

A Study on the Professional Development of Senior High School English Teachers: from the Perspective of New Curriculum Standards

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Abstract: The new curriculum reform of senior high school English attaches great importance to the professional development of English teachers and also puts forward new requirements for their professional development. This paper mainly explains the importance of English teachers' professional development to English education, analyses the problems existing in the process of English teachers' professional development from the objective and subjective perspectives, and puts forward corresponding countermeasures for the teachers, the schools and the relevant governments, which may help some English teachers to better realize their professional development.

Keywords: New Curriculum Standards, Senior High School, English Teachers' Professional Development, Problems, Countermeasures

1. Introduction

The English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education (2022 Edition), with its emphasis on the integrated cultivation of students' language competence, cultural awareness, thinking quality and learning ability, further highlights the nurturing value of the English subject, signifying that China's curriculum reform has moved towards the pursuit of higher values. The new curriculum has undergone changes in terms of both the curriculum programme and the curriculum standards. These changes are reflected in the refinement of the training objectives, the optimisation of the curriculum, the refinement of the implementation requirements, the strengthening of the educational orientation of the curriculum, the optimisation of the content structure, the development of academic quality standards and so on^[1].

No matter how good an educational policy is, its successful implementation depends on its availability and effective use, and the teachers are a key factor^[2]. As Professor Zhong argued, the success or failure of curriculum reform ultimately depends on teachers^[3]. As a result, the new English curriculum reform for general senior high school has posed higher requirements and challenges to the professional development of senior high English teachers. To meet these challenges, the professional development needs of the teachers have changed. Therefore, we need to pay more attention to the problems faced by teachers in their professional development and to propose corresponding countermeasures.

2. Connotation of English Teachers' Professional Development

Professor Ye defined teachers' professional development as a process of continuous evolution and enrichment of teachers' professional growth or their internal structures. At the same time, Professor Ye categorised the professional structure of teachers into three specific areas: professional knowledge, professional competence and professional attitudes. And she believed that teachers' professional development is the result of a combination of their growth and environmental support^[4].

According to Professional Standards for Secondary School Teachers (Trial), teachers' professional development includes three dimensions: professional philosophy and ethics, professional knowledge and professional competence. According to the professional standards, teachers are required to organically integrate disciplinary knowledge, educational theory and educational practice, to take the initiative to participate in teacher training and independent training, and to enhance their professional development^[5].

With reference to the above understanding of teacher professional development, this paper argues that high school English teacher' professional development refers to the dynamic process of growing from a novice teacher to an expert teacher by continuously enriching professional knowledge, improving professional skills and deepening professional awareness. The teachers should not only have systematic professional knowledge and comprehensive professional competence, but also have the ability to be popular transmitters of knowledge to their students. In addition, teachers need to combine the knowledge of books with students' real life, help develop students' independent learning skills and global cultural awareness, thus helping them become socialist builders and successors with an international perspective. What's more, teachers should have the right values, a good work ethic and a strong sense of responsibility.

3. Problems Existing in Teachers' Professional Development

The process and quality of teachers' professional development depends on a variety of factors, including internal factors and external factors. Internal factors mainly include teachers' professional knowledge, professional competence, professional attitudes and job burnout. External factors mainly include professional stress, teachers' cooperation, and teacher training. The next part will analyse the problems existing in the professional development of high school English teachers in terms of these factors.

3.1. Imbalance of English Teachers' Professional Structure

The professional structure of teachers includes professional knowledge, professional competence and professional attitude. These professional structures play a vital role in the process of teachers' professional development and one cannot be without the other. However, there is an imbalance in the professional structure of many teachers, which will badly affect their professional development.

