Promoting Quality Leaning through Enhanced Multi-grade Teaching

In the People’s Republic of China

Review Report

Evolution of China’s Policies on Multi-grade Teaching over 65 Years

Abstract: Since the founding of new China in 1949, multi-grade teaching has been playing an important role in universalizing and improving primary education in rural China. Over the 65 years, China’s policies on multi-grade teaching have been evolving with the growth of national strength and modifications of education development objectives. The evolution could be roughly put into four stages: from 1949 to 1979, multi-grade teaching grew in scale as the state approved of it and encouraged localities to conduct multi-grade teaching depending on the circumstances; from 1980-2000, multi-grade teaching continued to grow in scale as the state strengthened management over it, worked to fulfill its function in universalizing compulsory education, and took steps to promote multi-grade teaching and to improve education quality in multiple aspects; from 2001 to 2009, multi-grade teaching was scaled down as the state adjusted and optimized its layout; and from 2010 till now, the state put more efforts into teaching station building, took various measures to improve school-running conditions, and strived to upgrade education quality including that of multi-grade teaching.

Key Words: multi-grade teaching; policies; evolution

Introduction

Multi-grade teaching has a long history in China. Its evolution epitomized and witnessed China’s educational development. To look back at the development course of multi-grade teaching in China is significant for grasping and understanding the evolution of China’s multi-grade education policies in recent decades.

An embryo form of multi-grade teaching appeared in China as early as 4,000 years ago. At that time the productivity level was low and social economy was underdeveloped. Schools were of small scales with small numbers of teachers and students, and students of different ages (sometimes remarkably different) were often taught by one teacher and took class in one room. Though the students were not put into different grades, they were taught different things and were assigned different learning goals. In this scenario, the teacher would sometimes give different assignments to different students at the same time, and tutor students one by one or group by group, which constituted an early form of multi-grade teaching.
Education was scaled up in Feudal Society and there appeared more schools with increasing numbers of teachers and students. This led to the division of different levels of teaching within the education system. For instance, in the Song Dynasty, the Imperial Academy (taixue, the highest educational institution in imperial China) was divided into three colleges, namely the Outer College (waishu), the Inner College (neishe) and the Superior College (shangshe), and students were allocated to different colleges based on their individual academic achievement. By this time, the division between different levels of learning was rather rough and students allocated to the same level still differed greatly in terms of learning, which made it hard for teachers to teach the same materials to all students at the same time. Therefore, multi-level teaching was still prevalent in schools of various kinds and at various levels.

Since the beginning of modern times, as new education became popular in China, multi-grade teaching was introduced and conducted nationwide as an important teaching mode, and thus enjoyed considerable growth. In 1904, rulers of the Qing Dynasty published the Statute on Establishing Primary Schools, which said: “In remote and poor areas where numbers of children are small and it is not feasible to establish a primary school for each area, local officials shall, taking into consideration local conditions, try to persuade or require several villages to set up a school jointly, and the school may have one or multiple grades.” Some books about multi-grade teaching were published to provide guidance to multi-grade teaching practice, such as Teaching and Management Methods for Mono-grade Primary Schools (Ji Xinyi, Shanghai Civilization Press, 1905), Advanced Methods for Common Mono-grade Teaching, (Hou Hongjian, Shanghai Civilization Press, 1909), Introduction to Mono-grade Teaching Methods (Deng Qinglan, the Commercial Press, 1914), Multi-grade Teaching Methods (Zhu Zhixue, Chung Hwa Book Co., 1934) and New Primary School Teaching Materials and Methods: Multi-grade Teaching (Yu Ziyi & Zhu Zhengyang, Shanghai Children’s Press, 1934). These books covered areas like teacher training, grade establishment, seating arrangement, syllabus design, teaching plan drafting and teaching activity organization, etc., in multi-grade teaching. Besides, research in multi-grade teaching was taken seriously. Research organizations on multi-grade teaching, like the Mono-grade Teaching Research Institute in Wuxi County, Jiangsu Province, were established to look into some important issues about multi-grade teaching, including its pros and cons, teaching procedures and teaching plans. With regard to practice, some teachers experimented with new multi-grade teaching models, such as putting students with ages spanning six years into the same grade and putting students into groups in primary schools. In addition, some publishing houses specially published textbooks for multi-grade primary schools. For example, the Commercial Press, Chung Hwa Book Co., and the government approved of, compiled and published textbooks and teachers’ books for mono-grade primary schools in three subjects, namely Personality Cultivation, Chinese, and Mathematics.

