The Current Situation and Countermeasures of English Teaching in Senior High Schools under the Background of New Curriculum Reform

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Abstract. After a brief review of the current situation of English teaching in senior high schools under the Background of New Curriculum Reform, this article finds that various problems exist in senior high school English teaching, and the gap between the teachers’ seemingly acceptance of the new idea of new curriculum and their practical teaching exercises is distinct. The main reasons of these problems are teachers’ outdated conditional knowledge and practical knowledge, and the contradiction between the teaching requirements of the new curriculum and the summative assessment of the National University Entrance Examination. Therefore, promoting teachers’ professional development, perfecting the assessment mechanism and changing the traditional education mode are crucial, which are the main solutions to solve these problems.

Introduction

The national new curriculum reform started in 2001, the most important step is to set up compulsory courses and elective courses to study areas - subjects - module-based curriculum design and implementation of the credit system. [1] The changes in curriculum requires the corresponding changes of English teaching objectives, content, teaching methods, ratings and resource development and utilization in senior high schools. Only if the high school English teaching meets the curriculum and students’ characteristics, and the development needs of the students’ English learning, can the functions of the curriculum be achieved. So, how has English teaching changed since the new high school curriculum experiment in 2004? Even though the implementation are promoted more than 10 years, what are the problems still existing? What are the main causes of the problems? How to solve these problems? This paper attempts to answer these questions in the following parts.

The Current Situation of English Teaching

Changes of English Teaching in Senior High School

The most remarkable achievements of high school English curriculum reform are changes of teachers’ concept and adjustments and self-identity to the new curriculum ideas. A member of the English national curriculum standards disciplinary specialist group made a research report in 2006 and pointed out that all the teachers regard the National Curriculum as a guide and the new textbooks as a carrier engaging in the practice of changing teaching ideas. We can see that the teachers are trying to reverse the teaching track based on the simple and overly discipline-based system, and transfer toward people-centered development as the main line of the new orbital.[3] The report also showed that observing the teacher’s classroom activities found that “teachers own the awareness to cultivate students’ information ability, the awareness to allow students to express feelings and wishes of consciousness, the awareness to cultivate students' independent learning ability, the awareness to communicate equally with students and work in a English sense.”[3] This phenomenon shows that the new ideas of English courses not only have come into the minds of high school teachers, but also have turned into teaching action and begun to play a role in the classroom. The self-identity to the new curriculum is an important prerequisite for the teachers changing the teaching concept and reform of classroom teaching methods. The results above show that the promotion of the new curriculum has been paid off.
The changes of teachers’ teaching concept caused the changes in teaching behavior. Many high school English teachers regard the Curriculum as a guide to find ways to break point from the class teaching and try to apply the task-based approach to the skills of high school English class, so as to change instill teaching methods into a directive and tutoring teaching methods. In addition, there has emerged in a number of attempts to teach practices on creating a lively teaching atmosphere, carrying out teaching activities in order to highlight the diversity of the students’ position, innovating task design, reforming the reviews. Moreover, many local schools offered elective courses in the process relying on local and school-based resources, and actively developed school-based English curriculum and teaching materials. Some schools, like Haining senior high school in Zhejiang Province, the principal, Ye Cuiwei’s educational saying is “what more important than the score is healthy”; Zhou Bin, the principal of Zhejiang second senior high school, his educational saying is “Choose is more important than selection, students should learn to choose”,[4] such schools initially formed with local, flexible and diverse local curriculum, which accepted the local culture, local folklore, crafts, and other content into school-based teaching materials in order to deepen students’ understanding of the local culture and the culture of patriotism spirit.

Problems of English Teaching in Senior High School

Even though the changes in high school English teaching is evident, yet problems are also prominent. The first problem is the methods of high school English teaching are still backward, and transformation of the mode of learning is slow. There is an obvious inconsistency between the curriculum ideas and teaching behavior. Learner Liu Li ever commented the evaluation did not come into the both process and results form but only on the results. [5] “Result but process” teaching evaluation methods still plays a dominant role. Although percentile test scores and rating method are still based on the scores to judge the students’ academic performa, the combination of scores and descriptive evaluation is more popular in students. In fact, the evaluation did not completely change the weight of the values combination of evaluation, and qualitative and quantitative evaluation is not implemented. Outdated teaching methods fail to optimize the way of students learning. Meng Yanjun teacher’s report states that “The teacher is able to recognize the students as the subject of learning, and know that students should play a initiative role, but as for the design of specific activities, the students’ initiative space is still insufficient in the organization of classroom activities, because teachers are eager to show the results but not enough patient to wait for the whole process. There should be more time and space for most students’ needs to internalize the knowledge and skills.”[3] Compared with the teachers’ direct teaching, exploratory and inquiry-based learning takes more time, the teachers pursue the efficiency of knowledge transfer one-sided, do not allow students more time to self-discovery, exploration, ignoring the identifying and solving ability of students’ explorative activities, neither the creative thinking skills.

