Law” in 1986 issued by the National People’s Congress, MOE designed and have been implementing Curriculum Planning for Full-time Primary and Secondary Schools nationally. The existing curriculum design for basic education describes the subject matter or topical coverage by grade level or year and the number of hours devoted to each subject or topic at the primary and junior secondary grades.

*The adoption of the national curriculum in the formal school system*

The development and implementation of the curriculum was predominantly centralized from the 1950s to the 1980s. Almost all schools from primary to senior high school adopted some curriculum planning, syllabi, and textbooks. They were introduced in order to meet the needs of localities and schools. There were 8 sets of textbooks developed in different locations by textbook publishers. Since the early 1990s the implementation of the national curriculum has further changed, and the structure of the curriculum was divided into two parts: national curricular/subjects and local-based curricular/subjects. Primary and junior schools began to implement the “Curriculum Scheme for Full-time Primary and Secondary School “developed by the MOE. National curricula were arranged by the MOE, and locally based curricula were arranged by the authorities of provincial level or prefecture/city level in the light of local realities and needs. Schools must adopt the national curriculum and local-based curriculum, in addition to a few optional courses and outclass activities adopted by schools. The main pattern is that a central and national curriculum is developed by regional authorities responsible for implementing these policies in schools within their specific province or district. Genuine school-based curriculum development does not appear to take place on a significant scale in China.

At the same time, MOE began to carry out another policy, which allowed Zhejing Province and Shanghai to develop their syllabus and textbooks based on the national syllabus. This also means that the schools in the two areas get more opportunities to develop the curriculum themselves. The policy results in the development of multi-syllabus and textbooks, which will have meaningful impact on the system of development and implementation of curriculum in China.

Even though it has a strong tradition of centralizing the curriculum, there always exist varying degrees of decision-making at regional, local and school levels. The diversity in many fields is maintained through the existence of the Nation. Considerable responsibility is devolved to regional educational authorities, which adapt central curriculum objectives to local contexts where this is felt to be necessary. The system’s reform of the curriculum structure is moving forward to a three-level model in the beginning of the twenty-first century: national, local-based and school-based curriculum.
The central authority has a growing awareness of the importance of adopting more genuinely participatory approaches to the
process, and tends to use strategies of local-based and broad-based community participation in curriculum development. It encourages locals, schools and teachers to be innovative in interpreting and adapting the basic curriculum guidelines to suit the local reality and needs. It expresses a concern to involve teachers to a greater extent in future reforms in an effort to improve the curriculum design and the degree to which they are implemented, and encourage the participation of teachers in the development of textbooks and other instructional materials.

**The development and management of textbooks and instructional materials**

The development and management of textbooks and instructional materials is shifting from the state-based system to the market-based system. In the past, the central authority of education directly controlled the compilation and development of textbooks and teachers’ guides by approving a few state-owned educational presses. At present, any publishing house with qualification, including private companies, can take part in the textbook development through a certain process. For the national curriculum, the publishing house must submit textbook drafts to the MOE for approval. All the textbooks are compiled and revised in accordance with the syllabus or curriculum standards before their implementation. There are many textbook companies, including both public and private, and they compete with each other.

Education boards in local districts are supposed to select the textbook for each subject which will be used in schools in their areas. Schools are the major players in curriculum implementation and transaction. They are eligible for selecting or developing additional learning materials according to the particular needs of the community and the students. It is the obligation of the schools also to provide feedback to education authorities on the implementation status and make suggestions for further improvement of the learning materials.

China is exploring a new management system, which will be established for the development of instructional materials. All professional institutions (e.g., research institutions, colleges, publishers, schools as well as individual expertise) are eligible, with the approval of the Ministry of Education and provincial education authorities, for textbook compilation following the prescribed curriculum standards. The drafted textbooks will undergo professional examination and will be approved by the National Textbook Examination Committee for national subjects and corresponding provincial committees for local materials. Education authorities should publish the list of authorized textbooks regularly for schools to make selections within the curriculum framework. Textbooks are the primary but not the only curriculum resource for teaching and learning. Schools are requested to make full use of all the resources available on the campus (e.g., library, science laboratories and other facilities) in the community and increasingly through information technologies.