Upon the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, multi-grade teaching entered a new developmental stage. It continued to play an important role and has
since then obtained new development as it constantly evolves with the growth of China’s overall national strength and the modifications of the country’s educational development objectives. Over the 65 years since 1949, the Chinese government has attached great importance to the country’s educational development and has invested huge amounts of human, financial and material resources to promote education quality. Following different objectives and tasks in different phases of China’s educational development, the government suited its multi-grade teaching policies to differing conditions in terms of time and locality. With a pragmatic, serious and responsible attitude, the government recognized the existence of and necessity for multi-grade teaching, worked to fulfill its important function in promoting educational development, constantly optimized conditions to improve the learning outcome of multi-grade teaching.

1. 1949-1979: Multi-grade teaching grew in scale as the state approved of it and encouraged localities to conduct multi-grade teaching depending on their circumstances

After the People’s Republic of China was founded, the Chinese government intensified its efforts to promote educational development, recognized the legal existence of multi-grade teaching and treated it as an important way for rural students to get schooling. Multi-grade teaching thus became an important measure in the vast rural areas in China to promote the development of primary education and raise the enrollment rate of school age children. In 1952 the Ministry of Education issued the *Temporary Primary Education Regulations* (draft) and Article 35 went: “In principle, the number of pupils for each primary school class should be 20 to 50 in rural areas and 30 to 45 in urban areas. Apart from establishing classes for each grade, where the number of students at each grade was small, schools may group several grades into multi-grade classes or group all students of various grades of the school into one class, thus creating mono-class primary schools (previously called mono-grade primary schools).” The article approved of the existence of multi-grade teaching in primary school education and explicated the basic conditions for organizing multi-grade classes. It provided policy justification for localities to carry out multi-grade teaching and laid a foundation for its development. In the later reform seeking to popularize the five-year primary school system, the Ministry of Education specially gave the following instructions for multi-grade teaching: “In rural primary schools, due to the shortage of teachers, new classes adopting the new system may still follow the former two-year lower and four-year higher primary school system and conduct multi-grade teaching.” All later government documents on education reforms gave special attention to multi-grade teaching, a demonstration of the great importance the Chinese government attached to it. Besides politically giving multi-grade teaching a proper position, the Chinese government also endeavored to create positive conditions for the training of teachers. In 1956 the Ministry of Education issued the *Guidelines for Education Internship in Teacher Training Schools*, in which it was required that “due
to the essential role multi-grade teaching plays in the country’s primary school education, directors of internships must fully use resources available in the affiliated primary schools or other primary schools nearby for internship, to give each intern the chance to teach one lesson in a multi-grade class”. Thanks to such support from the state, multi-grade teaching developed rapidly and became an important way for the Chinese government to develop primary education. Statistics show that in 1956, multi-grade classes accounted for 33.9% of all classes nationwide, with the proportion higher than the level in many provinces and even reaching 79% in some counties. Many students got the chance to go to school and the enrollment rate went up quickly and dramatically. The state leaders acknowledged the contribution multi-grade teaching made to universalizing primary education. They met with multi-grade class teachers and inspected on site how multi-grade teaching was conducted, which gave great encouragement to teachers and students and promoted the development of multi-grade teaching.

2. 1980-2000: Multi-grade teaching continued to grow in scale as the state strengthened management over it and took steps to improve education quality

After the 1980s China entered a new stage of development and universalizing primary education became an important goal of educational development. In 1980 the Chinese government issued the Decisions on Several Issues about Universalizing Primary School Education, which put forward the task of “universalizing primary school education”, and in 1986 the government declared the decision to carry out nine-year compulsory education and started its implementation. At that time it was unusually difficult to universalize primary school education and nine-year compulsory education in China due to the national conditions – underdeveloped society, relatively backward economy, numerous poverty-stricken areas on a vast territory, a large student population and poor educational facilities. In response to the difficulties, the Chinese central and local governments constantly increased educational input. They ran schools in diverse forms, strengthened research into and management over multi-grade teaching, strived to fully fulfill its function and created favorable conditions to improve its quality. The policies and measures achieved remarkable results as follows.

