

A Survey of English Teacher Professional Development in Southeastern Chongqing Minority Schools: Problems and Solutions*

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Abstract—This paper aims to explore the existing problems and solutions of English teachers' professional development in some minority schools of Southeastern Chongqing from such aspects as professional knowledge, professional competence and emotional attitude. By questionnaires and individual interviews, research group has found some major problems like, nonstandard pronunciation, lack of theoretical basis, inadequate cultural knowledge, and insufficient scientific research ability. After analyzing those possible reasons, this paper provides some solutions: improving teachers' pronunciation, growing teacher's cultural awareness, strengthening teachers' linguistic and teaching theories, and offering some practical training programs.

Index Terms—Southeastern Chongqing minority schools, English teacher, professional development, problems and solutions

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, Chongqing is devoted to building the educational highland of the West area, and as the driving force of this course, teachers' professional development quickly receives much concern. Teachers' professional development refers to teachers' professional growth process, which describes the increasing level of their own expertise, continuous development and the final maturity of profession (Wang, 2005). The Ministry of Education has put forward new *English Curriculum Standard* of Secondary School in 2011, which requires English teachers not only to change teaching conception but to explore effective teaching methods in their teaching practices. Later, in 2012, the Ministry of Education has issued *Professional Standard for Secondary School Teachers* (a trial standard), the Standard for short. This Standard is the basic professional requirements for qualified teachers in secondary school and the guidance for professional development. As teachers are the essential players at the center of any educational reform (Cuban, 1990), their professional development becomes the hot issue or even the difficult problem in the whole process, especially in minority areas. Also, the success of reform in education relies on teachers' knowledge, skills, and abilities. As a consequence, teachers' professional development is a major focus of systemic reform (Corcoran, 1995; Corcoran et al. 1998). At the same time, Southeastern Chongqing is one of the few ethnic groups inhabited mainly by Tujia and Miao including one district and four counties, that is, Qianjiang district, Xiushan, Youyang, Pengshui and Shizhu counties, and the groups of teachers are mainly Tujia and Miao. Their educational development is relatively delayed for lacking advanced educational resources and educational conception, and teaching techniques are somewhat outdated, etc. Many scholars have performed some relevant researches on this tough problem. Ma (2015) explores the development of subject teaching knowledge in minority areas, finding some problems such as the outdated educational conception, the backward teaching skills, the single teaching method and lacking teaching reflection ability. Guo (2012) finds that minority areas English teachers whose teaching ability, accompanied with insufficient educational theories, unqualified capacity for scientific research and lacking awareness of educational reform cannot adapt to the requirement of the changing era. Yin (2012) explores the relationship between English education and minority culture in Southeastern Chongqing and finds that it represented as the unity of opposites. Currently, no scholars, however, do any researches on professional development of secondary school English teachers in Southeastern Chongqing. Therefore, this study aims at investigating present professional development and existing problems of English teachers in this area and expecting to provide a relatively objective reference and basis for teachers' development in minority areas.

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II. RESEARCH DESIGN

(1) Research time and respondents: this study was carried out by research group in the middle of May, 2016. Research members were divided into three groups to perform field investigations, randomly choosing English teachers of five secondary schools in the Southeastern Chongqing including Xiushan, Qianjiang and Shizhu as respondents, through questionnaire survey and individual interview.

(2) Research objectives and significance: this survey aims at learning the present professional development and finding out existing problems of English teachers in minority areas, analyzing reasons that hinder the professional development and providing the relevant solutions. This paper could provide a relatively objective reference for the professional development of minority area English teachers in Southeastern Chongqing and make secondary schools' faculties of minority areas in the Southeastern Chongqing more standardized and normalized.

(3) Research methods: documentation method, field investigation, survey and individual interview.

(4) Research questions and contents: according to the Standard, this questionnaire involves professional knowledge, professional competence, emotional attitude, etc. It covers eight dimensions including language knowledge, language skills, cultural awareness, knowledge of pedagogy and psychology, teaching practice ability, teaching scientific research capacity, teaching skills of education and emotional attitude of teachers. This questionnaire has designed forty multiple choices and two subjective questions.

III. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of this study, research group went to Xiushan, Qianjiang and Shizhu to conduct the field investigation, distributing 110 pieces of questionnaires and getting 105 responses, during the whole process, research members are all the time on the scene. From the questionnaires distributed and got, we calculated that the efficiency is as high as 95.5%. Under the guidance of our professor, the group members conducted a comprehensive data statistics to analyze advantages and disadvantage of professional development of teachers in local areas. Meanwhile, group members collected and summarized answers of interviewees and got the first-hand information of the teachers' professional development demanding. For the Limited length, this paper is about to analyze teacher's professional knowledge and competence in detail, while emotional attitude of teachers will be discussed in another thesis.