**The training of teachers for curriculum implementation**

China implements a system of teachers’ qualifications. According to the provisions of the Regulations on Teachers’ Qualifications, the qualifications of teachers in basic education are classified into four categories, namely, qualifications of kindergarten teachers, qualifications of primary school teachers, qualifications of lower secondary school teachers, and the qualifications of upper secondary school teachers. The State sets
the required academic qualifications of various categories of teachers: kindergarten
teachers should possess qualifications equal to or higher than the completion of
kindergarten teachers training schools; primary school teachers should possess
qualifications equal to or higher than the completion of teacher-training schools (normal
schools), lower secondary school teachers should possess qualifications equal to or higher
than the completion of junior teachers college; upper secondary school teachers should
possess qualifications equal to or higher than the completion of bachelor programs
provided by teachers colleges/universities.

The Chinese government has actively promoted the training and continuing education
of teachers so as to constantly enhance the overall quality of the teaching force. The
educational institutions engaged in the training of school teachers consist mainly of
teacher education institutions in various levels, in-service teacher training schools or
institutes, and other training institutions, as well as the schools employing teachers.
Institutions engaged in the training of college teachers mainly consist of the six key
normal universities directly under the Ministry of Education, and a number of teacher
universities as well as college teacher training centers under the provinces. At present, as
far as the in-service training of school teachers is concerned, when the task of making up
their deficiencies in academic qualifications has been basically concluded, the priorities
for training will be shifted to their continuing education. In 1999, MOE proposed the
implementation of “The Project of Continuing Education for Primary and Secondary
School Teachers.” The objectives of the Project are to train all the teachers in order to
meet the needs of quality education, particularly the training for implementing the new
national curriculum, universalizing IT education and improving the pedagogical practice.

The philosophy underpinning the curriculum in teacher education is similar to basic
education. A balance of conceptual and procedural knowledge for developing deeper
understanding of a lesser number of scientific concepts is promoted. The predominant
focus in schools currently appears to be upon the transmission of a large content base
through didactic practice. Teacher colleges/universities are accustomed to copying
comprehensive universities, and taking care of developing discipline knowledge and
research, and paying little attention to pedagogical knowledge and abilities. It is
concerned that without adequate in-service training and support materials many teachers
will experience difficulty in making a transition to a competency-based approach. In the
real classroom situation, the approach of teacher-centered and subject-centered still
dominates, and teachers still dictate to students and still place emphasis on textbook
content.

How to change the notions and behaviors of learning for students and teaching for
teachers is a major challenge in implementing curriculum reform for basic education. The
new curriculum in China has showed many changes: from disciplinary segregation to
well-balanced, integrated curriculum that is more adaptive to learners’ choices; from
systematic presentation of individual disciplines and excessive emphasis on traditional
knowledge to closer integration among modern society, technological development and
the learners’ life; from passive-learning modes to rigid memorization and sole imitation
to students’ development-centered and active learning by adopting pedagogical practice,
such as participatory observation, hands-on practice, peer group work; from excessive
emphases on memorization of facts and competitive examination to the integrated
assessment to dual focus not only the outcomes but also on the learners’ development and teaching improvement. These changes require reforming the teacher education.

*Feedback Mechanisms on the Implementation of the National Curriculum*

By 1999 the net enrollment ratio of primary school-age children reached 99.1 percent. Some 94.3 percent of primary pupils graduated and continued their study in junior high school. The gross enrolment ratio of junior secondary school-age children reached 88.6 percent. Fifty percent of junior high school graduated and continued their schooling in various types of schools at upper secondary school. The nine-year compulsory schooling has made historic advances, and by the end of 1999, it was basically universalized in areas inhabited by 80 percent of the country’s population.

National achievement tests, or qualifying examinations at primary and secondary levels are not available. There is a link between the regular tests carried out in the classroom and the periodic tests set by official regulation. The former occurs at the end of each important chapter or textbook subject; the latter at the end of the school term or school year. The typical assessment of students is based on percentage calculation systems. For the areas of basically universalizing the 9-year compulsory education, students in primary grades do not usually need entrance examinations for junior high school, and the policy of going to junior high school near their living place has been carried out. From the point of view of not popularizing the 9-year compulsory education, there are usually entrance examinations from primary to junior high school organized by district/country. The entrance examinations for senior high school, particularly for key or famous schools, is very competitive. The examination is usually organized by the teaching research institute of the prefecture/district. Designing the examination has keenly influenced the teaching arrangement of junior high school. Current assessment technique still emphasizes fundamental knowledge and skills. Entrance examinations to the secondary level and higher education is mainly based on summative knowledge and memory. It takes more time for students to prepare and for teachers to teach according to the designated teaching/learning curriculum orientations. Both students and teachers are overloaded. The current approach does not take into consideration various categories of student achievement. Consideration has not yet been given to the inclusion of other assessment information (records, homework, out-of-class activities, etc.) and to a diagnosis of the individual development of students.

