

Research on the Cooperative Behavior of Foreign Language Teachers in Colleges and Universities Taking the Course Construction of "A Guide to English-Speaking Countries" as an Example

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ABSTRACT

The scientific research ability of foreign colleges and universities language teachers in Chinese universities is regarded as a part of their professional qualities and is becoming more and more important. However, the "weakness" of Chinese foreign language teachers in scientific research is also an indisputable fact. This research relies on the school-level key course "A Guide To English-speaking Countries" of Shanghai University of Political Science and Law as the testing ground. In the construction of this foreign language subject knowledge curriculum, this research starts from the three aspects of curriculum content, teaching mode and evaluation method, and implements reforms based on the theoretical principles of cooperative behavior research, trying to provide a positive new field for the construction of foreign language courses in colleges and universities and the scientific research and development of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities.

Keywords: Cooperative behavior research, Ideology and politics in courses, Foreign language teacher development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The fourth round of first-level discipline evaluation initiated by China's higher education in 2016 and the notice issued by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance and the National Development and Reform Commission in 2017 on the "Implementation Measures for Promoting the Construction of World-Class Universities and First-Class Disciplines (Interim)" indicates that China is undergoing a historic leap from an education country to a higher education country. (Peng Qinglong, 2016: 34-41) Under this new situation, the scientific research ability of university teachers is regarded as an important carrier of discipline construction and the core element of professional quality has received unprecedented attention. The shortcomings of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities have become a stumbling block in their own discipline construction and teacher development.

How to break through the research bottleneck of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities has become a hot topic in the field of teacher research in recent years. There are many research angles involved, including the transformation of foreign language teachers' status, the transformation of teachers' roles, the development of teachers' knowledge structure, the development of teacher professional theory to teacher research, teacher action research, and the construction of teacher community. (Wang Tianxiao, 2012: 42-44) However, there is a consensus that the professional development of foreign language teachers should be closely integrated with teaching. While focusing on theoretical study and research, attention and strengthening action research should be taken. Based on this argument, this research studies how to uphold the theoretical principles of cooperative behavior research in real classrooms of foreign languages in colleges and universities to implement teaching reforms, and provides fresh scientific research samples for the scientific research

bottleneck of foreign language teachers in universities while providing the quality of foreign language teaching, so as to stimulate the originality of scientific research of foreign language teachers.

2. THEORETICAL ESSENTIALS OF COOPERATIVE BEHAVIOR RESEARCH

Cooperative behavior research "has become an important part of many research projects in recent years, especially in the field of education". (Glassman, Erdem & Bartholomew, 2013: 272) The definition of cooperative behavior research is diverse, such as the famous group dynamics of Kurt Lewin who is regarded as the "father of behavior research", which is also known as "group dynamics". It emphasizes that in a group, as long as there are others present, a person's thoughts and behaviors are different from those when he is alone, and will be affected by other people. The interest of group members in group activities, the frequency of interactions among members of the group, and the compliance behavior of each member can also affect the cohesion of a group. Lewin regards the group as a dynamic whole. This whole is not equal to the sum of its parts. Changes in any part of the whole will inevitably lead to changes in other parts of the whole, and ultimately affect the nature of the whole. Groups are not composed of members with common or similar traits. Similar traits and goals are not a prerequisite for the existence of a group. The essence of a group lies in the interdependence between its members, and this interdependence determines the characteristics of the group. (Lewin, 1944:196)

Cooperative action research began in the United States in the 1950s. With Stephen Corey's "Action Research for Improving School Practice" published in 1953, it was the first to systematically define action research in education, pointing out that all educational research work is based on the results of applied research. The research results hadn't been in vain (Dai Changhe, 1995). Corey believes that it is possible to change educational practice through action research, because teachers, supervisors, and administrators are all involved in problem investigation and the application of discoveries. The value of action research lies in the degree of improvement in practice. In the late 1970s, the heat wave of cooperative action research in the education field spread to other developed countries such as the United Kingdom, and gradually formed a context of attention to cooperative action research

in the international education community. Lawrence Stenhouse, a representative of British behavioral research, put forward the famous "process model" curriculum theory. He believed that the research and development of the curriculum should be a dynamic and continuous development process, and the design of the curriculum should be a combination of research, preparation, and evaluation. People can design courses rationally by specifying the content and various principles in the process, without having to specify the desired results in advance with goals. This model is based on the critical judgments of frontline teachers and implements the syllabus in an autonomous and experimental manner, thus strongly proving the function of cooperative action research in the practice of current professional teachers. Teachers who participated in the project have also undergone major changes. Compared with teachers who did not participate in the project, they hoped to obtain high-level research skills and development opportunities, and their attitudes were more positive and hoped to apply research inventions in teaching practice. (Oja & Smulyan, 1989: 10)

3. THE PURPOSE AND STEPS OF COOPERATIVE ACTION RESEARCH IN TEACHING

Cooperative action research aims to promote change and improvement in practice. Cooperative action research in teaching has two purposes, namely, teacher development and improvement of teaching practice.

