

## A Phenomenological Study on the Problem of Choosing Foreign Language Subjects in Gaokao in China

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### Abstract

**A study on judging the difficulty of reading texts in English. We first search for data, Since 2019, the number of students participating in the college entrance examination in China has exceeded 10 million for three consecutive years. In the college entrance examination, the score for foreign language subjects is the same as that for mathematics and Chinese, with a full score of 150. In order to improve the difficulty of the college entrance examination, open the distance between students' scores and realize the purpose of "selection", one-third of students fail in English for a long time after entering high school. With China's "one belt, one road policy" promotion, the Ministry of education of China issued a stipulation in 2014 to expand the scope of foreign language subjects selection when students take part in the college entrance examination. Students can choose not only English but also five small languages such as Japanese, Russian, French, German, and Spanish to participate in the college entrance examination. Like English, they are included in the total score of the college entrance examination. This policy has brought hope to students who have been partial to English for a long time. Through research, this paper analyzes the reasons why it is difficult for students to improve their English performance after entering high school, as well as their struggles and efforts, choices, and opportunities in order to improve their foreign language performance and enter the ideal university. So as to try to provide some effective solutions to these phenomena from the perspective of educational managers.**

### Keywords

**Gaokao foreign language; Minority Language; School Enterprise Cooperation.**

### 1. Research Background

China's annual investment in education accounts for more than 4% of the total GDP. In 2019, the financial expenditure on education exceeded 1 trillion yuan, but it is still unable to meet China's education needs in terms of per capita. Under such national conditions, as a fair selective examination, it is necessary to screen some students who meet the conditions to receive higher education and give them more educational resources.

Before 2011, the Foreign language subject of Gaokao is mainly English, while Japanese, German, Russian and other languages, due to the small demand for talents, are often enrolled in Colleges and universities in the form of separate enrollment.

In 2011, the Ministry of education of the State Council officially canceled the policy of separate enrollment of Minority Languages in Colleges and universities, and incorporated Minority Languages into the foreign languages of the normal college entrance examination. In 2014, the State Council issued the implementation opinions on deepening the reform of the examination and enrollment system, which once again stipulates that in addition to English, the college entrance examination also offers five Minority Languages: Japanese, Russian, German, French,

and Spanish. The curriculum plan for senior high schools (2017 Edition (revised in 2020)) issued by the Ministry of education in 2017 also clearly stipulates that five other small foreign languages, including Japanese, will be included in the foreign language assessment objects of senior high schools, compile and revise the curriculum standards and applicable teaching materials for Minority Languages, encourage schools to create conditions to open a second foreign language, and strive to meet the needs of students' differences needing in foreign language learning.

## **2. Research Methods**

### **2.1. Research Design and Setting**

This study uses the phenomenological method to explore the experience of poor English students in the choice of foreign language subjects in the Gaokao.

The participants are Tangshan City, Hebei Province in the north of China, and Hezhou City, Guangxi Province in the south of China. The average age of the participants is 16 to 18 years old. They are all high school students.

### **2.2. Sampling and Sample Size**

Fifteen participants were recruited by purposeful sampling. These 15 participants represent the students and graduates of ordinary high schools in northern China and the students and graduates of ordinary high schools in two provinces in southern China, to ensure that the cultural differences between southern and Northern China are taken into account in the study to the greatest extent. At the same time, the following characteristics are also considered: there are obvious differences in English scores in junior middle school, senior one, senior two, senior three, and graduates are covered respectively, which can represent the different economic consumption levels of the South and North, and can represent the family situation to the greatest extent. The only exclusion criterion is students who continue to learn English in senior high school. Preliminary interpretation of responses was done vis-a-vis data collection to identify data saturation. After the 15th participant was interviewed, no new topics and important statements were found. At this point, the sample size is considered sufficient.

### **2.3. Data Collection Procedure**

Before collecting data, based on my previous study experience, I imagined the difficulties that students might encounter when choosing foreign language subjects in the Gaokao, giving up English and choosing Russian or Japanese, and adjusted to an objective attitude to interview students. In the formal interview, I first communicate with the students about their interests and hobbies to let the students relax. Then, according to the question steps set before, ask questions step by step to conduct in-depth interviews.

My question mainly involves when did you begin to feel that English learning was difficult? Do you know which foreign language subjects you can choose to take in the Gaokao? Do your parents know about the choices of foreign language subjects in the Gaokao? What do you think is the biggest difficulty or risk of choosing another language in the Gaokao?

