

The Investigation Report on the Current Situation of Middle School English Teaching in Linzhi District in the Context of Trilingual Background

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Abstract

In the Tibetan region of China, nearly 20 years of English teaching has been carried out, which has got some achievements. But there are also some problems in English teaching. This article will investigate and analyze the current situation of middle school English teaching in Linzhi district in the context of trilingualism, hoping to effectively solve these problems that encountered in Tibetan middle school English teaching.

Key words: Linzhi district; Trilingual background; Middle school English teaching

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INTRODUCTION

In Tibet, there are more than 20 years of English teaching history. Linzhi district is an area where many ethnic groups live together. With the influence of history, economy, and humanity, Tibetans are the main population of this region. And in the context of trilingual background,

Tibetan, Chinese, and English, there are some certain differences in English teaching between Linzhi and other regions in China. Although China has already vigorously carried out English teaching in Tibetan area and made some achievements in recent years, there are still some problems.

1. INVESTIGATION BACKGROUND

Linzhi district is located in the southeast of the Tibet Autonomous Region whose jurisdiction over seven counties: Linzhi, Milin, Gongbujiangda, Motuo, Bomi, Cayu and Lang. Linzhi, with a total area about 117,000 square kilometers, has an average elevation of 3,100 meters and a population of more than 140,000. Linzhi is a colony of ethnic minorities like Monba and Lhoba ethnic groups. Linzhi district is home to more than 10 ethnic groups such as Tibetan, Han, Hui, Nu, Monba, Lhoba, Dulong, Naxi and so on. With the exception of Motuo County, the residents of the other 6 counties are mainly Tibetans with a population of more than 110,000, which accounts for more than 90% of the total population in this region.

2. RESEARCH METHODS AND RESPONDENTS

This research was carried out through questionnaires, individual interviews (small group) interviews and classroom observations. It has deepened into each school in Linzhi district by conducting a questionnaire survey among school principals and teachers, interviewing school managers, teachers, and some students, and reviewing related written materials at the same time.

2.1 Questionnaire Survey

Objectives: Middle school principals and teachers

Tools: Formulate questionnaires" on the current

situation of middle school English teaching in Linzhi district in the context of trilingual background” on the basis of consulting experts, reviewing literature and independently designing. And some secondary schools were selected as candidates at random in Linzhi district or using the network platform of questionnaire to investigate. The basis, dimensions and data of the questionnaire will be analyzed in EXCEL.

2.2 Interviews

To interview administrators, regular teachers, and students of junior schools and senior high schools in individual interviews or group interviews.

2.3 Classroom Observation

To listen to English classes which were conducted in junior middle school and senior high school in each county in Linzhi district, to conduct effective English classroom teaching experiments in Gongbujiangda Middle School and to track and collect data both on a case-by-case and process during this survey.

3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH

3.1 The Basic Situation of Middle School English in Linzhi District

Each county has a junior middle school and a senior high school in the urban area. There are 18-26 classes per grade in junior middle school. Each English teacher is responsible for two classes with 6-8 English lessons per week. Because many children are from farming area in these schools, middle school students usually have two consecutive weeks of classes for ten days and four days for rest. Their assessment methods are similar with Mainland. There are regular unit tests, month examinations for grade ninth and mid-term and final examinations. Online marking has not yet been implemented.

Students use the text books of edition of Hebei Province Education Press. The characteristics of this version are: it is based on the specific requirements of the English Curriculum Standards, and the teaching objectives of each unit of each textbook are detailed and specific; it focuses on the cultivation and training of students’ language practical skills and pay attention to the formation of students’ learning methods; it also fully reflects the new teaching ideas and teaching thoughts; its teaching contents are life-oriented, situational, humanized and close to students.

The types of questions that students take in the examination include: phonetics, single choice, cloze, reading comprehension, sentence correction, part-of-speech filling, sentence pattern conversion, verb conversion, sentence completion and written expression. No listening and speaking skills tested in the exams and

only 60 words are required in their writings. The first part of the college entrance examination question type is listening, the second part is reading comprehension, and the third part is the use of language knowledge.

