

Survey and Analysis of the Current Situation of Professional Training for English Teachers in Rural Secondary Schools

-- Taking Hengyang Region as an Example

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Abstract. The professional development of the rural teachers is a key to rural education development and the professional training of the rural teachers is an important measure to promote their professional development. By investigating the professional training of rural English teachers in Hengyang, the researchers have found that poor coordination of training management, poor relevance, low fit between training content and training needs, and lagging training models have still existed. Therefore, in the future, we need to strengthen the coordination of training organizations, provide targeted training for rural secondary school English teachers of different ages and titles, conduct training in accordance with the needs of the rural teachers, and innovate the training models to motivate the trained teachers so as to better serve rural education.

Keywords: teachers' professional training, professional development, rural secondary school English teachers, a survey.

1 Introduction

The development of rural education is the key to solving the problems of unbalanced regional education development and the rural teachers are the key to the development rural education. Therefore, the State Council has successively issued two documents for rural teacher development, the Rural Teacher Support(2015-2020) and the Action Plan for Teacher Education Revitalization(2018-2022), calling for "placing the construction of the rural teacher team in the strategic position of priority development," and "establishing and improving the support system for the rural teacher development, and carrying out training for all the rural teacher with high quality "[2]. Accordingly, the construction of the rural teacher group has recently received unprecedented attention from government department at all levels, and a series of training activities have been carried out to promote their professional development. This paper has thus investigated the current situation of training situation of English teachers in rural secondary schools

through web-based questionnaire so as to learn about and study their professional training.

2 Survey Results and Analysis of the Current Situation of Professional

2.1 Training for English Teachers in Rural Secondary Schools

This survey has been conducted for all 703 English teachers in rural secondary schools in Hengyang area, and 665 valid questionnaires have been recovered. The basic information of the respondents is as shown in Table 1.

Gender	number	percentage	age	number	percentage	title	number	percentage
female	601	90.38%	aged	234	35.19%	Prof.	4	0.6%
			20-30					
male	64	9.62%	aged	225	33.83%	senior	75	11.28%
			30-40					
			aged	172	25.86%	first-grade	284	42.71%
			40-50					
			aged	34	5.11%	second-grade	217	32.63%
			50-60					
						none	85	12.78%

Table 1. Basic information of survey respondents in Hengyang area in 2022

From the figures of the table, in terms of gender, female English teachers in rural secondary schools account for 90.38%, while males are only for 9.62%; in terms of the age, the rural English teachers under the age of 40 are for 69.02%, the teachers between 40 and 50 for 25.86%, and the teachers between 50 and 60 for 5.11%; from the perspective of tile, 11.34% of teachers have received the senior title, 42.71% of them have the first-grade title, 32.63% of them have the second-grade title, while 12.78 % of the teachers have no titles.

From the data, female English teachers in rural secondary schools greatly outnumber the males, accounting for more than 90% of the total; young and middle-aged teachers have a greater proportion than those over 50 years old; the teachers with the second-and first-grade titles are for more than 75%, and the number of teachers with senior titles is equal to the number of those without any title.

This reflects that the age and title structure of rural English teachers is reasonable, that a number of young teachers are willing to serve for the rural education and that national education policies favoring rural teachers as well as the training plans for publicly-funded teachers trainees have achieved certain success over the years. The implementation of these policies has attracted the young teachers and increased their proportion in rural secondary schools.

Based on the above respondents, this survey has focused on the training situation of English teachers in rural secondary schools. It centers on the number of times, content,

methods, and willingness of the training, aiming to reveal the current situation, identify problems and explore countermeasures. Shown as Figure 1.