The problems have been prioritized in the process of reforming the curriculum and learning activities. Research-based studies on the state and effectiveness of various aspects of the national curriculum and its implementation, including the effectiveness of curriculum content, existing pedagogies and instructional approaches, teacher training, and of textbooks and instructional materials have been arranged. For example, MOE has organized the experts and professors of key education institutes or universities to collect and review all the senior high school entrance examination papers. The results and recommendations have been used for monitoring and improving the examinations, and for guides of teaching reform.

**Evaluation of curriculum reform**

China is doing its best to realize the general objectives of the shift, that is, from basic education for higher learning to quality education for all. Along with the reform and
development of the national curriculum for basic education, the possibility of revising the
College/University Entrance Examination and Entrance Examination for senior high
school is being explored. It will integrate the principle of learning throughout life, not just
simply education for higher learning or education for jobs, into the underlying rationale
and philosophy of basic education.

Teaching and learning are the primary processes in curriculum transaction, which
include not only the organized classroom instruction, activities on the campus but also
students’ independent studies outside the school. Apparently, improving the teaching and
learning processes is a critical area of curriculum intervention. The key factors for
successful curriculum implementation are related to teachers’ competencies, students’
readiness, relevance of materials and positive interactions between teachers and students.

Curriculum assessment plays a facilitative role in curriculum implementation. With
this view, various instruments will be designed to promote the students’ overall
development. One of the devices may be the performance report on students to be used to
monitor their scholastic achievements as well as their strengths and weaknesses.
Assessment should be an involving mechanism, which starts from teachers’ self-
evaluation, supplemented by inputs from peer teachers, principals, students and parents.
Teachers are expected to make full use of such feedback to reflect upon their practice and
hence to improve their instruction methods. Regular assessment should also be
undertaken at school level for principals, teachers, students, parents and community
members to review the newly introduced curriculum and to take necessary initiatives to
strengthen its effectiveness.

The current examination system should also be improved. The curriculum contents
should be predetermined on the bases of the curriculum standards. Teachers should not
make the examination results public but rather as reference for instructional
improvement. The conducting and frequency of examinations should be a school
decision. In those areas where compulsory education has not yet been achieved, graduates
of primary schools should have access to the nearest schools for secondary education
without selective entrance examinations.

The examination of more choices and different levels of higher education may be
introduced. A new policy of allowing provinces or universities to organize their college
entrance examinations on the total or some subjects may be approved. There are also
some policies available, such as encouraging senior secondary schools to recommend
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examination.

**RECENT AND ONGOING CURRICULAR REFORM INITIATIVES**

The current national 9-year compulsory curriculum for basic education has greatly
contributed to the universalization of the 9-year compulsory education, and to the
realization of the objectives of education for all. It can guarantee that all pupils get their
training of basic knowledge and abilities. For example, students in primary and secondary
schools usually are strong in math.
The existing curriculum designed in 1992 was felt to be inadequate in a number of ways. The contents and ways of learning/teaching are overloaded and too difficult for pupils to complete. A lot of knowledge or curriculum contents are backward, and fall behind the development of socioeconomic environments and the advance in sciences and technologies. Inadequate attention is paid to the importance of individual development and ability for creativity and practice. The design and implementation of curriculum is too centralized, and the development and ability of local-based and school-based curriculum are still weak.

By the end of 2000, China has realized the historic objective of “basically universalizing 9-year compulsory education,” which shows that development of education in China has entered a new stage. The central government is determined to speed up the development of education in order to further carry out a strategy of “revitalizing the country through science and education. In the future, it will focus on promoting development through the integration of scientific and technological innovations and educational progress. An effort is made to reorient and improve the educational system through curricular reform. Renewing the educational notions and ideas including personal growth, improving the design and implementation of teaching and curriculum with the personal growth, improving the design and implementation of teaching and the curriculum with the spirit of new time, are put into focus in order to respond to the changing social contexts, the learners’ needs as well as the expectations of the parents and the community.

MOE is organizing a new circle of design and development of a curriculum for basic education. The “Guidelines for the Curriculum Reform of Basic Education” will be issued this year. The curriculum standards will be completed in the middle of the year 2001. From next year, as a pilot, one or more countries or districts in every province will be ready to participate in the new curriculum reform experiment. At the same time, new teaching materials will enter the experimental schools. The proposed reform will be accomplished over two phases, to complete the design, experiment, and modification of the new curriculum system during the 2001–2003 period; then to gradually expand the new practice throughout the country around 2005.

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