

# The Professional Development of the Foreign Language Teachers and the Professional Foreign Language Teaching Practice

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**Abstract**—Foreign language teaching practice plays an important role in developing the foreign language students' professional thinking of and improving their teaching ability in the normal university. In the gradual process of the foreign language teachers' professional advancement, the traditional concepts and the approaches of the teaching practice have failed to meet the standard of foreign language teacher training in the new era. Therefore, it is imminent to construct the professional foreign language teaching practice. In this paper, from the perspectives of the foreign language teachers' professional status, the connotation of the professional development and the structure of professional quality, the author rethinks the problems and the tasks in foreign language teaching practice and puts forward the new orientation and conception.

**Index Terms**—foreign language teachers, professional development, foreign language teaching practice

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since 1966 UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and ILO (International Labor Organization) recommended the teacher as a professional career. People have formed an international consensus on the concept of teachers' professionalization. And the teachers' professional development has become an important goal of the reform of the teachers' educational system and the curriculum system in many countries. Our "Teachers Law" sets, "the teacher is the professional who should devote himself to the education teaching". As the professional teachers, they need not only to have the broad and profound knowledge of the discipline, but also to go through the professional training in education and fulfill the requirements for the teachers' qualification and the professional norms. At present, all the countries in the world are to improve teacher's professional level, strengthening the teachers' team construction as a breakthrough to improve the quality of the elementary education. Our country is also facing up to the same problem.

In the system of teacher's professional development, practical teaching is an indispensable and important segment. As one of the main forms of the practical teaching, educational practice is an important part of higher normal education and the link between the teaching theory and teaching practice. Meanwhile, it is a key link in the process of the teachers' professionalization, and regarded as the source of teachers' professional development. Foreign language teaching practice plays an important role in cultivating the students' foreign language professional thoughts in the normal university and improving the students' teaching ability. The traditional foreign language teaching practice has helped to cultivate a large number of first-line teachers. However, in the gradual process of the foreign language teachers' professional advancement, the traditional concepts and the approaches of the teaching practice have failed to meet the standard of foreign language teacher training in the new era.

## II. THE OVERVIEW OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### A. *The Foreign Language Teachers' Professional Status*

As a language teaching, whether the foreign language teaching is one of the professional and technical professions or not has been debated for a long time. On May 7th, 1965 at Harvard University in Massachusetts the Foreign language Advisory Committee held a "The Preparation for Being Foreign Language Teachers" conference. Professor Brooks from Yale university (1966) attempted, from three academic and professional occupations - law (lawyer), medicine (doctor) and theology (priest), to find out a model to establish the professional status of language teaching. In recent years, foreign language teachers and foreign language teaching institutions have discussed and pay attention to the professional status of foreign language teaching again. For instance, whether the foreign language teaching has unique characteristics or not; whether the foreign language teaching needs special skills and training or not; whether the foreign language teaching can become a lifelong valuable career choice; whether the foreign language teaching can give practitioners highly professional satisfaction, etc. (Richards & Lockhart, 1996) The scholars around the world, language teachers and foreign language teaching institutions try to demonstrate the status of language education through a variety of means. From the perspectives of the language teachers' professionalism, working conditions, personal goals, attitudes and their career expectations, it is revealed that foreign language teaching should be recognized as the same as

other established profession. In 1991, the 25th International English Language Teaching Association declared to the world that since the beginning of this century people have achieved plenty of accomplishments through foreign language teaching practice and theoretical research, and professional foreign language teaching was formed.

### *B. The Connotation of Foreign Language Teachers' Professional Development*

The connotation of teachers' professional development is very abundant. The concept of teachers' professional development basically is around two main lines: one is the explanation on the process of teacher's professional development from the perspective of teachers' individual psychology; the other is the interpretation on the process to promote the teacher's professional growth from the angle of the teacher education. For example, Perry (1980) think, the word "professional" has multiple meanings. In terms of the meaning, the teachers' professional development means that teachers' personal growth in their professional life, such as enhancing the confidence, improving the skills, and trying to broaden and deepen the discipline knowledge. In terms of the most positive significance, the teachers' professional development contains more content. For example, the teachers are beyond the scope of skills and artistic performance; they become the people who can promote to be professional and transform professional knowledge into the authority.

