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English Teachers' Self-development of Teaching Abilities

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Abstract: With the development of the society and the educational technology, teachers' self-development is becoming more and more important just like the life-long learning, so are the English teachers. However, there are some misconceptions in the self-development of teachers' teaching ability, which hinder their further development. Of course, these misconceptions have their own roots. In order to solve these problems, individual teachers should first have the consciousness of self-development, know more theories about the teaching ability, and make reflection on teaching timely, regularly, and systematically. Meanwhile they also need to strengthen the cooperation and communication with other teachers. In conclusion, self-development as well as the self-learning relies on perseverance and lifelong conduction.

Keywords: Self-development; Teaching Ability.

1. Introduction

Teachers' self-development refers to the proactive development of teachers themselves, through self-examination and self-reflection, to identify their own limitations and shortcomings and to make improvements. "Essentially, it is a process of understanding oneself, perfecting oneself, and transforming oneself." It encompasses various aspects of teachers' development, including their qualities, moral characters, aesthetic perspectives, and professional growth. Professional development can be divided into the development of teaching philosophy, professional knowledge, and professional abilities (including teaching abilities and developmental abilities). This article will primarily focus on the self-development of English teachers' teaching abilities.

2. The Importance of Self-Development of English Teachers' Teaching Abilities

2.1. Personalized Development Tailored to Individual Teachers

Teachers' learning and training require time and the specific locations. When training is targeted at most teachers, it tends to provide universal teaching methods and the latest teaching theories. However, these theories may not always align with the actual teaching situations in certain regions or for individual teachers. The mismatch between high-level training content and practical implementation often makes teachers' training superficial. It is like fashionable clothing that may not suit everyone. On the other hand, self-development for teachers is a gradual process, tailored to the individual's actual circumstances, including their knowledge and skill levels. It involves self-examination, reflection, and the integration of theory and practice. Just as only we ourselves can feel that whether the water is warm or cold, only teachers themselves can be clearly aware of their own shortcomings and weaknesses. If they don't become their own teachers, no one else can truly help them.

2.2. Advancement of the Times Requiring English Teachers to Possess Corresponding Teaching Abilities

The development of modern information technology provides students with richer learning resources, methods, spaces, and tools, while also presenting challenges and opportunities to teachers. Therefore, teachers must continuously learn and apply modern information technology to teaching, establish new teaching concepts, keep pace with times, and improve today's teaching ability closer to tomorrow's requirement for it. Consequently, teachers must embrace the idea of lifelong learning, continuously acquire new knowledge, obtain new information, adjust and update their knowledge structure, and enhance their abilities to adapt to the modern teaching. Meanwhile, in the teaching process, English teachers should avoid relying solely on the modern information technology. Instead, teachers should skillfully grasp and fully utilize it while emphasizing the development of students' subjectivity, fostering students' self-directed learning awareness, and cultivating their innovative abilities. Just as Humphreys, said that Students are the mirror of their teachers. Therefore, teachers must first possess the ability for self-development, striving to improve their teaching abilities, and better influencing students through their own initiative, pro-activity, and creativity.

2.3. Misconceptions in the Development of Teachers' Teaching Abilities

In China, due to the influence of exam-oriented teaching, there is a one-sided emphasis on exam scores, believing that the higher the teacher's English proficiency or English scores, the higher the students' English scores will be, indicating the stronger teaching ability of the teacher. Consequently, this perception equates scores or knowledge with the teaching ability, leading to teachers focusing only on improving their language proficiency. They overlook the importance of the teaching methods and pedagogical principles and even neglect their responsibility to impart learning methods and promote self-development to their students. Even in teacher training, "only 5% of the time is spent on practicing and teaching pedagogy." Not to mention, in the class, teachers

primarily impart language and grammar knowledge to students in a dull and monotonous manner. This not only diminishes students' interest in learning English but also rigidifies the teaching model, causing teachers to adhere to established practices, lack creativity, and lag behind the development of the times. Although the role of teaching methods has been increasingly recognized in recent years, under the pressure of college entrance rates, many English teachers have no time to consider the study of teaching theories and their application in the class, failing to apply theories into their own teaching practice.

According to a survey on the self-development needs of English teachers in several high schools in Wenzhou, only 4.01% of teachers are "dissatisfied with their own teaching abilities." In other words, very few teachers truly have a self-development consciousness regarding their teaching abilities. While we may have the concept of self-development, we have not systematically planned for the self-assessment of our teaching abilities.

