

A Study on the Occupational Pressure of English Teachers in Chinese Local Medical Universities and Its Relieving Approaches

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Abstract—With deepening of higher education reform in China and the pursuit of characteristics of school-running by various colleges and universities, English teachers in local medical colleges and universities are faced with great occupational pressure different from English teachers in other kinds of colleges and universities. By analyzing English teachers' pressure from teaching, scientific research, individual development and economical life, the paper puts forward a proposal from the perspective of English teachers and colleges to reduce English teachers' professional pressure in local medical universities, so as to provide reference for other English teachers' development in similar medical colleges and realize the sustainable development of English teachers and higher medical education in China.

Keywords—local medical colleges and universities; English teachers; occupational pressure; relieving approaches

I. INTRODUCTION

College English teachers are the largest part of China's college teachers. Their career development has always been one of the concerns in the field of the foreign language education in colleges and universities. However, teachers, especially English teachers in local universities, as special practitioners of helping other people [1], are under high pressure. In recent years, the teaching of English majors has been attaching more and more importance to cultivation of talents quality, while college English teachers are facing unprecedented challenges in the context of exploring ESP (English for Specific Purposes) teaching. Under the heavy pressure, English teachers in colleges and universities have a high level of job burnout [2]. For teachers who are trapped in job burnout, on the one hand, their investment in teaching will be reduced [3], so the teaching quality cannot be guaranteed. On the other hand, teachers may choose to deviate from teaching due to the job dissatisfaction [4], which will inevitably affect the sustainable development of the whole higher education. Therefore, it is of great practical significance for both promoting development of teachers' profession and China's higher education by exploring the sources of college English teachers' professional pressure and the ways to relieve it.

Most existing studies on English teachers' occupational stress have analyzed the occupational stress of English

teachers under the whole college system from a macro perspective, and most of them focused on college English teachers' occupational stress [5]. There is little research on the specific occupational stress of English teachers in local medical colleges and universities.

This study will focus on English teachers in local medical colleges. Because of their own characteristics and development orientation, English teachers in local medical colleges also face a lot of professional pressure. This paper will discuss the professional pressure of English-major teachers and college English teachers in local medical colleges and universities and the ways to relieve pressure, so as to provide reference for English teachers in similar colleges and universities.

II. OCCUPATIONAL PRESSURE

Generally speaking, teachers' occupational pressure refers to an unpleasantly negative experience of mental tension, frustration and torment caused by factors such as heavy workload, academic pressure, interpersonal tension, students' noncooperation in class and excessive self-expectation [6]. However, English teachers in local medical colleges, owing to their professional characteristics and the development needs of the colleges they work in, have something in common with the professional pressure of English teachers in other colleges and universities. At the same time, they also have their own occupational pressure.

This paper will analyze the pressure of English teachers in local medical colleges from four aspects: teaching, scientific research, development and economic life.

A. Teaching Pressure

1) *Pressure of heavy teaching workload*: In local medical colleges and universities, the teaching workload of both college English teachers and English major teachers is extremely huge.

On the one hand, with the development of higher education towards popularization, colleges and universities began to enlarge their enrollment and the number of students increased day by day. On the other hand, the number of English teachers doesn't increase because local medical

colleges and universities have begun to require that newly enrolled English teachers must have a doctor's degree in English. However, due to the scarcity of doctor's degrees in English majors, it is difficult for local medical colleges and universities to attract English teachers with doctor's degree.

A survey shows that most college English teachers have 12 classes a week, sometimes up to 20 classes [7]. In the medical colleges where the author works, college English teachers have more than 20 classes per week, exceeding the national average. In addition, there are 11 English major teachers, who are responsible for teaching all professional courses of four grades. Each English major teacher has about 14 classes per week, and each English-major teacher is responsible for teaching at least two professional courses per semester.

It has become a very common problem for English teachers in local medical colleges to repeatedly teaching or teaching so many courses. Teachers run from classroom to classroom during the day or stay up late for preparing the new courses. After all, they are under pressure to do at least basic English teaching.

