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Survey on the Teaching Ability of Senior High School English Teachers in Underdeveloped Key Schools and Its Influencing Factors Analysis: Taking School A in Henan Province as an Example

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Abstract: The proposed study examines the teaching competence of teachers in an English subject in one of the major senior high schools within an underdeveloped region of Henan Province, China in the context of continuous changes in the field of education with an emphasis on equity and quality, language proficiency, instructional practices and reflection, and the implementation of curriculum remain the main problems of teachers. Besides that, this research hypothesizes the need-based training, reflective systems of teaching, and fairly distributing all available resources to facilitate sustainable development of teachers and minimizing inequality in education in the questionable areas.

Keywords: Teaching Competence; English Teachers; Underdeveloped Areas; High School; Professional Development.

1. Introduction

The basic education reform in China focused on equity and quality, and the reduction of urban rural disparities is one of the priorities on a national level. English since it is a core subject and has both instrumental and cultural value, is a subject that is mostly exam based in such situations.

This paper is based on the School A, a major senior high school in Lankao County, Henan Province-representative of underdeveloped but reform oriented schools. It is a semi-structured interview study of strengths and weaknesses of the competence of the English teachers and their relationship to factors at the individual, institutional and policy levels. Suggestions are given to solve issues related to teacher development and equity related to education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Connotation of English Teachers' Teaching Competence

More recent studies are treating the competence of the English teacher as a holistic, progressive system in which knowledge, skills, attitudes, and reflections are brought together. Competence is not about predetermined methods of teaching, but it focuses on the ability of a teacher to make competent and adaptive pedagogic decisions, based on the education objectives and situation [1].

Van Gorp, Costa and Avermaet emphasise the necessity of the critical multilingual language awareness, the synthesis of linguistic, sociocultural and learner oriented knowledge that will allow a teacher to take the reflective and strategic steps in a heterogeneous classroom [2]. Chinese researchers have placed this perspective in perspective: Zhang and Liu hold that the concept of competence must incorporate language skill and cultural knowledge because intercultural awareness has a direct effect on the learning performance of students [3]. Sun goes on to conceive competence in terms of unity of knowledge, ability, and attitude, emphasizing that teachers have a role to play in bringing up creativity and the overall personality of students in the new age of digitalization [4].

These theoretical frameworks however in most cases are not practical in underdeveloped areas. Thus, the study of this paper follows a localized framework based on Richards [1] by the means of integrating both international and Chinese viewpoints to offer four dimensions: language proficiency, pedagogical methods, strategic adaptability, and reflective competence.

2.2. Competence of English Teachers in the Underdeveloped Areas

In underdeveloped countries, although curriculum reform has taken place, English teachers are still characterized by low professional competence [5]. The language they use in the classroom is usually mechanical in nature, which relegates students in terms of communicative opportunities and participation [6].

Reflective awareness is relatively superficial: teachers pay little or no attention to dissecting the pedagogy or student learning and pay attention to the order of the lesson or disciplinary issues. According to Zheng and Fang, reflection is the result of an authentic professional development, but reflection is frequently shallow [7].

When it comes to exam pressure, teaching is test-based, which impedes innovation and self-efficacy. It is suggested that to achieve sustainable development, Zhang (2006) notes that an external policy support must be supplemented by internal motivation of the teachers [8]. Therefore, the development of professionalism in underdeveloped regions is supposed to be directed to the promotion of intrinsic reflection and adaptive competence as well as the facilitation of the institutions.

2.3. Teacher Factors that Affect Teaching Competence

The aspects influencing competence in teaching are interrelated on the individual, school and policy levels.

At the person level, the competence depends on beliefs of teachers, proficiency in languages and reflection. In underdeveloped regions, many teachers have no long-term career aspirations and no theoretical vision and, thus, poor motivation, which is why they have repetitive routines. Zhang M. M. underlines that outcome-based learning is key to the process of continuous professional development [9].

At the school level, institutional culture and support systems are determining. According to Saudi and Mahaka, the schools that have continuous training, fair assessments, and those with cooperative cultures can help form more confident and innovative employees [10]. By contrast, schools in less developed areas tend to experience discontinuous training, the evaluations being based on examinations and little or no personnel exchanges in general and thus, isolating teachers in professional terms.

At the policy level, teacher development national strategies are usually eroded at local implementation. Standardized policy construction does not comply with regional requirements and poor incentives and imbalance of resources lead to decreasing motivation and career identity of the educators.

Conclusively, individual cognition, school culture, and policy environments affect the English teacher competence in the underdeveloped areas. Nevertheless, the majority of the studies discuss these levels individually and lack the interconnections between them. This research paper is a combination of these views that is undertaken to provide a contextualized understanding of teacher competence which entails synthesis of global theoretical knowledge and local realities in a bid to facilitate sustaining teacher growth and to minimize educational disparity.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design and Framework

In this work, the researcher attempts to unravel the actual scenario of the teaching competence of the teachers in the underdeveloped regions especially in the perception and interpretation of the teaching practice of the teachers in China as they seek equity and quality in education. The qualitative research method was used to get the true experiences and thoughts of teachers involved and not depending on the quantitative data.

Problems in education are also situational and complicated. The qualitative case study design can be adopted to help the researcher explore the knowledge of the teachers about competence in their actual teaching situations and how individual, institutional and policy factors interact.

The study uses a circular reasoning of problem identification→data collection→analysis→model building, which is guided by three questions:

(1) What is competence among English teachers?
(2) What is the contextual influence on it?
(3) What can be done to make it sustainable?

The primary method of the research was the semi-structured interview, which was supported by the analysis of documents related to the specific topics and the study of the school materials.