2. 2 Number of Training Received

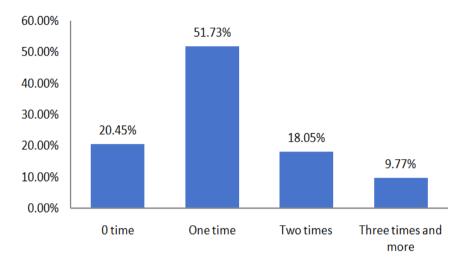
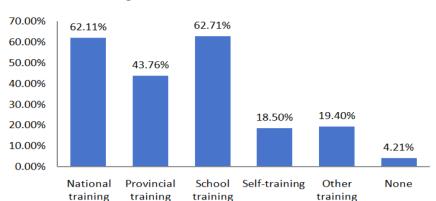


Fig. 1. Distribution of the number of training received by English teachers in rural secondary schools

From the data, nearly 80% of the English teachers in rural secondary schools have participated in post-service training in the past year, among whom, those who have taken one training session are for 51.73%, those who have taken two for 18.05% and those who have received three for 9.77%. Compared to 78.39%, the percentage of the rural teachers received training in the central areas in China reported by *Rural Education Development Report in China: An Annual Report* (2019)^[3], the data from this survey have shown that, despite the influence of global public health events, the current percentage is greater, reflecting that the trend of full training has not been stagnant, or that the percentage of rural secondary English teachers who have received training is higher than that of teachers of other courses.



2.3 Levels of Training Received

Fig. 2. Distribution of English Teachers in Rural Secondary Schools by Training Levels

As shown in Figure 2, the levels of training attended by English teachers in rural secondary schools mainly include national training, provincial training, school training, self-training (self-funded training), as well as some other training, such as distance training and webinars. Among them, 62.11% of rural secondary English teachers have participated in national training, 43.76% in provincial training, 62.71% in school training and 18.5% in self-training. Of all the rural secondary English teachers, 62.11 percentage have received national training, indicating that national training is now common in rural teacher training.

Over the years, the National Training Programme has shifted its focus downwards, and the Rural Teacher Support Programme, which is "constantly working on leading the development of teachers in China, and on serving the education in rural areas in central and western regions where education is the most urgent" [4], has been effectively implemented. Most of the English teachers in rural secondary schools have the opportunities to receive national training so as to develop their teaching abilities.

2.4 Content of Training Received

According to the survey, the content of the training received by English teachers in rural secondary schools mainly focuses on the areas of teacher ethics, improvement of teaching level, of theoretical level, of information technology application skills, of classroom management and writing of teaching and research papers. The data shows that most rural teachers have received training in teaching improvement, teacher ethics and information technology application, with the proportion of 76.54%, 71.58% and 67.07%, followed by improvement of classroom management, with that of 37.59%, and the writing of teaching and research papers, with that of 17.59%. A further 11.88% of rural teachers reported to have received training in such areas as mental health, educational psychology and so on. In terms of the training content and the proportion of participants, the top three are the improvement of teaching level, the teacher ethics and the

application of information technology, and this situation of training supply is consistent with the survey data in the *Rural Education Development Report in China: An Annual Report* (2019)^[3]. However, there is relatively little training on enhancing teachers' theoretical research, such as writing teaching and research papers, applying for and implementing teaching and research projects, etc. The training on mental health education is also little, with only a small number of teachers mentioning that they have received some relevant training. From these data, it can be seen that the content of the training available to the teachers does not necessarily meet their professional development needs. Shown as Figure 3

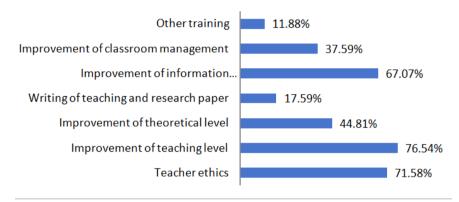


Fig. 3. Distribution of training content received by English teachers in rural secondary schools

2.5 Willingness to Receive Training

Willingness to receive training is included in this survey, and the results have shown that the need for the improvement of teaching level is in the first place, at 90.98%, followed by improvement of information technology application skills, improvement of theoretical level, writing of teaching and research papers, and improvement of classroom management, in the order of 61.05%, 49.17%, 47.07%, and 46.32% respectively. At the same time, the survey results have also shown that certain age differences in the willingness to receive training exist. For example, in the areas of improving teaching level, writing teaching and research papers and improving classroom management skills, the willingness to receive training shows a significant trend of gradual decrease with age, indicating that the demand for these items decreases with age and increasing teaching experience; in the areas of teacher ethics and theoretical level upgrading, the 20-50 age group shows a gradual decline in willingness, but the trend reverses and rises in the 50-60 age group, which may be related to the fact that teachers approaching retirement are worried about their own evaluation system and self-prospects; in the area of information technology application skills, the age difference in the willingness is not significant, showing that IT is developing rapidly and that IT application skill improvement is a live-and-let-live requirement and need for rural secondary English teachers. Shown as Figure 4, Figure 5.