A. Professional Knowledge

Professional knowledge refers to the steady systematic knowledge in a certain range, and it is also the organic component of knowledge ability, which is the basis of language skills and teaching development. Acquiring a good understanding of major knowledge, such as basic English language knowledge (vocabulary, grammar etc.), language skills, etc is the fundamental requirements for a qualified English teacher. Based on the concrete content of professional knowledge, 13 questions are designed for this part, including language knowledge, such as phonetics, grammar, vocabulary, semantics, syntax; language skills, such as listening, reading, speaking and writing; cultural awareness, such as British and American literature, cross-cultural communication; applied linguistics knowledge and pedagogical and psychological knowledge, such as teaching methodology, teaching management, teaching schools, etc.

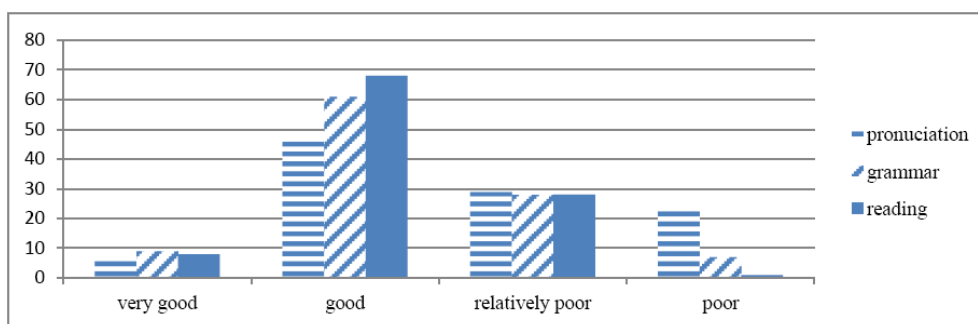


Figure 1 Language knowledge and skills

The survey shows that most teachers have acquired language knowledge and skills quite well, especially grammar and reading. As shown in Figure 1, 68.1% teachers have a good command of English grammar (8.6% very good+59.5% good), and 73.3% teachers' English reading level is high (7.6% very high+65.7% high). Systematic grammar knowledge and good reading skills help teachers perform well in teaching. Teachers' language knowledge and skills are the fundamental guarantee to carry out teaching activities, and only those who have a high level of languages can fully master the teaching materials, laying a solid foundation for teaching. Standard pronunciation makes a great addition to classroom teaching, but 50.5% teachers (27.6% dissatisfied+22.9% extremely dissatisfied) in this area are not quite satisfied with their pronunciation. The reasons are that, on the one hand, 68.6% teachers are ethnic minorities (47.6% Tujia+21.0% Miao). Their native language is their mother tongue, and Chinese is their second language, English belonging to their third language or second foreign language. "According to the theory of second language acquisition

and third language acquisition, English learning will be affected by the interference of mother tongue and second language, especially in oral English, syntactic structure and semantic distinction etc., which result in negative transfer being greater than the positive transfer” (Yin Bo, 2012, p.78). On the other hand, considering teachers’ general information surveyed on the questionnaires, 2.9% teachers are non-English majors, and they have not accepted systematic training of English knowledge, let alone pronunciation. Also, from individual interview, most teachers have mountains of teaching work to finish, like preparation for teaching, checking homework of students. Especially there are 74.3% teachers are female, for most of them, they must do much housework as well. Most of all, the lack of related practice as well as guidance are also one of the reasons for their imperfect pronunciation.

