Six-fold Correlative Elements of Curriculum Development in Language Teaching

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Abstract

The curriculum development in language teaching is a complicated and systematic project, which needs to consider several relevant and decisive factors. This study attempts to expound vital influences of such six aspects as need analysis, teaching environment, teaching objectives, teaching assistance, teaching materials and curriculum evaluation on the curriculum development from historical development of the curriculum development. The purpose for doing so is to obtain the scientificness, completeness, applicability and feasibility of the curriculum development.

Keywords: language teaching, curriculum development, teaching syllabus, need analysis, curriculum evaluation

1. Introduction

Generally, the key element which influences whether a language teaching is successful or not is to select a correct teaching method. However, other more important elements decide whether the language teaching will be successful or not as well, such as requirements of education services to teaching, teachers’ expectations to a curriculum, learners’ purposes to language learning, teaching styles of teachers, learning needs of learners, teaching objectives, teaching environment, teaching aids, development and utility of teaching resources, curriculum evaluation systems, teaching evaluation and so on, all of which influence selection of efficient teaching methods and reality of effective classroom teaching from different aspects. In modern language teaching, more and more language scholars and instructors realize language teaching efficiency is not only close to the instruction of language teaching theories, but also it is closely tied to many relevant elements of language teaching. The language curriculum development is to integrate and manage those vital elements of deciding language teaching efficiency and helps people make the language teaching and the curriculum development clear (Brown, 1995), which is specific expression and main evidence of teaching management as well (Xia, 2003). Therefore, as language teachers, it is vital for us to realize the establishment of language teaching view, which is based on the curriculum development.

2. Origin of Curriculum Development in Language Teaching

In language teaching, the curriculum development has a close relationship with theoretical development of applied linguistics, which basically has been developed synchronously with applied linguistics, and suggests that people pay much attention to

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language researches and language teaching and have a deeper understanding to it, too. The prototype of curriculum development is syllabus design. The syllabus design is one of aspects of the curriculum development and it is different from the curriculum development. The syllabus design refers to descriptions of course contents and teaching sequence towards a course. In most cases, the syllabus is that foreign language researchers and practitioners create a certain language teaching mode based on a certain language theories and language learning theories, and it frequently includes selection and arrangement of teaching contents and requirement of fulfilling them (Cheng, 2002). The curriculum development mainly refers to a general explanation and expression of teaching means and methods towards languages and the nature and characteristics of language teaching, teaching requirements (Shu, 2004). Therefore, the syllabus design is to planning course contents and teaching sequence.

With the development of linguistic mainstream, theories of the language curriculum development went through the historical development from grammatical structuralism to behaviorism, and then from functionalism to social constructivism, during the course of which language teaching methodology also experienced different development stages from sentence pattern teaching method to situational method, and then from natural teaching method to task-based language teaching method. Before 1960s, language teaching never got rid of influences of other subject teaching. That is to say, the language teaching was still a scholastic research towards language systems and structures. Form of expression in language teaching is that every language systems are divided into different grammars and words for students to learn and master. At that time, lexical and grammatical teaching was usually the focal of language teaching. However, in practical language teaching, people gradually realize that we not only consider word frequency and word range, but also we pay close attention to word teachability, similarity, availability, coverage and defining power while we select teaching vocabulary. Meanwhile, when we select grammatical teaching items, we not only consider grammatical selection and teaching sequence, but we should focus on linguistic distance, intrinsic difficulty, communicative need, grammatical frequency and grammatical presentation (Rechards, 2001). Thus it can be seen that the syllabus design in the early age has a lot of limitation. That is to say, it only focused on vocabulary and grammar teaching at that time, the reason of which is that people had an idea of teaching words and grammars as teaching core.

It is well known that the real language syllabus design was begun at the beginning of 1960s. With the wide use of English language, various teaching methods has been emerging from one to another, among which the communicative language teaching method is deeply around because it can focus on the whole teaching environment, social and learners’ needs. At that time, Taba (1962) proposed seven constructional elements of the language curriculum development such as judgment need, goal-setting, content selection, content organization, learning style selection, learning style organization and content evaluation and means. In 1970s, people’s attention to learning needs of learners brought about a new campaign and teaching researches and practices of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) became the center of attention. Language practitioners defined English for different purposes by means of register analysis, and English for Science and Technology (EST), Business English, Computer English, and such different linguistic features as lexical and syntax level successively appeared. The
rise of ESP initiated people to think learners’ needs and made need analysis become an important factor of the language curriculum development. McNeil (1977) introduced the role of theoretical support and policy instruction the syllabus played when we made and carried out a teaching plan and classified American curriculum development into four kinds, which are humanities, social construction, technical and academicals. At the same time, he pointed out the classification mentioned above can be totally regarded as the basis of the language curriculum development. Although the framework of Taba’s curriculum development has become theory evidence of curriculum and syllabus research many people used, people found that such framework of teaching syllabus had deficiency to the guidance and pertinence of the language curriculum development. Therefore, it can’t satisfy the need of language practitioners and course administrators.