In the foreign language teaching literature, the concept of foreign language teachers' professional development is basically as the same as that of teacher professional development. The reason why teaching has become a significant feature of the profession is that teachers should treat their professional growth as a permanent goal (Pennington, 1990). The growth means the change and development, which includes four elements: the consciousness of the development, the positive and open attitude, the accumulation of knowledge and the development of the skills (Larsen - Freeman, 1983). There are four characteristics of the language teachers' changes. However, those changes do not necessarily reveal in behavior, but also can refer to the changes of their consciousness. The changes are not necessarily to get instant results or accomplish at one stroke. Some changes can be directly obtained, so it is quantifiable, but others are not. Some sorts of the changes tend to be enclosed, while others belong to open (Freeman, 1989). In this case, the change here refers to the development with innovative significance.

As for the growth of foreign language teachers, it can be understood as the dynamic process in which foreign language teachers continuously learn, reflect and develop in the teacher educational system, under the background of teacher's specialization. The famous educational scholars Pennington (2001) outline the process: in the latest teacher educational literature, there are two terms, "reflection" and "development", begin to be concerned with. In the connotation and the denotative concept of these two terms, they are able to describe the overall orientation of the nature of language teaching and learning, which means that "reflection" and "development" is not only intended to change the learners and teachers, but also will help the teachers to transform from the transforms in the traditional course of into the active agents in the common situation in the future.

### *C. The Structure of Foreign Language Teachers' Professional Quality*

The foreign language teachers professional quality structure consist of five sections, including the development of foreign language teaching beliefs, comprehensive professional language knowledge, professional ethics and emotional attitude, healthy personality and the initiative of the self - development. Teaching belief is refers to the education teaching conception that the teachers select, approve and determine in their profession. The conception of the foreign language teaching including the beliefs in the nature of the foreign language teaching, the beliefs in the characteristics of the foreign language learners and the nature of learning foreign language, the beliefs in the disciplinary value and the like. Teachers' beliefs can restrict their behavior, and can influence the teaching behavior more than teachers' knowledge. The teachers' beliefs have a significant impact on their study and growth.

As the people who preach, grant knowledge and disabuse, foreign language teachers should first have a general knowledge of culture. Foreign language course teaching should be involved in the Chinese and western culture, customs, popular science knowledge, ancient and modern celebrities, and the knowledge in political, economic, cultural and artistic field, etc. Foreign language teachers, though not necessarily to be proficient in various subjects, should know "a bit". In terms of the discipline knowledge, foreign language teachers should have a solid and systematic targeted knowledge, including the pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. In addition, foreign language teachers still should have knowledge associated with the targeted language, such as discourse, pragmatics, language acquisition, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and the national language knowledge. The knowledge of foreign language teaching is an important part of the discipline knowledge, which includes the teaching skills on the language knowledge and the language skills, the skills to design the teaching activities and manage the teaching material and the methods and skills to feedback classroom teaching and monitor teaching activities. In addition, the knowledge of foreign language teaching theories and personal practical knowledge is the important pillar of teachers' knowledge. With the promotion of the teacher's professional status, teachers' development should consist of curriculum development, the theory of curriculum outline design, testing and evaluation theory.

Professional ethics is the core component of teachers' quality. Teachers are the ones who inherit and spread the human spiritual civilization. They should lead an important role in the teaching process. The concept that "cultivating themselves" should have priority over "educating others" embodies the teachers' basic attitude towards the occupation. Teachers' professional ethics and emotional attitude has begun to form, and will run through the whole process of teachers' career. Professional moral and emotional attitude is an important index to measure the quality of the teachers'

professionalization.

Individual mental health mainly covers three aspects: the individual psychology to be good at cooperation, good psychology to tolerant and the quality of modesty and humility. Because foreign language teaching has certain nature of the sociality, it is particularly important for foreign language teachers' professional development to have the individual psychology to be good at cooperation with others. Good psychological ability, optimistic mood and positive spirit can promote the quality and process of foreign language learning.

