

The Current Situation and Sustainable Development Strategy of Public Foreign Language Education in China: A Language Planning Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to deal with the striking problem: homogenization of China's public foreign language education policy. It indicates that the government has not formulated special and diversified public foreign language education policies and plans to eliminate or minimize the drawbacks in the current situation. After reflecting on some relevant disadvantages, the author propose corresponding countermeasures from the perspective of language planning to achieve an ecological balance, by advocating diversification, updating outlook, implementing multilingualism and rectifying public foreign language education environment; and further point out that the self-confidence in culture is an important direction to realize the sustainable development of public foreign language education in the context of China. This study provides a very useful reference for language planning and design of public foreign language policy reform.

Keywords: *public foreign language education; language planning; language policy; self-confidence in culture*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language education level is a significant indicator to measure a country's modernization and language capability. In mainland China, especially since the reform and opening up policy has been implemented more than 30 years ago, public foreign language education has undergone tremendous changes. While China's foreign language education has made great achievements, many problems are also very prominent, and some scholars have made in-depth reflections on this-the focus is on the fact that public foreign language education is in reality public English language education across the country. From the perspective of national macro-education management and policy formulation, due importance should be attached to the issue of the homogeneous tendency of public foreign language education.

The ubiquity is an important factor that any nation must consider in its language policy[1]. In China, the only choice of public foreign language teaching for students at all levels and types of schools is English language. The public foreign language teaching departments of most colleges and universities is actually the English teaching ones. After college English has become the only language of public foreign language, it has affected all aspects of pre-school education, basic education, continuation education and even professional promotion and job hunting. English training of various types and levels has also emerged randomly. Public English language education tends to become more and more prominent in this context,

and its drawbacks are becoming more and more obvious, which should arouse the great attention of national education experts and authorities, who play key roles in making public foreign language education planning and policy.

2. HOMOGENIZATION OF PUBLIC FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION: DISADVANTAGES AND ANALYSIS

The popularity of English and the homogeneous situation of English education are related to its use value. The universal status of English in the world makes most people tend to use English as the first choice for personal foreign language learning. This is natural and understandable. However, from the perspective of national education policy and foreign language education strategy, international cooperation and national cultural security, there will be severe consequences, if we cannot scientifically plan national foreign language education. In addition to Chinese and English, the working languages stipulated by the United Nations include French, Russian, Spanish, and Arabic. The long-standing tendency of homogenization of public foreign language education has neglected the education of other languages and the training of reserve talents. The adverse consequences should not be underestimated. In general, the homogeneity of public foreign language education in current China has the following disadvantages:

2.1. Negative Impacts on the Improvement of Nation's Language Capability and Effect of International Communication

The simplification of public foreign language education has affected the improvement of nation's language capability and the effect of international communication. At the basic education stage, we lack a foundation of the training and selection of all kinds of non-English foreign language education reserve talents, and the excellent non-English foreign language majors in universities are scarce. Almost all non-English foreign language majors in colleges and universities have to start from "zero", while the other languages offered by foreign language colleges are very limited, which causes the occurrence of discontinuous learning starting points. For example, some high school students who have already learned a certain foreign language (non-English) in middle schools have to learn it again from the beginning when they become university students. This causes repeated foreign language learning, which will inevitably lead to time-consuming and useless work. If things go on like this, the country's overall foreign language capability will be hard to get improved, and foreign language education will inevitably not meet the strategic needs of nation's modernization and "cultural outreach", thereby hindering the international spread of Chinese culture.

2.2. Departure from China's Principles and Concepts of Cultural Diversity Around the World

In international affairs and among international relations, China advocates respect for cultural diversity and equality of different nations. The homogenization tendency of public foreign language education is not in line with the principles and ideas that it adheres to in international relations and international affairs, which is also contrary to the basic norms that China, as a world power, should uphold towards the languages and cultures of different countries. In addition, too much emphasis is placed on English as a universal language, while other non-universal languages such as Russian, Japanese, French, German, Arabic, Spanish, etc. is ignored. This unreasonable language structure is bound to have a certain impact on international foreign language communication. English will continue to occupy an absolute position and advantage in the entire foreign language education system. The unmatched position of English is bound to promote the arrogance of its cultural hegemony, and also seriously affect the formation and development of Chinese cultural ideology of Chinese students.