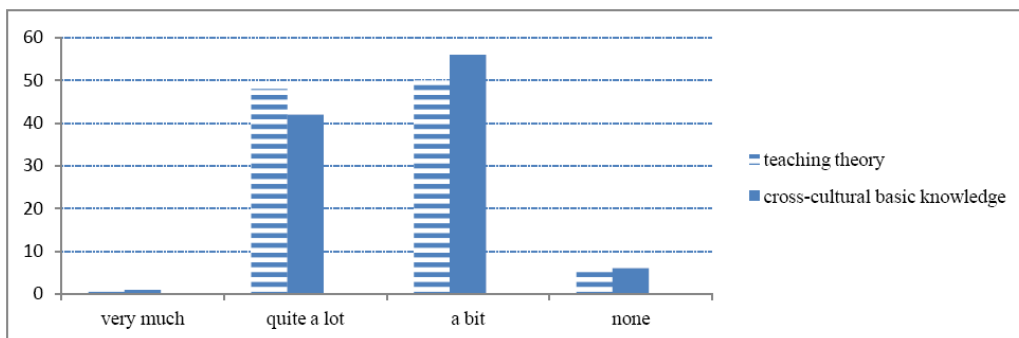


Figure 2 Teaching theory and cultural awareness

Only if teachers have good theoretical basis can they deeply understand the essence of the curriculum standard and teaching method, and apply some theories to teaching. However, there are still some deficiencies in teachers’ theoretical knowledge of language teaching in this area. As shown in Figure 2, 53.3% teachers (47.6% a bit+ 5.7% none) lack theoretical knowledge in language acquisition theory, teaching theory and so on. 45.7% teachers (40% a bit+5.7% none) know little about basic knowledge of cross-cultural knowledge. Just one teacher masters well about the theory of language acquisition and cross-cultural knowledge. As Bao (2012) put forward “in our country, there is a tendency to emphasize skill but ignore theories among English teachers” (p.18). Teachers are more likely to regard teaching as a kind of technique. Since they believe that practice makes perfect, they do not need to know so many theories. According to Yan (2011), this phenomenon is more prominent in minority areas.

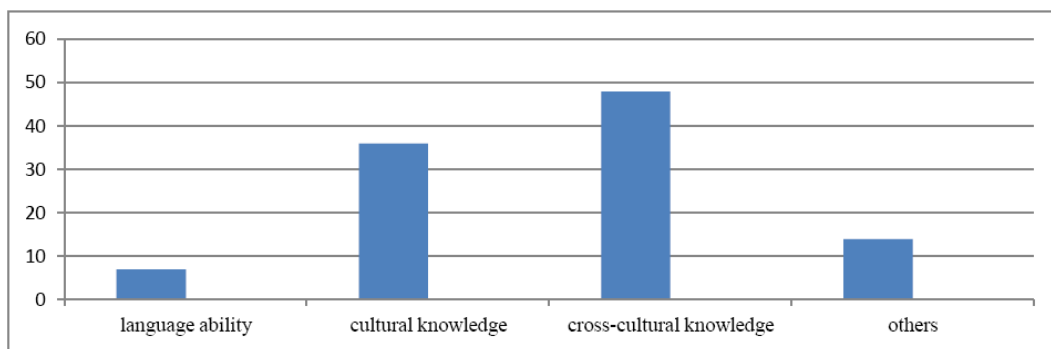


Figure 3 the lack of knowledge in teaching

Language is the carrier of culture, as well as a part of culture. Therefore, English teachers should have a comprehensive understanding of the culture of English-speaking countries. In teaching, teachers should not only pass on language knowledge and cultivate their language skills, but also impart the encyclopedic knowledge behind the language, because culture input proves to be very necessary in foreign language teaching and learning, as a result, cultural competence plays a critical role in successful language learning. While teachers in this area are relatively lack of English cultural knowledge. As shown in Figure 3, 35.2% teachers lack basic knowledge of English and American literature, and 42.9% teachers lack cross-cultural knowledge. According to the latest revised edition of the English Curriculum Standards in 2011, the five dimensions of teaching goals are language knowledge, language skills, emotional attitude, learning strategies and cultural awareness. Five dimensions are equally important, but to some extent English teachers focus on the cultivation of language knowledge and language skills, and ignore the other three aspects. This situation is closely related to the present situation of paying much attention to the examination rather than the application of English teaching in our country in the long term.

B. Professional Competence

The level of teachers’ professional competence will affect the final results of educational and teaching activities. It includes teaching practice ability, scientific research ability and educational teaching skills. “Teaching practice ability

refers to the actual teaching ability of teachers, showing in the aspects of the teaching and training ability of English knowledge and skills, teaching organizational skills and comprehensive teaching skills”(Bao, 2012, p.23). The scientific research ability refers to the capacity of exploring English teaching and learning rules in the process of teaching practice, besides the ability of organizing teaching and implementing of curriculum. Educational teaching ability mostly includes teaching design, classroom communication and modern educational technology application. For professional competence level, 20 questions are designed in the questionnaire, from question 14 to question 34.