Fig. 4. Distribution of training willingness of English teachers in rural secondary schools

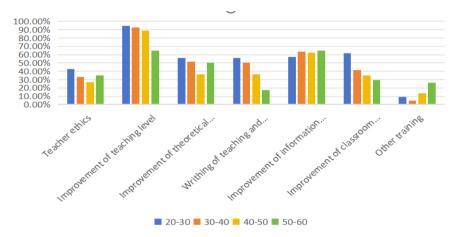


Fig. 5. Difference in Age-Training Willingness of English Teachers in Rural Secondary Schools

3 Problems Existing in the Training of English Teachers in Rural Secondary Schools

Based on this survey of the basic situation and training of English teachers in rural secondary schools, the following problems have been found:

3. 1 Training Organization to be Further Integrated

This survey has found that the organization of rural secondary English teacher training in Hengyang area is overly centralized and that the role of the local normal universities is under-utilized.

On the one hand, the management of English teacher training in rural secondary schools in Hengyang is relatively uniform, relying mainly on the rural schools and local education management. Therefore, the way in which English teachers in rural secondary schools take the post-service training is mainly designed and notified by higher authorities. The education administration has decided the level, the content, and the time and place of the training. From the data in Figure 6, the proportion of teachers participating in national and provincial training increases in ascending order by title level, which is consistent with the government's characteristic of allocating quotas, and at the same time shows the awkward position of teachers without titles in government-coordinated training and the plight of teachers who have to take the training at their own expense.

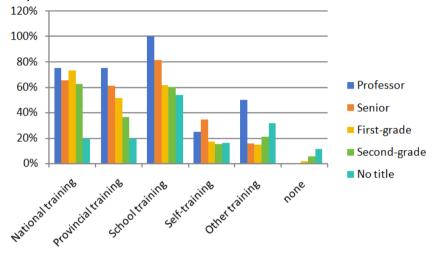


Fig. 6. Differences in training level-title of English teachers in rural secondary schools

On the other hand, local normal universities are relatively independent of the training organized by the education administration and thus play a limited role in the training. Although the universities also organize teacher training occasionally, but the overall coverage is not broad due to the constraints, which is verified by the fact that less than 20% of rural English teachers participated in both self-training and other types of training as shown in Figure 2. It can be said that the tripartite body of the local government, universities and various primary and secondary schools still has little cooperation in teacher training. A lot of problems in the implementation of rural teacher training still exist, which is not the same as "promotion of the trinity" of the local government, institution of higher education, primary and secondary schools collaborative parenting mechanism" put forward by *Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of the Construction of Teaching Personnel in the New Era [5] in 2018.*

3.2 The Relevance and Fit of the Training Content to be Further Improved

According to the survey, the content of English teacher training in rural secondary schools in Hengyang area has the problem of insufficient relevance and fit.

On the one hand, there is not much differentiated training according to the differences of training goals resulting from ages and titles. The needs of rural secondary school English teachers for training differ from ages and titles, and the training effects of teachers of different ages are not the same. [6] Teacher training should be implemented in response to the different training needs of different teachers. If teachers with less than 15 years of teaching experience, for instance, possess a weak sense of research and a narrow knowledge structure, the training content should be geared to this group of teachers with such characteristics. However, it is found in the survey that although the proportion of rural secondary English teachers in Hengyang area aged between 20 and 30 is 35.19%, and that of those aged between 30 and 40 is 33.83%, the content of the training attended by almost all the teachers is basically the same, and the degree of differentiation is extremely low. For example, the proportion of teachers in the four age groups participating in the "teacher ethics" and "improvement of teaching level" is between 70% and 80%, while that of those in the "improvement of theoretical level" is between 40% and 48%. This is consistent with a survey conducted by Yanling Zhu of Northwest Normal University more than a decade ago, which found that young teachers' training "involves less improvement of theoretical level" [7], suggesting that this problem has not yet been improved in the training of rural English teachers in Hengyang area.