3.2 The Basic Characteristics of Middle School English Teaching in Linzhi District

3.2.1 Teaching Methods Are Traditional

In the traditional teaching model, teachers are the masters of the classroom, ignoring the role of the student’s cognitive subject, which is not conducive to the cultivation of innovative thinking and ability, or the growth of creative talents. Traditional teaching method ignores students’ subjective initiative and creativity, and it can’t put students’ main role into full play. It is difficult to evoke students’ learning potential, so that students do not have independent thinking ability, space or motivation of creativity, and they will completely disregard their own ability training which leads to form a habit of no questions to ask or to think or even they don’t know how to ask questions gradually. It will create a blind worship of textbooks and teachers’ stereotypes, which will hamper students’ divergent thinking and imagination. As the controller of student learning, teachers have a strict control over teaching objectives, contents, methods, processes, results, and quality assessment which shows that teaching process is rigid. Traditional teaching methods also have some flaws in the artistic and normative teaching. Some teachers lack the basic skills of calligraphy, so their arbitrariness of on-site board writings have a direct impact on the students’ vision and understanding, and then affect the effectiveness of teaching and fail to meet the teaching goals and requirements. In addition, as mentioned above, in the model of the traditional teaching methods, teachers are under too much labor intensity, and a large amount of writings on the blackboard takes up the limited time of classes, which results in the waste of educational resources. Meanwhile, the dust of chinks flying in the classroom contaminates the teaching environment, and does harm to teachers and students’ health, which will result in occupational diseases.

3.2.2 Mother Tongue (Tibetan) and Second Language (Chinese) Influence on English Language Learning

In addition to lack of teacher resources, imperfect teaching equipment and constraints on economic conditions affect Tibetan students’ English learning; their native language will also cause certain interference. What’s more, due to the common non-English environment in our country, English learning is not as easy as Chinese Mandarin learning. Many students do not have preschool education. As soon as they begin the first grade of elementary school, they have to learn Tibetan and Chinese at the same time, and they will be taught other subjects in Chinese. Then they start to learn English in the third grade. Three languages functioned at the same time, English would be

a weak discipline, for lack of a language environment, and their English teachers are mostly native Tibetans. Own to the influence of Tibetan pronunciation, their spoken English is not standard enough. Middle school students' English learning is influenced by Tibetan and Chinese, especially Tibetan. Tibetan language is the main language of Tibetan students. This language is similar to English in terms of structure. Therefore, in Tibetan, students rarely use Chinese to mark English pronunciations to help them pronounce, but Tibetan.

3.2.3 Multimedia Teaching Is Limited

Firstly, curriculum resources are limited. Being located in a remote area, first, there are lacking teacher resources. Without high-quality teachers, it is difficult to get good results in English learning. Without excellent teachers, curriculum arrangements will be more casual and the effectiveness of classroom teaching will be reduced. Restricted curriculum resources have prevented students and teachers from full development.

Secondly, the net speed is limited. (3G network, 4G was available in January, 2018) 3G network is much slower than 4G network, especially in the era of Internet, a smooth network will greatly affect the efficiency of learning.

Thirdly, limited power supply and frequent blackouts. Blackouts will have a great impact on students learning and teachers' lessons preparation. The government should take practical actions to improve their people's livelihood so that students' learning level can be further improved.

Fourth, poor level in technology information skills. Many teachers can't make courseware. Of course, teachers can't make courseware caused by the first few unfavorable factors. After solving the above problems, teachers certainly must consciously improve their quality of information media and actively use the Internet and other learning resources to enrich themselves. Furthermore, the government also can organize training classes for teachers to help them get improvement to accelerate the pace of teacher training.

3.2.4 There Are Fewer Activities Related to English Learning

First, there are relatively few English-related competitions in their city. Some English composition contests, speech contests, recitation competitions, grammar challenge competitions and other activities can be organized, and with corresponding incentive mechanisms will popularize English teaching and stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning.