2.1 Emphasize fulfilling the function of multi-grade teaching

In September 1988, the Chinese State Education Commission held a symposium on universalizing primary education in areas faced with grave difficulty, and the following was put forward: “School-running forms should be flexible and diverse to suit local conditions. Apart from full-time primary schools, schools in other forms should be run according to practical needs, such as half-day school, school for farmers’ and herdsmen’s children, mobile school, multi-grade teaching school, school offering classes in the morning, afternoon and evening, teaching station, boarding school, or school providing boarding for some of the students.” In March 1999, the
Chinese State Education Commission issued the *Primary School Management Regulations*, pointing out that “in primary schools teaching should be organized with class being the unit. The class should be of one grade in form, but where conditions do not allow this, multi-grade classes may be used”. The Chinese education authorities mentioned explicitly for many times the role of multi-grade teaching in universalizing primary education and approved of the adoption of multi-grade teaching in areas with grave difficulty or under special circumstances to be a form of school-running and a way to provide primary school education. The positive attitude of these policies towards multi-grade teaching generated great enthusiasm among multi-grade teaching practitioners, gave green light to areas with special difficulties to adopt multi-grade teaching as a way of promoting primary education universalization, and created a favorable public opinion atmosphere for multi-grade teaching to gain attention, seek resources and improve quality.

2.2 Grant state-employee status to “substitute teachers” practicing multi-grade teaching

“Substitute teachers” (*minban jiaoshi*, as opposed to *gongban jiaoshi*, state-employed teachers) refer to primary school and high school teachers in China who are not employed by the state. Substitute teachers were the main compensation for the lack of teachers in rural China to universalize primary school education. Apart from a particularly small number of them who worked in rural junior high schools, most of them worked in rural primary schools. They constituted the majority of teachers for multi-grade teaching. They often had relatively low educational levels (most of them were junior or senior high school graduates), relatively low income (they got as reward work points according to the local standards and besides that received monthly subsidy from the state in cash), and had heavy workload (they had to work for many class hours and in some cases one school had only one teacher). The Chinese government took substitute teachers seriously and respected them for their contribution to the nation’s educational development. To change the ambiguous and awkward conditions of substitute teachers in terms of status and remuneration, the government made policies and took measures to gradually grant state-employee status to them, so that they could enjoy the same position and remuneration as state-employed teachers and receive payment and pension from the government budget. In October 1979, the State Council decided to grant state-employee status to over 80,000 primary and high school substitute teachers working in 136 border counties of the country. In August 1992, the Chinese State Education Commission, the State Planning Commission, the Ministry of Human Resources and the Ministry of Finance jointly issued *Suggestions on Several Issues Concerning Further Improving and Strengthening Work about Substitute Teachers*, which set forth five solutions to the substitute teacher issue, “to control the increase of new substitute teachers, to transfer substitute teachers to state-employees, to enroll substitute teachers into teacher training schools, to dismiss unqualified substitute teachers and, where applicable, to put substitute teachers into early retirement”. In September 1997, the
State Council issued the *Notice on Solving the Substitute Teacher Issues* and set the target of largely solving the substitute teacher problem nationwide before the end of the 20th century. By 1999, the number of substitute teachers in the country went down to 53,569 from 4,910,000 in 1977, and the substitute teacher problem was solved on the whole. Almost all of the teachers practicing multi-grade teaching in remote and poor areas were state employees and received payment from the government. In addition, the Chinese government made preferential policies for teachers practicing multi-grade teaching and gave them favorable treatments in workload, title granting and excellence appraisal.

### 2.3 Improve the quality of teachers practicing multi-grade teaching

The Chinese government attached importance to the quality of personnel practicing multi-grade teaching and sought to enhance their teaching abilities in diverse ways, including training at teacher training schools, in-service training, and action research. In July 1987, in order to summarize and exchange school-running experience about how teacher training schools should cultivate qualified primary school teachers for rural areas and to back the educational reform of teacher training schools, the Chinese State Education Commission held a symposium in Anhui Province. In the symposium, Chaigoupu Teacher Training School in Hebei Province introduced their way of training personnel for multi-grade teaching. Responding to the needs of rural primary school education, Chaigoupu Teacher Training School set up a research center on multi-grade teaching, wrote and edited learning materials on multi-grade teaching, took efforts to cultivate multi-grade teaching abilities of the faculty, and achieved considerable results. Some places, using resources available, specially compiled optional course books on multi-grade teaching for teacher training school students. In the *Course Book on Primary School Education* the State Education Commission entrusted the People’s Education Press, a part was devoted to “multi-grade teaching in primary schools”. The *Teacher Training Schools · Learning Materials on Multi-grade Teaching* was compiled in Shanxi Province, the *Optional Course Book on Primary Education for Teacher Training Schools in Shandong Province · Learning Materials on Multi-grade Teaching* in Shandong Province, and the *Optional Course Book for Three-year Teacher Training Schools · Multi-grade Teaching in Primary Schools* in Jiangsu Province. Besides, the Chinese government organized training classes for teachers practicing multi-grade teaching nationwide, to lead teachers to discuss multi-grade teaching, and set up a “multi-grade teaching special column” in *People’s Education*, a periodical published by the state educational authorities. In addition, local governments actively experimented with new methods of training and cultivating teachers with the ability to conduct multi-grade teaching, and have made some achievements and accumulated some good experience.