2.3. Potential Challenges to National Cultural Security

In the context of globalization and informatization, language work has a major bearing on national security and needs to be given due attention[2]. The homogenization of public foreign language education has brought huge and potential challenges to the cultural security of the nation. As is well known, the spread of language is the spread of a nation's culture and values. The simplification of English-based public foreign language education has enabled the culture and values of English-speaking countries to be widely spread from children and teenagers to all classes of Chinese people. The continuous impact of English culture and values on the young and even all aspects of society has undergone changes from latent stage to overt stage, and this has become particularly prominent among young people, who are attracted to advocate Western cultural customs and values, and be keen to imitate the Western way of life. For example, from the inferior imitation of Western architecture to building various "European" towns or "resorts", to being keen on celebrating foreign festivals, eating foreign food, and watching Hollywood blockbusters. This value concept has invaded many aspects of China, and Chinese cultural traditions and socialist values are facing comprehensive and severe challenges. Although the formation of this phenomenon is related to the background of China's reform and opening up policy, the simplification of English education has undoubtedly played a role in fuelling the flames. Therefore, if no great importance is attached to resolutely correct the simplification of English education, it might eventually influence a nation's cultural security.

2.4. Waste of Resources and Aggravation of Unfairness of Education

It is reported repeatedly that public foreign language education policy has caused much waste of resources and aggravated the unfairness of education. China's public foreign language education not only has an English-based tendency, but English has become the main subject of senior high school students' entrance examination, college entrance examination and even postgraduate entrance examination. The pressure of entering a higher school and fierce competition strengthen the status of English education. Now not only the primary schools in big cities set up English courses from the first grade, but most of the rural primary schools also follow up this trend, and further English learning has been extended from the school-age population to pre-school education. In terms of employment, some units set English scores as a mandatory requirement, and many types of professional promotion use English exams as a threshold that must be crossed. In this way, English learning is almost accompanied by a person's lifelong education. Regardless of whether English is really necessary for the individual, people have to pay a huge price in English learning. The time, energy and money

spent on English learning and on study of other courses take on great disparity. Due to the differences in the educational environment and personal endowments, English learning has very different effects for different educated persons. The current public foreign language education policy has actually become one of the important factors causing the unfairness of education in China. The life paths of talents and rural youths may have been changed just because they did not learn English well. It is not hard to imagine that no country in the world like China puts a foreign language education in such a "supreme" position or makes it even surpass Chinese mother tongue. This is really worth public foreign language policy maker's reflection on the dominance of English education.

3. MEASURES TO ENSURE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The author hereby call on the department of national education management to comprehensively survey and evaluate the current status and existing problems of public foreign language education, attach great importance to the adverse effects caused by the simplification of public foreign language education, and take effective measures to promote the healthy development of public foreign language education.

3.1. Advocating the Diversification of Public Foreign Language Education

The ecological imbalance of foreign language education should be actively changed to better adapt it to the new situation of nation's reform and opening up as well as cultural development strategy, by improving strategic plan of public foreign language education from a macro perspective so as to vigorously achieve its diversification across the country. Many countries have comparatively mature plans for public foreign language education, which are worthy of our reference. In theory, a country's public foreign language education should be geared to all citizens and the entire world. In terms of macro planning, it should provide citizens with free choice of public foreign language education, provide more possibilities and create basic conditions. However, due to the constraints of educational resources and the influence of people's tendency to choose foreign language learning, it is impossible for any country to include all the languages in the scope of public foreign language education. Generally, a country can only determine the most important ones that can satisfy the majority. China is expected to clearly advocate and stipulate some certain major languages in the world as the languages of public foreign language education. On the level of macro policy, these languages should have the same as English to promote nationally the formation of diversification of public foreign language education.