The second problem is the formalized teaching activities, and the achievement of teaching objectives being ignored. Contrary to the knowledge-based teaching and classroom practice teaching, some English classes are bustling, but the teaching learning activities carry little meaningful content and can not reach the purposes to expand knowledge and develop skills. The teacher Guo Jing pointed out, “Some teachers’ exploration activities are formatted, and the pursuit of active classroom scene one-sided and the lack of thinking inquiry process in depth lead the students to have a greater lack of mastering knowledge and can not achieve the goal of innovation. There is a big gap between the students’ emotions experience and learning goals.”[6] Here comes a typical example to reveal the problem. In general, “Hangman” game is a kind of guessing words play. All students are interested in this event and take part in actively, but often students can not realize what the target word is only in the game’s final seconds. So, most of the rest of the time is spent on blind guess. The game is able to stimulate students’ emotions, but it takes the lack of validity and that is not a valid way of target practice spelling, and basically it does not need students’ creative thinking.

The third problem is the lack of school-based curriculum development and the shortages of curriculum resource; teachers’ weak awareness and low ability to control and teach the curriculum.
resources. A survey shows that “many teachers entirely take textbook as curriculum resources, equivalent to the ‘entrance canon’, ‘English Express’ and other workbooks. The teachers do not know the specific procedures based on the curriculum development and operations and the school does not have the required conditions to develop the school-based curriculum.”[6] The teaching resources in economically developed areas is such a phenomenon, it is easy to imagine the English curriculum resources situation of the economy relatively backward areas. Since it is inadequate in high school English curriculum resources, the teachers’ and students’ awareness and the ability of exploring resources are utmost importance under the lack of teaching materials. However, the literature shows that the high school English teachers’ and students’ awareness of curriculum resources are still relatively weak. In terms of the use of materials, some teachers have teaching low ability, it is difficult to fully exploit the value of teaching. Meng Yanjun teacher’s report states that “teachers are not yet fully accustomed to the new way of thinking to analyze and understand the English textbooks’ characteristics of the concept written under the new curriculum standards. Besides seizing the teaching focus and achieving the teaching way of using textbook are teachers’ general confusion.” [3] The teachers’ understanding of the material and the ability are urgent to increase.

Causes of the Problems
The Dated and Backward Conditional Knowledge and Practical Knowledge

According to the professor Lin Chongde’s point of view, teachers’ knowledge can be divided into three aspects: the technical knowledge -- knowledge of a particular subject, in terms of high school English teacher is the knowledge of English; conditional knowledge -- the pedagogy and psychology knowledge including knowledge of teaching and learning, the knowledge of students’ physical and mental development and knowledge of students’ evaluation; practical knowledge – the knowledge of facing the realization of purposeful behavior in the classroom situation and the related knowledge.[7] It is not a big problem for the current high school English teachers’ technical knowledge. The English major undergraduate or master’s degree graduates entering high school English teachers should have a solid knowledge of the English language and skills to meet the needs of high school English teaching. The former survey also showed that the high school English teacher teach mostly knowledge-based in the classroom and full of the technical knowledge.

For most high school English teachers, conditional knowledge is obtained at the University learning process, and rarely updated after graduation. The value of the English language teachers’ teaching and learning make a direct impact on teachers’ behavior in the classroom. If the teachers regard the language acquisition as a kind of language habits forming, then there will be a lot of mechanical practices in the classroom. If the teachers regard the language acquisition as a rule-governed activity, then the teachers will use deductive way to teach grammar rules in the classroom within many sentence transformation exercises. If the teacher regard the language acquisition as a socialization process and constant interaction between the language learners with the environment, then the teachers will use a large number of communicative activities in the classroom, creating opportunities for language interaction for the students.

From this perspective, the reason why the teachers recognition to the new curriculum can not be the same as their classroom behavior is that the teachers’ previous knowledge can not meet the foreign language requirements of students and the new curriculum changes existing conditions of the development of new knowledge. The new teachers’ understanding of teaching philosophy stays on the surface to accept the concept, and no deep meaning from the new curriculum, which are not linked and reorganized to their original concept of language learning and teaching concept of knowledge structures. However, many teachers are lack of connotative knowledge of task-based teaching, and can not distinguish the differences between tasks and language practice activities. So, task-based teaching is just formality and the traditional language drills in fact.

Practical knowledge is accumulated from teachers’ experience with clear situationality. Teachers’ personal experiences have a significant impact on its accumulated practical knowledge. In that
sense, the process of obtaining the technical knowledge and conditional knowledge and the experience of learning the New Curriculum’s have a great impact on the implementation of curriculum. If it is a passive acceptance process within mechanical memory for the teachers to get the technical and conditional knowledge, if the learning of new courses and the Curriculum adoption still take an indoctrinated methods, the teaching methods experience and the learning of New Curriculum will remain at the theoretical level, then it will be difficult to break through classroom learning behavior patterns experienced themselves in classroom behavior. The dated and backward conditional knowledge restrict the development of their practical knowledge, in turn, practical knowledge will affect the update of conditional knowledge, resulting in a weak sense of teachers’ professional development, lack of internal motivation, and forming an undesirable cycle.