In 1980s, the emergence of communicative language teaching method made one-fold language element teaching transfer to language communicative competence under different language environment, and promoted the appearance of the Notional Syllabus, which emphasizes the three categories of grammatical meaning, modality and communicative function. At that moment, language teaching circles generally accepted the point view that the curriculum development was the core link of language item design. Based on researches of predecessors, Dubin and Olshtain (1986) have written a monograph on language learning program and the book is completely based on the purpose of communication. Furthermore, the book fully expounded the task of curriculum designers, pointed out how to achieve the teaching and learning aims the syllabus made and how to make textbooks become a bond between the syllabus and learners. At the same time, they defined differences between ESL and EFL, differences between syllabus and curriculum, importance of textbooks in language teaching, and meaning of teaching plan in language teaching setting. After Dubin and Olshtain, Yalden (1987), Nunan (1988) and White (1988) published their monographs successively about syllabuses and curriculum developments. Making a comprehensive survey of by-past syllabuses and curriculum developments, we can find they are basically on the basis of teaching results, and selection and difficulty of teaching contents. After that, research emphasis gradually was transferred from teaching results to teaching processes. Specifically, the research emphasis was transferred from what knowledge and skills we wanted students to master to how the students mastered those knowledge and skills.

3. Components of Curriculum Developments in Language Teaching
3.1 Need Analysis

Need analysis is a process to understanding language learning needs of language learners and arranging for learning needs according to relative importance or urgency (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Need analysis is the pre-condition of all the education and teaching activities. Only when we accurately analyze learning needs of learners, do we probably make reasonable teaching objectives and complete relative element designs. When carrying out need analysis, first of all we should consider what learners have something to do with need analysis and what kind of information we should collect as data analysis. Furthermore, we should still consider learners who participate in the need analysis have what right and remit, what existing
resources at hand, what limitation they are hindered and what analytical program they adopt. Need analysis in language teaching mainly ensures that different language learners need what language skills, makes clear whether the current course satisfies learning needs of learners or not, judges what learners need to be trained through professional language practices, finds out learning problems of those students with special problems faced, their major learning direction, personal ability, and attitude towards teaching styles and methods and so on. Moreover, need analysis also makes clear changes of focuses of the analyzed learners, and the gap between mastered skills and desired skills of learners, finds out daily language use styles, judges attitude of learners and their families towards school education, and defines acquisition levels of learners to cognition and professional skills during the course of English learning. Most needs are easy to defined, especially, those learners who have special learning purposes. However, under the circumstances of EFL, learning needs of learners are hard to make clear because they learn English as compulsory course, and then whether they have other learning needs or not are a question. Thus, while selecting information to need to be analyzed, we should clarify differences between form need and language need, subjective need and objective need, and language content need and learning process need.

Curriculum designers should know what learners need. Need analysis in language teaching not only needs to analyze what learners have already realized and had, but also needs to know what learners haven’t known and been potential. Need analysis mainly focuses on linguistic needs. That is to say, it is the language skills that people live by in English society. Generally speaking, the major users of need analytical results are officials of educational administration who are responsible for the curriculum development, and teachers, learners, textbook writers, testers or employees of third party organizations which are related to the curriculum development. However, research objects of need analysis mainly include educational policy makers, education department officials, teaching administrators, teachers, learners, parents, and relevant experts and so on. In order to ensure their integrity, reliability, effectiveness and usability of collecting information, need analysis may adopt existing published resources, language testing, questionnaires, students’ self-evaluation, individual or group interview, communication conferences, observation, collecting learners’ language samples, task analysis which learners need to finish in the future and case studies and so on. Information collection is not for quantity, but to ensure the quality and relevance of information. After collecting information, learning goals, learning contents, learning conditions, learning procedures and learning mentality of learners should be analyzed from multi-angle.

