

The Development and Utilization of School-based Curriculum for English Majors in Minority Concentrated Regions

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Abstract—This paper states the urgent need for the development and utilization of a school-based curriculum for English majors in minority concentrated regions based on the current education situation in those regions. This paper takes Mongolian English majors as an example to illustrate the need of school-based curriculum in minority concentrated regions. Detailed situations in Inner Mongolia are analyzed and some suggestions are made to help to find proper ways of improving the education quality in minority concentrated regions.

Keywords—*school-based curriculum; minority concentrated regions; proper ways; education quality*

I. INTRODUCTION

English learning and teaching is regarded as a crucial activity in universities and colleges both for English and non-English majors because English is needed in many fields in society when students graduate from universities or colleges. There are many course books designed and written for English learners. Universities and colleges would choose the curriculum and the books according to their own situations. Usually they will choose similar courses as the other universities and colleges, and for some of the courses, they will choose several specialised courses based on their own education features. Sometimes, they will use the books edited by themselves because they think those are better for their students.

But in minority concentrated regions, there is a different situation for ethnic minority students. This research takes Mongolian English majors in Inner Mongolia the example to illustrate the problem. There are many Mongolian students who graduate from Mongolian middle schools with their mother tongue Mongolian and their second language is Chinese. Many of these students start to learn Chinese in middle schools. When they enter universities or colleges, their Chinese is not perfect and they are still learning and perfecting their Chinese. However, in universities and colleges, there are no special English course books designed and written for Mongolian students. So it is very difficult for these students to catch up with the English learning,

especially for English majors. School-based curriculum is based on different schools' own special conditions. The curriculum is designed and used according to their own conditions and the books are chosen or written according to the students' real levels. With the development of education in our country, school-based curriculum gradually develops in many schools and is supported by the government.

In Inner Mongolia, there are some Mongolian students who major in English. In recent years, many Mongolian English majors have graduated from universities and colleges and they help much both in the English education and in many other fields in Inner Mongolia. When they are in a university or a college, they are in a class called the Mongolian English class. Their Chinese levels are different and often it is quite difficult for teachers to cope with the situation. The curriculum is the same as that used by other Han students. Teachers teach their classes in Chinese. The course books they use are the same as other students. So most of the students find it difficult to catch up and their grades are not as high. Therefore it is urgent to improve teaching quality and learning opportunities for these students because they are important for the development of English teaching and learning in Inner Mongolia and in the construction of the region.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF MONGOLIAN ENGLISH MAJORS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INNER MONGOLIA

In Inner-Mongolia autonomous region, English teaching

And learning is an important part in university and college teaching. Talents majoring in English are needed in many fields for the development of economy and society in Inner Mongolia. Graduates who can speak Chinese, Mongolian and English are needed badly in many positions. So in some universities and colleges Mongolian English majors are enrolled for the need of developing economy and society. In many research fields, the education of Mongolian English majors is discussed and teachers in universities and colleges are trying their best to find suitable ways to teach these majors efficiently. Inner Mongolia

is developing rapidly and its future development is related to skills in all fields. English majors are vital to communicate well with the outside world and learn more from others in order to develop the region's economy and society. People who can speak Chinese, English and Mongolian are needed, especially in the field of cultural communication. Those who can only speak Chinese and English may not know the Mongolian culture well, so sometimes misunderstandings may arise. To increase the number of tri-lingual speakers, more Mongolian English majors have been enrolled in recent years.

In the education field, Mongolian English majors are needed because schools all need English teachers and in some Mongolian schools, all the teachers and students speak Mongolian. If English teachers can speak Mongolian to assist their English teaching in class, students can understand the contents better and improve their grades. Improving Inner Mongolia's education is crucial to its future development. There are some Mongolians living in rural or pasturing areas and the education conditions are poorer there, including English education opportunities. So Mongolian English majors are needed in those areas to improve the education conditions and help students gain a good education. At the same time, this will help develop the economy and living conditions in those areas.

Culture is an important aspect of a region's development. Inner Mongolia has its distinct features and Han, Mongolian and many other minority nationalities live happily in this region. In order to communicate well with other regions in our country and in the world and introduce Inner Mongolian culture to others, Mongolian English majors are needed badly because they can introduce the culture correctly and effectively to others.