The reason why collaborative action research can promote teacher development is that through this method, teachers can reflect on interesting or problematic areas in a structured form, break the isolation state of "obstructing career", and realize that "no teacher is an island" (Wallace, 1998:207). Burns also said, "Teachers are very interested in cooperating, in order to investigate and critically reflect on their own teaching scenarios, and to implement the principles of action research together." (Burns, 1999: 12) By participating in the research, teachers become critical and reflective practitioners, so as to become more familiar with the language, methodology, and design of the research. Therefore, this is the first link of teacher development, "absorbed the exploration and reflection of internal practitioners." (Felicity Armstrong and Michele Moore, 2004: 2)

The second purpose of cooperative action research is to promote teaching practice.

Participants will plan, implement, and reflect with a better understanding of teaching and learning methods. The improvement in practice will be based on a systematic investigation of many problems and workarounds. It should be pointed out that a theoretical basis is required to "understand the various points of view of teaching and learning, and the concept should be established in the reality of the classroom, and plan to respond to continuous changes in reality." (Oja & Smulyan, 1989: 209) In 1992, League of Educational Action Researchers in the Northwest concluded that teachers used the collaborative action research process to improve the teaching-learning process. (Sagor, 1992) A survey report in 2009 studied 7 male and 5 female students with 12 doctoral candidates who took elective courses of "learning and learning context". The age range is 30-60 years old, and the number of graduate school years ranges from the first year to the fifth year. They are all education practitioners in the UK while working. The conclusion is that through reflections on practice, research provides a positive opportunity to generate new teaching methods, allowing people to form new insights and understandings of the teaching process, and illuminating the evaluation of the effects of policy-related changes (Pilkington, 2009: 174).

In fact, "action" and "research" are originally two different concepts: the former refers to the practical activities and practical work of practical workers; the latter refers to the exploration of certain laws by specially trained scholars and experts. In order to further stimulate the innovative spirit of researchers and enable them to benefit from collective wisdom, the subject of "cooperative action research" is proposed and advocated. As far as education is concerned, "cooperative action research" is generally divided into several steps:

- participating teachers choose a topic or profession that everyone is interested in;
- collecting, organizing, and collating information on this topic;
- taking action on the basis of these data.

4. NEW PROBLEMS AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES IN THE COURSE CONSTRUCTION OF "A GUIDE TO ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES"

Against the background of new liberal arts, large foreign languages, and construction of

application-oriented colleges and universities, "A Guide To English-speaking Countries" is a traditional basic cultural curriculum for English language and literature majors. With the advancement of undergraduate general education in China, many colleges and universities have begun to open to non-foreign language majors in the form of professional elective courses in recent years, aiming to expand college students' ability to use English and cultural literacy, and also to improve students' cross-cultural communicative competence. The Shanghai University of Political Science and Law has also opened a "A Guide To English-speaking Countries" for all undergraduates. Facing students of different majors and different levels of English, the teachers of the "A Guide To English-speaking Countries" course group studied the current situation of the course through questionnaire surveys, classroom observations and data analysis, and found that the teaching content can be improved, the learning effect is not ideal, and the test evaluation is also the improper "the final examination paper determining everything". Accordingly, this research reiterated the "cultural needs" in English learning, and proposed a new direction for curriculum construction from content to teaching methods and testing and evaluation methods.