3.2 Teaching Environment

Besides the need analysis in language curriculum development, such society, courses themselves, relevant education administrations, teachers and learners and so on also should be considered. Analysis to teaching environment can make up for the deficiency of information collection during the course of need analysis, which can be not only regarded as a part of need
analysis, but also can be regarded as a kind of evaluation to courses. From a micro perspective, teachers, learners and cultures are to mainly restrict and influence language teaching (Larson-Freeman, 1987). However, from a macro perspective, factors of restricting and influencing language teaching cover such social environmental factors as sociolinguistics, cultural conventions, and economic development situation, subjective factors of learners as cognition, emotion, personality, learning willingness, learning strategies, learning skills, learning psychology and thinking process, and objective factors as teaching objectives, teaching contents, teaching procedures, teaching means and teaching evaluation (Stern, 1983).

As for the curriculum development itself, it is mainly influenced by such social factors as educational policy makers, education administrators, government officials, business owners, educational experts, educational institutions, parents, citizens and students, among of whom sources of participants in the curriculum development, existing language teaching policies and evaluations, reasons for the curriculum development, major supporters, selection modes of them, how to supervise them, how to manage the course program group, what their main responsibilities are, and how to determine the objectives and procedures of the course and so on should be considered as well. Institutional factors mainly refer to the micro and macro teaching environment, which include classroom teaching facilities, the allocation of media technologies and library resources in the school, textbooks, the function of textbooks and other teaching materials in teaching, faculty morale in teaching, problems teachers are facing and how these problems are solved, whether the support from the school administration and effective communication with the management are achieved. Factors from teachers are whether they have innovative thinking and educational vision. Teachers' language level, teaching experience, teaching ability, creative thinking, training, qualification, working enthusiasm, work motivation, teaching style, teaching philosophy, teaching principles, teaching means and teaching methods will all affect the teaching effect. The students’ factor in the curriculum development mainly refers to their past learning experience, learning motivation, learning style, expectations to courses, attitude towards the language teaching expectations towards teachers, learners and teaching materials, favorite learning methods, favorite learning contents as well as available learning resources.

3.3 Teaching Objectives

Academic rationalism in the language curriculum development, educational ideas of focusing on social and economic benefits, learner-centered thinking, Social Reconstructionism and multiculturalism all have deeply influenced the curriculum development. The academic rationalism stresses influences of subject contents, learners’ intelligence (memory ability, analytical ability, ability to reorganize knowledge), human values and rational thinking. And the subject contents are usually regarded as the base of courses and mastery of the subject contents is the ultimate goal of courses. Based on this theory, some schools set up language courses for the purpose of increasing social courses, or add literatures and Anglo American cultures to the language courses. The educational ideas of focusing on social and economic benefits emphasize needs of learners and society and influences of courses towards learners in creating economic value. Therefore, the language teaching under such theory stresses practical
and functional language skills. The learner-centered thinking focuses on personal needs of learners, effectiveness of individual life towards language learning, self-consciousness, self-reflection, critical thinking and learning strategies. The learner-centered thinking may generally refer to individualized teaching. That is to say, it emphasizes experimental study, advocates liberalism in teaching, and focuses on learners’ creative self-expression and practical activities close to social needs. The theory emphasizes the process of language learning but not the result, recognizes individual differences of learners, learning strategies, self-guidance, self-monitoring and autonomous learning. And the Social Reconstructionism believes that the curriculum development is not neutral, and schools cannot provide a fair learning opportunity to all the learners. Moreover, it stresses that schools and learners can or should play an important role to facing social inequalities. Teachers and learners should participate in the course of exploring and reorganizing knowledge and teachers need to help learners change their own lives. Finally, the multiculturalism states that schools should make learners understand different cultures, face racism again, enhance ethnic minority’s pride and learn to appreciate different cultures and religions.

Based on the different ideas mentioned above, setting of curriculum objectives in the curriculum development is quite different as well. When we define the curriculum objectives, firstly we should make teaching aims and teaching objectives clear. The teaching aims generally describe changes made by courses, may concretely define course objectives, provide guidelines for teachers, learners and textbook writers, help teachers to set teaching importance and describe important and applicable learning effectiveness, all of which are mainly from the need analysis towards learners. In the past time, description to the teaching aims has three aspects of errors: (1) the teaching aims turn teaching into a kind of skills. In order to keep the educational aim of courses, the teaching aims should include meaningful and valuable learning experience. The way of solving the problem not only pays attention to learning results of language, but also focuses on the teaching objectives of non-language results. (2) The teaching aims have dismembered the teaching and made it result-centered. The teaching objectives not only pay close attention to those visible learning results, but describe teaching procedures and experience, too, which can be seen as the focal of courses. (3) The teaching aims don’t adapt to various levels of language application. And the teaching objectives emphasize changes towards learners courses brought to, such as visible learning behaviors and achievements and can provide evidence for fulfillment of teaching activities. Concretely, they have the following features: describing learning results, bringing into correspondence with the teaching aims, accurate description and feasibility. Besides teaching objectives in language, the course objectives still include non-language outcomes and process objectives. The non-language outcomes generally are related to needs and power of learners, society, culture and politics, for example, to help learners to know immigration relief agency. The process objectives mainly describe learning process but not learning results, for example, to encourage learners to learn according to their own life experience.