Second, there are fewer school-based English curriculums. In the case of meeting the curriculum standards and combining with English learning situation of students in their own schools, schools can design more English courses to improve students' English proficiency and teach students in accordance with their aptitude.

Third, English teachers do not pay enough attention

to cultural knowledge. On the one hand, they do not understand, either. Language learning must not be limited on textbooks, or it will lead to a "useless" outcome. As a result, it is difficult to evoke students' interests in learning, and students will find it difficult to get motivation for learning. Therefore, English teachers should consciously strengthen their own extracurricular cultural knowledge. On the other hand, the network's channel is obstructed. Using the Internet properly can help their learning accumulation. Besides, teachers fail to keep pace with times. Complacency in study is doom to fail, so does teaching. Teachers should update their teaching ideas and teach their students the latest, the best and the most practical knowledge.

3.2.5 Students Are not Interested in English Learning

First, they lack internal drive. The main factors are students' disdain the role of English and their parents' backward ideas and thoughts which caused by the regional environment influence on students. To solve this problem fundamentally is difficult. We need to step up publicity on the role of learning English and guide students to be positive.

Second, fear difficulties. Learning languages without related language environment, without good teachers, and without advanced learning equipment can make it much more difficult. But this is not an excuse for retreat, instead of, to guide students properly to deal with the difficulties. Of course, teachers should persuade themselves to improve their English level so as to set good examples for students.

Third, learning atmosphere was poor. English learning in the context of trilingualism is definitely lacking the necessary language environment. Students are under pressure as they have to learn Tibetan, Chinese and English. Almost every student bears such an idea that learning atmosphere of English is difficult to form. So there is a long way to change this situation and with difficulty at every step. Teachers should strive to create a language environment for students, even if it is a small recitation activity, which may also enhance the learning atmosphere.

3.2.6 Leaders Don't Think Highly of English Learning

Many school leaders don't know about English teaching. They think that Chinese and mathematics are the main subjects which are undisputed. So there isn't much attention to English teaching, no serious teaching research and management, no good guidance and supervision of teachers in English teaching, then they are unable to understand the English teaching situation and guide the teacher to improve the level of English teaching, English in many schools becomes a dispensable subject at last. English teaching seems to be a task to be completed for higher authorities rather than as an integral part of quality education.

3.2.7 Parents Have Limited Cultural Levels

No enough attention to English education. According to the survey, only 35% parents have junior middle school education, and more than 50% parents only have primary school diplomas, and they have not learn English. Parents are limited in their ability to teach their children. More than 35% parents believe that their children's academic performances are bad, with lower income, their kids cannot enter high schools or even universities, and so after completing nine-year compulsory education, they will enter society and earn their living. It is not necessary for them to learn English. We know that family is the cradle to the child's growth. Parents' disregard will directly affect their child's attitude towards English learning.

3.3 Problems in the Middle School English Teaching in Linzhi District

3.3.1 Trilingual Background Influence English Learning

The most important issue is the language environment as to English learning. With a proper language environment, language learning can be done with ease. The language environment is not good in China. There are very few opportunities for learners to use English to communicate with others. Lack of listening and speaking exercises will make learning more difficult. Furthermore, in Linzhi district, Tibetan is their mother tongue, Chinese is a second language, and English is a third language. When they learned Chinese, they already have lacked a language environment, let alone English. Moreover, most translations of English textbooks are directly faced with Chinese. Fewer English learning materials are directly translated into Tibetan, which undoubtedly causes great disadvantages to English learning in Linzhi district.

3.3.2 English Teaching Faculty Needs to be Strengthened

Under the situation of market economy, junior middle schools have poor teaching equipment and fewer excellent teachers in Tibet which face the same problems as some of the mainland schools in China. That is because few outstanding students in the university entrance exam chose normal universities, and even if some of them chose the pedagogical colleges and universities, but they did not stay in teaching positions after graduation. For those teachers who come from other places, because parts of Tibetan environment are relatively hard, which makes some excellent teachers don't want to come to Tibet. In this case, Tibetan teachers, Chinese teachers tend to be deployed to be part-time teachers of English. A research result shows that non-English major teachers accounted for 42% of all English teachers in this district, indicating that nearly half of English teachers are not in English majors (Cang & Qiong, 2010, pp.40-43). Because of this issue, the effectiveness of English teaching is greatly reduced.