### 2.4 Strengthen the research institutions for multi-grade teaching

To enhance the researches on multi-grade teaching, a number of research organizations for multi-grade teaching have been established nationwide and
multi-grade teaching research networks have been formed at county, city, provincial and national levels. In 1986, the Research Society for Multi-grade Teaching was established in Wuxi City of Jiangsu province. In 1989, the Working Committee for Multi-grade Teaching affiliated to Research Council for Primary Education was created in Fujian province. In the meantime, a series of research organizations relating to multi-grade teaching were also created in such provinces as Shanxi, Hunan, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Sichuan, Hebei and Hainan. In 1994, the Research Society for Multi-grade Teaching, a national research organization under the leadership of China Education Society was established in Loyang City of Henan province. Since then, the society has conducted a number of activities related to multi-grade teaching such as research survey, consultancy, workshop, educational reform pilot, academic communication, teacher training and household-based teaching, and has also created a Journal entitled “Multi-grade Teaching” and published a series of books relating to multi-grade teaching. The research institutions for multi-grade teaching have brought teachers, experts and specialists, educational resource persons all together to form a consortium so as to conduct researches and practices in terms of multi-grade teaching reform and innovation that are conducive to the development of multi-grade teaching in a long term.

2.5 Write and compile the textbooks and teaching materials

Due to the differences of teaching mode and special needs for textbook between multi-grade teaching and single-grade teaching, Chinese government has mobilized related experts to write and compile special textbooks for multi-grade teaching at national level, and at the same time, also encouraged local educational authorities to write and compile textbooks for multi-grade teaching that are relevant and adapted to local educational practices. In 1988, the former State Education Commission of China issued a document entitled “the Planning for Writing and Compiling Textbooks for 9-Year Compulsory Education”. The document stated that “actively create conditions to conduct researches and pilots, and mobilize related experts to write and compile three types of textbooks as follows: (1) the textbooks for primary school that are relevant and adapted to multi-grade teaching; (2) the textbooks for primary and secondary school that are relevant and adapted to special economic zones and oversea Chinese communities; (3) the textbooks for primary and secondary school that are relevant and adapted to ethnic and minority group.” The State Education Commission also entrusted the Hebei province to write and compile special textbooks and teaching materials for multi-grade teaching in compulsory educational schools. In 1995, the special textbooks and teaching materials for grade one and grade two gained national approval to use nationwide. In 1997, the special textbooks and teaching materials for grade three and grade four gained national approval to use across the county. These materials (including textbooks, teaching materials and student workbooks) are welcomed by teachers and students at multi-grade teaching schools. Furthermore, the Education Commission of Zhejiang Province mobilized the relevant experts to write a set of textbooks for multi-grade teaching, including Chinese Language and Mathematics from grade one to grade two in primary school, totally 12 volumes. The
Education Commission of Shanxi Province wrote and compiled the textbook entitled “the Self-learning Textbook for Multi-grade Primary School”, as well as multi-function teaching materials and students’ workbook and so on. In 1993, on the basis of trial and amendment, the province started to use the special textbooks in multi-grade primary school, including such four subjects as Chinese Language, Mathematics, the Nature and the Social Study. Each subject includes two types of materials for student use and teacher use, from Volume 1 to Volume 8 for Chinese Language and Mathematics, from Volume 1 to Volume 4 for the Nature and the Social Study.