3.2. Updating the Outlook on Public Foreign Language Education

It is necessary to update the concept of public foreign language education, scientifically locate it in proper position, and examine its role in national education system. There is no doubt that public foreign language education should be an important part of modern education. However, while advocating its diversification, foreign language education should be put in an appropriate position conceptually, and thus English as the most important subject is expected to be placed in the same important position as Chinese and mathematics in high school entrance examination and college entrance examination. In the postgraduate entrance examination, it should be treated the same as the public political course, and its rationality should indeed be reassessed too. Due to the deviation of concepts and understanding, public English education has been placed in an inappropriate but important position, which makes the current public English education not only show a single tendency, but also a utilitarian one. Public foreign language has become a veritable "Stepping stone" for professional promotion or entering the next higher school, which fundamentally deviates from the purpose of foreign language learning. Therefore, China's government must not only plan for the diversification of public foreign language education and stipulate that multilingualism has the same status in promotion and employment, but also pay attention to establishing correct foreign language education concepts and comprehensively evaluating foreign language education system and its status in social life, so as to bring foreign language education and learning back to the normal track.

3.3. Policy-making in Multilingual Orientation

To formulate specific plans for the implementation of multilingual education in public foreign language education at the stage of compulsory education and university education is a good idea to create a sound policy environment and provide conditions for the implementation of multilingual education. To implement multilingualism, we must first make overall arrangements for policies involving public foreign language education, so that different languages of public foreign languages managed by the state can enjoy policy fairness. In order to correct the oversimplification of English education and employ the advantages of its long-term accumulation, the necessary supporting policies for education in other languages should be put on the agenda as soon as possible. For the implementation of non-English languages education, especially in terms of teacher training, textbook compilation and the construction of student academic evaluation systems, comprehensive planning and arrangements, more efforts should be made to create the necessary conditions for the development of multilingual education. Facing the future, the country looks forward to the opportunity to integrate foreign language education and

professional education to cultivate talents who are proficient in foreign languages, have global knowledge, and are familiar with international rules[3].

3.4. Rectifying Public Foreign Language Education Environment

While advocating and implementing the diversification of public foreign language education, we should pay more attention to rectifying the public foreign language education environment, including strict and standardized management of various foreign language training institutions, various foreign language examinations and foreign language examinations for promotion purposes, etc. Administrators need to deal with the actual interests of various interest groups formed due to the simplification of English education, and strive to eliminate resistance and interference to promote harmonious and healthy public foreign language education environment. Such measures are hopeful to appropriately cool the "English fever" in China, save a lot of social resources and high costs, and create a reasonable space for the promotion of other public languages. At the same time, effective measures should be taken to resolve the serious disconnection between public foreign language teaching and practical applications. Chinese students have spent about 14 years studying English from elementary school to university, and the main energy they put in is mainly just for all types of examinations. This kind of examination orientation has led to the fact that all domestic students learn is dumb English. What is even more disappointing is that the education tendency for all people to learn English has weakened the learning of Chinese language. The domestic educational environment lacks enthusiasm for mother tongue, and Chinese language ability of Chinese is deteriorating. This cannot but be said to be a great irony. Therefore, government must not only regulate the utilitarian nature of the English training market, but also guide the teachers and students in their positions and attitudes in English teaching and learning.