On the one hand, there is an imbalance between teachers' professional knowledge and teachers' professional competence, that is, an imbalance between teachers' theoretical knowledge and teaching practice. As a language, English is constantly being updated and developed, so English teachers should pay attention to the latest teaching reforms and learn from the successes of English teaching. However, many English teachers have little time to follow the latest developments in teaching due to their busy schedules. They do not have extra time to enhance their learning to improve their teaching skills. As a result, these teachers are slow to update their theoretical knowledge and teaching competence, thus they cannot adapt to the requirements of the new curriculum reform.

On the other hand, some high school English teachers have unclear professional attitude and lack education belief, which are manifested in the following aspects. Some teachers cannot adapt to the requirements of new curriculum reform, some still have a conservative concept of education, some still overemphasize grammar and vocabulary teaching, some neglect the cultivation of students' communicative ability and emotional attitude, some only have a single way of teaching which makes all the teaching activities on examination basis, and some still stay in a concept of "teacher-centered" and refuse to accept any new teaching structure or method. All of these behaviors limit their professional development.

3.2. Job Burnout of English Teachers

Job burnout is an extreme reaction to an individual's inability to cope successfully with work stress. And it is also a state of emotional, attitudinal and behavioral exhaustion that accompanies the experience of prolonged stress. The emergence of teachers' job burnout can lead to negative emotions and behaviors in the teaching process, which will seriously affect the teachers' professional development. At the same time, teachers' job burnout also has a harmful effect on the object of education, for example, it will badly influence the healthy growth of the students, so that the quality of teaching will decline. Ultimately, it will affect the development of education.

While, some researches have found that a great number of high school English teachers bear the great psychological and mental stress in their work^[6]. These teachers are taking on more and more roles and therefore more responsibilities in the teaching process. They have a heavy teaching load and simply do not have the time or energy to focus on their professional development. What's worse, the low material remuneration of teachers and the fierce competition among teachers prevent them from feeling the joy and satisfaction of teaching, so that their enthusiasm and dedication to their work gradually diminish. Ultimately, this can make teachers feel physically and mentally exhausted, leading to different degrees

of job burnout.

Teachers' job burnout can lead to a lack of enthusiasm for teaching and a loss of motivation for professional development. If teachers do not take countermeasures to get out of job burnout, it will be difficult for them to achieve success in their future teaching. In this condition, job burnout will become a bottleneck that restricts teachers' professional development.

3.3. Lack of Communication and Cooperation Between Teachers

Suchomlinski once said that any teacher is part of a unified whole. This requires teachers to cooperate with each other and form an educational force to achieve the optimization of educational effect. However, we regret to see that there are still isolation and closure between teachers in senior high school English education. Some teachers always engage in their own scientific research, unwilling to participate in research teams.

There are many reasons for this phenomenon. First of all, due to the school evaluation mechanism, the ranking of teachers in teaching and scientific research directly affects their evaluation and promotion. So there is a fierce competition between teachers, and the space for cooperation is limited. Secondly, although some teachers have rich resources and experience, they are unwilling to share with others in order to maintain their own advantages. All in all, these teachers lack a sense of team awareness. The professional development of teachers should not only rely on their own, but on the cooperation of other teachers. Good professional development requires teachers to exchange experience, so as to gain encouragement and support from others, which will help increase the impetus for their professional development.

3.4. Inefficiency of Teacher Training

On most occasions, the efficiency of senior high school English teachers' education and training is not high. There are several reasons for the inefficiency. First, a considerable number of senior high school English teachers rarely participate in high-level teacher training. On the one hand, a lot of English teachers cannot free up a special time to participate in off-campus training. On the other hand, they think that there is no substantial help for them to participate in the training. Secondly, even if the teachers participate in the training, they may not have inadequate opportunities to communicate directly with the experts. Because the content of teacher training is limited to communication among teachers in this school, and communication is only in the form of "I listen to you". Thirdly, the training form and content are mostly the same for all kinds of English teachers in primary and secondary schools, which lack pertinence and effectiveness for teachers of different grades. Last but not the least, the training effect is rarely made in a timely evaluation. So the lack of follow-up tracking research on the training of teachers is another reason that causes the efficiency of teacher training. In a word, the teachers have rare opportunities to learn and to communicate in the teacher training.

