A Survey on the Construction of Hidden Curriculum by Teachers for English Majors in Universities and Colleges—A Case Study of Anhui Sanlian University

Hong Zhou

Abstract. Teachers, as the core element in curriculum construction and management, are inseparable from the curriculum. The hidden curriculum is an open subject to be further developed. This paper, taking Anhui Sanlian University as the case, chooses English teachers as the subjects and empirically studies the present situation of the construction of hidden curriculum at the level of teachers through both qualitative and qualitative analyses, for a purpose to further promote the construction and management of English courses in universities and colleges.

Keywords: teachers in universities and colleges, hidden curriculum; English major.

Introduction
The ideas of hidden curriculum, emerging in the early 1900s, were originated from “collateral learning” proposed by J. Dewey and “associate learning” by WH Kilpatrick. The concept of hidden curriculum was reportedly coined by P. W. Jackson in Life in Classrooms (1968) and N. V. Overly in The Unstudied Curriculum: Its Impact on Children (1970) in the 1960s and 1970s. After the birth of the term, a variety of its aliases and translations have appeared at home and abroad. The diversity of the names indicates that the understanding towards the hidden curriculum and study perspectives tend to diversify, making the “hidden curriculum” become an open topic to be further developed. In addition, due to the difficulty in conducting standard and quantitative measurement on hidden curriculum as what has been done on the
manifest curriculum, the research on the hidden curriculum is far fewer when compared to the manifest curriculum, and consequently fewer studies have been made on the English hidden curriculum in universities and colleges. The curriculum can be defined as a process and an activity composed of the elements, like syllabus, teaching material and teaching method; among them, the core element is a teacher who is inseparable from the curriculum. Therefore, it is of great theoretical and practical significance to study the construction of hidden curriculum at the level of English teachers in universities and colleges.

**Background**

Compared with substantial research results of “manifest curriculum” in theory, method and content, there is an apparent lack of researches on hidden curriculum in domestic academics. Shi Guangxiao (2010) retrieved the core journals of education from 2000 to 2009 in Chinese Journal Full-text Database, only to find that there were less than 20 papers on hidden curriculum research published and no papers on foreign language hidden curriculum had ever been published in core journals of foreign languages studies during such a period. Monographs on the construction of hidden curriculum are also rare in China. The scarce research on the hidden curriculum in universities and colleges mainly borrows the research results of hidden curriculum in fundamental education and applies them to the research of higher education. Yu Boying and Shi Guangxiao (2012) caution the academics against the deficiency of the study on foreign language hidden curriculum in universities and colleges and analyze the hidden curriculum of foreign languages and possible research topics. Ran Chunfang (2014), by sorting out the researches on the hidden curriculum in universities and colleges in the past three decades, points out three stages of its development. The first stage spans from the middle and late 1980s to the early 1990s, during which the researches opened a new vision of domestic study on hidden curriculum (representative figures including Tang Yexian, 1987; Tang Xiaojie, 1988; Zheng Jinzhou, 1989). The second stage is in 1990s, during which the study on hidden curriculum was directed at the curriculum itself and focused on theoretical thinking as well as macro-surface (Liu Genping, Huang Songhe, 1992; Pang Xueguang, 1994; Wu Liping, 1996; Jin Yule, 1996; Zhang Chuting, 1999; Zhao Zhengming, 2000). The third stage lasts from early days of the 21st century to present, during which the Ministry of Education of China proposed to deepen the educational reform, promote the quality-oriented education in an all-round way and shift from the examination oriented education to the quality oriented one, education workers thus gradually starting to examine and study the hidden curriculum from a new perspective. The study during the period gradually turned into micro aspects
and went deeper into class management, campus culture development and educational management of all disciplines in all kinds at all levels (Zhong Qi Quan, 2009; Lei Hui, Deng Luoping, 2010; Zhu Qing, Gao Yuan, 2012; Zhou Tiemin, 2015, etc.). Though the focuses have been shifted from the theoretical understanding to the practical operation, the study was yet limited to basic discipline in fundamental education, and the empirical research is relatively insufficient.