The Contradiction between the Ideal and the Reality

The goal of the new Curriculum for senior high school English is to develop students’ comprehensive ability to use language, focusing on the learning process and methods to promote task-based teaching methods. However, the current National University Entrance Examination is regarded as the sole criterion for testing the quality of teaching and student learning in high school, heavily impacting on the teaching in senior high school English. In order to improve the college entrance rate, teachers tend to stick to the traditional teaching methods and instill knowledge within lots of practices, and students are not willing to “waste” time to explore and experience new knowledge in order to be able to be enrolled. After all, it is a simple way to save time to seize knowledge directly from the teacher, rather than their own inquiry. Facing the new curriculum goals, the new curriculum involved in conflicts between summative assessment of the National University Entrance Examination and teaching balance naturally favors the test side.

Solutions and Suggestions

Promoting the English Teachers’ Professional Development

Teachers are the key factors in the implementation of the new curriculum. Actively to meet the challenges brought about by the new curriculum reform and to seize the opportunity for personal professional development while improving the implementation of the new curriculum are the guarantee of new curriculum reform to get good results. And there is a long way promoting the professional development. Above all, the measures should be taken to innovate the modes of training teacher and play the advantages of school-based training. Teacher training is the process to update their knowledge structure and take new ideas. Experiential, participatory and active teacher training approach helps teachers themselves to find the new teaching methods.

Secondly, teachers should improve their professional self-awareness development. Teacher training is the extrinsic requirements and motivation, and teachers are often in a passive situation. The professional development of teachers relies on more awareness and self-development efforts. Scientific self-reflection, conscious teaching and research, open-minded exchange are the main way of English teachers’ professional development.[8] The English teachers in senior high school should adhere to self-study, update their knowledge structure, learn about advanced teaching philosophy and learn in a specific teaching situations and use their education and teaching theory properly. Well-organized teaching activities and well-done classroom emergencies achieve the balance of teaching philosophy and teaching behavior. What’s more, constant scientific self-reflection, finding the problems in teaching, exploring problem-solving methods and strategies can improve teaching efficiency. To master the basic research methods and actively to carry out teaching research activities can improve the teaching quality and conscious behavior. Furthermore, open-minded, colleague’s communication, mutual learning and mutual promotion can achieve the common development.

Perfecting the Mechanism of Teaching Assessment and Awards

Scientific evaluation system is an important guarantee to achieve course objectives. [2] The
schools should give full play to the functions of evaluation on education, feedback, diagnosis, guidance and motivation. It is urgent to change the only teaching evaluation of the test scores equal to bonuses, and develop a reasonable evaluation system and awards mechanism. Enhancing the proportion of the process of evaluation can encourage teachers to focus on students' cultivation emotions and attitudes values. In order to achieve a combination between extraneous comment and self-assessment needs various evaluation methods. And the organizers should aim to evaluation diversified, and then the school leaders, teachers themselves, the subject teachers and even students can become evaluators. In addition, it is a key step to reform the design of the National University Entrance Examination into a way that not only assesses students’ mastery of language knowledge and skills, but also highlights the ability of students flexibly applying the knowledge and skills in different situations and selecting appropriate strategies to achieve specific communicative goals, the ability to solve and analyze a specific problem. That is to say, the National University Entrance Examination should be the measurement of students' comprehensive ability to use language.

**Changing the Traditional Teaching Mode**

As far as the former mentioned, the New Curriculum requires teachers to optimize educational mode to make design of classroom teaching conducive for the students to show their creativity and imagination, to develop students’ critical thinking skills and innovation spirit, to increase the open, task-based and exploratory learning content, which make the students have opportunities to express their own views and opinions, and encourage students to collaborate, and develop the communicative ability. [9]

**Conclusion**

The Curriculum is full of new ideas in teaching philosophy, teaching content, and implementation measures, but the English teaching in different senior high schools take on different looks. Teachers’ outdated conditional knowledge and practical knowledge, and the contradiction between the teaching requirements of the new curriculum and the summative assessment of the National University Entrance Examination may be the main cause for the unconformity. The essential step to improve the implementation of senior high school English curriculum is to proceed from the senior high school English teachers’ professional development and improve the evaluation mechanism. Within the awareness of self-development, the teacher will adjust to the structure of knowledge and establish the faith of teaching English in order to improve English teaching ability. Only forming the reasonable evaluation and awards mechanism can the Curriculum guide the teaching behavior properly to achieve the course objectives.

**References**