3.3.3 The Negative Impact From Environmental Factors

First, popularity of English remains low. Since China's reform and opening up, all regions have achieved brilliant achievements in various undertakings, compared with other provinces, especially in the eastern coastal provinces. Tibetan region in economic, cultural, and educational development lags behind, which led to the lack of English learning atmosphere in the area. At the same time, the popularity of English in Tibet is still relatively limited. There are not many people who speak English, and the poor language environment also affects English teaching.

Second, the use of information technology also lags behind. First of all is the backwardness of multimedia devices. Local governments have not paid enough attention to the role of multimedia in education. Of course, local economies also have a certain influence. What is more, teachers' multimedia skills are not good enough. Many teachers do not know how to use multimedia to make courseware; their ideologies still stick to traditional teaching methods. Finally, information exchanges with other places are not frequent. The more difficult but perhaps effective information and other learning resources have a greater impact on the application and development of local information technology.

3.3.4 Student's Inner Motivation of English Learning is Lower

English is a subject with strong application and practicality. As a non-native language cultural system, its outside-in implant has also resulted from the objective and subjective cultural exclusion which led to a relatively fixed character in middle school students' mentality of learning English. According to surveys, more than 85% middle school students' main purpose of learning English is only for examinations. Among them, the most important factor of the lack of internal motivation is that the utility value of the language tool is not reflected in the long-term value. Tibetan students have little opportunity to go abroad; English can hardly become a tool for communication. Therefore, students' interest in learning English is generally not high.

4. COUNTERMEASURES AND SUGGESTIONS

4.1 To Create an Atmosphere for Learning English and Increase Students' Comprehensive Ability

To improve students' English proficiency, oral practices and trainings are needed. The communicative function of language is reflected in communication. Therefore, via various forms of extracurricular activities, English Corner, English learning groups, organizations of multi-level small-scale English activities to create an atmosphere

of English learning is an effective way to provide students with oral trainings. In addition to encouraging students to speak English frequently, teachers also should help increase their students' reading, cultivate and strengthen students' sense of language, improve students' comprehensive ability. At the same time, teachers also need to pay attention to the cultivation of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and further enhance students' motivation to learn English and make them have a strong sense of self-regulated learning and make them understand oral or written materials and simply express their own opinions.

4.2 To Strengthen the Construction of Teaching Teams

In terms of overall arrangements, the Tibetan education department should master the current situation of lacking English teachers in the entire region. After fully understanding the actual situation in the region, active measures should be taken. To help English teachers get proper trainings and bring in some excellent English teachers step by step and in a targeted and planned way to solve this problem gradually. At the same time, it is necessary to ensure teachers' financial expenditures and properly improve the treatment of outstanding English teachers and English teachers who are in rural areas. With policy support, more English teachers will be attracted to teach in the border area. This will help achieve the joint improvement of middle school students' English proficiency in different regions of Tibet. In addition, the education department also needs to fully consider the difficulties existing in the process of English learning of Tibetan students. After understanding the differences in geography, social environment, history, etc., and knowing well about diversities of students' cognitive style, learning motivation and personality, then to make objectives and requirements practically will work. Teaching materials also plays an important role in improving English learning. As for some regions, their teaching materials are not suitable for students to learn. In this regard, the education department should actively take the lead to improve the effectiveness of English teaching on the base of considering their local talent demands and the status quo of teaching resources to make their English teaching materials more suitable for the actual situation in Tibet and make their local culture outstanding as well.

4.3 To Strengthen Students' Self-cognition and Cultivate Their Independent Learning Capacity

Self-cognition mainly refers to the individual's understanding and insight into himself, including self-evaluation and self-observation. As to English learning, students need to be able to do a full range of their own cognition, that is, they know their own weaknesses in English learning, then to focus on weaknesses in the future learning and conquer them by applying different ways to achieve their own English learning effect. Language is a

tool for communication. The more interests in English, the more students can summarize their own learning methods. Therefore, teachers need to use different modes of application to achieve students' independent ability. On the basis of strengthening their self-directed learning, teachers should formulate practical and feasible English learning goals and help their students learn English knowledge better under the guidance of the objectives.