2) Pressure from education reform and characteristics of teaching: With the development of economy and society, the English level of graduates is required to be higher and higher. In such a circumstance, teaching reform is carried out in almost every college and university to improve the quality of teaching.

In recent years, the ministry of education in China has launched a comprehensive reform of college English teaching. The orientation of teaching college English is turning from EGP (English for General Purposes) to ESP (English for Specific Purposes). For college English teaching in local medical colleges and universities, it is inevitable to explore new curriculum design and teaching mode of college English teaching under the background of ESP teaching, which will be the new challenge for traditional college English teachers.

Additionally, the major of English has never stopped the pace of teaching reform. With the promulgation of national quality standards for all 92 undergraduate majors (hereinafter referred to as 'National Standards') in 2017, English-major teaching will certainly strengthen the curriculum construction of the English major and improve the quality of English major teaching according to the requirements of national standards. This will certainly pose greater challenges to English-major teachers.

At the same time, in recent years, colleges develop teaching or discipline characteristics based on their preponderant disciplines. In some local medical colleges, medical English courses are offered and the English major also begins to combine with medicine, offering medicine English or elective courses in medicine and pharmacy. All these will require English teachers to expand their knowledge structure, learn medical knowledge, and carry out relevant lesson teaching. However, at present, most English teachers receive traditional English education and have a relatively narrow range of knowledge. The current

characteristic education poses a great challenge to them, especially the older English teachers.

That is to say, apart from the heavy teaching work of English teachers, they should further challenge the education and teaching reform and think about how to change the teaching ideas and improve the teaching quality.

3) Pressure from the passing rate of English test and individualized teaching: The passing rate of CET-4, CET-6, TEM-4 and TEM-8 has become a yardstick for employers to measure the English proficiency of graduates. The faculty and students' English foundation in local medical colleges and universities are weaker than those in other ministerial universities and other comprehensive universities. Therefore, in order to help students to outstand in the job market in the future, local colleges will necessarily try their best to mobilize all factors to promote the students' English proficiency. First of all, they will ensure the higher passing rate of CET-4, CET-6, TEM-4 and TEM-8.

In order to improve the passing rate, both college English teachers and English major teachers have to tutor students in addition to heavy teaching load. As for the English major of the medical college where the author works, most of the students are transferred to English major, so their interest in English learning is generally not high and their basic English skills are very weak. In order to improve students' cultivation quality, the college has implemented the tutorial system for English majors since 2014, which required that each English teacher should offer the students personalized and comprehensive guidance in terms of students' thought, life, study, employment and other aspects. This means that teachers' workload is extremely heavy due to the personalized teaching requirements as well as the normal workload.

B. Researching Pressure

The level of scientific research is a remarkable symbol of the strength of colleges and universities and it is also an important basis for colleges and universities to strengthen discipline construction and improve the level of running colleges, as well as a fundamental guarantee for improving the quality of talent cultivation. Therefore, all colleges and universities put emphasis on scientific research [8]. Thus, local colleges and universities began to follow the trend of emphasizing teachers' achievements in scientific research. The categories of scientific research projects, awards for scientific research achievements, the number of published papers, the grades of published journals, and the citations have become important referential indicators for the annual assessment of teachers in colleges and universities, and they are firmly linked to the professional title assessment, promotion and position grading of teachers.

However, the number of scientific research projects in English is small and these projects are rather difficult to apply for. Furthermore, the core journals in English language are also rare. So applying for projects and publishing high-level papers are extremely difficult.

For the English teachers in local medical colleges, on the one hand, they are all undertaking heavy teaching work, which result in little time for scientific research. On the other hand, English teachers in local medical colleges, as a vulnerable group in the college, surrounded by outstanding teachers in the dominant medical disciplines, are naturally difficult to apply for the project in the college. Meanwhile, it is even more difficult for them to apply for the higher-level project as a weak subject in medical college. They are faced with the pressure of concluding the projects with publishing high-level papers in outstanding journals even though they assiduously and successfully apply for the projects. In a word, it is an indisputable fact that English teachers are under great pressure in scientific research.