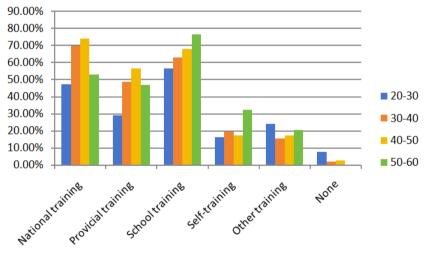


Fig. 7. Differences in training level-age of English teachers in rural secondary schools

On the other hand, the content of the training provided does not fit well with the teachers' training willingness. The training content should be tailored to the needs of teachers' teaching practice and professional development. Previous studies have also found that the problem of poor fit between the content of training and the need of the teachers has been serious in recent years.

For example, the Rural Education Development Report in China concludes, after investigating the supply of and demand for rural teacher training, that although the training available to teachers mainly centers on teaching competence, teacher ethics and information technology application, the top three training needs are safety education, mental health education teaching competence, [3] which profoundly reflects that there exists a serious problem in the matching of supply and demand in current teacher training; Wang Dinghua (2020) also pointed out that the content of the current teacher training is not relevant enough, mainly reflected in: practical course training is mostly suitable for urban schools, rather than the rural education; theoretical training lacks mental health education, left-behind children care and so on; [8] Cui Shuhui (2022) found in a survey on the training content needs of rural teachers in Henan Province that the majority of teachers believed that they were in urgent need of training in teaching skills and techniques, followed by training of cutting-edge theories of education and concepts of curriculum reform, and that of mental health education.^[9] In this survey, we also have found that there is a big gap between the content of training received by rural secondary school English teachers in Hengyang area and their willingness. As shown in Figure 7, the demand for improvement of teaching level is 90.98%, while the supply in this area is 76.54%; the demand for classroom management is 46.32%, but the supply is 37.59%; the need for writing of teaching and research paper is as high as 47.07%, while the supply only accounts for 17.59%. From these data, it can be seen that the areas in which the content of training matches the willingness closely include the improvement of information technology application and of theoretical level; the areas in which the content does not quite match the need are teacher ethics, improvement of teaching level and writing of teaching and research paper. Evidently, the training provided in Hengyang is still difficult to meet the teachers' training needs. Shown as Figure 8.

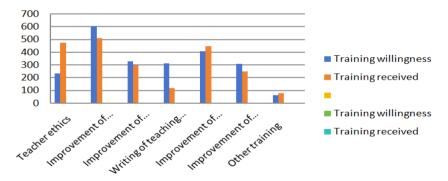


Fig. 8. Differences in training willingness-training received of English teachers in rural secondary schools

3.3 Training Models to be Further Innovated

According to the on-site research, it has been found that the current training for rural secondary school English teachers in Hengyang area still uses a relatively single model.

On the one hand, in the national, provincial, school training or other centralized training, the role of participating teachers is set as "recipients", "trainee" or "required participants" so "a considerable portion of participating teachers in the training is still

in the 'passive promotion' state'. [8] This demotivates English teachers in rural secondary schools to take the training. From the survey, the offline training available to the rural secondary English teachers in Hengyang area is more than the online training, and rare is the online-offline integrated training, which is convenient, motivating, and flexible for the teachers.

On the other hand, traditional indoctrination training is mainly adopted in the training, this kind of training method has many drawbacks compared with the modern popular experiential, immersion and seminar training, lacking in embodiment, generativitity, extensibility and situation. Therefore, the teachers are unable to critically internalize theoretical knowledge as rural educator. This "superficial learning" [10] phenomenon is prominent and the effectiveness of training is greatly reduced.

4 Suggestions for the Training of English Teachers in Rural Secondary Schools

Based on the above problems, in order to further develop the post-service training for the professional development of English teachers and the quality of education in rural secondary schools, the researcher puts forward the following suggestions.

