

Study on the Status Quo of Pre-service English Teachers' Knowledge Literacy under the Background of New Normal Education Policy

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Abstract

New Normal Education, a policy which outperforms the traditional normal education system, emphasizes cultivating a batch of quality-oriented normal students with solid knowledge literacy, endowing new tasks and requests to the development of normal university students in all-round perspectives, especially the professional knowledge literacy. The purpose of this study is to examine and delve into the problems that arise about the knowledge literacy of English normal students, so as to give some constructive suggestions according to the new request from the new normal system.

Keywords

New Normal Education; Pre-Service English Teachers; Knowledge Literacy.

1. Introduction

Aimed at permeating the spirit of the 20th CPC National Congress into education, Department of Education of Guangdong Province has implemented a policy—Implementation Plan of Guangdong New Normal Education Construction. It emphasizes on cultivating a batch of quality-oriented normal students with solid knowledge literacy, endowing new tasks and requests to the development of normal university students in all-round perspectives, especially the professional knowledge literacy.

The new normal education is labeled with prospect connotations-cultivating a group of quality-oriented teachers with high professionalization[1]. "high professionalization" is concerned with the professionalization of pre-service teachers' subject knowledge and educational science knowledge. That is, the pre-service teachers should not only have a thorough mastery of the target subject knowledge, but as importantly equip with advanced educational concept and methodology to guide their teaching. Li Jing[2] proposed that normal education should be a more open and practical one. In her thesis, teachers' cross-intercultural communication ability and practical knowledge are emphasized. Similarly, Zhang[3] and others stressed the cultivation of pre-service teachers' practical knowledge over the course of their teaching practice, holding that teaching practice should offer pre-service teachers sufficient opportunities to expose their teaching theoretical knowledge and skills in an authentic teaching situation. In addition, policy makers have paid more and more attention to students' English core competence at elementary and secondary stages since it was advocated in 2017[4]. In this sense, more requirements on teachers' qualifications have been asked, especially their knowledge literacy. Therefore, the cultivation and education of those college students who expertise in English teaching needs improving, so as to lay a sound foundation for higher quality of English teaching in the future.

Under this new scenario, profound educational sentiment and outstanding professional knowledge literacy are needed. Nowadays, the researches concerning New Normal Education are gradually springing up from diverse aspects. Among them, a dominant number of researches focus on the curriculum reform in the Normal university. Typically, it's The

Innovation of the Pre-school Education Curriculum under the Background of New Normal Education[5]. Additionally, some others concentrate on the development of certain skills or ability consistent with the connotation of New Normal Education[6], and Practical Teaching Skills of Pre-service Geology Teachers[7]. They mainly concern on subjects other than English, let alone investigate into the pre-service teachers' knowledge literacy based on the new policy. Therefore, it is imperative to address how to develop teachers' knowledge to make teaching process effectively. The purpose of this study is to examine and delve into the problems that arise about the knowledge literacy of English normal students, so as to give some constructive suggestions according to the new request from the new normal system.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Teachers' Knowledge Literacy

Since 1980s, under the trajectory of teachers' professionalization, the researches on teachers' knowledge literacy have grown in popularity. In 1983, F.Elbaz the pioneer in this domain, generalized teachers' knowledge systematically, emphasizing practical knowledge and teachers' response to the in-class situation[8]. Unlike Elbaz, Shulman studied teacher knowledge from the theoretical and practical perspective, regarding teachers' knowledge as the integration of teachers' theoretical knowledge and teaching strategy[9]. The researches on teachers' knowledge literacy at home started a decade later than abroad. In 1989, Wang Daojun and Wang Hanlan contended that teachers' knowledge mainly referred to teachers' quality knowledge and discipline knowledge[10]. Pedagogical content knowledge is also the significant branch of teachers' knowledge, and it was practical and professional. In general, the present author holds that subject oriented knowledge is the foundation for teachers' knowledge literacy. Since different scholars defined teacher knowledge from different perspectives, there is still not concrete definition about teacher knowledge.