The initiative for self-development can help to produce the actuation of the self-development. Without the teachers' active development, the students cannot develop actively. Before foreign language teachers guide their students to have lifelong learning goals, they should firstly obtain the ability of active development. With the development of world economic integration, foreign language has become a "developmental" discipline. The initiative for self-development is essential for foreign language teachers to obtain the ability to develop sustainably.

### III. THE HISTORY OF TEACHING PRACTICE

Teaching practice, once called "field practice" in the earliest time in the western countries, was called "practical knowledge" or "practical exercise" in our country. Although there are diverse names of teaching practice at the ancient and modern times in the Chinese and western countries, but its essence is the same, which namely refers to a process and a kind of teaching mode to cultivate and train the future teachers. In our country, teaching practice was produced in the end of our modern society. In 1898, Sheng Xuanhuai founded the first Nanyang Chinese public school normal college, with the target of "through a year, the normal students learn as well as rethink profoundly, and obtain the benefits from the learning and practice". Therefore, the teaching practice occurred in China. According to "Imperial Peking Normal University Charters" formulated by Qing dynasty in 1902 and "Superior Normal School Regulations" promulgated by Qing dynasty in 1904, the fourth year in Peking Normal University was the time for the students to practice, which resulted in that the practice was determined in the form of a system. After the 1911 revolution, the republic government promulgated the "The Normal School Curriculum Standard", which regulated that the teaching practice should occupy 5.3% of the total teaching hours. And due to "The Modified Normal School Regulations" promulgated in 1916, the school should strengthen the teaching practice time, and "the teaching practice, in addition to various professors, all about management and other matters shall be ready to guide at any time."

During the revolutionary civil war, the Communist Party of China established farmers Institute. In 1934 the farmers Institute were changed into the advanced normal school, where the forms of teaching practice were visits, training and teaching. In 1941, the Ministry of Education of the Kuomintang (KMT), announced "The Methods of the Normal School (Department) Practice", which was China's first specialized work regulations about teaching practice. Those Regulations provided for the specific content of teaching practice in detail, such as the time, content, organization and leadership, performance assessment and evaluation, etc. According to the "The Regulations in Normal College" promulgated in 1942, the students should spend 5 years to graduate from the normal schools, which includes that they should study four years at school and in the last year they need to practice in the middle school. Just when the students were qualified to practice, they could finally get the degree certificate.

After the founding of the PRC, teaching practice has a greater development on the basis of the original. In 1952, the Ministry of Education promulgated the "Regulations on the Higher Normal School (Draft)" and regulated that the affiliated schools of the higher normal schools were the important places of teaching practice for students. The Ministry of Education for the first time drew up "The Outline of Teaching Practice in the Normal School (Draft)" in 1952 and "The Outline of Teaching Practice in the Normal University and Vocational College" in 1957, and formulate "the time of teaching practice is one year, and the contents of teaching practice include five aspects: ①the understanding of the practice of school work; ②the observation of classroom teaching and educational activities; ③trying to teach and listen to lectures; ④the practice of the head teachers' work; ⑤writing the practice diaries and make the practice report." During ten years of turmoil, the teaching practice was canceled, which caused a sharp drop in the quality of education.

After the downfall of the gang of four, the system of teaching practice has been restored and developed. In October 1980, the Ministry of Education issued "The Suggestions to Do a Good Job in the Higher Normal College", and pointed out: "teaching trainee and practice is an important link for the teachers to associate theory with practice and to cultivate qualified middle school teachers. The normal colleges must attach great importance to and strengthen the teaching practice earnestly. If the condition is allowed, the normal colleges should develop and build their attached middle schools for the educational experiment and practice." In 1987 the national Education Commission promulgated a new "Eight Teaching Plan for Two-year Normal School", which pointed out that the time for teaching practice will be increased from 4 weeks to 6 weeks. During the period of the ninth five-year plan, the Ministry of education put forward to strive to run the normal education at all levels, improve the professional quality of the normal college graduates, and attach great importance to the cultivation of students' practical ability.