3.2. Research Process and Research participants

3.2.1. Procedures and Data Analysis in the Research

This analysis was conducted in 5 phases:

(1) Framework definition: It was determined that based on prior studies there were gaps and this helped in the guiding and shaping of questions and interview outlines.

(2) Data collection: Ten teachers at School A in Henan Province that teach English were interviewed. The interviews took place one on one, with 45-70 minutes each, with the teaching beliefs, classroom practices and retrospectives of the institutions and policy support.

(3) Data organization and coding: Open coding was used to code the transcripts to identify key concepts and categories that included specific terms like: teaching beliefs, reflection habits and the role of institutions.

(4) Development of themes and model building: The common patterns were contrasted among teachers and a conceptual model was developed which explained the development of competence and limitation at three levels-individual, school and policy.

(5) Synthesis and recommendations: Conclusions were summed up as recommendations towards enhancing the levels of teacher competence at various levels.

3.2.2. Role of the Researcher

The researcher was the listener/interpreter and did not show any bias in data collection by observing with neutrality and empathy. Each interview was followed by reflective notes in order to record impressions and reduce the concealment of bias.

Several strategies were applied to achieve reliability: Member checking: the participants checked the accuracy of the interview summaries; Peer review: interviews were reviewed by colleagues to determine their consistency in coding; Reflective journaling: the researcher made notes on observations; Data Triangulation: the findings were compared with other sources like school documents.

3.2.3. Research Site and Sampling

A sample of ten English teachers was chosen with the purposeful sampling approach where emphasis was put on the richness of the information, as opposed to representativeness. According to Palinkas and others, it is the richness of information that is gained which is the essence of the sample selection and not the quantity of the participants [11]. The participants were diverse in the aspect of gender, years of experience, and teaching style so that different point of view were not missing.

Informed consent was given, and all the participants volunteered. The anonymity was preserved by means of pseudonyms, and all the data were safe. Regardless of the small sample size, the range and quality of reflection of a small sample of people guarantees the reliability and transferability of results.

3.3. Overall Conclusion

3.3.1. Reaffirmation of Teacher Agency and Professional Identity

This paper throws more emphasis on teacher agency as the essence of professional competence. Teaching policy is not as important as individual procedures of teachers to make informed choices, think critically, and be flexible to problems. This agency is usually limited by institutional hierarchies and exam-based systems in underdeveloped regions. Nevertheless, teachers remain free to change lessons, incorporate local culture and create an interactive setting in the classroom. And fortifying agency needs training, and more, it needs trust. Commitment and shared responsibility are achieved as teachers are engaged in curriculum design and policy

feedback.

3.3.2. The Continuous Professional Learning Out of Fragmented Training

Majority of the teachers identified their professional learning as disjointed and too abstract. When short-term workshops are over, there are no follow-up mechanisms; thus growth becomes unsustainable. Learning among professionals needs to be therefore, continuous, collaborative and contextualized. Continuing development may be facilitated using long-term mentoring, reflective journals, and peer observation. Teachers in isolated locations can also be connected through digital communities and webinars, yet they should be used to truly exchange the profession and not to substitute it. Creating communities of practice through which a community of teachers share practice and build knowledge are essential in the long term.

3.3.3. Cultivating Constructive and Contemplating School Culture

Schools significantly determine whether competence will increase or not. At School A, the administrative tasks tended to block the pedagogical discussion, leaving the teachers alone. It is necessary that a change towards a learning-oriented leadership be made. Leaders at school are expected to be catalysts of professional development by fostering open discussions, peer reviews as well as sharing of lessons. Reflective practices could be encouraged through various methods, teaching journals or small-scale action research might be encouraged to help these individual experiences to turn into institutional knowledge and eventually build an organizational culture of learning and improvement.

3.3.4. Policy, Equity and Sustainability

Equitable and flexible policies are critical in ensuring development of teachers in the underdeveloped regions. The challenges facing the organization include limited funding, ineffective training, and minimal incentives are many and are systemic, and not individual. Policies are supposed to have differentiated support options considering the local limitations and giving more impartial judgments and incentives like scholarships, promotion credits, or research grants. The introduction of the practice should permit the feedback of the frontline teachers since reforms should be contextual. Besides, it is a crucial aspect to focus on the well-being of teachers whose workloads and insufficient recognition lead to de-motivation and further unsustainability.

3.3.5. Constraints and Future Research

The study was limited to a single school in Henan Province and this has reduced the generalizability. Comparative cases, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data and the impact of emotional and motivational determinants on competence could be incorporated in the further research. Longitudinal studies are also required to follow the development of competence in the teachers in the course of the policy and technological change.

3.3.6. Final Reflection

Finally, the teachers will still be the foundation of the educational development. Even with limited conditions, the teachers of School A are resilient and devoted to the cause of education. The enhancement of competence has to start with itself, reflect, self-aware, and intrinsically driven, backed by a system of trust and level-mindedness. The competence of teachers is a dynamic process that can be developed through dialogue, adaptation, and common purpose which can not only create stronger classrooms, but also a more just and sustainable future of the education in China.

4. Conclusion

In general, the study provides a contextualized view of the competency of English teachers in a poorly developed key high school in Henan Province. The interviews conducted with ten teachers of School A indicate that despite their intentions to be committed and flexible, the development of teachers remains constrained by discontinuous training, views of an exam-oriented system, and lack of support in schools. The results highlight that teacher competence can be enhanced by improving teacher agency, establishing continuous and collaborative relationships with professional learning, creating a vibrant school culture and carrying out policies responsive to local needs. Connecting larger theoretical frames to local realities, this study indicates that sustainable teacher development is linked to both internal and external motivation, making the education in underdeveloped areas more equitable and of higher-quality.

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