From the perspective of the present author, teachers' knowledge is a comprehensive term involved quality, discipline, pedagogical content as well as subject knowledge, etc.

2.2. Researches on the Classifications of Teachers' Knowledge Literacy

Classifications of knowledge literacy vary from scholars' standpoints and research orientations. Shulman first classified the teacher knowledge literacy into three categories, involving subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and curriculum knowledge[9]. Subject matter knowledge refers to the knowledge itself of the target subject, including its substantive and syntactic structures. As for pedagogical content knowledge, it is teachers' skills or strategies to facilitate the process of learners' knowledge acquisition, such as employing analogy, paradigm, presentation, or explanations, etc. After a period of time, Grossman added with another four categories of teacher knowledge[11]-- general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical knowledge of the learners and their characters, knowledge of the educational context, as well as educational values and ideas. Among all the categories, pedagogical content knowledge was considered as the most important one. Shulman's classification of teacher knowledge was first put forward and interpreted explicitly[12]. According to Turner[13], teacher knowledge consists of two kinds: propositional knowledge and practice-oriented knowledge.

Broadly speaking, subject orientation and practical orientation are two aspects that are mainly discussed at home. Most of the scholars tended to pay close attention to subject orientation. For instance, On the basis of existing characteristics of teacher knowledge, Xin Tao[14] categorized the knowledge literacy into four dimension, subject matter knowledge, conditional knowledge, practical knowledge, as well as cultural knowledge. Among them, ontological knowledge is the further development of pedagogical knowledge, which is the basis of teaching activity. In his

view, practical knowledge plays a pivotal role in knowledge literacy. Wan Wentao[15] also classifies teacher knowledge into three categories: situational knowledge, theoretical knowledge and operational knowledge.

From the perspectives of the present author, English teachers' knowledge category includes subject matter knowledge, conditional knowledge, practical knowledge, and cultural knowledge as well, as this classification is more widely acceptable and available in application. Specifically, subject matter knowledge in English, it mainly refers to phonology, morphology, syntax, as well as the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In terms of conditional knowledge, it involves the knowledge of psychology, pedagogy, technology information, which is an integral part of teacher knowledge literacy. Additionally, practical knowledge is considered as the teachers' capacity of applying the theoretical knowledge in to the real pedagogy classroom. Last but not least, cultural knowledge refers not only to the ability to understand the cultural phenomena, attitudes, and values, but also the cultural stance, cultural identity through analyzing the cultural traditions.

3. Research Design

This research aims to examine the status of pre-service teachers' knowledge literacy from four aspects authoritatively summarized and officially recognized by Xintao, namely subject matter knowledge, conditional knowledge, practical knowledge, and cultural knowledge[14]. This study is mainly designed to solve two problems below:

Question 1: What's the current status of English Teaching Major pre-service teachers' knowledge literacy in a certain university?

Question 2: How to cultivate pre-service English teachers' knowledge literacy?

3.1. Research Contents and Participant

There are 114 college students and 19 teachers from China West Normal University participated in the research. Among them, the data of questionnaire of 88 students selected from junior and senior students who major in English teaching were available to analyze. Most of them are equipped with internship or trial lecture experience. As for the teachers, they are all excellent with plenty teaching experience. The courses they teach involved basic English course, English teaching skills course, writing course, cross-cultural communication course, British American literature course, as well as educational psychology.

3.2. Research Instruments

3.2.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire is designed to investigate the current status of pre-service teachers' knowledge literacy from four dimensions based on Xintao's classification of teachers' knowledge literacy, namely subject matter knowledge, conditional knowledge, practical knowledge, and cultural knowledge[14]. In this research, two kinds of questionnaires are provided. One was for juniors and seniors majoring in English education in China West Normal University. The other one was for teachers who have been teaching English majors in China West Normal University. 88 effective questionnaires for students were recollected, including 35 juniors and 53 senior students. Among them, the data of questionnaire of senior students are the main parts to analyze. In the second questionnaire, there are 19 college teachers participated in the research.