2.6 Organize conferences and workshops on multi-grade teaching

In 1996, the State Education Commission of China organized a national conference on multi-grade teaching. On the basis of group discussions, the consensus reached on the notion that was stated as “after achieved the universalization of compulsory education, the mode of multi-grade teaching would be existed in China in a long term. Therefore, the researches relating to multi-grade teaching should be enhanced, and the importance of modern educational technologies used in multi-grade teaching should be emphasized. The educational statistical department should put great efforts to make clear the number of students in multi-grade schools, and local educational authorities should conduct researches in terms of the rules, characteristics, modes and forms of multi-grade teaching, including summarization of experiences and lessons learned from local practices.” In addition, a number of working conferences, symposium and workshops were organized at provincial level and county level, which promoted the development of multi-grade teaching.

2.7 Raise the teachers’ status in multi-grade teaching school

Chinese government has strongly acknowledged the contributions from teachers in multi-grade teaching schools and attached great importance to improvement of their social status. For instance, the teachers from multi-grade teaching schools would be given priorities in selection of the deputy to the National People's Congress (NPC) and member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), outstanding teacher and “model worker”. During this period, some teachers from multi-grade teaching schools became the deputy to the National People's Congress (NPC) and member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), outstanding teacher and “model worker”, and their political and social status upgraded significantly. For example, Mr Ma Anjian, from Lukeng multi-grade primary school in Yanling County of Hunan province, was selected as outstanding teacher, provincial and national “model worker”, outstanding class teacher, and winner of “Xuteli Education Award”. He was given a title of “Outstanding Expert in Rural Educational Development” with special allowance from government. He also was given an award of “Poverty Alleviation through Science and Technology” by former State Commission of Science and Technology of China. In addition, he was offered an award of “Ruziniu Golden Ball for Outstanding Teachers” by Park Lane Education Foundation of Hong Kong. During the period of 1983 and 1988, Mr Ma
Anjian was selected as the deputy to the sixth National People's Congress (NPC), the deputy to seventh, eighth and ninth People's Congress (PC) of Hunan province. In 2008, he was selected as “Beijing Olympic Torch Bearer”, and gained the first-class award of national teaching research and presented the celebrating ceremony held in the Great Hall of the People due to his research project – multi-grade teaching pilot. The preferential policies for teachers from multi-grade school have played a great role in improving teachers’ status, stabilizing the teacher team, inspiring teachers’ enthusiasm, and have ensured the achievement and consolidation of universalization of 9-year compulsory education.

In short, during this period, the multi-grade teaching in China had boomed. The related policies for multi-grade teaching had clarified the status and role of multi-grade teaching, and had helpfully raised teachers’ social status and professional skill, improved teaching facilities, optimized teachers’ training and teaching research mechanism, and promoted teaching and learning quality.

3. 2001-2009: the governments had adjusted the multi-grade school distribution, the school number had decreased and the school distribution had been optimized.

In 2001, Chinese government declared achievement of the “Two Basics” – basically universalizing 9-year compulsory education and basically eliminating young- and middle-aged illiterates. Since then, Chinese government has shifted the educational strategy to fully achieve universalization of compulsory education, promote education equality and raise educational quality. Educational authorities identified new working tasks –“strongly promoting basic education reform, putting emphases on consolidation and improvement of “Two Basics”, significantly improving the school condition in compulsory education school, and further upgrading educational quality and efficiency”. In consideration of basic education development and multi-grade teaching reality, government had done adjustment and amendment to the policies relating multi-grade teaching. During this period, some new policies related had been developed and the pattern of multi-grade teaching had been changed.

3.1 Share more responsibilities for multi-grade teaching by the governments

Over a long period of time, Chinese government had implemented a policy entitled “Walking on the Two Feet” to universalize primary education. “Walking on the Two Feet” means government as “one foot” to mainly take responsibility on running schools, and social forces such as rural communities, enterprises and factories as “another foot” to run affiliated schools. In rural areas, primary school had been run by village committee, and most of teachers in this kind of multi-grade school were farmer-turned (also called substitute teacher). On one hand, teacher’s main responsibility in these schools was to conduct teaching activities. On the other hand, these teachers had to struggle to make money so as to support their family livelihood, purchase school facilities and provide financial aid to their students. At that time, this policy had played an important role to China’s education development. However, this
policy also had brought a series of problems to educational quality. With the deepening of economic reform and opening up to the world, China's comprehensive national power has been increasing rapidly and the fast economic growth has made Chinese government able to entirely afford financial support to compulsory educational schools nationwide. In the meantime, Chinese government has put great emphasis on restructuring and adjusting school distribution, and optimizing school resources allocation in order to upgrade education quality and promote education equality. Furthermore, the school system has been uniformed gradually across the county, and rural education has been run on the track of national standard. As a result, China’s education in rural areas has changed dramatically, while multi-grade teaching also has been developed and optimized.