The first aspect, the introduction of ideological and political elements in British and American cultural studies

At the National Conference on Ideological and Political Work in Colleges and Universities, Xi Jinping pointed out that it is necessary to make good use of the main channel of classroom teaching, so that various courses and ideological and political theory courses can go in the same direction and form a synergistic effect. Since Shanghai University of Political Science and Law established the "A Guide To English-speaking Countries" as a key course in June 2020, the author, as the course leader, with the purpose of improving students' language learning ability, comprehensive cultural quality, and cross-cultural communicative competence in the course construction of the next two years, in class teaching, in addition to introducing basic knowledge of English-speaking countries' basic geography and population knowledge, national development history, Western political systems, modern and contemporary economic development, cultural education, etc., while appropriately introducing Chinese historical and cultural elements, comparing Chinese and Western politics, economy, culture, religion, etc.,

and emphasizing the core values of socialism, Chinese excellent traditional culture and education, especially the core of the "four self-confidence" (road self-confidence, theoretical self-confidence, system self-confidence, and cultural self-confidence) of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, while studying the history and cultural knowledge of western developed countries, the students can realize that different countries have their own unique development paths, and stimulate contemporary college students' strong sense of national pride and patriotic enthusiasm.

The selected textbook for "A Guide To English-speaking Countries" is the book "A Guide to English-Speaking Countries" published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press and edited by Xie Fuzhi. This book contains introductions to 6 major English-speaking countries, including Britain, Ireland, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Because the course hours are limited, this course can only focus on three countries: the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada. The curriculum design takes the transition from feudal society to capitalist society in British history as an example. Why can't the introduction of China be as smoothly as the British transition from feudal society to capitalist society, and finally chose the socialist road.

The second aspect, classroom teaching pays attention to the cultivation of thinking ability

Cooperative action research summarizes teaching experience after classroom observation, after-class feedback, and group discussion, and is committed to cultivating students' thinking ability in classroom teaching. Discrimination is mainly reflected in "developing students' ability to question, evaluate evidence, and develop interpretation, so that students can think and solve problems more critically". (Fabillar, 2003:22) This kind of critical education can also mobilize students' enthusiasm and enliven the atmosphere, allowing students to open up their wisdom and expand their minds while having fun. There are various methods for cultivating students' thinking ability. The typical teaching methods the teachers use include happy "asking", in-depth "speaking", and contrasting "seeing".

The "question" of happiness refers to starting from the "familiar phenomenon" of students "asking" and answering. This involves the principle of "knowledge matching": introducing unfamiliar knowledge from familiar things can inspire

learners' interest, while new interpretations of things often make people feel "happy" while "knowing". The teachers of the research group noticed that starting with actual phenomena in teaching can arouse students' interest in the courses they are learning, correctly identify the history and culture of English-speaking countries, and cultivate differences between China and the West from the perspective of historical development. For this purpose, the teachers have set up "happy questions" in different chapters and topics of "A Guide To English-speaking Countries". For example, when it comes to the development history and three stages of English, the introduction of "Esperanto", "Is Chinese the most spoken language in the world", and the 2006 movie "Babel" directed by Alessandro Gonzalez Inarito and starring Brad Pitt, Kate Blanchett and Reiko Kikuchi, the question can be: The movie "Babel" tells the tragic story that occurred in four families in different countries in the world due to poor language communication within 11 days. This language barrier is a real existence in the real society. Apart from learning foreign languages, what other ways do students have to reduce the tragedy and harm caused by this language barrier to our lives? What have countries done for this? Under normal circumstances, students' answers are babbled, and the answers are sometimes quirky. At this time, the classroom atmosphere is active and students' participation is high. Of course, teachers can't come unprepared. Since the problem is raised, they must have a unique insight into the problem. Moreover, when the teacher gives a "teacher interpretation" to each interesting "question", he tries his best to give consideration to both "academic" and "popularity" so that students can remember, understand and think.

In-depth "speaking" refers to the emphasis on the renewal of concepts and the replacement of perspectives in teaching to increase the sensitivity and in-depthness of problems, so as to guide students to "re-examine" those so-called natural problems with new perspectives and concepts, and cultivate students to be open and tolerant. If teachers follow the instructions of "teaching textbooks in class, filling in students' knowledge, closed-book and spot-checking some key content of the exam textbook at the end of the semester" (Shi Jianjun, 2013: 86), it will not be conducive to the development of students' thinking ability. Although the teachers are not masters of Chinese studies, they can learn from the views of professional scholars through learning, internally learn foreign aid, apply