3.2.2. Interview

The interview is based on the objectives of this thesis and the questionnaire. It was carried out after the questionnaire, so it can further investigate pre-service English teachers' knowledge literacy. In this research, two college teachers who teach English major students in China West

Normal University were the interviewees. The interview is composed of two parts. The first part is about the interviewees' basic information, including the teaching age, the teaching grade, and the teaching course, and the second part consists of three questions concentrating on their evaluation methods of pre-service English teachers' knowledge literacy, their performance in teaching practice and the courses they learned back in college.

4. Research Results

4.1. Status Quo of The Pre-service English Teachers' Knowledge Literacy

First and foremost, the importance ranking of the four dimensions were examined. From the statistics, the students opt the subject matter knowledge as the most important ingredients in the teacher knowledge literacy constitute a majority (41.67%), From their vantage points, eligible English teachers are supposed to master a high degree of solid professional English knowledge, especially an in-depth understanding of Chinese and Western culture. Followed by those regarded practical knowledge as more salient one (33.33%) and those inclined to the mastery of cultural knowledge (20%). Still, there are other purposes that constitute a mere (0%). Such information brings clarity to the fact that, most of the pre-service students have rifely got the awareness of the pivotal role that subject matter knowledge and practical knowledge will play. Nevertheless, the condition knowledge, such as the usage of modern information technology and psychological skills tended to be overlooked.

Secondly, the difficulties of the four dimensions were examined. When it came to the difficulties they encountered during their internship, more than half students contended that it is a big challenging for them to stand in front of the students in an easy manner having a vibrant interaction with them. Besides, the allocation of the teaching time, classroom management, and the design of activities were other problems that most of them were encountered, which could be classified into practical knowledge. 36.67% students proposed that the lack of the background knowledge concerning Western culture impedes them from achieving an effective class, which could be classified into subject matter knowledge. In addition, 25% students regarded the lack of modern technology as their big barrier, which could be classified into conditional knowledge. Above all, it was worth noting that, practical knowledge is among the weakest that most of the pre-service students had problem with.

Thirdly, the ways of developing knowledge literacy were examined. 86.67% participants opting for having professional normal courses leading on the top, while those who prefer self-studying constitute a mere (36.67%). It dedicated that, to a great extent, most would be inclined to rely on the in-class lesson learning. In addition, 70% participants preferred to learn from classroom observation and the educational practice, 61.67% participants opt for having centralized training. Accordingly, Personal experience was seen as an effective way to gain practical knowledge.

Besides, The interviewees of this research were college teachers who taught English major students in China West Normal University. Through interviewing, with regard to the pre-service English teachers' mastery of teacher knowledge literacy, both the two teachers gave evaluations of 7.5 points in average. From two teachers' vantage points, compared with freshman English knowledge level, the current pre-service English teachers have achieved an significant improvement, but there is still plenty of room to their spoken English and writing competence. When it came to the whether curriculums were effective to the development of pre-service English teachers' knowledge literacy, a teacher proposed that most of the curriculum focus on infusing theoretical knowledge, which is not various.

5. Discussion

5.1. The Current Status of The Pre-service English Teachers' Knowledge Literacy

Based on the analysis of the data statistics from questionnaires and interviews, pre-service English teachers' knowledge literacy status was examined. The author was to discuss it in four dimensions, including subject matter knowledge, conditional knowledge, practical knowledge, and cultural knowledge.

Firstly, for the first dimension of the subject matter knowledge, the statistics indicates that subject matter knowledge has always been attached great importance among college education and the perception of pre-service teachers. Current college set up a series of related courses, such as Comprehensive English, Grammar, Listening, Writing, Speaking, and Interpreting, etc. In effect, most of the curriculums are exam-oriented education. Students tend to rote learning only to pass the test when the exam is drawing near, rather than internalize what they learn and migrate the knowledge into the practice. Besides, in addition to the basic curriculum education in college, few students are able to keep on some extracurricular accumulation related to their subject matter knowledge.

