

RURAL ENGLISH EDUCATION IN CHINA

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Abstract

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The development of social life and economic globalization make the importance of English increasingly prominent. As one of the most important languages, English has become the most widely used language in all fields of human life. Many countries regard English education as an important part of civic quality education in their basic education development strategies and put it in a prominent position. The importance of English teaching has been widely recognized by people as a significant tool of getting a better life and the most competitive subject in the exam for Chinese students.

Under the background of urbanization, the gap between urban and rural English education is increasing. In rural areas, especially some remote and poor areas, there are more difficulties in middle school education. The number of rural students is large, but their educational experience is limited by various conditions such as teacher teaching methods and student learning methods.

This essay begins with the analysis of the current situation of rural English education in China, discusses the current development of rural English education and the challenges it faces, and proposes countermeasures to solve the problems of English education in rural middle schools in China. It is hoped that it can help improve the quality of rural English teaching and the development of rural students' comprehensive English ability

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Chapter I Introduction

With the continuous deepening of the new curriculum reform in our country, the education in rural areas has been greatly improved. At the same time, there is a different degree of improvement in teaching and quality of junior high school English in rural areas, but it has to be acknowledged that there is still a lot of difficulties in teaching English in rural middle schools. There are many reasons for this. First of all, the environment of English teaching, the physical spaces in which students learn, is not to the standards of urban schools. This is particularly seen in classroom environment where some schools do not have enough desks and chairs, classroom walls are absent of inviting decorations, and materials are often not updated. Second, the overall English foundation of students is lower than their urban counterparts. Third, teaching equipment as well as the quality of teachers is often considered less than those found in urban schools. These problems are all important factors in the difficulty of English teaching in rural junior high schools. Below we will analyze the reasons.

Statement of the Problem

The problems of basic education in rural areas have received much attention in recent years. At this time, in the state of education, the most significant difference between rural spaces and the city can be found in English education. Wenbo (2015, p.116) says that in rural areas, some parents are unaware of the importance of their children's learning and ignore some courses which are considered unimportant in their lives, especially English. In their view, education is just to learn a few words and to count numbers. English as a language is far from their lives and useless. It is better to go out to work early and earn more money to subsidize the family. These bad habits not only affected the physical and mental growth of children, but also destroyed the education atmosphere of rural middle schools.

Yuan (2019) argues that as a language of international communication, English is becoming more and more important in daily life and learning (p. 252). The junior high school stage is the entry and foundation for learning English. Family education plays an irreplaceable

role in English education. It is for students to learn English. In the second classroom, family education is the supplement and development of school education and plays an important role in the process of students learning English. For example, there are many students in a class, teachers cannot really teach according to their aptitude, and there is no way to stimulate the interest of each student in learning English, but family education can do it well. This is because parents understand the characteristics of their children and students have a strong curiosity about things, and parents can make full use of the children's curiosity at home to arouse students' interest in learning English. Family education is the only education for a fixed number of children, and the education environment is more relaxed and freer than school education. For example: parents can attract children's attention through online videos and English paintings, they have a strong desire to learn and learn English interest, only if there is a strong interest in learning English, the following learning content can be carried out smoothly.

Xiuying and Tianlong (2018) approve that compared with cities, the educational awareness and ability of rural families are generally lagging behind. English education is not just the responsibility of schools and teachers. Family education is equally important.

Even after the implementation of the new curriculum standards, rural English teaching reform is still limited by many subjective and objective factors. Rural English education starts later in the lives of students when compared to their urban counterparts, with single teaching materials and monotonous teaching methods. In the countryside, there are many Grade 9 students who can't pass the examination for entering high senior high school because of poor English grades (Hongqing, 2019, p.139). English education is inseparable from teaching and learning, that is, students and teachers. Solving the problems of rural students and rural teachers is also a main concern of English teaching in rural middle schools. While discussing the development and challenges of English education in rural middle schools, this essay divides them into two categories: students and teachers.

Significance of the Study

In view of the current series of problems in rural middle school English education, the professional development of rural English teachers and the cultivation of rural students' interests in learning are taken as research objects. It has important theoretical and practical significance and it is reflected in the following aspects:

Students: It is helpful to cultivate the interest of rural students when learning English to help improve their ability to use English and improve their learning methods. Students in rural schools face a number of challenges when it comes learning English. Students in rural schools tend to have less interest in learning English. Many of them have bad learning habits. They are also defined by having less basic knowledge of the English language.

Students in rural areas learn English late, and most students only formally learn English after they have entered junior high school. They cannot correctly explore their own English learning methods, resulting in low efficiency in learning English. A survey (Dongyuan, 2020) found that 30.4% of the students encountered difficulties in learning English and did not ask anyone, nor did they check the relevant materials themselves, and gave up any problem that they can't solve. In addition, rural areas lack advanced English learning resources, such as foreign teachers and various English learning software. At this time, it is very important for students to master the correct method of learning English (p. 189)

These factors certainly have a great impact on the improvement of students' English ability.

Teachers: We must help to enhance the professional quality of English teachers, enhance the professional status of English teachers, and promote the professional growth of English teachers in rural China. To strengthen the professional development of English teachers, we must reform and improve the system, teaching model, and teaching methods of in-service teacher education according to the needs of teacher professional development, and constantly reform and improve the theory of foreign language teacher education. In order to help students to learn English better and accept English learning methods, junior middle school English teachers are constantly striving to try new teaching methods and strategies. Many teachers have participated

in junior high school English training and learned a lot of new teaching methods, teaching methods, etc (Haipeng, 2019, p.125). Due to the orientation of habitual thinking, many English teachers' teaching methods are outdated and lack of flexibility. Students often feel bored and uninteresting in class, and naturally lose their interest in English learning. To change this situation, English teachers can participate in junior high school English training and watch some excellent teaching videos, so that teachers have a new understanding of themselves and have the courage to improve their teaching practice.