4.4 Teachers Should Improve Their Own Quality

Teaching needs to be finished by human. Human factors are the primary factors that affect teaching effectiveness. For English teaching, the teacher's English level will directly affect the students' English learning effect. Only by establishing a high-quality English teacher team can we continuously strengthen the teaching management function so as to continuously promote education and teaching more scientific and more modern. First of all, it is necessary to establish a new teaching concept, which is mainly reflected in: ①Set up an idea that Chinese teaching of minorities is the second language teaching. ②Ensuring and strengthening of English teaching is an understanding of foreign language teaching. Teachers need to carefully study the influence of Tibetan, the mother-tongue, on English learning, and according to the actual conditions of the students to carry out foreign language teaching, and they must reverse the traditional English teaching methods (Shi & Xiao, 2011, pp.55-56).

As a Tibetan English teacher, to build up the concept of lifelong learning is very important. In order to transfer English knowledge effectively, teachers should enhance the study of cultural knowledge and English language continuously and improve their English proficiency in the teaching process. As having a good English level, English teachers should actively innovate their teaching methods. First of all, teachers should stimulate students' interest in learning by scientific ways to strengthen the management of students' mood, so as to make them be interested in English learning. In terms of specific methods, teachers can create vivid and realistic scenarios for students via wall charts, physical objects, audio recordings, multimedia, and illustrations and so on. Based on the mobilization of the students' sense, teachers can make students enjoy a full sense of the real situation and deepen the memory on the basis of the correspondence between words and physical objects at the same time. Second, teachers should have a noble sentiment. They must not only have the spirit of devotion to work, but also do a good job in protecting their students. Positive and active communication between teachers and students will help students get away from fears of learning English. Through encouragement, students can engage in English learning with a more confident attitude. Finally, teachers should consider the actual situation of trilingual teaching of Tibetan students; teachers should create some activities like teachers' reading in class, students'

recitation and dictation to give full play to students' advantages of speeches and pronunciations. Through oral communication, they strengthen the interests of Tibetan students in using grammar knowledge to verbally make or compose sentences, so as to obtain better results in teaching. It is important to create a harmonious education environment, as giving students "original" learning space (Liu, 2011, pp.111-112).

4.5 Relevant Education Departments Should Create Conditions for English Teaching

The education department should rationally allocate funds and equipment invested by the state to schools in rural areas, help those area improve the quality of education, provide schools with equipment and software which related to English teaching, broaden students' access to English, and cultivate their strong interests. In order to make schools focus on English teaching, the education department can list the level of English teaching as an important part of school assessment. Carrying out effective education supervision to promote the continuous improvement of the quality of education is also vital (Mou, 2011, pp.66-67).

To make targeted developments of related trainings for English teachers who are from other areas or at local, in order to solve the current status of the shortage of English teachers in Tibet. In addition, related policies should be made to encourage college students to work in rural areas and provide them with policy support and financial support to strengthen English teaching in rural areas, meanwhile, to take efforts to promote the publicity of English teaching and learning in rural areas to help solve the problem of the shortage of teachers (Tan, Xue, Li, Ye, & Ciren Zhuoga, 2015, pp.10-14).

School Leaders and Parents Should Pay More Attention to English Teaching and Fully Recognize the Importance of English Teaching

Related government and other sides should not only create good conditions of hardware facilities for English teaching, but also encourage excellent English teachers and students in terms of system, such as establishing a bonus system and designing various English activities like English Corner to allow students to participate in, then to cultivate students' enthusiasm of English learning as well as to get knowledge. In addition, in order to improve teachers' English teaching level, schools can cooperate with other schools, hold experience exchange conferences, and organize teachers to participate in professional trainings, etc.. As to strengthen the popularity of English teaching in rural areas, improving the teaching level should be the first step.

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