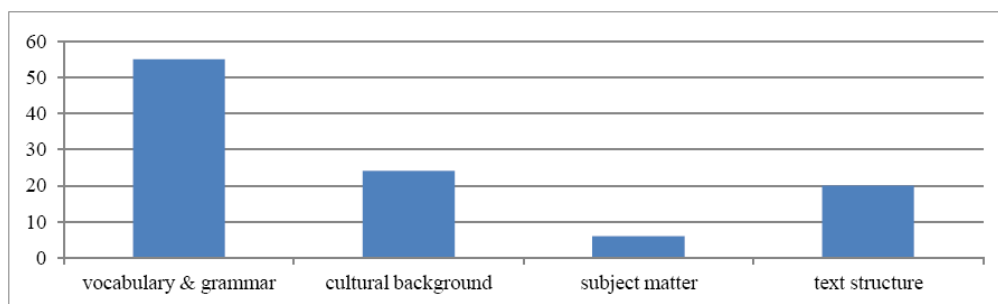


Figure 4 teaching foci

The survey shows that 53.3% teachers can use target language to organize teaching, and the teaching methods are abundant and diverse. Teaching activities are not the traditional teacher-centered, but student-centered, which is more heuristic and interactive, to some extent, helping students activate the enthusiasm. However, teachers cannot effectively balance language knowledge, cultural awareness and discourse analysis in teaching. As shown in Figure 4, 47.6% teachers pay much attention to vocabulary and grammar in the teaching process, but ignore the importance of culture; however, language and culture are closely related. Culture is the foundation of language formation and development, and many factors in language (such as sentence structure, lexical meaning) are related to it. English teaching should help students comprehend their own and foreign culture, broaden their horizon and develop cross-cultural awareness. At the same time, some teachers only focus on the “surface structure” in interpreting texts, while ignoring the “deep structure”, that is, the subject matter and textual structure. According to individual interviews, teachers are under much pressure in students’ entering higher school. They pay much attention to test items and neglect culture, which explains the reason why teachers just emphasize on the vocabulary and grammar, while ignoring the importance to cultivate students’ culture awareness. In addition, some teachers express they are indeed lack of cultural knowledge so that they cannot give students a comprehensive system of cultural knowledge.

Maintaining a good reading habit, reading a large number of books and magazines related to their profession and constantly obtaining new information are extremely significant for teachers’ professional development. But the survey shows that only 7.6% teachers read more than 5 hours per week, while 72.4% teachers read professional books and magazines less than two hours per week. The main reason is that teachers have lots of classes per week. Most teachers say they do not have enough time to upgrade their knowledge. The Ministry of Education has strict requirements on secondary school teachers’ class hours, for English subject (senior high school 10 classes/ week, junior high school 12 classes/ week), but 57.1% teachers have 15 classes or more per week, which means heavy teaching tasks. In addition to the basic organization of teaching, they need to correct the homework and prepare for the teaching; therefore, they have no spare time, let alone reading the relevant professional books. Moreover, according to individual interviews, some teachers believe that the key point of teaching is to explain the textbook, and there is no need for extra-curricular reading because they think it is enough to interpret textbook knowledge thoroughly to help students pass exams. And after finishing one day’s work, physically and mentally exhausted, some teachers mention that their teaching tasks are so heavy that they are not willing to read any more.

Professor Wang (1998), a famous Chinese linguist, says that with some knowledge of foreign languages and some teaching experience, teachers should do some research. However, many of them are contented with their current achievement and do not want to improve themselves. They should understand they will have no academic achievements and their teaching skills will not be improved or even fall behind if they do not do any research. 90.5% teachers in this region write less than two essays in recent three years and 43.8% of them have never published one. Many teachers believe that the primary task is to teach students language knowledge, not aware of the importance of research. Meanwhile, teachers’ professional titles are on the low state. Only 7.6% Teachers’ professional title is in a senior post, and this indicates that in English subject there are a few discipline leaders, so teachers’ training and introduction is critical. In the interim, from personal interview, some teachers tell that they do not master the scientific research methods because of limited systematic training and poor facilities and condition in school.

C. Some Major Problems

Through the analysis above, research members find the following problems in minority school English teachers’ professional development:

- (1) Nonstandard pronunciation; some teachers are not satisfied with their pronunciation, and at the third question on

questionnaires, it is about teachers' satisfaction with their own pronunciation and intonation. Only six teachers satisfied with it and most teachers' pronunciation is relatively poor.

(2) Part of teachers are lack of theoretical basis; at the ninth, tenth and twelfth questions, it is about teachers' grasp of language teaching theories, general linguistic theories and the most deficient knowledge in teaching respectively, finding that teachers are inadequate for some theories, like most teachers do not know pragmatics, language acquisition, semantics and teaching schools etc.