4.1 Strengthening the Co-ordination of Training Organization for English Teachers in Rural Secondary Schools

A "U-G-S" (University-Government-School, i.e. "University-Local Education Administration-Primary and Middle Schools") training model for rural secondary schools should be set on the basis of tripartite co-operation in among the government, institutions of higher education and primary and secondary schools, which meets the needs of English teachers in the countryside.

On the one hand, the U-G-S teacher education and training model has been further improved to enhance the training management of English teachers in rural secondary schools. In 2012, the State Council issued the Opinion of the State Council on Strengthening the Construction of the Teaching Corps, which proposes to "innovate the model of teacher training, and establish a new mechanism for higher education institutions to jointly train teachers with the local government, primary and secondary schools (kindergartens and vocational schools)"[11]. The U-G-S model of teacher education and training has been affirmed at the national level. In 2018, the Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Comprehensively Deepening the Reform of the Construction of Teacher Teams in the New Era emphasized the "promotion of the tripartite collaborative nurturing mechanism among local governments, institutions of higher education, and primary and secondary schools" [5], indicating the U-G-S teacher training model in the new era of teacher construction reform is significant. The survey shows that the G-S linkage mechanism in Hengyang region is relatively sound, but there is a surplus of "correctness" and a shortage of "innovation". For example, the number of national and provincial training programme attended by non-titled teachers is far lower than that of titles teachers. If the U-G-S

teacher training model plays the part fully, non-titled teachers will be included in the national and provincial training, which will be beneficial to 31.76% of non-titled teachers who attended "other" forms of training and 11.76% of those who did not, as indicated in the survey.

On the other hand, the university's role as a supply base in the U-G-S teacher training model has been brought into full play to improve the quality of English teacher training in rural secondary schools. In the U-G-S rural model, universities, the government and rural secondary schools play the roles of "supply", "co-ordination" and "use" respectively. Universities possess high quality resources of talents, scientific research and network and so on, using this existing resources to train teachers, spread educational concepts. Meanwhile, in the course of training, universities can gradually have a indepth understanding of rural education, which in turn exert influence on university education. The government has information, economic and institutional advantages, which effectively bridge the "supply" of universities and the "demand" of rural teachers. If the coordination of U-G and U-S can be further strengthened, it will be conducive to the three main roles giving full play so as to make the training more efficient and beneficial to the professional development of rural secondary English teachers.

The survey found that the Research Center for English Teaching and Learning in Secondary Education set up by Hengyang Normal University has cooperated with the government and local rural schools to serve for the training of teachers, through using its talents, scientific research and network resources and so on. This has greatly enhanced the efficiency of training and indicated that the influence of U-G-S model in the post-service training and development of teachers.

4.2 Developing Training that Fits Well with the Needs of English Teachers in Rural Secondary Schools

Optimizing the content of training and improving its relevance and fit is an important part of improving the quality of training.

On the one hand, training with different purposes, contents, approaches and forms is provided for different groups and categories of English teachers in rural secondary schools, so as to achieve the objective of efficient training. Well-targeted training is more facilitating and encouraging for teachers' professional development.

In this survey, the proportion of young teachers aged 20-40, who have a need for teaching and research training, exceeds 53%, which is significantly higher than the 36.63% in the 40-50 age group and 17.65% in 50-60 age groups. Towards the young teachers aged 20-40, the local government and schools can provide relevant training by encouraging teachers to actively apply for all kinds of research topics, by providing appropriate lectures for guidance, by assigning teaching researchers and core teachers to instruct the young teachers. Local universities can also serve to provide lectures on theoretical knowledge, guide secondary school teachers and university teachers to participate in joint research projects, invite them to participate in thesis supervision by university students, and encourage them to participate in universities education practice. Rural secondary school English teachers over 40 years of age, who is for 30.97% of the total, have a higher demand for training in the integration of information

technology and teaching. This kind of training supply is more than adequate. And therefore for this type of teachers, the only thing that needs to be strengthened in information technology training is the guidance on certain specific issues and the integration of information technology with specific teaching issues.

