

The Deficiency and Reconstruction of Knowledge of China's English Language Education History among University English Language Teachers

Chen You^a

College of Foreign Studies, Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan, 523083, China

^adoctorchen4949@gmail.com

Keywords: University English language teachers; English language education; knowledge of China's English language education history; deficiency and reconstruction

Abstract: Through the investigation and research of 130 university English language teachers' knowledge of China's English language education history, it is found that in the study most university English teachers are deficient in the knowledge of China's English language education History. Specifically, 1) there is a lack of understanding of English language education during the periods of the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China; 2) there is a shortage of mastery of the development history of English language education in China from decline to prosperity since 1949; 3) most university English language teachers fail to grasp the important historical figures and educational ideas related to China's English language education; and 4) it is no deeper perception of the development and application of English language education technology in China. In view of these, this study explores the causes of the problem from three levels of teachers themselves, school education and teaching reform and education authorities, and puts forward countermeasures and suggestions from three perspectives of education authorities, schools and teachers themselves in order to improve university English language teachers' knowledge of China's English language education history.

1. Introduction

The knowledge of China's English language education history is greatly important for university English language teachers, which can help teachers understand English language education background, learn from previous experience, cultivate historical awareness, and improve their teaching ability and professional quality ^[1]. Nowadays, although English language teachers in universities usually have higher educational qualifications (such as the degree of master or doctor) and professional backgrounds, they pay more attention to the current teaching contents and methods in educational practice, and have little understanding of the historical development of English language education in China. Therefore, by learning and studying the knowledge of China's English language education history, university English language teachers are able to understand the past English teaching experience and methods, which can not only provide them with references, but

also help them to better design teaching schemes, choose textbooks and improve teaching quality.

2. Research Design

2.1 Methodology and Purpose

This study adopted a questionnaire survey that was conducted among 130 English language teachers in X university, focusing on the aspects of English language education in the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, the decline and prosperity of English language education in China since 1949, the important historical figures and educational ideas related to English language education in China, and the development and application of English language education technology in China. The purpose is to grasp the current understanding and mastery of the knowledge of China's English language education history by university English language teachers, to help teachers understand the development process and background of English language education in China in the process of education and teaching, and assist them with perceiving the current background of English language education policies, teaching methods and textbook compilation in order to better deal with teaching challenges.

2.2 Research Content, Form and Instruction

The content of this questionnaire involves two aspects of participants' personal information (e.g. gender, education background, major and professional title) and knowledge of China's English language education history. The questionnaire employs a selective approach, with a total of 45 question items, and the options are mainly multiple-choice. The survey was carried out in the form of QR Code of online platform ("Survey Star", Changsha Ranxing Information Technology Co., Ltd., Changsha, China). Then, a total of 140 copies of online questionnaires were distributed to English language teachers at X university, and 130 valid questionnaires were collected, with a recovery rate of 92.86%. Among these 130 valid questionnaires, 44 and 86 copies were severally from male and female teachers.

3. Research Results

Through the analysis of the questionnaire data upon the knowledge of China's English language education history among university English language teachers, the specific findings are as follows.

3.1 Insufficient Understanding of English Language Education during the Periods of Late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China

On the one hand, 46.15% of English language teachers in university does not know that "English entered into China in the late Qing Dynasty (1840-1912)"; 30% of English language teachers cannot understand that "Lin Tse-hsu (Lin Zexu) was the first person in China to perceive the importance of learning Western science and technology through learning English language, and was even referred to as the first person to open their eyes and see the world by China"; 30% of teachers have no idea that "China established the first foreign language school (Tongwen Guan) in 1862"; 60% of the subjects are unaware that "the main content of students' English language learning in Tongwen Guan was Chinese-English translation"; Even 83.08% of participants are unclear that China's "Renyin Education System" has listed English language course as a compulsory subject for schools for the first time. On the other hand, during the period of Republic of China (1912-1949), English, as an important foreign language, deeply influenced Chinese education and culture at that time ^[2].

However, in the survey, 37.69% of university English language teachers are not aware of Cai Yuanpei's educational thought of advocating simultaneous development of five kinds of educations such as Military and Physical Education, Utilitarian Education, Civic Moral Education, World Outlook Education and Aesthetic Education; 52.31% of English language teachers cannot grasp that "many celebrities at the time (such as Hu Shi, Lu Xun, Yan Fu, etc.) could effectively communicate with foreigners in English and play an important role in cultural exchange". Both of these knowledge surveys to some extent reflect the insufficient understanding of English language education by university English language teachers during the periods of late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China.

