

An Empirical Study on Young College English Teachers' Professional Practice Ability in Minority Areas

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Abstract—This paper analyzes the current situation of young college English Teacher's professional practice ability, especially teachers in minority areas. The study points out the problems that exist in young college English teachers' professional practice abilities and at the same time introduces several ways to solve the problems through an empirical study. Professional knowledge, practice chances and psychological quality are emphasized in the process of improving young college English teachers' professional practice abilities.

Keywords—*professional practice; empirical; psychological; improving*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ethnic Minority Universities are the important bases for the cultivating of professional talents and for the heritage of outstanding minority culture. They play an important role in education nowadays.

Since the reform and opening up, China's national universities cultivate a large number of high-level professionals for the development of ethnic minorities and ethnic areas, but the development of national universities still face the reality of the imperfect teaching management mechanism, the relative shortage of educational resources, and the lagging behind of teachers' professional development. Especially due to the combined effect of the educational resources, teaching characteristics of foreign language subjects, and uniqueness of the national culture, the foreign language education in national universities in the region shows great specificity.

Meanwhile, with the intervention and migration of the mother tongue and second language, foreign language learning mechanism of ethnic Universities' students also shows the unique complexity. In addition, foreign language teachers in national universities are increasingly younger than before. Young teachers have become the main strength of foreign language teachers in those universities. So their development cannot be ignored.

However, due to the differences of development and educational level of universities, in ethnic minority areas, not

many young foreign language teachers have a doctorate or master's degree. Many young foreign language teachers generally lack professional practice, professional experience and means. But teachers' professional practice ability sometimes directly determines the students' practical abilities.

Thus, effective strategies to train young ethnic college foreign language teachers in professional practice are the key to improve the overall level of foreign language teachers. Only when young foreign language teachers have a strong practical wisdom and ability, can they do the practice of foreign language teaching design, demonstration and guidance.

In this process, teachers gradually form their own teaching philosophy to rethink and reconstruct English teaching concepts, to form their own set of teaching philosophy, and use them to guide the EFL Classroom (Richards, 1998). At the same time the national college English education quality will be improved.

Some studies about teacher development emphasize not only foreign language teachers' teaching skills training, but also their theoretical knowledge of education. They put more emphasis on teachers' awareness of self-development as well as ways to promote self-development of teachers. Teachers are asked to understand and improve foreign language teaching skills, foreign language teachers' professional practical ability, and to rethink and reconstruct teaching concepts in the improvement.

This study analyzes the current situation of young college English teachers' professional practice ability in minority areas through an empirical study. The problems existing are analyzed in several main aspects. Combined with the situation in these universities, some strategies are mentioned in detail in order to solve the problems and improve the teaching quality on the whole.

II. AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON YOUNG COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE ABILITY IN MINORITY AREAS

Over the past decades, our research in the development of foreign language teachers' professional abilities already has a

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number of achievements. Many researchers realize the importance and needs to conduct teacher development studies. But the scope of the studies is still limited to guide the development ideas and training goals.

There are not many researches on foreign language teachers' knowledge structure and ability of professional quality, let alone an empirical study of foreign language teachers' professional practice. Both the theoretical foundation and the research methods are to be improved and enhanced.

Some existing researches lack convincing data support, and does not reflect the needs of first-tier foreign language teachers' professional development. Teachers' practical wisdom and ability do not get enough attention.

As a new academic orientation, the studies of foreign language teachers' professional practice are immature. The empirical researches on foreign language teachers' professional practice of national universities are still a blank.

These are the three main areas for young college foreign language teachers' training strategies of practice abilities. In this study, the foreign language professional basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation capabilities), specific vocational job skills (classroom teaching ability and teaching activity), professional innovation capabilities (scientific research ability and practical teaching ability) are explored through classroom observation and interviews both for teachers and students.

A. The Subjects

Five subjects in a university are chosen to do the empirical study. All of them are volunteers for the study. They are the English teachers in a university for the nationalities who are under the age of 35. Two of them are man and the other three are women. Three of them have a Master's degree and two of them have a Bachelor's degree. They are representative among the teachers.

B. The Methods

Classroom observation is the main way to observe and note down the classroom behaviors of the teachers and students. The observation points include the teaching language, teaching activities, communications between teachers and students, students' involvement and the records of the classroom atmosphere.

Interviews are used to get the ideas of the teachers and students. Each teacher or student is interviewed separately. The questions vary according to different answers from teachers and students.

C. The Procedure

The researchers come into the classrooms of the five teachers and observe and note down their classroom behaviors and the classroom outcomes. Different class types are chosen for the observation.

After the classes, the researchers interview each teacher one by one to know their ideas about professional practice abilities.

Interviews are also given to some students to know the ideas of students about their classroom achievements and their teachers' behaviors.

D. The Results

After the empirical study, the following results are summarized:

First, the basic professional abilities of the five teachers are a little different. The teachers with a Master's degree have a more pure pronunciation than those who haven't. Their explanation of grammar is clearer. In the class, those who have a Master's degree tend to present more experience and have a wider horizon.

Second, the specific occupational post abilities seem to be the same in five teachers' classrooms. That is, their classroom teaching abilities and teaching activities don't have much difference. The male teachers seem to have a more active classroom atmosphere. They all behave actively and kindly in the classrooms. The interactions between teachers and students are favorable. All of the five teachers can create a warm and relaxed classroom atmosphere.

