

Research on Nine-Year System Schools in China: Progress and Prospects

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Abstract: Nine-year system schools play a pivotal role in China's compulsory education framework, designed to improve the overall quality of education. As highlighted by previous studies, such as 'School Choice in Chinese Context,' these schools address challenges in urban and rural disparities by promoting continuity in learning and reducing gaps in educational opportunities. They address the challenges of the transition between primary and junior secondary levels, offering a more seamless and comprehensive educational experience for students. These schools help ensure continuity in learning and reduce educational disparities across regions. A review of current academic literature reveals three major themes of discussion: educational management and school operation models, curriculum continuity and teaching quality improvement, and student development and psychological support. The literature highlights the advantages of nine-year system schools in resource integration and continuous education, while diverging on issues such as management models, curriculum design, and psychological support mechanisms. Looking ahead, future research should give more consideration to regional differences and subject-specific characteristics, strengthening empirical studies to provide a solid theoretical foundation for further improving the management strategies and educational systems of nine-year system schools.

Keywords: Nine-year system schools, educational management, curriculum continuity, psychological health

1. Introduction

As global education reforms progress, the structure and content of basic education have become central topics in policymaking worldwide. In China, the policy of nine-year compulsory education has been a focal point of attention and research. The analysis of Beijing's nearby enrollment policy highlights the effectiveness of such measures in reducing enrollment pressure in urban schools. These policies have also proven critical in achieving regional equity in education distribution.[1]Nine-year system schools integrate primary and junior secondary education within a unified school system, aiming to achieve coherence and continuity in curriculum design, instructional management, and faculty development, thereby enhancing overall educational quality. In recent years, this educational model has gained traction domestically, sparking increasing discussion and exploration within the education sector.

The appeal of the nine-year system education model lies in its break from the traditional separation of primary and junior secondary education systems. This approach seeks to mitigate the negative effects of stage transitions on students' development and facilitate their overall growth. Under traditional systems, students face significant adjustments during the transition from primary to junior secondary school, involving new environments, teaching methods, and content, which often result in adaptation challenges. By adopting integrated management and instructional approaches, nine-year system schools aim to reduce students' stress and anxiety during different learning stages. Additionally, as China emphasizes educational equity, the potential of nine-year system schools to balance urban and rural education development and bridge educational resource gaps has garnered attention from policymakers and scholars alike. The nine-year compulsory education policy in China serves as a cornerstone in promoting universal education access and reducing regional educational disparities.[2] Thus, examining the development of nine-year system schools not only reflects on contemporary educational reforms but also offers forward-looking insights into future educational development.

The academic community has conducted substantial research on nine-year system schools. This review aims to systematically organize existing studies, summarize their findings, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of this model. By reviewing the literature, we seek to clarify the prevailing issues and disagreements in current research, providing a comprehensive perspective for future studies and practices in the field. This review also contributes to understanding the practical impacts of this educational model and the challenges encountered during its implementation.

To systematically summarize and organize existing research on nine-year system schools, this review addresses the following core questions:

1. What are the key issues discussed in current academic studies on nine-year system schools?
2. What similarities and differences exist in scholars' perspectives on these issues?
3. What problems and challenges in the implementation of nine-year system schools have received insufficient scholarly attention?

As a distinct form of schooling within China's compulsory education system, nine-year system schools have drawn extensive interest from academia. Scholars have explored their advantages and challenges in educational management, student development, curriculum continuity, and policy implementation from various perspectives. This review classifies and analyzes 20 relevant studies under three main themes: educational management and school operation models, curriculum continuity and teaching quality improvement, and student development and psychological support.