3.2 Renovate and rebuild schoolhouse for multi-grade teaching

In February 2001, Chinese government conducted a program entitled “Program for Renovating and Rebuilding the Dilapidated Schoolhouse in Primary and Secondary School” across the country, and made great efforts to eliminate the disrepair schoolhouse within two years. Due to most of multi-grade teaching schools and teaching stations are located in remote rural areas with very poor school condition, and some of building in these schools are dilapidated that arise issues of school safety, Chinese government decided to restructure rural school. As for teaching stations dispersed in the remote rural areas, some of them were integrated into central school located in town, and others were renovated and rebuilt. In this process, some of multi-grade teaching schools were merged into single-grade school, and others were remained and the school conditions including schoolhouse and teaching facilities were improved greatly.

3.3 Normalize and standardize the mode of multi-grade teaching

Most of multi-grade schools in China are dispersed in remote rural area, with poor school condition, low teacher quality, poor information delivery and communication, outdated teaching method and overloaded teaching work that could lead to low teaching quality, students’ learning failure and drop-out of school. According to field survey by Longnan City of Gansu province, among 66,965 students in multi-grade schools, only 40-70% of junior students can pass the examination of Chinese Language and Mathematics in primary school, with a drop-out rate of 4% and a repeat rate above 10%. Chinese government has realized the problems and decided to normalize and standardize these kinds of multi-grade schools. In May 2001, State Council issued a document entitled “the Decision on Basic Education Reform and Development”, and the document asked local governments to “restructure and adjust school distribution according to local conditions. The junior students should enroll in schools near their house, and middle schools should locate in central town. Primary schools and teaching stations should be merged and restructured following the principle of ensuring the junior students enrolled in the school nearest their house, and some teaching stations should be remained to avoid students’ dropout.” In the process of restructuring and adjustment
of school distribution, some multi-grade school or teaching stations were dismantled or merged into single-grade school. Others were upgraded through investment of funds, quality teachers and good governance. As a result of implementation of governmental policies relating to multi-grade teaching, the student number in multi-grade school has decreased, the school distribution has been optimized, school condition has been upgraded and the teaching quality has increased.

3.4 Enhance teacher’s team for multi-grade teaching

Teachers in multi-grade school are important forces for China’s educational development in remote rural areas. Chinese government has attached great importance and given a priority to teachers in multi-grade school. In 2001, Chinese government increased the quota of teachers specially for multi-grade school. A document entitled “Opinions on Teacher’s Quota in Primary and Secondary School” clarified that the schools with the increase of teacher’s quota should include multi-grade schools or teaching stations. More teachers should be allocated to these schools and the salary of increased teachers should be ensured by government. In 2006, Chinese government implemented a “Special Teacher Recruitment Program” for remote rural school. The graduates from colleges and universities are mobilized and encouraged to engage in teaching in remote rural areas. The salary of these newly recruited teachers are offered according to united national standard, and shared by both central government and local government. About 20-30 thousand of teachers are recruited annually to be dispatched to rural schools and teaching stations, especial to multi-grade schools by the “Special Teacher Recruitment Program”, which has played an important role in stabilizing teachers’ team, improving teachers’ quality and optimizing teacher’s structure and upgrading the teaching quality in multi-grade school.

3.5 Decentralize and devolve the power of curriculum arrangement to the local

In 2001, China launched a pilot program on curriculum reform for compulsory education school and formulated the pilot scheme. The scheme stipulated clearly that curriculum arrangement for ethnic minority school, multi-grade school or teaching station should be decided by provincial educational department because of the big gap of educational development among regions. The mode of multi-grade teaching has vanished over years in developed regions, and has been shrinking in less developed regions, and universally existed in poverty-stricken regions in China. In this circumstance, the central authority has decentralized and devolved the power of curriculum arrangement to the provincial government, allowing them to decide the curriculum arrangement themselves.