Students, when we went to the school and the school leaders to introduce and promote the Minority Languages of the Gaokao, communicated face-to-face with the students under the arrangement of the school. Therefore, the interview is not entirely conducted in private, but in a semi-open form, which is conducted in class, because these problems are universal and common, and do not belong to personal privacy.

### 3. Findings

The students who participated in the interview shared their English learning experience, family environment, difficulties, and current situation in learning, problems, concerns and concerns in the selection of foreign language subjects in the Gaokao. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants.

**Table 1.** Summary of Demographic Profile of Participants

Serial Number	Participant	City	Grade	Length of learning English	Family status
1	Cui Yan	Tangshan, Hebei	Grade2	7-year	The only child, whose parents are civil servants, has excellent economic conditions
2	Li Shuaiqi	Handan, Hebei	Grade3	7-year	There are two children at home. There is a company at home and the economic conditions are good
3	Liu Zhiji	Zhumadian, Henan	Grade1	6-year	The only child, the father works, and the economic ability of the family is average
4	Zuo Yubing	Zhengyang, Henan	Grade2	7-year	His father died and his mother raised two children alone
5	Wang Shuai	Linyi, Shandong	Grade2	7-year	There are two brothers and sisters in the family. Both parents have fixed jobs and are in good financial condition
6	Gao Qi	Tai'an, Shandong	High school graduation	6-year	The only child, both parents have jobs, and the family is in good financial condition
7	Zhao Zhihao	Pingyao, Shanxi	Grade1	6-year	Only child, parents have fixed jobs and good economic situation
8	Xu Wenxin	Hezhou, Guangxi	Grade1	7-year	The family has five children, their parents have lost their labor force and their economic situation is poor
9	Zou Xianwang	Hezhou, Guangxi	Grade2	6-year	The family has two children. The father has a job and the financial situation is average
10	Yao Mingshuai	Hezhou, Guangxi	Grade3	6-year	The only child, whose father is a civil servant, has medium economic conditions
11	Wu Xinxi	Hechi, Guangxi	High school graduation	6-year	The family has two children, only the father works, and the economic situation is not good
12	Feng Shijie	Wuhan, Hubei	Grade1	6-year	There is one child in the family, the mother works, the father is in poor health and the economic situation is general
13	Yao Huiru	Wuhan, Hubei	Grade2	6-year	There is only one child in the family, the parents are self-employed, and the family economy is good
14	Peng Junhao	Wuhan, Hubei	Grade3	7-year	The family has two children. The father is a civil servant and the family economy is average
15	Deng Huijin	Changsha, Hunan	Grade2	7-year	The family has a child, a family business and a good family economy

The data from the interview reveals four important themes: the helplessness of giving up English learning after entering high school; Difficulties in choosing to learn Minority Languages in the Gaokao; Problems in the teaching of Minority Languages in the Gaokao.

#### 3.1. The Helplessness of Giving Up English Learning after Entering High School

After entering high school, it is a very risky thing to force students to give up English have learned for at least six years and transfer to learn other languages. The main reason for giving up is that in the examination for entering high school, their English scores are very poor. After entering high school, they can't catch up with other students. If they continue to study, not only

can they fail to achieve good results in the Gaokao, but It will also delay the study of other subjects because it spends a lot of time on English.

Cui Yan's statement can best illustrate this helplessness:

*My aunt is a college English teacher. After I found that my English performance could not be improved in junior middle school, I made a lot of effort. Under the introduction of my aunt, my parents spent a lot of tuition fees and hired English teachers with teaching experience to help me with my English after class. I also spent a lot of time on English learning, but no matter how hard I tried, I can't get into a good learning state, it makes me afraid and bored of English learning.*

### **3.2. Difficulties in Choosing a Minority Languages for the Gaokao**

The biggest difficulty in choosing a Minority Language for learning in high school is the teachers. Since the Ministry of education of China issued the policy of liberalizing the Minority Languages of the college entrance examination relatively late, it was not until 2019 that the Ministry of education of China issued the Japanese teacher qualification examination. At present, at least 80% of public middle schools in China do not offer Minority Languages courses for the Gaokao or do not have their own Minority Languages teachers.

In this regard, language training institutions outside the school smell the business opportunities and begin to cooperate with middle school. The institutions recruit and train Minority Languages teachers, enter middle schools and teach students. However, because this teaching activity is a cooperative behavior between enterprises and schools and does not receive financial subsidies from the Chinese government, the institutions need to charge a certain amount of training fees for students, which undoubtedly gives many Minority language learning needs for the Gaokao, However, students from families with financial difficulties have increased a certain burden.