(3) English teachers are inadequate to cultural knowledge; at the eleventh, twelfth and nineteenth questions, some topics related to cultural knowledge are designed, like, most lacking knowledge in teaching, the understanding of cross culture and teaching foci, finding teachers cannot balance language knowledge, cultural awareness and discourse analysis in teaching, also, they are lack of cross-culture and foreign literature.

(4) Teachers are insufficient for scientific research ability; at the twenty-ninth, thirty-first and thirty-second questions, it is about teachers' research ability, including the frequency of organizing English research activity, the undertaking of research subjects and papers published respectively, finding teachers barely publish papers or organize research activities. Also, from individual interview, knowing teachers do not know how to do research because of lacking scientific guidance and relatively poor facilities in school.

D. *Some Possible Solutions*

According to the previous problems and possible reasons, relevant solutions are given as follows:

(1) Improving teachers' pronunciation; The key point of phonetic teaching lies in teachers' own phonetic quality. At the beginning of English teaching, imitation and repetition are primary. The object for students to imitate is mostly from their teachers. Therefore, teachers should be equipped with standard pronunciation, so they should utilize some English learning APP to simulate native speakers' pronunciation in some materials, such as entertainment, politics, literature and economics, etc. It is beneficial for teachers to practice frequently in order to cultivate a better pronunciation habit. Meanwhile, reading more theoretical phonetic books and browsing English learning Websites will be a great help. Most importantly, teachers can use English as a device to share their teaching plan between teachers, like making other teachers listen to the plan from pronunciation and intonation, then giving some suggestions to help correct. And it is a long-term mission to pronunciation study, so teachers have to persist in practicing all the time.

(2) Strengthening teachers' linguistic and teaching theories; reading more books about linguistics and teaching theories can deepen their comprehension of nature of language, which means an easier way to connect language use with age, gender, race, and education level, as a result that they can apply teaching theories to teaching practice efficiently. Yates (2003) says only acquiring theories, modes and teaching rules can teachers form their own teaching style. However, there is a tendency that teachers prefer skills to theories in teaching, which is more salient in this area. Shu et al. (1996) think there are two main functions of teachers' theory quality: for one, it can promote teachers to abide by principles of language teaching and development and to adopt an appropriate teaching method. For another, it is a proper way to understand language, improving language quality and language use ability. For most teachers, because they have not enough theoretical knowledge on their own, they can ask other advanced teachers to share their own ideas and experiences.

(3) Growing teacher's cultural awareness; a majority of teachers know little about basic knowledge of cross culture, and English speaking countries' literature, so that they cannot handle the relationship among culture, language knowledge and discourse analysis, paying much attention to vocabulary and grammar, which Bao (2012) has discussed it makes teaching activities dull. Associating useful and novel cultural knowledge with authentic pronunciation can foster students' emotional attitude, achieving a better result. It is urgent for teachers to form a sense of culture awareness, not only to study foreign culture but to internalize their native culture comprehensively. Only in this way can they guide students to take in elite culture and abandon decadent one. Before class, it is necessary for teachers to combine internet resources and references with foreign culture in teaching and to differentiate different cultures, which help teachers enhance culture awareness and sensitivity. After that, teachers are able to adjust their teaching activities to activate the class atmosphere.

(4) Offering some practical training programs; an excellent teacher is not only the practitioner in teaching but the researcher of the rules of study. Using various materials like professional books, internet and media can develop their scientific research ability. Also, Harwell (2003) says supporting from school and society influences the progress of teachers' development. Combining 'Bring in' with 'Going out', encouraging teachers to participate in corresponding training and further study and inviting professionals to deliver lectures make them acquire theoretical knowledge to stimulate their professional development.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper makes a survey of the minority secondary school English teachers' professional development in Southeastern Chongqing, from three levels, like professional knowledge, professional competence and emotional attitude, including eight dimensions, discovering that some teachers in Southeastern Chongqing minority schools are not qualified for basic professional knowledge, because their pronunciation is not standard, and in the teaching process, they focus on interpreting grammar and vocabulary, while ignoring the importance of culture, meanwhile, their

scientific research ability is insufficient.. For problems discussed above, this paper tries to offer some suggestions: for example, improving teachers' pronunciation by making use of English learning APP and websites to imitate standard pronunciation and sharing experience and ideas to others; Strengthening teachers' linguistic and teaching theories by taking advantage of internet and library, and reading theoretical books to improve knowledge structure; Growing teacher's cultural awareness by fostering their cultural ability and sensitivity to cross culture and adjusting their teaching activities; Schools and related departments offer some practical training programs, combining 'Bring in with' 'Going out', and supporting resources for teachers to stimulate their professional development.

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