### IV. THE RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING PRACTICE

#### A. *The Orientation of College Foreign Language Teaching Practice*

The foreign language education in the higher normal colleges belongs to the professional education. The educational

goal of the foreign language education is to cultivate the foreign language teachers who have the ability of teaching and research. The aim of foreign language teaching practice is to make students into the foreign language teaching practice, consolidate and expand their knowledge and skills learned in school, improve their language applied skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation, develop their ability to be independently engaged in teaching and research, so that the students can have more extensive adaptability after graduation and adapt to the needs of foreign language teaching and the development of the society. Foreign language teaching practice possesses the characteristics of normal education and the foreign language discipline, its positioning is summed up as:

- Foreign language teaching practice is the professional skill training course where the foreign language students link the educational theory to the practice;
- Foreign language teaching practice is the foreign language students' academic achievement review course;
- Foreign language teaching practice is a political course where foreign language students consolidate their professional thoughts;
- Foreign language teaching practice is a unified activity course with multi-side participation and joint implementation;
- Foreign language teaching practice is an identification course where foreign language students obtain the qualifications for teachers.

### *B. The Construction of Professional Foreign Language Teaching Practice*

#### 1. The Construction of the Skills

**Teaching design skill**— It is a kind of the skills that teachers use to anticipate and design the overall teaching process and teaching steps from the global teaching situation. It can include the following main activities, such as designing the structure of various foreign language classroom teaching process; selecting the appropriate teaching methods; configuring teaching tools; according to the teaching objective, choosing the content of teaching materials and turning it into the teaching project projects (language paradigms, communicative situation, text etc.); arranging the bilateral activities between teachers and students in the teaching process; the needs associated with speech training project; designing exercises; etc.

**Communicative and cooperative skill**— This skill requires, in the teaching process, that the student teachers should establish a communicative and cooperative relationship between teachers and students, among the students themselves and between the teacher and the whole class in foreign language teaching, student teachers use to the language that they teach the students to create a foreign communicative teaching atmosphere. Teachers and students participate in the real communicative activities in a cooperative manner, which ensure the authenticity of the target language.

**Organizing and monitoring skill**— This skill is an important guarantee to realize the first two skills. It includes the following main activities, such as organizing and achieving the established teaching plan in class; organizing the students' communicative activities in accordance with the planned teaching system, the students' individual characteristics and the level of the foreign language that they have mastered; holding the foreign language competitions and language games, etc. At the same time, teachers should monitor the students' behavior and their communication activities in extra-curricular activities or the teaching process, and timely adjust their teaching strategies. The teaching skill is an ability test for the student teachers' comprehensive ability in practice, and also an important factor in the teaching activities smoothly.

**Quality education skill**—it mainly refers to the skill with which teachers use the foreign language materials of the textbook for the students' individual development education, intelligence education and moral education. This function is contained in the teaching, but it is essential for quality education, and cannot be ignored in the foreign language teaching activities.

**Research skill**— The function of this skill requires the student teachers conduct their teaching activities as well as studying the students' psychological and age characteristics, teaching method and teaching materials, experiencing the theories in the teaching time, finding and solving the practical problems, forming the practice report or research paper, which reflects the requirement that the future foreign language teachers change into the "research" teachers.

#### 2. The Construction of Practice Content

Based on the content of the original language teaching practice, the professional foreign language teaching practice can elaborate the practice programs and strengthen the professional quality, which is helpful to facilitate the formation of foreign language teaching behavior and the implementation of formative assessment.

**The classroom teaching practice**—Classroom teaching is the basic form of class teaching system. The teachers systematically teach knowledge and develop their students' intelligence according to provisions of the teaching plan. At the same time, it is a kind of teaching activity for the students' moral education. It is the core content of the student teachers' comprehensive training and improvement, and a basic approach that the student teachers apply the professional knowledge they have learned to the real teaching practice. As a key link in the whole process of teaching practice, classroom teaching practice is divided into several class teaching methods, such as attending the lectures, preparing for the courses, teaching methods, writing teaching plans, teaching demonstration, classroom teaching, assessment, correcting the assignments and the like.