But problems appear when these students come into university. The class they are enrolled is called the Mongolian class and all the class members are Mongolians. Some of them started to learn Chinese and English in middle school. Their English scores for entering the university are lower than the students in the Han classes. When they come into university, they use the same curriculum and course books with other English majors. So most of the time, they would feel quite difficult in their English learning. Many teachers and students complain that the curriculum and books are not appropriate for Mongolian students. Students report feeling discouraged and disappointed in their learning.

Chinese teachers and researchers discuss the school-based curriculum from different aspects. Usually they analyse the different situations in different schools. All agree there is a need for school-based curriculum in Chinese education. School-based curriculum should be a crucial base for education and requires teachers' cooperation and ability to finish the task. Some researchers believe that it is the future hot topic in education. Schools would choose their own curriculum according to the

This paper is included in the research "The promotion research of the training of Mongolian English majors for the education and economy in Inner Mongolia" supported by Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China, No.2012B043.

culture of their region, the students' learning ability, the teachers' teaching ability, the education facilities in their school, the job chances for students, the books available and other requirements they receive. The process of developing school-based curriculum would be continuous and it would not be easy to finish this. It needs to be adjusted continuously. Teachers should gradually develop the appropriate ways to construct their own curriculum. Researchers focusing on minority regions are rare especially those studying university education for English majors. For example, Hai and Teng (2009) point out that different regions have their own cultural features, and teachers could design their own curriculum according to their own conditions. Inner Mongolia has its own cultural features, the Mongolian students majoring in English have their own advantages and the curriculum designed should be different for the development of education. So it is an urgent need to arouse people's attention to school-based curriculum for Mongolian English majors.

III. THE CURRENT SITUATION IN UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES FOR MONGOLIAN ENGLISH MAJORS

The Mongolian students in universities and colleges in Inner Mongolia face the problem of improving their English levels. Mongolian English learners usually find it hard to cope with their English study because some of them cannot understand the explanation from their Chinese-speaking teachers. The teachers teach their lessons in Chinese and some students find it difficult to understand the Chinese explanation.

Teachers and students are all concerned with the effective study for Mongolian English majors. Recently there is some research about the improvement of education for Mongolian English majors. Out of the classes, teachers discuss ways of improving the teaching quality for Mongolian English majors. Most teachers focus on how to motivate students' interest. Some teachers will use different ways to arouse students' interest in class.

Teachers who teach the Mongolian class feel an additional burden in their teaching, and some teachers feel they have no methods to improve their students' understanding. They feel the only way is to teach hard and to learn hard. Sometimes when the teachers meet, they would complain how hard they are teaching and the result is not satisfying. Out of class, the students say that they want very much to improve their English because they are English majors, and they should speak and use the language fluently.

There are some problems existing now for Mongolian English majors and the problems need to be considered carefully and solved step by step. Mongolian English majors now study in university for four years and the curriculum they use is the same as that used by other English majors. They studied in university for five years before and they had more time to perfect their English. With four years in university now, they must study very hard to reach the same standard. The curriculum they use is nearly the same with the curriculum used by other universities or

colleges in the country. This would be difficult for them because their entrance level is lower than students in Han class and in other universities and colleges. With the same curriculum and the same study time, most of them cannot improve. So after graduation, they have difficulty finding a satisfying job. Most of them cannot compete with other graduates in the job market and this impacts negatively on the students' motivation.

As for the curriculum itself, it is suitable for most of English learners because it is made after years of experience of teaching and learning English. It includes basic courses, advanced courses and literature, linguistics, translation courses and many other fields. But when Mongolian English majors use this curriculum, they often feel the books are too difficult for them and there are too many new words to be looked up in the dictionary and too many new words are to be recited. For example, in the first two years, they will learn general English, comprehensive English, reading, grammar, listening and oral English. In the last two years, they will learn advanced English, translation, literature, linguistics, culture and others. They use the same textbooks as Han English majors. After years of teaching experience, teachers feel that these books are fit for Han English majors to study, but they are too difficult for Mongolian English majors to learn. With so many new words and new grammar, Mongolian English majors often feel English learning is uninteresting.

Mongolian students may feel they cannot compete with Han students using the same curriculum because they lack the knowledge Han students are taught in primary, middle and high school. Some of them may lose interest and confidence in English study. This phenomenon is not good for the management of students because when some of the students stop studying they focus on out of university activities.

Most of the students will study hard, but they feel the burden. They want to study the language well because it is their major and they will use it to find a satisfying job. If they cannot study as well as others, it means they have fewer chances to get a good job. This demotivation deeply affects their study life.