3.4 Teaching Assistance

Besides those factors of ensuring high-quality teaching mentioned above, schools,
teachers and learners are vital as well. Factors from schools mainly refer to the organization structure of schools. Richards (2001) clarifies it into the mechanistic model and the organic model. The mechanistic model organizes group activities by officials, emphasizes authority, hierarchical control and clear supervisor-subordinate management system. For example, some schools not only provide teachers with teaching plan, but detailed syllabus. Moreover, they arrange for teaching contents per day, even give specific pages and exercises of the textbook. Paradoxically, the organic model tries to perform teaching flexibility and adaptability, encourages trusting each other between upper and lower levels to fully mobilize the enthusiasm of employees, makes the communication among employees smooth and teamwork successful and rights of decisions and control can be well distributed within the organization. For example, administrators in many schools wish their teachers to be competent to various teaching tasks and make great progress in their professional development. Some schools provide professional training opportunities for their teachers to improve teachers’ teaching levels and make their own personal value come true. Certainly, in teaching what on earth schools choose which teaching model depends on the size of schools and the situation of teachers.

There is no doubt about the importance of teachers in teaching, especially their classroom practice ability, understanding of the course and related background, teaching skills, personal knowledge quantity and teaching reflection ability. Teachers can be divided into trained teachers and non-trained teachers and can be divided into new teachers and senior teachers. As to those non-trained teachers or new teachers, schools should provide them with necessary help and corresponding support, such as appropriate teaching materials and course guide, assigning tasks for teachers, conducting training, giving them enough spare time, carrying out tutor system and regularly reviewing and summarizing related teaching tasks. Teaching mode and principles firstly should be considered while the teaching process is being focused on. Generally speaking, the teaching mode includes two kinds of operating mode and problem-solving mode. The former can be viewed as the mechanistic model of school organizations, and the latter is the organic model. In practical language teaching, the teaching model also instructs specific classroom teaching activities by means of teaching principles. In order to obtain high teaching quality, schools can use collective meeting, written reports, classroom lectures and learners’ evaluations to observe, find and solve teaching problems (Roberts, 1982). Additionally, it is very important for learners to understand teaching. Whether learners accept the courses, their personal learning styles and learning motivation all should be considered.

3.5 Teaching Materials
Teaching materials provide corpus for courses, exist in the form of physical entity, can be properly analyzed, evaluated and rectified according to teaching behaviors and directly influence the classroom teaching. Forms of the teaching materials are various and they can be published articles and non-published articles, and the combination of the published articles and non-published articles, too. Surely, other learning materials not made for teaching are also used as teaching materials. The teaching materials include real teaching materials and
compiled materials. The real teaching materials refer to those which are not prepared for the language teaching such as original texts, photos, films or videos and the compiling materials mainly refer to textbooks or other teaching materials with certain teaching objectives. In the practical teaching, teachers should make the most use of the two materials and take advantage of their good points and get rid of their inappropriate parts. Textbooks and other additional materials are materials of the most frequently seen in the language teaching, strong assistants to achieve teaching objectives and play various roles in teaching (McGrath, 2002). Roles textbooks play in the language teaching are as follows: firstly they can provide a syllabus to follow for courses, which is good for standardized teaching, guarantee teaching quality, provide various learning resources, save teachers’ lesson-planning time, provide imitative language input for learners, and stimulate learners’ learning interest visually.