Third, their professional innovation abilities--- the research ability and the practical teaching ability, are a little different. Those who have a master's degree seem to have more research outcomes. But on the whole, their overall research abilities need improving. When research achievements are mentioned, they all say they don't have satisfying works.

E. The Problems Found

In the process, some problems about the teachers' abilities and English teaching are found.

First, teachers' language abilities need improving. The basic skills for language teaching are still not perfect. For example, the oral English, the writing ability and the translation ability of these teachers are to be improved gradually. As a language teacher, the basic language skills are quite important. They all have some problems in their teaching.

Second, Teachers' teaching skills needs improving. Nowadays, there are many new ideas and methods in language teaching. So there are more requirements for teachers to improve their teaching skills. A student-centered classroom atmosphere needs to be really realized in the language classrooms. And the reform of language teaching hasn't been reflected well in their classrooms.

Third, some teachers are scared of research. When research is mentioned, some of them say they don't have enough abilities to do research. So they feel they are afraid of research and don't know how to finish their research tasks every year. And they also don't have a way to solve the problem.

Fourth, some teachers point out they want to do further study, but they don't have the chances to do so. They are worried about their own professional development. They want to perfect their teaching skills and their own teaching experience.

III. THE STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE ABILITIES IN MINORITY AREAS

The aim of the study is to explore training strategies in realistic national universities. Young foreign language teachers with professional features are needed urgently. The professional practice and training of young national college foreign language teachers should be emphasized by universities and higher education organization.

We need teachers who are not only familiar with the actual work standards and norms in the professional field, but also can effectively use their professional knowledge and professional skills applied in practice to solve practical problems in this area of expertise, technology development, technical services in order to improve the ability of technological innovation.

With the existing research results, the present project is from the investigator's own experience and interests.

The researchers use practical wisdom and the ability to give full consideration to foreign language teachers' professional quality and practical ability with the aim of improving foreign language teaching.

Through interviews and classroom observations, some strategies are summarized according to the study.

First, further professional studies are needed for the development of the young teachers. All the young English teachers in this study don't have a Doctor's degree and part of them have a Master's degree. From a personal aspect, as a college English teacher, they should have a Doctor's degree; at least they should have a Master's degree in order to cope with the development of language teaching. A higher degree study experience can give them more knowledge and more experience in professional development.

In the classroom observation, the researchers find that some teachers have pronunciation, writing and translation mistakes. If they do further study, these problems can be avoided. And at the same time, from the interviews for the students, they also think their teachers should have a higher degree to make sure that they have rich professional knowledge.

If the teachers have an experience of further study, they can do their research more easily. Without the training of research methods, they would find researches difficult for them.

Second, the psychological aspect of teachers should arouse more attention than before. From the interview for teachers, the researchers find that most teachers have the feeling of fear, both for teaching and research. And they want to find ways to do further study and improve themselves

In the teacher development programs, teachers' psychological aspect or affective variables don't catch people's eyes much. People usually think in the teaching process, students' affective variables should be emphasized and the teachers' psychological feeling is strong. But in the study, it is found that teachers have a feeling of fear.

The ways to solve the problem are to give more chances for teachers to go on their study or more chances to take part in communication programs or meetings.

Third, the chances for teachers to go abroad or go to other universities to study are good ways to improve teachers' professional practice abilities. Communication is a good way to learn from others.

Nowadays, things are changing fast. English teaching and learning are going into a new period. More and more new ideas and methods are playing a key role in English education. As a college English language teacher, especially a teacher in minority universities, they should have more chances to see the outside world and catch up with the progress in the field.

Fourth, there should be more programs designed for universities in minority areas. In universities of minority areas, teachers usually have a relative lower degree and their knowledge is limited because they usually have fewer accesses to the newest ideas and developments in the language teaching field. More training programs for these teachers should be set up in order to improve the teaching qualities.

Fifth, teachers in the universities for minorities should have courage and beliefs about language teaching and about the improvement of their own professional practice abilities. They should grasp the chances to learn from others and go on their professional studies actively. Peer study and classroom observation are needed to help each other perfect the teaching process.

Universities in minority regions should prepare more useful materials for teachers to do their teaching or research. Materials are very important for language learning and for the research. Without proper and sufficient materials, teachers cannot know the current development in their area and cannot finish the research successfully.

More useful lectures and reports from famous researchers and teachers can be introduced into the universities to give teachers more chances to learn.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study is to provide empirical research data for the disagreement of the traditional idea of "heavy theory, light practice". Young foreign language teachers' professional development model needs renewing in order to improve the young teachers' continuing education system and improve the training of young college English teachers' practical teaching skills and research capacity. To improve foreign language training quality is the final result.

The project is based on some preliminary research. The empirical research conducted has accumulated rich experience and improved research methods and experimental design. It selects the national college English teachers in the study. The young teachers selected for the study have some typical features and can represent most young teachers in minority universities.

The study easily gets access to relevant university and gain teachers' support and cooperation in the most effective and

efficient ways to investigate and understand the national young teachers' training strategies of college English teachers' professional practice.

The project emphasizes on qualitative research methods. This is because the biggest concern of this project is young foreign language teachers. Teacher is a living, thinking "people", in a dynamic social and teaching environment. Its essence is the humanities, social nature, the pursuit of truth and the understanding of the observed phenomena and discourse

This study can be used as an opportunity to promote national universities to further improve the foreign language teaching practice environment, and improve the business assessment of young teacher evaluation system. The professional practice examination and evaluation are important indicators. The equivalent mechanisms for professional practice and research are to be established to strengthen young foreign language teachers' professional practice training initiative, especially in minority nationality regions.

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