Xu Wenxin is a typical representative of this situation. When talking about his choice of learning Minority Languages, he said:

*My family did not seriously implement China's family planning policy. When my fifth sister was born, my parents were in increasingly poor health and gradually lost their ability to work. The source of family income mainly depended on government subsidies. However, after I entered high school, my English score has been unable to improve, but I deeply realize that only through the Gaokao can I change the fate of myself and my family. Therefore, when I learned that English is not the only choice for foreign language subjects in the Gaokao, I saw hope. The school opened the Japanese course in the Gaokao, but the tuition fee for three years is more than 20000 yuan, My family can't afford it.*

### **3.3. Problems in the Teaching of Minority Languages in the Gaokao**

Whether the school recruits teachers, opens Minority Languages courses for the Gaokao, or cooperates with institutions outside the school to introduce teachers into the school for teaching, there are certain problems.

Peng Junhao's description can best reflect this problem:

*Our Japanese teacher was recruited by the school itself, but because the number of students studying Japanese with me is relatively small, the school only recruited a Japanese teacher. To tell the truth, I feel that she is very lonely in school. It is said that the test questions for our Japanese exam were purchased by the school from training institutions outside the school. I feel that the knowledge taught by the teacher is only from textbooks, I'm worried that if I change to Japanese, I won't be able to improve my grades.*

## 4. Results and Discussions

### 4.1. The Students Have Some Blindness in Choosing Minority Languages for the Gaokao

Because the popularity of Minority Languages in China is very low, when students choose to learn Minority Languages, most schools and parents are unable to provide them with more suggestions and help in time. When facing the choice, students do not understand the difficulty of the language they are going to learn, nor can they judge whether they are suitable for learning.

### 4.2. Accelerated Classes Have An Adverse Impact on Students

The accelerated course of Minority Languages in the Gaokao to take the examination makes students who change to Minority Languages in senior high school unable to get real language education.

Students who choose to study Minority Languages have some problems with their learning ability or learning habits. Most of them are "chosen" to "step into the University", not out of their interest and love. Therefore, they lack initiative in learning. In the process of learning, they also carry out exam-oriented learning to improve their grades. Over time, they may lose interest in Japanese learning because of boring vocabulary and grammar learning. Such learning motivation is not conducive to the ecological development of Japanese education in China, and will also have a certain impact on the cultivation of Japanese talents.

### 4.3. Utilitarian Teaching Has Brought Challenges to College Second Foreign Language Teaching

The current Gaokao of Minority Languages teaching has brought some difficulties to second foreign language teaching in Colleges and universities because it is too utilitarian.

The candidates of the Japanese crash course of the Gaokao to take the examination also bring many difficulties to the next higher Japanese education. Due to the heavy learning task of examinees in high school, the general cycle of examinees learning Japanese is short, and the examinees' oral English is not investigated in the Gaokao so students do not pay enough attention to Japanese pronunciation.

In addition, the teaching staff around the country is uneven, including the influence of local dialects, so many students' Japanese pronunciation is not standard or even strange. For students who have a certain Japanese Foundation and even have formed a certain pronunciation habit through high scores in the Gaokao, it is difficult for teachers to effectively help them correct pronunciation errors in the short term, and learners do not realize the seriousness of the problem subjectively, which also brings great difficulties to teachers' teaching in the stage of higher education.

## 5. Conclusion

Due to the relative shortage of higher education resources in China, according to the relevant data survey, the average acceptance rate of first-class universities in 2021 is 30%. Among them, the number of applicants for the college entrance examination in Beijing in 2021 was 51700, the acceptance number is 22100, and the acceptance rate is 42.75%; In Henan Province, a populous province, the acceptance rate of the undergraduate batch is only 11.18%.

The number lack of first-class colleges and universities forces a large number of Chinese families to do everything they can to improve their children's total score in the Gaokao to let their children receive the best college education. Fortunately, after 2014, students who are not interested in English learning had more Minority Languages to choose from in the Gaokao. Although many of them think it is a helpless choice to change to Minority Languages to

participate in the Gaokao, by improving their foreign language scores, thereby improving the total score of the Gaokao and finally entering the ideal university, This can indeed change the fate of their whole life.

However, in the experience of this choice, there are still many problems, which need Chinese educators to practice and explore, and also need the Chinese Ministry of education to play a real management and guidance role in relevant laws and policies.

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