**Research Design**

**Topics**

The curriculum refers to a process and an activity with planning and prescriptive natures. As contents inconsistent with the manifest curriculum are often hidden in teachers’ daily teaching activities, it is thus of special significance to examine teachers’ daily teaching practice from the perspective of hidden curriculum. This paper mainly focuses on the following topics: Do teachers have their own unique hidden curriculum with reference to English major curriculum syllabus? If so, what factors are related to the emergence of hidden curriculum? And what is the main reason for the emergence?

**Subjects**

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the study to the greatest extent, the selection of the subjects follows the principle of fully voluntary participation. 20 teachers from English Teaching and Research Group, School of Foreign Languages of Anhui Sanlian University are selected as the subjects, most of whom are young and middle-aged females with a master’s degree and an intermediate professional title. The information of the subjects is shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
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<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1. Gender and Age of 20 Subjects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Title</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate professor</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average teaching seniority (year)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Average Teaching Seniority, Education Background of 20 Subjects.
Methodology

The quantitative analysis is employed in the study in combination with the qualitative one. Quantitative analysis is chosen for a questionnaire survey to 20 subjects and for data statistics. As to some data deserving to be dug up in the questionnaire, three interview questions are designed and certain individual subjects selected for the interview survey.

Results and Discussion

It is found in the study that hidden curriculum exists, more or less, in the daily teaching activities of these 20 English teachers, the emergence of which is in relation to the familiarity with curriculum syllabus, courses undertaken, teaching methods and activities in the teaching and teachers’ own beliefs and cognition. First of all, teachers’ familiarity with the curriculum syllabus has a direct impact on their hidden curriculum in teaching contents. Half of the subjects claimed that they were “unfamiliar” or “not quite familiar” with the syllabus of courses they taught while some respondents noted that they had not participated in the preparation of the syllabus of the courses they taught, and that the syllabus preparation, which, in their point of view, should be completed by the teaching affairs office, the school and the teaching or a research group, has little relation with them, and thus they only needed to understand the teaching tasks of the number of chapters to be completed in each semester and class hour arrangements, free of any cares about other regulations and requirements. In this case, teachers would not select the teaching contents specifically according to the syllabus, and thus the hidden curriculum with different focuses would not be generated. Besides, the courses undertaken by teachers and their teaching methods would trigger hidden curriculum to different degrees in their teaching contents. In the survey, it is found that cultural professional courses like Introduction to English Speaking Countries are more likely to lead to the emergence of teachers’ conceptual hidden curriculum while in the teaching of professional basic courses like Intensive Reading, the respondents are more likely to teach the contents related to the TEM4 and TEM8 “frequently”, though the exams are not clearly defined and described in the syllabus. Moreover, in terms of teaching methods, most respondents still focus on “lexical and grammar explanation”, “text structure analysis” or “organization of student practice and discussion” while teaching activities, such as cross-cultural communication skills and development of learning strategies, are less involved. Finally, teachers’ beliefs and cognition also constitute an important cause for the emergence of hidden curriculum. Teachers’ beliefs would directly work on the judgment in the teaching process, dominate their teaching behaviors and affect the teaching effect and students’ thoughts in an invisible and formative way. Teachers’ judgment on theories, views and opinions in the teaching
process would affect the teaching practice through the combination of hidden and manifest curriculums.

**Conclusion**

In the survey on the teachers from the English Teaching and Research Group, School of Foreign Languages of Anhui Sanlian University, it has been found that the hidden curriculum exists to a varied degree in their teaching activities, the emergence of which is related to the familiarity with the curriculum syllabus, courses undertaken, teaching methods and activities in the teaching and teachers’ own beliefs and cognition. The hidden curriculum, which plays a real role in manifest classes, exerts an invisible and formative influence on the students’ learning effect, the formation of concepts and the cultivation of the humanistic quality. In consideration of the great significance of the hidden curriculum, the reasons for the formation of hidden curriculum at the side of English teachers in universities and colleges and its pluralistic characteristics will be further explored and the in-depth relationship between hidden curriculum and manifest curriculum be analyzed.

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**References**