2. Educational Management and School Operation Models of Nine-Year System Schools

Research on the educational management of nine-year system schools primarily focuses on improving educational efficiency, optimizing resource allocation, and reducing the adaptation issues associated with the transition from primary to junior secondary school through integrated management.[3] Some studies, such as *Strategies for Managing Nine-Year System Schools* and *Positioning and Systematic Improvement of Nine-Year System Schools*, emphasize the importance of the concepts of "integration" and "continuity" in the operation of nine-year system schools. This is reflected in the integration of management systems, the allocation and evaluation of teaching resources, and the construction of an overall campus culture.

2.1. Integration of Management Systems

Scholars such as Wang Yuguo and Jing Shiyong argue that the strength of nine-year system schools lies in their unified management model, which enhances administrative efficiency and standardizes teacher management and teaching standards.[4] However, other scholars, such as Wei Yuefang, have

pointed out that many nine-year system schools adopt the name "nine-year system" but continue to rely on traditional segmented management practices in implementation, failing to achieve true resource integration.[5] This superficial integration leads to inconsistencies in teacher resource allocation and management policies.

2.2. Allocation and Evaluation of Teaching Resources

Most scholars agree that nine-year system schools should adopt a cross-stage approach to teacher management. Liu Changquan proposed mechanisms for flexible teacher rotations and inter-grade exchanges.[6] While others, such as Zhu Min, argue that maintaining relative stability among teachers in primary and junior secondary stages is essential to avoid frequent adjustments that could negatively impact teaching quality.[7] This divergence in perspectives reflects the need for flexible adaptation of teacher management strategies to the specific circumstances of different schools.

2.3. Construction of an Overall Campus Culture:

Some scholars, such as Meng Xianbin, have highlighted the necessity of establishing a unified campus culture to realize the "integrated and continuous" educational philosophy of nine-year system schools. This approach fosters collective identity among teachers.[8] However, other researchers, such as Cheng Hehong, contend that the distinct characteristics of teachers and students at different stages should not be overlooked, as enforcing uniformity might undermine teacher enthusiasm and fail to meet the individualized developmental needs of students.[9] Scholars hold differing views on the degree to which campus culture should be unified.

3. Curriculum Articulation and Improvement of Educational Quality

Curriculum articulation is a key focus in research on nine-year system schools, aiming to address issues of content redundancy or gaps in the transition from primary to junior secondary education while enhancing students' adaptability during subject knowledge transitions. Studies, such as Research on Mathematics Curriculum Articulation in Nine-Year System Schools and Survey on the Current State of Curriculum Articulation in Nine-Year System Schools, emphasize the need for systematic curriculum articulation plans to ensure knowledge continuity. These plans are reflected in three aspects: the continuity and coherence of curriculum content, the adaptability of teaching methods, and the alignment of student learning approaches.

3.1. Continuity and Coherence of Curriculum Content

Scholars such as Liao Ting and others, through case studies on mathematics teaching, advocate for gradually introducing junior secondary-level content in the senior grades of primary school to reduce knowledge gaps during the transition.[10] Conversely, Chen Xinxin and Zhou Feng argue that separate transitional content should be designed for primary and junior secondary stages to ensure a solid foundational understanding before progressing to junior secondary learning.[11] This divergence stems from concerns about students' academic burden: some scholars worry that early introduction of advanced content could cause undue pressure, while others believe that well-designed articulation curricula can enhance students' cognitive abilities.

3.2. Adaptability of Teaching Methods

Some researchers, such as Zhou Feng, advocate for integrated teacher training and cross-stage collaborative research activities to promote coordination in teaching methods.[12] On the other hand, other researchers emphasize maintaining distinctions in teaching methods between primary and

junior secondary stages, recommending tailored approaches based on students' age differences. This debate reflects differing attitudes among scholars regarding teaching strategies in nine-year system schools: whether to pursue fully integrated teaching or adopt a phased teaching approach.

3.3. Alignment of Student Learning Approaches

Some researchers suggest that nine-year system schools can help senior primary school students gradually adapt to junior secondary learning styles by introducing autonomous learning tasks and inquiry-based assignments. However, Zhang Pingping argues that such transitional methods may be suitable for some senior primary students but could create additional stress for those with weaker learning abilities.[13] These differing views highlight scholars' attention to the individual differences among students and the need for personalized approaches to curriculum articulation.