C. Developmental Pressure

In addition to the pressure of daily teaching and continuous scientific research, English teachers are also faced with the pressure of their own development.

On the one hand, with the acceleration of teacher professionalization and the deepening of English education and teaching reform, the society and English teaching have higher and higher requirements for English teachers. On the other hand, the universities have carried out the performance appraisal, supervision and peer mutual assessment, students' online teaching assessment, and a series of measures triggering competition gradually broke college teachers' 'iron rice bowl'. Various teaching competitions and inspections make the teachers rather nervous, and their crisis consciousness is high. In order to meet the requirements of college English teachers' career development, they must strengthen professional learning, optimize their knowledge structure, and improve their academic and theoretical level.

Therefore, a part of English teachers begin to study for their doctor's degree. However, there are only a few doctoral programs in English in China, while English teachers are numerous. However, due to their heavy teaching tasks and scientific research pressure, it is extremely difficult for them to improve their academic level by taking part in a doctoral study. Another part of English teachers begin to apply for visiting scholars at home and abroad. However, this is also difficult for them to gain such a chance because of the weak discipline of English in the medical university. In addition, there is relatively little training for English teachers. In a word, the occupational development of English teachers is facing unprecedented pressure.

D. Economic and Living Pressure

The income of English teachers in local medical colleges and universities is not as high as that of English teachers at the provincial or ministerial universities. The salary of performance appraisal is not as high as that of administrative staff at the same level. Moreover, it is not as high as that of students and friends working in foreign-funded enterprises. The lack of benefits makes people feel financially embarrassed. The young teachers, who just joined the teaching work, are faced with purchasing a house. Financial stress will undoubtedly affect their work, which in turn increases their professional stress.

In addition, female teachers take up a large proportion of English teachers in local medical colleges and universities. The social role of female teachers forces them to devote more energy to family life. This will undoubtedly have a negative impact on their career development.

III. CONSEQUENCES OF OCCUPATIONAL PRESSURE

A. Influencing Physical and Mental Health

The heavy teaching task and the pressure of scientific research and development are ruthlessly overdrawn English teachers' physical health. The decline of the average life expectancy of college teachers has become a social problem that cannot be ignored in recent years [9].

However, the contradiction of high investment and low return has given rise to the unbalanced psychology of some English teachers. Faced with the reality that some local medical colleges and universities cannot change the disadvantaged status of English teachers, some teachers are either self-pitying or complaining.

In conclusion, higher occupational stress will inevitably affects the physical and mental health of English teachers.

B. Influencing Teaching Quality

The heavy teaching task and the stress of scientific research consume the energy and physical strength of English teachers. The relative imbalance between effort and reward has seriously eroded the enthusiasm of English teachers. English teachers do not have time or passion to carefully organize classroom teaching, resulting in dull and boring teaching activities and the lack of fun in English classes. This will seriously affect the quality of English teaching.

C. Reduced Professional Emotion and Separation from Teaching

The professional emotion of teachers is the psychological response to the relationship between loss and demand [10]. Namely, it is teachers' inner experience of whether their profession can meet their own social needs. English teachers in local medical colleges and universities are too busy, too tired, too bitter, too poor, and too helpless, so that they do not feel the joy and sense of achievement brought by the occupation. High professional pressure greatly reduces their professional emotion. Many English teachers even start to do WeChat business and even began to emerge the idea of leaving the teaching profession.

In a word, teachers in local medical colleges and universities suffer from excessive professional pressure, which will definitely damage their physical and mental health, affect the quality of English teaching, and even force them to break away from the profession, which will definitely affect the development of English education in China.

IV. PRESSURE RELIEVING APPROACHES

Correct and timely relieving English teachers' occupational stress in local medical colleges and universities plays a positive role in eliminating practitioners' occupational burnout, as well as promoting and deepening the reform and development of English education and teaching. In order to effectively deal with the professional pressure of English teachers, both the individual teachers and the organizational departments should take corresponding measures.