3.2 Inadequate Grasp of Development History of English Language education in China from Decline to Prosperity since 1949

After the founding of New China (PRC) in 1949, that is, between 1949 and 1955, because of the influence of the Soviet Union's economy, culture and education, Chinese people began to be enthusiastic about learning Russian ^[3]. In the survey, 75.38% of university English language teachers are unaware that "English was at a disadvantage in language teaching and daily use"; 88.46% of English language teachers are not able to realize the importance of English language in teaching until 1956 to 1965; 38.46% of teachers are unclear that "English language education and teaching had almost fallen to the lowest level during the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976); Even 52.31% of the participants cannot figure out that "China has begun to implement significant reforms and developments in English language education since 1977". Afterwards, English language education in China started to embark on a prosperous path and achieved good accomplishments ^[4]. However, many university English language teachers lack a deeper understanding of the history of English language education in China from decline to prosperity since 1949.

3.3 Failure to Appreciate Important Figures and Educational Ideas Related to English Language Education in China

In the questionnaire survey, 92.31% of university English language teachers are not familiar with that "the first English teacher in China was John Shaw Burdon"; 84.61% of English language teachers cannot get to know that "William Alexander Parsons Martin", the president of Tongwen Guan, has laid a solid foundation for the development of English language education in China"; 83.08% of teachers are short of comprehension that "Zhang Shiyi was a pioneer in English language teaching in China and published China's first book on English language teaching methods"; 84.61% of the testees are puzzled by Li Tingxiang's introduction of Communicative Approach to Chinese English teachers and his Dialectical Teaching Method proposed in English language teaching; 15.38% of participants did not know that "Lin Yutang was a best-selling author of writing and translating foreign language books"; 75.38% of respondents cannot make sense of Zhang Zhengdong's Three Dimension Approach in foreign language teaching; 71.53% of subjects are unaware of the Five-element Approach proposed by Zhang Jianzhong in foreign language teaching; 90% of persons are completely ignorant of Wang Cairen's Dual-activity Teaching Method in foreign language teaching, and 59.23% of people are ambiguous about the Chinese Structural-Functional Approach in foreign language teaching. These survey results directly indicate that university English language teachers have not been able to appreciate the important figures and educational ideas related to English language education in China.

3.4 Lack of Deeper Understanding of Development and Application of English Language Education Technology in China

According to the survey results, 36.92% of university English language teachers are not in position to discern that “blackboards do not belong to educational technology”; 83.08% of English language teachers are unclear that “a company in Pennsylvania, USA, published the book *Visual Education* and first proposed visual education methods in 1906”; 53.08% of language teachers are unaware that “China's educational technology was primarily the development and application of audio and video technology and other technological means in education (which is commonly referred to as audio-visual education); 81.54% of teachers do not know that “Nanjing University (formerly Jinling University) first used educational technology in education and teaching in the 1930s and was entrusted by the Chinese Ministry of Education to hold a national audio-visual education training class”; 75.38% of participants have no idea that “Jiangsu Second Normal University (formerly Jiangsu Education College) first opened the major of educational technology and trained educational technology talents”; 65.38% of subjects are confused about the first audio-visual education building in Shanghai International Studies University; 80% of respondents have a vague understanding of Nanguo Nong as the founder of China’s audio-visual education; and 79.23% of people mention that in their actual work, they rarely actively explore the application of educational technology in English language education and teaching, except for using multimedia devices and language laboratories for simple teaching demonstrations. All of these results invisibly indicate that university English language teachers lack a deeper understanding and reflection on the development and application of English language education technology in China.

From the above four aspects (such as English language education in the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, English language education in China since 1949, important figures in English language education in China and their educational ideas, as well as the development and application of English language education technology in China), a majority of university English language teachers are seriously lacking in understanding and mastering the knowledge of China’s English language education history, which will result in some adverse effects on teachers’ actual education and teaching, such as neglecting students’ ideological and political education in English language education, and being unable to explain the context of a certain knowledge point in English language development, etc.

4. Cause Analysis of the Problem

As for the shortage of knowledge of university English language teachers in the history of English language education in China, this study explores the causes of the problem from three levels of teachers themselves, school education and teaching reform, and education authorities. The details are as follows.