4. Suggestions for English Teachers' Professional Development

In order to solve the above problems of the professional development of the teachers, the followings are some suggestions for the teachers, the schools and the relevant governments.

4.1. Suggestions for the Teachers

4.1.1. Enrich Professional Knowledge

The most important and most basic thing for English teachers to enhance their professional knowledge is that they should constantly consolidate their basic language knowledge and language competence. Reading is also a good way for English teachers to enrich their professional knowledge. English teachers need to read as much professional books and pedagogy psychology books as possible, which can provide direct help and guidance in their teaching. Through reading these books, teachers can better understand the latest and most cutting-edge research and dynamic of their teaching at home and abroad. If they can transplant, transform, and innovate what they have read, their teaching competence and professional development will be improved.

The professional development of English teachers is the key to improving the quality of English teaching. Therefore, the teachers should seize the great opportunity of curriculum reform. They should

constantly enrich their knowledge, and explore the development of the teaching model to make themselves an excellent professional teacher.

4.1.2. Focus on Teaching Reflection

While enriching and constantly updating their knowledge structure, teachers should also continue to improve their capacity structure. The most effective way to develop teachers' teaching ability and spirit of reform is to improve their self-reflection capacity. Reflection is not a simple summary of teachers' teaching experience, but the whole process of teaching behavior, which is accompanied by teacher self-monitoring, analysis and resolution of practical problems in educational actions. Teachers should make efforts to cultivate reflective teaching ability in their teaching, by means of classroom observation, audio and video recording, action research and writing reflection diary. In doing so, they can develop their ability to reflect, improve their education and teaching competence, and develop their own ability to find problems and solve problems.

The above reflection methods are commonly used by teachers and easily operate, and the teachers can choose their own way to promote their professional development. In a word, teachers should make efforts in various ways to improve their overall quality and break through the ecological limits of their professional development.

4.1.3. Cultivate a Sense of Cooperation

Mutual learning between teachers is the most direct resource for their professional development. And the cooperation between teachers should be strengthened on the basis of good teaching culture and teacher culture. The so-called "teacher cooperation" is a training mode in which teachers accomplish a common learning goal through a series of learning activities in the form of a group. Teachers can learn from each other, promote each other, and make common progress through cooperation. The followings are some specific methods to strengthen the cooperation between English teachers.

First, teachers should actively participate in collective lesson preparation, subject practical research, professional team construction, mutual class evaluation, demonstration class, open class, etc. Secondly, they can share a series of teaching materials to enhance their cooperative teaching, such as teaching plans, teaching preparation materials. Thirdly, they can also share their teaching experience with other teachers. Cooperative teaching can further strengthen the communication between teachers and peers, which can help solve the problems in teaching timely and efficiently, so that to improve the quality of teaching. Besides, efficient cooperation can also eliminate the loneliness of teachers' struggles and increase the happiness of teachers. What's more, the process of teaching is also a process of learning, so cooperation between teachers and students should be strengthened. To better encourage students' subjectivity, initiative and creativity, the teachers should take the learner as the center and activities as the main forms in class.

4.1.4. Enhance the Awareness of Self-professional Development

Teachers should have a clear sense of development because a clear self-professional sense is the source of teachers' professional development. It is of great importance for teachers to strengthen their cultivation of self-professional awareness. Only in this way can teachers form their professional self-awareness and stimulate their ideal pursuit. In order to accelerate their growth, teachers are required to constantly update their values, improve themselves consciously, and set up a correct view of education, teaching, teachers and students. Furthermore, teachers should constantly modify and improve the established goals according to the practice of feedback information, thus achieving their higher goals.