On the other hand, the training content are to be enriched to meet the diversified and rural-specific needs of English teacher in rural secondary schools. Many of the rural teachers in the survey indicated in their questionnaires that they would like to receive training that addresses the practical problems they face. For young teachers, they have a stronger awareness of theoretical level improvement, a higher demand for guidance on how to write teaching and research papers, and a stronger desire for title promotion. They need to solve these practical problem around them. However, the content of the training has not covered these problems yet. Then there is a need to provide at least three elements of training for young teachers, including theoretical, practical and research training. And the training management department and trainers should be committed to expanding the content of training, providing adequate training content and opportunities. For example, for teaching concepts, training should extend theoretical content; for teaching methods, training should enrich teaching practice content; for the promotion of the title, training should expand teaching research content.

Regarding some of the unique problems faced by English teachers in rural secondary schools, such as psychological counselling for left-behind children, implementation of teaching practices suitable for the rural classroom and enhancement of cultural literacy in English education, teacher training in these areas must be further improved and strengthened.

4. 3 Training Model to be Further Innovated

Good content must be presented in a good form. It is necessary to continuously create new models of training and to use suitable forms to promote the professional development of English teachers in rural secondary schools.

On the one hand, the integration of online and offline training model should be strengthened for English teachers in rural secondary schools, so that it can be upgraded from a new technology to a new model, so that the Internet and digital technology can play a greater role in the training of English teachers in rural secondary schools. As early as 2018, the state pointed out in teacher training that "the phenomenon of emphasizing extension over substance is still relatively prominent" and advocated that teacher training should "innovate the model of teacher training"^[5].

Over the years of training implementation and continuous progress, the training models have been gradually enriched, and the training method is constantly moving towards the integration of online and offline. Further innovating the integration training model of online and offline to promote the overall quality of rural secondary school English teachers on the basis of improving their digital literacy is an important way for the professional development of teachers and the modernization of rural secondary school English education^[12].

On the other hand, new forms of embodied, generative, extended and situational training are being constructed to enhance the effectiveness of training. Compared to the

past, although the current form of teacher training has been optimized, the role of the teacher trainee as a training subject in the form of training is still a passive "receiver"over the years, rather than an active "participant". It is therefore necessary to further innovate the training model and further strengthen the design, planning and implementation of experiential, immersive and seminar-based training [13].

In the survey, the Research Center for English Teaching and Research in Secondary Education has tried to use remote classrooms, WeChat, Tencent Classroom and so on to enable university teachers and rural secondary school English teachers to observe and evaluate classroom together, to apply for the research projects together, to guide the thesis writing for university students together. In such activities, the rural teachers have thus acted as the "participants", "researchers", "guides" and "explorers". Together with university students and teachers, rural teachers have studied hot issues, cuttingedge issues and real problems in education. This has more effectively stimulated their participation, exploration, and development. Therefore, this training model can be used as a pilot experiment and as an innovative experiential, immersive and seminar training model, which can be followed up with strengthened inputs, guidance and summaries for further research and application.

5 Summary

The key to the development of rural education lies in the development of rural teachers, and the development of rural teachers in training. It is vital to provide training that is highly targeted, with good content fit and truly motivated.

According to the survey, it is learnt that in rural secondary schools, young teachers who account for a larger proportion have a higher demand for the improvement of teaching level, the improvement of theoretical level and the writing of teaching and research paper, while the middle-aged and old-aged teachers have a higher demand for the application of information technology. However, these different demands have not been met because of relatively homogeneous management and form of teacher training, resulting from limited degree of integration of the government-led teacher training with the local universities and secondary schools.

Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the management of English teacher training in rural secondary schools, to form a tripartite training model among local governments, institutions of higher education, and primary and secondary schools, and to provide appropriate training content for the different needs of different groups.

In addition, the model of online and offline integration of teacher training, which dilute the role of the teacher "trained", but set that of the teachers as "participants", "researchers" and "explorers", develop "teacher learning power" [10] in rural secondary schools. These initiatives will serve to help the professional development of rural teachers so that they can better serve rural education.

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