4. Student Development and Psychological Health Support

Nine-year system schools demonstrate certain advantages in promoting students' continuous development and providing psychological health support, particularly in alleviating the stress and adaptation challenges during the transition from primary to junior secondary school. Research highlights the importance of psychological support during the transition period between primary and junior secondary stages. Students often face significant academic and social changes, making tailored psychological interventions crucial for their development. Studies, such as *Do Students in Nine-Year System Schools Develop Better than Those in Regular Schools?* and *Research on School-Based Career Education Curriculum Development in Nine-Year System Schools*, suggest that continuous curriculum design and moral education support in these schools contribute to enhancing students' psychological resilience. The research conclusions can be summarized in three key aspects: the necessity of psychological support mechanisms, the application of career education, and moral education and student management.

4.1. The Necessity of Psychological Support Mechanisms

Many scholars, such as Zhang Pingping, advocate for strengthened psychological counseling during the primary-to-junior secondary transition to help students cope with the pressures of the new academic stage.[14] Conversely, Meng Xianbin argues that psychological support for students in nine-year system schools should be provided throughout their education, with particular emphasis on introducing mental health courses in junior secondary school to ensure emotional stability.[15] This reveals differing scholarly opinions on the critical timing for psychological interventions.

4.2. The Application of Career Education

Chen Juan proposes that nine-year system schools can implement school-based career education curricula to help students develop career awareness and self-recognition abilities as early as the primary stage.[16] However, others argue that career education is more suitable for the junior secondary stage, where students have a clearer understanding of themselves, ensuring better outcomes. This divergence reflects differing views on the appropriate academic stage for integrating career education.

4.3. Moral Education and Student Management

Most scholars agree on the importance of cross-stage moral education courses in nine-year system schools to help students maintain consistent values throughout their primary and junior secondary years. [17]However, Jing Shiyong and others suggest that moral education should be adjusted

according to students' age groups: focusing on cultivating ideal beliefs in the junior secondary stage and emphasizing behavior development in the primary stage.[18] These differing perspectives on the adaptability of moral education content highlight the significance of stage-specific characteristics in curriculum design.

5. Conclusion

The comparative analysis above demonstrates that academic research on nine-year system schools has preliminarily established a multidimensional framework, but there remain significant differences in the implementation pathways and scholars' perspectives.

First, the theoretical advantages of management innovation in nine-year system schools are evident in terms of integration, but practical implementation is influenced by factors such as teacher management and cultural construction. Scholars are divided on how to achieve effective management, with some advocating for flexible strategies and others emphasizing unified integration. Schools need to tailor their management strategies to their specific circumstances, while academia can further explore the applicability of various management approaches in different contexts.

Second, curriculum articulation is a notable strength of nine-year system schools, but scholars hold differing opinions on how to achieve it. Discussions focus on teaching methods and content design, with considerations such as student workload and cognitive development at the forefront. Future research could experiment with different articulation strategies across stages and subjects to identify curriculum designs that best support student development.

Additionally, nine-year system schools exhibit clear advantages in supporting student development and psychological health, but scholars differ in their views on the details of support mechanisms. Key areas of debate include the timing and scope of psychological health support and career education. Some advocate for early integration beginning in primary school, while others emphasize introducing these supports at appropriate developmental stages. Future research in this area could involve long-term observational studies to track students' psychological and career development needs across different stages, thereby optimizing support strategies in nine-year system schools.

In summary, future research should strengthen empirical studies on different operational models, with a particular focus on the regional and disciplinary characteristics of management strategies, curriculum design, and student support mechanisms. This includes in-depth exploration of curriculum articulation and teaching quality improvement, as well as student development and psychological health support, to achieve the comprehensive educational objectives of nine-year system schools.

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