Previously, when the Mongolian students were at university for five years, they had additional choices of textbooks. Books starting from "A, B, C" were used to help students go over the knowledge and learn the language step by step. However, today the job market more demanding, and it is hard for students of nearly all majors to find employment, so now all English majors study in university for four years. With the same course length in university, in order to get the same education, so the same curriculum is used. No proper textbooks can be found for Mongolian English majors now, so the Han textbooks are used for them.

Teachers and students are all concerned with the study. Some teachers say that most Mongolian English majors study even harder than Han English majors. They think their basic knowledge is lacking and they want the chance of study, so they are very serious about their study. They listen to their teachers'

lessons carefully and finish the homework on time. The study atmosphere is good in Mongolian class. Most teachers say when they give their lessons they can feel the eagerness for learning. But there are some students who cannot catch up with others. Sometimes in order to be fair, Mongolian students and Han students will be given different tests because their starting points are not the same. But some teachers are afraid that this will cause Mongolian students to feel they cannot study as well as others when they graduate and they cannot get the same jobs as others.

Most of the teachers teaching Mongolian English majors are Mongolians because teachers want to communicate well with them and understand their problems. But not all the teachers can speak Mongolian fluently, so in class they speak English and Chinese. When they explain grammar, they also use English and Chinese. This causes problems because some students cannot understand the grammar explanation in Chinese, as Chinese and Mongolian grammar have different constructs. The textbooks they use are written in English and Chinese, and teachers can only use English and Chinese in class.

When these Mongolian English majors go into the job market, they have fewer chances than others because people will think that their entrance level lower, and they study the same courses with others, so they cannot compete well with others in English. Some graduates will go to Mongolian schools to be teachers, but this option is not open to all graduates.

IV. METHODS OF DEVELOPING A SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM

In recent years, many teachers teaching Mongolian English majors are conducting research in their class to see how to teach these students more effectively. They will consider methods to motivate the students, change some class activities to arouse students' interest and do some tests to encourage students. But most teachers find the most important thing is to find the proper curriculum for these English majors. They have a different culture should be given a different curriculum according to their own study methods. So universities and colleges should support teachers and students to design the curriculum for themselves. With a suitable curriculum, students' motivation and interest can be raised.

First, when developing the school-based curriculum, students' level should be considered first. Their vocabulary, grammar and understanding ability should be considered. The basic courses could be designed with the difficulty level rising step by step. This will guarantee that students learn and gain progress in a natural situation. Teaching the students based on levels should be respected. Mongolian English majors have a relatively lower English entrance score than those Han students of the same major. If they are taught with the same curriculum and also with the same methods, the results cannot be similar, particularly if textbooks are more difficult for them.

Second, some courses must reflect the Mongolian culture and requirements. Mongolian English majors will actively take part in the construction of Inner Mongolia and they are very

important to the construction. As English majors, students must learn the basic and necessary courses for all English majors, for example, grammar, reading, listening, writing, literature, linguistics and translation, etc. These courses can be the same as those used by others. And universities and colleges can think about the future job possibilities of these students, and design the school-based curriculum for them according to the jobs students will do after graduation. Usually these students are needed in many fields in the construction of Inner Mongolia. For example, they will do jobs in trade, travel, education and some companies. So courses about trade, travel and culture should be open to these students to meet the requirement. With these course options in university, students are more likely to find a satisfying job.

Third, the school-based curriculum can include some Mongolian features. Most of these English majors will work in Inner Mongolia in the future and to know more about Mongolia is useful for their future development. For example, the travel book used in courses about traveling English can contain some passages about traveling in Inner Mongolia. This on one hand can arouse students' interest to learn because it is about the introduction of their homeland and on the other hand they can use the knowledge in the in their employment.

Fourth, courses about culture are necessary because learning about different cultures can help students understand the language and avoid some unnecessary misunderstandings in communication with foreigners. The comparison between different cultures is needed because every culture has its own features and advantages. Mongolian English majors should on one hand learn the knowledge about the western culture and on the other hand introduce Mongolian culture to people all over the world. This can help the better understanding between cultures and enhance better communication between different regions.

Fifth, if necessary, teachers of Mongolian English majors should design and edit some course books for their students because now the books used by Mongolian English majors are not suitable. One suggestion has been that in the first two years these students can use books with the difficulty of that in middle schools and for the last two years, they can use college course books. But if the students are taught in this way, their English levels cannot be guaranteed. The books used in middle schools are much easier than books used in university. Therefore students may find the first two years easy, but struggle again with the final two years. It seems then that the best solution is for teachers to write Mongolian-English textbooks books for students. Writing their own textbooks has many advantages. If they design their own curriculum, they should have their own textbooks because their curriculum takes Mongolian English majors' requirements into consideration, and the textbooks should be designed to meet the standards of the curriculum. Teachers should choose passages they think their students will find relevant and interesting at the appropriate difficulty level for the students.