4.1 Teachers themselves

University English language teachers are wanting in the knowledge of English language education history in China, which is closely related to the following factors. First of all, university English language teachers often use the curriculum and textbooks of the modern English language education system, while they have relatively little knowledge of the English education system in the late Qing Dynasty, the Republic of China and the founding of New China, which virtually leads to their deficiency of in-depth understanding of the development, teaching methods and education policies of English language education in China during these periods. Secondly, today's university English language teachers mainly focus on the theory and practice of modern English language

education in their education and teaching, and their research orientation is usually also in the field of modern English language education, which causes their few researches on English language education in China in the past, and thus their understanding of English language education is insufficient. Finally, the resources and time constraints for university English language teachers count. In other words, English language teachers in university may face limited time and resources when conducting teaching and research, making it difficult to fully engage in the research of English language education during the late Qing Dynasty, the Republic of China and the founding of New China.

4.2 School Education and Teaching Reform

At the level of school education and teaching reform, university English language teachers fail to understand and master the relevant knowledge of China's English language education history for the following reasons. First, the education system evolves rapidly. China's education system has undergone multiple reforms and transformations, including the English language education system. With the change of the education system, the goals, teaching methods, and textbooks of English language education have also changed in different periods^[5]. University English language teachers may pay more attention to the current education system and the important development of modern English language education, making them a lack of deeper understanding of the early English language education system. Second, the focuses of the knowledge system and research orientation are different. Normally speaking, universities require English language teachers to lay more emphases on the theories of linguistics, literature, and teaching methodologies when preparing and carrying out teaching tasks, and to concentrate more on the practice of English language education. Therefore, university English language teachers may focus more on the research of well-known scholars and research results, and less on the research and understanding of China's English language education history. Third, there is a requirement in the school curriculum and schedule. Generally speaking, the English language curriculum in universities more often than not centers more on cultivating students' language abilities and practical skills, while historical English language education development is less involved in teaching plans.

4.3 Education Authorities

At the level of educational authorities, university English language teachers are void of the knowledge and understanding of China's English language education history, which is likely to be related to the following factors. On one hand, there is an insufficiency of educational policies and guidance. The education authorities usually issue relevant education policies and guidance, but these documents possibly emphasize more on current education reform and important developments, and have fewer detailed introductions and requirements for the historical development of English language education. On the other hand, there exists the shortcoming in university English language curriculum design and textbook compilation. When the educational authorities participate in the formulation of curriculum and textbook development for English language education in universities, there is a lack of requirements for historical English language education development as a kind of necessary knowledge. At the same time, there are deficiencies in the professional development and evaluation mechanism of English language teachers in universities. That is to say, the professional development and evaluation mechanism of English language teachers in education authorities and universities usually focus on teachers' teaching ability and research results, and there is little demand for teachers to understand and master the knowledge of China's English language education history.

In a word, university English language teachers do not have a good grasp of the relevant

knowledge of China's English language education history, which is caused by diverse factors, such as teachers themselves, school education and teaching reform and education authorities. The worst thing is that most university English language teachers have not systematically and deeply studied the history of English language education in China. They stress more on the use of modern teaching methods and textbooks, while ignoring the study of history of English language education. In the meantime, university English language teachers need to spend more time and energy on new teaching methods and teaching contents in the education and teaching reform, which gives rise to the negligence of the knowledge of China's English language education history. In addition, the education authorities often pay more attention to the specific indicators of education reform and development in the evaluation of colleges and universities, but do not include the knowledge of China's English language education history into the scope of teacher training and assessment. These factors are all undoubtedly leading to the scarcity of knowledge of China's English language education history among university English language teachers.

5. Countermeasure and Suggestions

After understanding the current situation of university English language teachers' mastery of China's English language education history, and analyzing the causes of the problem, this study proposes reconstruction strategies from three perspectives of education authorities, schools and teachers themselves so as to enhance university English language teachers' knowledge of China's English language education history.

5.1 From the Perspective of Education Authorities

First, strengthening teacher training and learning support is essential. The education departments can provide university English language teachers with special training courses, introduce the development process and related events of China's English language education history to English language teachers, and boost their understanding and mastery of China's English language education history.

Second, promoting academic research and exchange is vital. The education authorities should encourage university English language teachers to participate in the study of English language education history in China, organize academic exchanges, and share research achievements and experience.