Certainly, textbooks have their own disadvantages such as unreal materials, non timeliness, divorcing from learners’ reality, not satisfying learners’ needs and not being good for teachers to show their teaching skills. Therefore, when we select and use textbooks, we should assess them. While assessing textbooks, functions of textbooks in courses, situations of teachers and learners, teaching contents and teaching ideas and teaching methods textbooks reflect should be considered. Any textbook can satisfy all the teaching needs. Thus, in the practical teaching it is necessary for teachers to select and adjust textbooks according to specific situation. Specifically, teachers can rectify, replenish, reduce teaching contents, adjust teaching sequence, modify and extend teaching activities and even self-compile teaching materials. In addition, before compiling textbooks, selection of compilers, arrangement of compiling process, definition of textbook reviewers, trial of the textbooks, design of pages and other successive work should be done. During the course of compiling textbooks, compilers need to understand the nature and process of textbook writing, and gradually put forward principles of writing textbooks. After compiling textbooks, compliers still should consider types of language materials and exercises. While the textbooks are using, compliers still need collect relevant information about the textbooks, write down methods of the textbooks, problems in the course of using, modifications, supplements, and reductions of teachers towards the textbooks, collect feedback information of using the textbooks and help other teachers scientifically and reasonably use the textbooks.

3.6 Curriculum Evaluation

The curriculum evaluation can be clarified according to evaluation purposes. Richards (2001) divides the purposes of the curriculum evaluation into program accountability and program development. The program accountability focuses on program outcomes and usually is assessed by external personnel. Development of curriculum pays much attention to how to improve its quality, and is controlled and mastered by teachers or teachers’ trainers. According to different purposes, the curriculum evaluation can be divided into three types, which are formative evaluation, illuminative evaluation and summative evaluation. The formative evaluation focuses on the curriculum process and curriculum improvement such as approval ratings of the textbook, proper teaching methods of teachers, and approaches of stimulating learning interest of learners. The illuminative evaluation tries to explore how all the aspects of
the curriculum are performed, pays attention to how learners carry out group activities, what error-correcting strategies teachers use, what decision they need to make in teaching, how they use teaching plan and what means teachers and learners use to communicate with each other. Many classroom action researches or teachers’ exploration can be regarded as a manifestation of the illumination evaluation. The summative evaluation is that decision makers provide information about whether the curriculum is effective and successful after the curriculum is over. Generally, to what extent the teaching objectives are achieved, and whether various testing achievements, degree of the curriculum preference and the efficiency of the curriculum are got.

In addition, service objects, participants, quantitative measurement, qualitative measurement, finishing materials and fulfillment of evaluation should be focused on in the course of assessment. Different service objects of assessment need consider different problems while assessed. Learners pay much attention to what they have learned, teachers focus on what teaching effectiveness they can get, curriculum designers hope to know whether the curriculum development and teaching materials are suitable, teaching administrators should know whether the time arrangement of the curriculum evaluation is correct and curriculum sponsors hope to know whether the sponsor money has good value. Evaluation participants include two kinds, who are insiders and outsiders. The insiders are teachers, learners and others of participating in the curriculum and the outsiders are those who don’t participate in the curriculum and give objective evaluations such as advisors, inspectors, and teaching administrators. Meanwhile, whether the quantitative measurement is adopted or the qualitative measurement is used should be under consideration as well while assessed. The quantitative measurement may use numbers to express and the qualitative measurement needs to observe and describe in person. Arrangement of evaluation materials is quite important. The earlier the evaluation materials are sorted out, the earlier the relevant curriculum is decided. Information need to be collected before evaluation includes data related to the curriculum (such as the number of learners and the size of the class), files related to the curriculum (such as teaching objectives, teaching aims, textbooks, and teaching guidance documents), course products (such as testing papers, learners’ homework, and exercise materials), written evaluation, school documents and reviews and reflections of teachers towards the curriculum. The range of collecting information should be fully considered before performing the curriculum evaluation. At the same time, whether the evaluation results are satisfied with needs of service objects, reliability of collected information, and objectiveness, representativeness, comprehensiveness and timeliness of evaluation should be also paid close attention to. All the information collected during the course of fulfilling the evaluation needs to be reviewed, and findings of the evaluation should be classified. Besides, what changes need to be achieved, how much the changes need to be invested in, what benefits the changes can bring, how change the plan, who will be the successive person in charge and what mechanism should be established to test the efficiency of changes are under consideration.

4. Conclusion

In a word, the curriculum development in the language teaching is involved in many
relevant influential factors. More or less, they have an affect on the rationality and scientificity of the curriculum development. Sometimes, they even decide whether the curriculum development is successful or not, and among each factor, they influence one another. One of the most influential factors is learning needs of learners, teaching environment, the definition of teaching objectives, the application of teaching assistance, the selection of teaching materials and the fulfillment of the curriculum evaluation.

References