Another phenomenon is that as years of teaching experience increase, teachers become more satisfied with their own teaching abilities. Some veteran teachers have developed their own set of teaching methods and achieved certain results, demonstrating confidence in their teaching abilities. However, this confidence also makes them complacent and resistant to new teaching methods and ideas, hindering further improvement in their teaching abilities. These data reflect, to some extent, the issues existing among teachers nationwide, not just limited to the region of Wenzhou.

3. Strategies for the Self-development of English Teachers

3.1. Possessing the Consciousness of Self-Development

Teaching ability consciousness refers to the teacher's individual evaluation of their teaching ability and the level of conscious change required to improve the current situation. Teachers should evaluate themselves directly and also refer to others' evaluations to form a comprehensive evaluation of their own teaching abilities.

Self-development consciousness is an important factor influencing the self-development of teachers' teaching abilities. The stronger consciousness the teachers have, the more teachers will focus on their own development. It connects teachers closely with the outside world and makes them aware of their deficiencies, weaknesses, and areas of lagging behind others. This awareness stimulates the enthusiasm and initiative for self-improvement. With initiative and proactivity, teachers can make development a habit in their daily life, reflecting on and planning their development based on their past trajectory and current situation, and persistently carrying it out. In this repetitive process, ongoing issues require consciousness for self-reflection and self-control, and the process of problem-solving becomes a process of self-development. Finally, this consciousness enables teachers to consciously seek favorable factors in life and update their teaching abilities.

3.2. Possessing Theoretical Knowledge to Enhance Their English Teaching Abilities

Having the awareness or willingness for self-development alone is not enough for teachers. Without the willingness, self-improvement of teaching abilities remains utopian. Teachers should continuously learn new theories, absorb new teaching concepts, and teaching methods, among others. The scope and standards of teaching abilities are not fixed; they change with the development of teaching theories or concepts. Currently, the diversity and transformation of the teacher's role require higher standards of teaching abilities. Especially in English teaching, as the pace of teaching reform accelerates and the comparison between new and old teaching models intensifies, the expectations for teaching effectiveness and the demands on English teachers' teaching abilities increase. They need to possess various abilities to adapt to the requirements of reforms and role transformations. Teaching abilities are primarily formed in teaching activities and are comprehensively reflected in daily teaching activities, directly influencing teaching effectiveness. Therefore, they should focus on the development of teaching abilities from the following aspects:

3.2.1. Predictive Abilities in Teaching

Predictive abilities in teaching refer to the ability to anticipate students' physical and mental conditions, the suitability of teaching content, and various factors that may interfere before teaching activities. Cultivating this ability requires teachers to pay attention to summarizing and accumulating experiences after each teaching activity. During this process, it is crucial to establish a comprehensive, objective, and scientific teaching perspective regarding the content of teaching activities, students' thoughts, interests, and psychological factors of interference (such as negative transfer from Chinese, conflicts between Chinese and English cultures and their negative impact on teaching content). “Rome wasn't built in a day.” The same goes for predictive abilities. They require repeated practice, experience accumulation, and theoretical analysis. For novice teachers lacking foresight and practical experience, only through diligent and thorough preparation can they reduce interfering factors and ensure smooth activity. At the same time, we can develop our own abilities. However, this does not mean experienced teachers do not need to develop their abilities because everything is constantly changing. They still need to understand new changes and continuously challenge the experiences they have accumulated in order to achieve further development.

3.2.2. Communication Abilities in Teaching

"Communication abilities in teaching refer to the ability to transmit information worked on to students and make it effective for them." It can be divided into formal language (spoken and written) and informal language (facial expressions, gestures, clothing, etc.). In terms of formal language, Chinese students lack a conducive English learning environment. Therefore, the language demonstration by English teachers is particularly important in teaching activities. Language is constantly evolving, and English is no exception. However, the development of teaching materials often lags behind the development of language. Sometimes the English words or knowledge students learn has become outdated. Therefore, teachers should absorb the latest English knowledge from various sources and impart it to students, not just limiting themselves to the textbooks. English teachers can strive to use authentic English to refine the expression of "formal language," but there is no need to imitate Western "informal language" entirely. They can try to understand Western informal language and purposefully utilize it.