**The in-charge teacher practice**—The practice of being the teachers who are in charge of the class contains several

specific content, including establish the work plan for the work of the teachers who are in charge of the class, organizing the themed class meeting, carrying out the extracurricular activities and having the family visit work.

**The investigation and study practice**—The content of this practice is involved in many aspects, such as educational environment, teaching methods, the usage of teaching materials, the students' learning motivation and learning strategies. The results of the investigation and research practice are the investigation reports or research thesis.

**The establishment of the portfolio on teaching practice**— Based on the role that teaching practice plays in the normal students' professional development, the portfolios on the foreign language teaching practice are divided into three types, including material, reflective and communicative type. In the portfolios there should be the files that can show the students' innovative ability and their growing process in teaching practice. After the completion of the portfolio, the time and directory should be marked on the cover. The teachers should give their feedbacks according to students, collected content in teaching practice. The students and their fellows can also participate in the assessment activities in teaching practice.

### 3. The Construction of Practice Criteria

A person of profound knowledge can become a teacher. A person of higher respect can become a model. The word "normal" in the phrase "higher normal colleges" in Latin means "regulation and standard". The professional foreign language teaching practice is intended to reflect the standardized requirements.

**The requirements for basic skills**— The requirements for the basic skills are embodied in the three aspects, pronunciation, language teaching and writing on the blackboard. Before the teaching practice, the students should pass the test of reading and the phonetic symbol. In the classroom teaching, the student teachers should be required to hold the accurate pronunciation and intonation. Their teaching language should follow the specification and conform to the syntactic and pragmatic rules. Their blackboard writing should be required clear, clean and without spelling mistakes. Their teaching practice should reflect the teaching points and knowledge structure.

**The requirements for teaching plan**— The teaching plans include the unit plans and the lesson plans. There should be the detailed teaching plans in the lesson plans. The content of the teaching plan should include the following elements, such as the teaching goals, teaching steps, time distribution, assignments, the design of the blackboard writing, etc.

**The requirements for educational technology**— In the teaching demonstration and practice, the students should make a class independently. And their teaching design can reflect the usage of the network resources.

**The requirements for lesson assessment and lesson lecture**— In the teaching demonstration and teaching practice, the students are required to use the target language to assess and lecture the lessons. Their participation is listed in the assessment index.

**The requirements for ethics**— During the teaching practice, the students should comply with the school rules and regulations, and their behavior should conform to the teacher's ethics.

## V. CONCLUSION

Foreign language teaching practice is aimed at to provide a platform for the normal students' professional knowledge and the theoretical practice. The significance of that platform is to strengthen the vocational spirit and ideal in foreign language teaching, to internalize the professional theories of the foreign language teaching, to activate the practical knowledge of the foreign language teaching and to reflect on the role of foreign language teachers. For the foreign language students in the normal college, foreign language teaching practice is not only a test of professional knowledge and skills, but also a challenge and test on their occupational spirit and ideal. Teaching practice is facing up to the problems that how the students make the theoretical knowledge applied in classroom teaching. The teacher's practical knowledge results from their practical sense, which is a kind of ability to reflect and grasp subconsciously when they are immersed in the educational environment.

Foreign language teaching practice is the preparation stage of the foreign language teachers' specified professional roles. The reflective ability is the inner motivation of teachers' professional development, and one of the important contents of reflection is the reflection on the teacher's role. Foreign language educational trainees will feel a bit confused, uncomfortable and even frustrated. Reflection can make the trainees calm in the face of emergencies, objectively view their deficiency in the teaching practice, and actively adjust themselves, so as to promote their self-development and self-perfection. A good beginning is half done. The professional platform for the foreign language teaching practice is an integral part of the foreign language teachers' professional development to, but is also the starting point of foreign language educational action research.

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