Third, improving the assessment mechanism and evaluation indicators is needful. The education departments ought to properly incorporate the requirements and assessment of the knowledge of China's English language education history into the teachers' professional development and evaluation system to ensure that relevant knowledge is valued and cultivated.

Lastly, providing abundant learning resources is indispensable. Education authorities can establish and maintain related learning resource databases, provide university English language teachers with relevant documents, research results and historical materials that are easily accessible, and promote their learning and research on China's English language education history ^[6].

5.2 From the Perspective of Schools

In the first place, emphasizing teacher training is foremost. Universities need to provide training courses for English language teachers to introduce the development, evolution, important events and influences of China's English language education history.

In the second place, perfecting English language textbooks and courses is significant. Universities can require English language teachers to add certain contents related to the history of

English language education in China to their teaching plans, so that students and teachers can better understand the history of English language education in China.

In the third place, research support and promotion are offered. Universities encourage English language teachers to become involved in the research of China's English language education history, and promote the dissemination and application of knowledge by publishing papers, participating in academic exchanges and other channels.

In the last place, providing resource support is weighty. Universities need to provide English language teachers with rich resources, including relevant literature, research results and professional academic organizations, to help them understand the knowledge of China's English language education history.

5.3 From the Perspective of Teachers Themselves

Firstly, independent learning should be put in the first priority. University English language teachers can actively engage in self-directed learning, read relevant literature and research results, and understand the historical background, major events, and important figures of the development of English language education in China. Simultaneously, English language teachers can obtain relevant information by consulting books, academic journals, relevant websites, special forums, and other means.

Secondly, participating in academic conferences and seminars is prominent. University English language teachers can participate in relevant academic conferences and seminars of English language education both domestically and internationally, learn from the speeches and sharing from other experts and scholars, and understand the latest research trends and academic perspectives. This not only allows for access to cutting-edge research results, but also enables communication with researchers to broaden teachers' knowledge breadth and depth.

Thirdly, engaging in research projects is beneficial. University English language teachers apply to participate in national, provincial or school research projects to carry out research on the history of English language education in China. By conducting in-depth research on specific topics, one can deepen their understanding and mastery of relevant knowledge, and gain research experience.

Fourthly, stressing on academic exchange and cooperation is helpful. University English language teachers should communicate and collaborate with peers or experts and scholars in other fields, sharing their research findings and reflections. Through cooperative writing, collaborative research and other ways, the relevant knowledge of China's English language education history can be learned and studied.

Fifthly, offering relevant courses is necessary. University English language teachers should properly integrate the relevant contents of China's English language education history into their teaching tasks, and guide students to understand and discuss the historical development of English language education by offering relevant courses.

To sum up, English language teachers, universities and education authorities need to work together to better improve teachers' knowledge of China's English language education history.

6. Conclusion

On the whole, understanding and mastering the relevant knowledge of China's English language education history can not only make university English language teachers follow the development context and evolution process of English language education, but also help teachers perceive the characteristics and trends of English language education in various historical periods, master teaching materials and teaching resources in different periods, enrich teaching contents, provide more language background and cultural knowledge for students' English language learning, and

finally enhance students' interest and enthusiasm for language learning. Meanwhile, education authorities, schools and teachers themselves need to cooperate with each other to comprehend the success and failure of English language education reform in history of China, grasp the current English language education policy and reform direction, and better provide students with English language education that meets the needs of the times.

Acknowledgement

This paper is funded by the project of Online Course Construction and Practice of *The History of English Language education* Based on the Superstar Fanya Platform in Guangdong University of Science and Technology in 2021 (Project No.: GKZLGC2021143).

References

- [1] Shu Baimei. *Modern Foreign Language Education (2nd Edition)* [M]. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2013.
- [2] Li Xinhui. *A Preliminary Study of the History of English Language Education in China* [J]. *Journal of Qingdao Ocean Shipping Crew College*, 2001 (03): 24-31.
- [3] Liu Daoyi & Wu Zhaoyi. *English Language Education in China: Past and Present* [M]. People's Education Press, 2015.
- [4] Li Liangyou, Zhang Risheng & Liu Li. *History of English Language Teaching in China* [M]. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1988.
- [5] Ge Ruifeng. *Review of Research on the History of English Language Education in China* [J]. *Overseas English*, 2021 (15): 5-7.
- [6] Xue Wei. *Discussion on the Necessity of Studying the History of English Language Education* [J]. *Shanxi Education (Higher Education)*, 2016 (07): 9-10.