But designing and writing their own textbooks are not an easy task because it requires much hard work and learning of teachers. Teacher should first know their students' ability, and then choose suitable passages and if necessary, they should write relevant passages. So this needs many teachers' cooperation. Only if each of them has their own task and finishes their task successfully, can the textbooks be written for the students.

In order to teach Mongolian English majors well and educate students for the construction of Inner Mongolia, the universities and colleges should support teachers to make new curriculum and write textbooks for students. Teachers would have to finish the additional task in their spare time and therefore need encouragement and support. Teachers should be encouraged to study more in and out of their own universities and colleges to ensure that they understand appropriate pedagogy, and can design and write appropriate textbooks.

Sixth, students should be able to choose the course they want to study or in the field they believe they want to enter. Some courses including economy, trade, travel, and translation should be open to students. They don't need to learn the same courses.

Seventh, students' learning styles should be studied in order to design proper ways to teach them. Mongolian English majors' learning may not be the same as Han English majors because different mother tongues and different experiences of learning languages may affect their learning styles. Usually, Mongolian English majors are more reticent than Han English majors, not only when they are facing foreign teachers, but also when they are facing Chinese teachers. Some of them dare not answer the questions actively and freely. If school-based curriculum is designed, teachers can choose some questions interesting to them to arouse their interest and at the same time encourage them to answer questions actively in class. This will support their language learning.

Eighth, the features of Mongolian language should be studied to help design the school-based curriculum. The mother tongue influences language learners' learning another language from a variety of aspects, and in learning English, Mongolian students are learning a third language, unlike Han students who are only learning a second language. Teachers should first know the features of Mongolian language, its grammatical structure, sentence structure, etc. Then, they can compare the features between Mongolian and English, Chinese and English, Mongolian and Chinese. When teachers understand the basic difference between these languages, they can teach English better and they can design a school-based curriculum for Mongolian English majors more effectively.

Ninth, if teachers want to design the school-based curriculum for their students, it is important to understand the needs of the students. Before designing the curriculum, interviews should be done with students. If teachers understand their students' requirements for the future, then the curriculum design will be more effective. If students are interested in what they are learning, they are more eager to learn and more likely to get

good results. In this way, teachers will be able to motivate students to learn in the classrooms. At the same time, affective variables of teachers and students should be emphasized (Li, 2012). With proper affective variables, teachers can be active and serious about their teaching and be creative in their developing and using the curriculum. With proper affective variables, students can be confident in their learning and the result can be satisfying.

Tenth, the school-based curriculum must be suitable for the integrated development of Mongolian English majors. On the one hand, the school-based curriculum must reflect the requirements of the area, and be support the education and development of people in Inner Mongolia. On the other hand, as English majors, Mongolian English majors must learn the necessary courses designed for all English majors because they must have the ability to compete in society and they are required to learn the basic knowledge that is known by all English majors. This will guarantee that Mongolian English majors are competitive in job hunting and have the ability to improve in the future.

V. CONCLUSION

English teaching and learning is important for English teachers and English majors. Students in minority areas who speak Chinese as a second language and English as a third language require more efficient teaching methods to improve both teaching and learning. It is not an easy task to design an effective school-based curriculum for students, and it needs the cooperation of schools, researchers, teachers and students.

With the development of Inner Mongolia, Mongolian English majors are needed for communication with the outside world and at the same time for introducing the excellent

Mongolian culture to the outside world. The education of more Mongolian people is also a long-term task.

Universities and colleges with both Han and Mongolian English majors have the responsibility to find more appropriate ways to improve teaching quality because this area of teaching has specific requirements that must be developed. One effective method for improving pedagogy in these specific situations is the development of a school-based curriculum. With the support of a central curriculum a school-based curriculum can help arouse the students' interest, reflect the ethnic and national characteristics and teach students based on their own requirements and levels. In the process of designing a school-based curriculum, teachers can also develop their own qualities of teaching and researching.

Education is a long-term task for all teachers and it needs hard work from all parties. Education is also a vital job because with more excellent students graduating from schools, regions and nations develop.

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