4.2. Suggestions for the Schools

4.2.1. Care More About the Teachers

The design of teaching activities should be based on activating students' real reading experiences and leading them to actively explore thematic meaning. Activities are supposed to promote students' participation in understanding, analyzing, and applying textual information. In activities designing, teachers should offer students opportunities to read independently as much as possible. As the most important task of students' language learning, the exploration of thematic meaning is closely related to the level of students' discourse comprehension, the level of thinking development, and the effectiveness of language learning. Therefore, teachers should create conditions and allow students to explore thematic meaning step by step, instead of presenting to them directly. Through active learning and exploring, students can gradually develop their learning ability and thinking quality.

4.2.2. Guide Teachers to Make Clear Professional Development Plans

The schools should make professional development programs for English teachers, which mainly include the key activities of the school English discipline. At the same time, the schools should guide each English teacher to make their own professional development plans, which include short-term, medium-term and long-term goals of their professional development. When teachers implement these plans down to earth, their professional development will be constantly promoted. Moreover, schools should link the completion of the professional development plans formulated by the teachers with their teaching performance at the end of the year, so as to mobilize the teachers' enthusiasm and initiative in teaching.

4.2.3. Optimize the School Evaluation System

In addition, the schools should create a sound teacher development evaluation system, and try to avoid evaluating the level of teachers' teaching ability through the results of student examinations. The schools can establish teacher self-evaluation groups, student evaluation groups, teaching and scientific research evaluation groups, and so on. The evaluation groups need to evaluate the teachers from multiple angles. Reasonable use of a teacher evaluation system can make teachers have a clearer professional development direction. All in all, it is fair to evaluate every teacher in the school, and the most important thing is to develop a quantitative assessment standard that teachers collectively recognize.

4.3. Suggestions for the Relevant Governments

4.3.1. Increase Policy Support

As for the relevant governments, they should improve the welfare guarantee and evaluation incentive mechanism, so that to promote the professional identity of the English teachers. More specifically, first, the relevant governments need to further improve the salary and treatment of high school English teachers, which can make an institutional guarantee for the teachers' professional development from the national legal level. Second, the relevant governments should also improve the social status of teachers, which can provide a source of strength for the professional development of teachers from the spiritual level. In addition, the relevant governments need to provide some platforms and opportunities for senior high school teachers' professional development, like increasing financial investment and giving certain financial support to the teachers who participate in the research and further study.

4.3.2. Rectify and Reform the Way of Teacher Training

Except increasing some policy support to promote the professional development of senior high school English teachers, the government should also rectify and reform the teacher training for these teachers. On the one hand, education administrative departments and teacher development centers at all levels should macro-control and appropriately adjust the training, so as to ensure that every English teacher can participate in effective training with enough class hours. According to the different original educational backgrounds and levels of teachers, specific training plans should be formulated by categories, so that to improve the effectiveness of training. On the other hand, it is necessary to build an integrated training network in urban and rural areas to expand the training system, which can help improve the training efficiency.

5. Conclusion

The new curriculum reform of senior high school English attaches great importance to the professional development of English teachers and also puts forward new requirements for their professional development. This paper explains the importance of English teachers' professional development to English education. And it also analyses the internal and external factors that affect teachers' professional development. Internal factors mainly include teachers' professional knowledge, professional competence, professional attitudes and job burnout. External factors mainly include professional stress, teachers' cooperation, and teacher training. Besides, this paper also analyses the problems existing in the process of English teachers' professional development from the objective and subjective perspective, such as unbalanced professional structure, job burnout, lack of cooperation, ineffective teacher training. To solve these problems, this paper puts up some suggestions for the teachers, the schools and the relevant governments. As for the teachers, they should enrich their professional knowledge and professional competence, focus on teaching reflection, cultivate a sense of cooperation and enhance the awareness of self-professional development. As for the schools, they should care more

about the teachers, guide teachers to make clear professional development plans and optimize the teacher evaluation system. As for the relevant governments, they should increase policy support and reform the way of teacher training.

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