Secondly, for the second dimension of the conditional knowledge, according to the data, a multitude number of the pre-service teachers ignore the importance of conditional knowledge, which result in knowledge deficiency in this dimension. In fact, it is worth noting that, conditional knowledge, involving psychology, pedagogy, multimedia technology and so on, can greatly contribute to an effective classroom management to a large extent. Nevertheless, currently in college, few related training curriculums are provided for pre-service teachers.

Thirdly, for the third dimension of the practical knowledge, based on the result of the research above, it can be seen that practical knowledge serves as the weakest part in pre-service English teachers' knowledge literacy. Most of the pre-service English teachers are stuck in practical teaching due to the lack of practical knowledge. In terms of the improvement of this situation, it is far from being enough to consider only to set up respective courses mainly pertained to theory. In effect, such knowledge takes time and energy to come to fruition. Pre-service English teacher should have more opportunities to do more practical work, so that they are able to learn from their own experience and model their own successful actions from the past, which is impossible to gain in the in-class lesson.

Lastly, for the fourth dimension of cultural knowledge, the data shows that little attention is paid on this dimension. However, as foreign language teachers, cultural awareness is an essential component for guiding teenagers to establish positive cultural value.

5.2. Implications for Cultivating Pre-service English Teachers Knowledge Literacy

To face the fact that the brand-new missions and issues are pushed out under the publish of the New Education Policy, it is a matter of urgent things to delve deeper into the cultivation of pre-service English teachers' knowledge literacy.

With regard to subject matter knowledge, the new policy stresses that the current pre-service teachers, are supposed to have a solid profession with the target subject. Additionally, equipped with local features is also required. In this sense, in college education, the courses should be in a perfect harmony with foundation and universality. Such courses can be achieved by design special optional courses or setting up related online courses to meet the needs of the epoch.

With regards to conditional knowledge, "Based on the solid professional subject knowledge, feature with the cultivation of pre-service English teachers' eurhythmics, information, and psychological literacy"[2] was the cardinal concept advocated by the new normal education

policy. There is no doubt that the general education curriculum plays a pivotal role in uplifting the pre-service English teachers' cognition regarding psychology, and information technology. However, it is equally essential to provide a sort of open activities involved academic lectures, information technology or psychological counseling competition etc, so that those pre-service English teachers have the chance to independently put the theoretical knowledge into application. It lies a sound foundation for them to cope with some anticipate problems, in future teaching.

With regard to practical knowledge, most of the pre-service English teachers treat the internship as a final task for graduation. In effect, this experience contributes a lot for developing their practical knowledge. The curriculum of noviciate and internship should be bound up with each other.[5] On the one hand, the curriculum of noviciate can be arranged since the normal students are in their freshman year, and students are required to write related trainee reports after each trainee experience. On the other hand, the curriculum of internship can be arranged in their senior year. There are four principles for designing practical curriculum suggested by Zhang Weikun and others. First, the curriculum of internship should combine cultivating their organization competence of class daily work with the subject teaching skills together. Second, the training should contain as many sections as possible. Third, combine teaching activities and educational activities together. Last but not least, combine individual and cooperative training together.[3] Besides, as for pre-service English teachers themselves, are supposed to do their utmost to seize every possible opportunity to develop their own practical literacy. are all accessible.

With regard to cultural knowledge, nowadays, cultural awareness is regarded as an salient component of education, especially for English teaching. Pre-service English teachers are supposed to perceive English as a mean for cultural dissemination rather than simply an academic subject. As for the communicative language competence involving linguistic (lexical, grammatical, semantic, phonological, etc) and social linguistic competences (dialect and accent, politeness conventions, etc) [16], It is suggested that teacher training programs in the college, such as literature, linguistics, or foreign language conversation practice, should be hold to raise the awareness of pre-service teachers regarding the role that culture diversity plays in language teaching. As for General Competences involving declarative knowledge (sociocultural knowledge, and intercultural awareness) and existential competence (attitudes, motivation, values, beliefs, cognitive styles)[17], ideological and political classes in college should put great emphasis on cultivating the sense of identity of the core socialist vales, so that the pre-service English teachers have correct outlook on life, world, and value. In addition, adopt a correct attitude towards Western culture and self-culture.

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