4. SELF-CONFIDENCE IN CULTURE

Public foreign language education has both instrumental and humanistic missions[4]. China's foreign language education can transcend the tool-humanity dispute by opening up a culturally conscious educational concept and consciously pursuing the cognition and perception of the differences and common trends between Chinese and Western cultures[5]. The simplification and over-emphasis of public English education could aggravate the aphasia and imbalance of the world's diverse cultures and national traditional cultures during the education of college students, especially could cause difficulties in college students' cultural identity and obstacles to self-confidence. As a result, on the one hand, college students have weak cross-cultural awareness and insufficient cross-cultural

communication skills, on the other hand, they will gradually lose their awareness and self-confidence in their own national culture and will not be able to become language and culture communicator who are both rooted in local culture, or have global perspective or cross-cultural thinking consciousness.

Therefore, it is urgent for government to formulate an active language policy, cultivate and establish a high degree of cultural awareness and self-confidence in public foreign language education. In the process of internationalization, self-confidence in Chinese culture is a prerequisite that must be adhered to the process of internationalization of foreign language education in colleges and universities[6].

The cultural consciousness of a nation lies in its sober and rational understanding and awareness of its own culture's formation, development, current situation, future and cultural elements. Cultural consciousness is the prerequisite and foundation of cultural self-confidence, and cultural self-confidence originates from cultural consciousness. Therefore, the so-called "cultural self-confidence" without cultural consciousness can only be blind and false self-confidence, and cultural self-confidence in the true sense can only be built on a high degree of cultural consciousness. Foreign language educators shoulder great responsibilities for cultivating and establishing a high degree of cultural awareness and cultural self-confidence, and need to actively participate in the process of building an "excellent traditional cultural inheritance system".

To understand the value of one's own culture and establish the status of one's own culture, one need to adopt an open and tolerant attitude towards the excellent cultures of different countries and nations, and be good at opening up and have inclusive spirit in comparison with different cultures. Therefore, public foreign language education needs actively integrate and absorb many different excellent cultural elements in the world. In this context, the state and relevant government departments should formulate active language policies to better cultivate and foster a high degree of cultural awareness and confidence among university students, and enhance the soft power of country's culture to promote Chinese culture to truly go out and go into other cultures.

When Chinese culture is introduced into college English teaching, it may absorb and/or collide with Western culture as an independent subject. In this regard, college teachers ought to keep up with the trend of the times and actively introduce Chinese cultural content in foreign language teaching, and guide students to strengthen the learning of traditional Chinese culture in multiple dimensions and to enhance their sense of national cultural identity, and deepen Chinese cultural self-confidence. It is necessary for students to learn foreign languages on the basis of cultural self-confidence and national pride[7]. It is also essential to cultivate "the inheritors of Chinese culture, the communicators of Chinese voice, the innovators of Chinese theories, and the pioneers of China's future"[8].

5. CONCLUSION

A good foreign language planning requires first of all foreign language education to be in accord with a country's development, and formulate a foreign language policy that is conducive to improving the country's language capability, as well as citizens' language ability constitutes the foundation of a country's language capability[9]. The so-called national foreign language capability or good foreign language planning refers to the foreign language policy that can meet the national strategic needs to the greatest extent and directly serve the national interests. With China's increasing involvement in global activities, high-quality education has become a key strategic guidance to enhance national competitiveness and ensure social sustainable development[10]. In recent years, the Ministry of Education of China has issued some official documents to strengthen the reform of public foreign language teaching in colleges and universities, and public foreign languages have been established as one of the national strategies. This is an important change in the national foreign language education policy in the new era. It is likely to improve the status of public foreign languages in higher education and even the strategic layout of the country's education planning: to improve college students' comprehensive application skills of foreign languages, and cultivate a large number of students' specialization and multiple abilities, such as mastering one foreign language, being familiar with several other foreign languages, possessing professional capability, and multilingual communication and writing ability. All of these contribute to the cultivation of high-quality inter-disciplinary talents. Then where is the development direction of public foreign language in future? The proper direction of the reform of public foreign language education should be geared towards English for specific purposes (ESP), that is, college students are required to be able to use foreign languages to engage in their own professional studies, work and research proficiently[11]. This is the biggest flaw in public foreign language teaching nowadays and will be the future direction of public foreign language policy reform.

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