3.2.3. Control Abilities to the Teaching Process

"The ability to control the teaching process is the ability to govern teaching activities." With the transformation of the teacher's role, teaching activities are no longer teacher-centered but student-centered. However, this does not mean reducing the control by teachers during activities; on the contrary, it requires greater control abilities. Otherwise, students in the class will be like loose sands. Additionally, teaching activities do not always proceed according to the lesson plans. As long as teachers have a certain level of control ability, keeping activities under their control throughout, minor changes in direction or steps will not affect the overall purpose or outcome of the activities.

3.3. Timely, Regular, and Systematic Self-reflection

Self-reflection is the proactive process of comprehensive review and objective analysis of teaching activities by teachers. It involves identifying shortcomings, making adjustments, and continuously improving teaching quality through ongoing practice. Through self-reflection, teachers can identify personal issues with their teaching abilities, which serves as the foundation for self-development. Without self-reflection, genuine self-development cannot exist, but they often overlook this point. Many teaching methods are unconsciously used by teachers in the class, let alone intentional reflection and evaluation after class. To cultivate the habit of self-reflection, it is advisable for teachers to set aside a fixed time on weekends to engage in self-reflection, allowing for a holistic review of teaching activities over the week. During the reflection process, teachers can discover patterns, gain experiences, learn relevant theories, and integrate these theories with their own practice, providing support for future endeavors. However, this alone is not enough. Thoughts or feelings that arise during reflection are fleeting and require documentation, along with notable events or influences from activities, as well as simple analysis. These records serve as materials for weekend reflection.

In addition to that, teachers also need to engage in vertical and horizontal comparisons. Vertical comparison involves using the materials recorded, organized, and summarized each week as a portfolio for self-development, showcasing the trajectory of their development. Through vertical comparison, teachers can easily compare their current teaching abilities with their past abilities. In horizontal comparison, teachers can create a schedule reflecting the levels of various teaching abilities at different stages of their development based on the outcomes of their development research. Then, they can compare their actual level at each stage with the levels in the table. Through comparison, teachers can identify their weaknesses, avoid unnecessary anxiety, as some difficulties are common among teachers at the same stage. Finally, at each stage of development, teachers can record their own self-evaluation and the evaluations received from others. Comparing self-evaluation with others' evaluations can help identify aspects that are overlooked in self-reflection to a certain extent.

3.4. Collaboration with Other Teachers

While teachers largely become competent through self-learning and play independent and fully responsible roles in the class, the development of their abilities as teachers will be limited without collaboration. In teaching, they always collaborate directly or indirectly with colleagues. Teachers' self-development does not mean isolating oneself from others during the process but emphasizes the teachers' initiative and proactiveness. If they want to develop themselves, they need an open mindset to easily accept and boldly try any approach that contributes to the development of teaching abilities. Collaborating with other teachers is one of the best ways because teachers have many commonalities. They can easily understand each other, effectively help one another, and work closely together. Teachers need the courage to acknowledge the problems currently troubling them, in order to share experiences, exchange opinions candidly, and overcome difficulties together.

4. Conclusion

The drawbacks of traditional teaching hinder the development of teaching abilities and trigger teaching reforms. The advancement of teaching reforms and lifelong learning have changed the way teachers' development occurs. From teacher professionalism to teacher professional development, and then to self-renewal and professional development. The focus has shifted from quantity to quality, from the collective teacher to the individual teacher, and from being taught to self-learning. Teachers' self-development in teaching abilities aligns with the trend of teacher development. As individuals, self-development of teaching abilities not only aligns with the development of the times but also reflects the characteristics and shortcomings of individuals. It transforms teachers from passive learners to active learners and transitions their development from inconsistent, singular teaching within a given time and space to unlimited, continuous individual learning. From these changes, it is evident that lifelong learning is crucial in self-development. Lifelong learning incorporates the perspective of new mutual competition, where the half-life of knowledge is shrinking, and professional obsolescence will soon affect everyone except those engaged in lifelong learning. Learning means keeping up with the development of the times. A teacher who lags behind the times is an incompetent teacher. However, knowledge does not equal ability. It is merely the foundation of abilities. Teachers should transform knowledge into teaching practice abilities through the process of repeated learning, reflection, and practice. There is a popular saying in China: "Knowledge is infinite," and the same goes for teaching abilities. The self-development of teaching abilities is also a form of continuous development.

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