A. Individual Level

1) *Maintaining an optimistic attitude and firming personal professional faith:* Under the multiple pressures from teaching, scientific research, self-development and economic life, English teachers in local medical colleges and universities should first keep a positive and optimistic attitude and then try to overcome the negative emotions caused by stress by calmly analyzing the situation and actively looking for countermeasures. At the same time, English teachers should constantly deepen their cognition and identification of teaching profession, so as to strengthen their professional faith. Joys and pains, gains and losses in the career of English teachers should be dialectically analyzed. Responsibility and mission of English education are shouldered and the passion of teaching should be reignited.

2) *Developing self-management skills:* Improving self-management ability is also a very important part for English teachers in local medical colleges to cope with professional pressure. Self-management ability of practitioners can effectively manage and reorganize their life. This ability includes mastering the ability about how to relax oneself, plan to exercise and arrange the free time [10]. Therefore, English teachers in local medical colleges and universities should develop their self-monitoring, self-evaluation and self-improvement management abilities in teaching, scientific research and life. At the same time, it is necessary to flexibly deal with the relationship between work and life.

3) *Improving teaching and research ability by strengthening self-study:* Knowledge updating speed is amazing in such an era of knowledge explosion. Teacher professional development has become a continuous process. In order to consolidate their professional status and prevent the decline of professional ability, teachers must continue to learn professional knowledge. Therefore, as college English teachers, we should first establish the concept of lifelong learning. For example, we should timely learn new vocabulary emerged with the development of society, comprehensively understand common sense of cross-cultural communication, master the latest English information through network media, improve our information literacy, select useful information to be used in English teaching and apply relevant language teaching theories into English teaching practice.

Now, under the background of English teaching reform in medical colleges, the local medical college English teachers, for the sake of meeting the needs of college development, should broaden the knowledge actively, and when necessary, take the initiative to learn some medical knowledge to adapt to the college English ESP teaching reform and the development of the medical English.

In addition, scientific research is also an important way for college English teachers to improve their comprehensive ability. English teachers should master the scientific research methods of their major, learn statistics when necessary, and use statistical analysis software to carry out relevant quantitative research. English teachers in local medical colleges and universities can focus on the teaching and research fields of medical English, and apply for projects or publish research papers based on the experience summarized in college English teaching, so as to gradually improve their own scientific research ability.

B. Organizational Level

The department where teachers work should take the corresponding measures to help English teachers relieving their professional pressure, set up a professional development platform for teachers and establish a reasonable evaluation system.

1) *Building a platform for English teachers' development:* The professional development of English teachers should not only depend on their own efforts, but also need the organization of the department to provide a platform. In particular, local medical colleges and universities should not only pay attention to the development of teachers of advantageous subjects, but also pay attention to the development of college English teachers and English-major teachers.

Considering the limitation of educational level of English teachers in medical colleges and universities, departments can train English teachers in language teaching theories, teaching methods and scientific research methods according to different stages of their career development. Department leaders should also strive for the opportunity to send teachers to further study at home and abroad. These training and visiting experiences play an extremely important role in improving English teachers' teaching and research ability.

2) *Establishing a reasonable evaluation system:* For a long time, the management of teachers in colleges and universities has been highly stylized, which obliterates its uniqueness and diversity. Teaching workload, student evaluation rate, papers and scientific research projects have become rigid indicators for colleges to evaluate English teachers. Teachers are actually human beings who truly need humanistic care and an evaluation system that respects their development rules and needs.

It is suggested that the college and department formulate individualized scientific research assessment and professional promotion standards. We should not assess English teachers' scientific research according to the standards for other liberal arts subjects, let alone those for

medical or science teachers. Reasonable support to the English subject development should also be given.

V. CONCLUSION

Local medical college English teachers, on the one hand, as well as other college English teachers, face heavy teaching tasks, scientific research, professional development and economic life pressure, on the other hand, face pressures different from that of English teachers in other colleges and universities due to the disadvantageous status in medical colleges. The negative impact of high professional pressure on English teachers cannot be ignored. Individual teachers and their departments should take appropriate measures to effectively eliminate these pressures or even turn professional pressure into professional motivation. Only in this way can English teachers be motivated to rebuild their positive values and form the motivation to pursue progress, so as to ensure their stable development in the new situation.

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