3.6 Emphasis on ICT Support to Multi-grade Teaching

The Chinese government attaches great importance to the role of information in education development. With the promotion of the Project of Modern Distance Education in Rural Schools, it provides quality education to rural schools to improve
the quality of education in rural areas. In 2006, MOE made a systematic summary to introduce the construction mode of Project of Modern Distance Education in Rural Schools, and, especially, they come up with the construction mode for multi-grade teaching through CDs. “Due to the fact that the teaching points are usually located in the inaccessible mountainous areas and impoverished areas, which tend to be staffed with one teacher and adopting multi-grade teaching, it is very challenging to the teacher to teach several grades and meet the basic quality of education. ” Equipped with TV, DVD player, and sets of teaching CDs, it is a good way to make up for the lack of teachers in teaching points by playing CDs, and thus contributes to the improvement of education quality. With the application of ICT, it increases the possibility of offering complete curriculum through multi-grade teaching, and also opens a window to the teachers and students to the outside world, and it becomes an important way to raise the quality of multi-grade teaching.

At this time, the Chinese government was fully committed to the universalization of compulsory education in rural and remote areas, and was consolidating and improving the compulsory education nationwide. By increasing the financial input, adjusting the geographic distributions of schools and improving the school facilities, the teaching quality of compulsory education witnessed great improvement, especially in the vast rural areas. A large number of multi-grade teachers and students had the opportunity and conditions to access the single-grade school for better education environment and higher quality teaching. And the necessary teaching points were given great attention and special assistances which led to the improvement of teaching conditions and teaching quality.

4. A2010-present: the government has been attaching great importance to the building of teaching points, and various measures are adopted to improve the school conditions, focusing on raising the teaching quality, and multi-grade teaching is also included.

In 2010, on the basis of universalization of compulsory education, the Chinese government sets the target of offering more equitable and better quality compulsory education to school aged children, and the advancement of balanced development as an important task for compulsory education reform and development, embarking on the new journey to consolidate the outcomes of universalization, improve the quality and promote the connotation development of compulsory education. The teaching points (Inferred from the relevant statistics, quite a number of teaching points are using multi-grade teaching), retained for various reasons, become the focus for compulsory education towards balanced development and better quality. By investing more financial, human and material resources, the Chinese government redoubles the determination in running the necessary teaching points to guarantee the school conditions and teaching quality.

4.1 Redoubles the determination in running the necessary teaching points

After efforts in more than a decade, the geographic distribution of the rural schools in China is adjusted through closing and merging. The school conditions are improved;
the allocations of teachers are optimized; and the efficiency and quality of schooling is raised. But at the same time, the consequences of the sizable decrease of the number of rural schools, such as more time on the way to school for some students, more potential transportation safety issues, heavier economic burdens to students’ families, calls for the retention and restore of some teaching points. The statistics shows that there were 72,483 teaching points for primary education nationwide in 2009 accommodating 3,310,681 pupils; as of 2013, there are 82,768 teaching points across the country with 3,803,710 students. In light of the situation, the Chinese government issued The Opinion on Implementation of Scientific Outlook to Further Promote the Balanced Development of Compulsory Education in 2010, puts forward that “ For the necessary primary schools and teaching points, the allocation of the teaching staff shall be strengthened, and the modern distance education means shall be fully utilized to distribute the quality education resources to guarantee the quality of the education.” The Opinion in Regulating the Adjustment of the Layout of Rural Schools issued in 2012 made the clear requirement of running the village primary school and teaching points. The Opinion on the Comprehensive Improvement of Basic School Conditions in Weak Compulsory Education Schools in Poor areas issued in 2013 reemphasized to run the necessary teaching points. The various clear requirements in running the teaching points shows the great attention given by the Chinese government, and it also serves the rational to the relevant policies and measure for the building of teaching points.