cutting-edge research results to teaching, and give in-depth and detailed lectures on topics. The in-depth "speaking" is not only the teacher's preaching, but also emphasizes the debate between teachers and students, and between students. Debates can be "clearing right and wrong, adjudicating chaos, clarifying similarities and differences, finding out the real names, punishing interests, and deciding suspects." The debates under the guidance of the ideological and political concepts of the curriculum have more special significance in the teaching of the course "A Guide To English-speaking Countries". For example, when introducing contemporary American politics, economy, and culture, the teachers talked about the "ethnocentrism" that has been rampant in Western countries in recent years. This concept overlaps with the connotation of the Chinese idiom "夜郎自大 (extremely arrogant)" and implies the connotation of self-righteousness as the "central country". It can be seen that since ancient times, this has been a common phenomenon that humans see themselves. At this time, the teachers need to show students how the world maps published by various countries "center" their own country, and how the "Mother and Child" in the paintings of the world all resemble people in their own countries. Then the teachers will analyze the reasons for the emergence of "ethnocentrism" either in the narrow living environment, or in the phenomenon of "selective blindness" in psychology, or out of the need for cultural inheritance, suggest that everyone must be broad-minded when dealing with cultural issues, take a correct view of the shortcomings and strengths of themselves and others, and do not be blindly arrogant or self-contemptuous.

The "look" of contrast is to emphasize the link of "comparison" in the discussion of the topic. Undoubtedly, "the approach of strong cultural contrast has an excellent driving effect on stimulating students' enthusiasm for learning" (Zhang Jingtian, 2015: 144). At the same time, through the correspondence or divergence of the same problems, phenomena, and concepts between subjects and subjects, ancient and modern, Chinese and external, it can also expand students' knowledge and improve their thinking ability; it is necessary to combine knowledge education with ability education and value education, and integrate thought guidance and value shaping into the classroom teaching of the course "A Guide To English-speaking Countries", so that the course teaching can not only complete the set teaching

goals, but also make the ideological and political education classroom effective to the maximization.

In the third aspect, the types of tests have increased, and the proportion of "formational evaluation" has increased.

Teaching evaluation test is an important part of foreign language teaching, and it is one of the important means to measure the effectiveness of foreign language teaching and improve the quality of foreign language teaching. However, this is also a double-edged sword. Standardized testing methods can detect the level of students, provide feedback for foreign language teaching, and help teachers improve teaching. At the same time, excessive reliance on tests to determine the level of students and assess teachers' teaching results will lead to test-oriented foreign language teaching, causing teachers and students to focus only on the content and skills that often appear in tests, and ignore the cultivation of students' comprehensive abilities. In order to promote testing and evaluation more reasonably, the curriculum construction of "A Guide To English-speaking Countries" starts with two main bodies-teachers and students. Both sides use multiple testing and evaluation methods in and out of class to increase the proportion of "formative evaluation", and to promote the success of "targeted testing". As far as students are concerned, it is necessary to "enhance learners' autonomy in learning and introduce self-assessment." (Bailey, 1996: 262-271) As far as "A Guide To English-speaking Countries" is concerned, the reading of many chapters needs to be completed independently by students after class. Reading teaching is mainly about the core knowledge points, method guidance, task arrangement and inspection. As far as teachers are concerned, students' evaluation information can be collected from classroom observations, group discussions, topic presentations, tests, examinations, etc. Students' usual performance accounts for the continuous will increase in the overall curriculum evaluation. By focusing on students' overall curriculum performance throughout the semester, students are encouraged to learn to continuously assess their own level, strengths, deficiencies and progress, and work towards their own goals.

5. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the cooperative actions of foreign language teachers can be said to have gained a lot from the curriculum construction practice of "A Guide To English-speaking

Countries". From the perspective of the individual development of foreign language teachers, collaborative action research can directly improve teachers' year-end teaching reviews while promoting the continuous improvement of current teaching quality. Teachers can also write papers based on relevant research data, thereby promoting teachers' professional development and motivating teachers' "lifelong learning". Cooperative action research can also promote teachers' psychological health and interpersonal relationships. There is a positive correlation between the teacher's personal life and the teacher effectiveness/student learning. The identity of the teachers affects their senses of responsibility, motivation, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and clarity of goals (Sammons et al., 2007). When a foreign language teacher is immersed in the specific teaching situation, he finds meaning from it, and treats teaching as something he likes to do. Teaching and research are integrated with each other, and there is no irritability and boredom caused by confusion, repetition, and complicated tasks. Cooperative action research can eliminate the sense of isolation that teachers often have when they work in the classroom, and enable teachers to investigate the same issues in a team form, form a higher degree of interaction, and enhance the relationship between colleagues. In short, cooperative action research provides a positive new field for the construction of foreign language courses in universities and the development of foreign language teachers in universities.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

This paper is independently completed by Xiangping Fan.

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