4.2 Comprehensive support to teaching points
The Chinese government provides comprehensive support, such as favorable conditions in areas of funds, teachers, and teaching, to build teaching points. The Opinion in Regulating the Adjustment of the Layout of Rural Schools issued in 2012 clearly requires that “Multiple measures shall be adopted to improve the conditions for those retained and restored village primary schools and teaching points, with a focus to improve the teaching quality. The public funding per student shall be raised in village primary schools and teaching points. For those under 100 pupils, the public funding shall be allocated as 100 pupils to ensure its normal function. To study and work out the professional ranking criteria conforming to the realities in village primary schools and teaching points, favors shall be given to the teachers in village primary schools and teaching points in terms of professional ranking promotion and performance-based salary; effective measures such as to establish post allowances to support the excellent teachers to work in village primary schools and teaching points shall be encouraged. The informationization of rural education shall be accelerated, and village primary schools and teaching points shall be equipped with quality digital teaching resources. The central school shall play the supervising and guiding role in areas of curriculum arrangement, organization of touring teaching, group research, and sharing of teaching resources to improve the teaching quality in village primary schools and teaching points. The Opinion on the Comprehensive Improvement of Basic School Conditions in Weak Compulsory Education Schools in Poor areas issued in 2013 restates the requirement that “Necessary facilities shall be provided to the
retained teaching points to ensure the basic needs in teaching and living ”, “The construction and use of teacher dormitories shall give the priority to teachers in teaching points. ” These specified requirements and measures play the role of improving the school conditions, alleviating the workload, enhancing the working capabilities, and improving teaching quality in teaching points.

4.3 Constant emphasis on teaching force capacity building
Teacher capacity building is an important aspect of balanced development, and is the primary condition for improving the teaching quality. The Chinese government has given extra attention and support to teaching points in areas of teacher allocations, teacher professional development, and teaching training. In 2010, the Chinese government launched the “National Training Project”, including the “The Exemplary Training Project for Primary and Secondary School Teachers” and “The Training Project for Key Teachers in Mid and Western Rural Areas”, with a central government funding of 550 million Yuan. The combined training modes including off-job full-time training for key teachers, group training and distant training for large number of teachers, are used to provide tailored training to key teachers in mid and western rural areas. In Opinions on Accelerating the Modern Agriculture to Increase the Vitality for Rural Development issued by the Chinese government, it states that allowances shall be earmarked to teachers working in destitute rural areas, village schools and teaching points, requesting all levels of governments to provide subsistence allowance to rural teachers in destitute areas. The literature shows that, based on the local conditions, 2114 million Yuan is channeled from the central fund as allowances after the application of the policy over one year. For instance, teachers in the village primary schools and teaching points are receiving the allowance as much as 1,400 Yuan in Luxi County in Hunan Province, and it turns out that less than a hundred urban teachers are competing for 12 teacher post openings there. In 2014, 60,000 teacher posts in the western areas are opened for college graduates with central funding, and the priority will be given to the village primary schools and teaching points. All these policies are playing the role of retaining the teaching force and recruiting excellent teachers to work in the rural areas, and the number, academic degree, subject, age and specialty of the teaching force is also optimized, which all contribute to the improvement of education quality.

4.4 Provide the digital education resources to teaching points
Besides disseminating quality education resources through modern distance education means, the Chinese government has been strengthening its efforts in the provision of digital resources to the teaching points. In 2012, MOE launched the “Project of Full Access to Digital Education Resources”, equipping the rural teaching points with digital resources receivers and players and disseminating the quality digital education resources. ICT is utilized to assist the teaching points in offering all the programs required as national curriculum, thus to improve the education quality, to promote the balanced development of compulsory education and to meet the needs of the school aged children in the rural remote areas to have easy access to quality education. The
project of digitalization makes it possible to have easy access to quality digital education resources. Not only these resources can be used in classroom teaching, it is also can be used to have access to the teaching and learning in other teachers classroom. The complete offering of national curriculum is in place and the teaching quality is improved.

On the way to the balanced and quality education, the Chinese government has paid special attention to the retained teaching points with comprehensive assistance to improve the quality of education there. Though multi-grade teaching is rarely mentioned, the teaching points have witnessed more qualified teachers in terms of academic degrees and subjects, access to rich teaching resources, upgraded educational facilities, more diversified teaching methods, all of which are laying the solid foundation to improve the education quality.

Always putting education on the top agenda over the 65 years, the Chinese government has been striving to realize the universalization, consolidation and improvement of compulsory education, and has been constantly seeking better education quality. In the efforts of universalization of the compulsory education, the Chinese government, in light of the national strength and education development tasks, puts forward the policies to recognize, encourage, adjust and optimize the development of multi-grade teaching accordingly. The Chinese government actively plays the role of multi-grade teaching to realize the universalization of compulsory education, and makes timing adjustment to change the situation of multi-grade teaching that is too spread out, poor-quality and low-efficiency, and focusing on the building the retained teaching points in the remote and poor areas. All in all, the multi-grade teaching emerges for the universalization of primary education, and grows in the promotion of nine year compulsory education, downsizes on the way to the balanced development of compulsory education, and retains for the development of quality education.