At the same time, the professional development of rural English teachers is the key to the efficiency of students' English learning, the success of rural education reform, and the development and prosperity of the rural economy.

Methodology

This essay examines the existing results at home and abroad through a collection of electronic literature and books and relevant data. A literature review analyzes these documents according to the purpose of the study, fully absorbing and using the research results of its predecessors, in an attempt to construct the development and challenges of rural English education in China, and put forward effective countermeasures and suggestions for rural middle school English development.

Definition of Terms

Rural: There is still controversy on the definition of the concept of "rural". The main points of contention are: Does the county belong to the countryside? Does the township (town) belong to the countryside? In this article, rural refer to the vast administrative areas such as townships (towns) and villages excluding counties (cities)

English Teachers in Rural Junior High Schools: The so-called rural middle school English teachers refer to the middle schools that located in the vast townships (towns) and villages and other administrative regions. They are teachers who teach and educate students in rural areas and are engaged in English teaching. They are mentioned in the article including teachers who specialize in teaching English subjects, as well as teachers who also teach other subjects while teaching English subjects.

The Reform and Opening Up: A government policy of China that launched in 1978, it refers to reform domestic economy, education, politics and open up to foreign countries.

Chapter II Review of Literature

The Development of English Education in China

Since the Reform and Opening Up, the scale of English education in China has continuously expanded, and remarkable achievements have been made in education and teaching. However, the current situation of English education cannot meet the needs of China's economic construction and social development, and there is still a gap with the requirements of the development of the times (Xiumei, 2017).

Change the English curriculum. Older forms of education put too much emphasis on the interpretation and teaching of grammar and vocabulary knowledge; it neglected the tendency to cultivate students' practical language use ability and the learning interest of students.

New teaching methods advocate learning methods and task-based teaching methods of experience, practice, participation, cooperation and communication. They can develop students' comprehensive language use ability and make the process of language learning become a positive experience for students by helping to improve their emotional state, attitude toward learning, and intrinsic motivation to learn. It can also improve the process of thinking, cross-cultural awareness and forming autonomous learning ability.

The Challenges of English Education in Rural Middle School in China

In recent years, many scholars have analyzed the current situation and problems of rural education and rural English education. At present, rural middle school education has faced great difficulties, and it is necessary to take countermeasures as soon as possible to increase the attractiveness of rural middle school education in order to reverse the disadvantages and create a good reading atmosphere (Wenbo, 2015).

For the students' part, interest is the best motivating factor for students to learn. Therefore, in order to truly improve students' English ability, teachers must stimulate students' learning interest. Interests enable students to truly participate in classroom activities and become masters of classroom learning (Xiaodi, 2013). In the course of English teaching in rural middle schools in the future, teachers should be able to flexibly use various teaching methods, be good at integrating various teaching resources, and truly stimulate students' desire for knowledge and promote students' English ability.

To properly stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning English, teachers must look for a new form of teaching to make the English classroom more interesting and lovely. Therefore, teachers should strive to achieve fun teaching during the lectures. In Liping's (2019) research, when it comes to the introduction of their names in class, teachers should not only continue the traditional teaching method to explain themselves, but encourage students to introduce themselves bravely in class in front of the whole class. In the introduction process, they can only introduce their names without following the textbook. The students can freely play what they want to talk about, including age, hobbies, and family situation. When such activities are often carried out, on the one hand, they can promote confidence within students, and on the other hand, they can cultivate students' interests and hobbies in learning English.

Because of the poor basic conditions in the countryside, the vast majority of primary school students have not been exposed to English before, let alone the use of oral English for expression and communication. Even there are also students who are not resistant to spoken English, they are ashamed to use spoken English, so teachers also have to use Chinese to teach (Lili, 2019).

Xiaohui and Xue (2017) said that in some developed cities, the reading materials of English courses are dazzling. However, most students only come in contact with the teaching materials, so the source of vocabulary is limited. This can make it difficult to understand the different meanings of English words in different contexts. In less developed areas, the process of rural English education clearly lags behind urban areas. According to the survey data of a county in Nanyang City, Henan Province, nearly 30% of the village schools did not have basic classrooms such as voice classrooms, multimedia, and radio English teaching hardware and equipment. Resource allocation has not reached the basic conditions for the provincial school (Hongqing, 2019).

For teachers, in terms of quality education, rural English education has fewer options than cities. First, the teaching method is monotonous. Hongqing (2019) found that in the countryside within the teaching time and energy, the school teacher's English professor cannot satisfy the children's learning needs (p.139). Many remaining problems are transferred to English tutoring agencies and the quality of tutoring in language tutoring agencies varies. Because there isn't a standard of teachers' abilities in some tutoring agencies, some teachers' spoken English is not good which mislead students' pronunciations and even some teachers haven't gotten professional training.

Li's (2010) research has shown that in terms of the use of teaching instruments and equipment, only 20% of the teachers believe that the schools where they teach are perfect for teaching English, such as teaching instruments and equipment and the school can provide a wealth of teaching materials and other resources. Nearly 90% of teachers strongly demanded further improvement of English teaching conditions. According to the interview results, multimedia teaching is used in some schools, but most schools cannot provide the teaching

conditions. In her survey on the teaching staff, 80% of the teachers think that the school is lacking of English teachers and 75% of the teachers think that the English courses at the basic teaching stage needs foreign teachers to teach. In the career development survey, 73% of teachers expressed satisfaction with the profession of rural English teachers (p.81).

Therefore, under the guidance of the education department, rural middle schools should pay attention to the development of various information channels (Li, 2010), such as purchasing resource libraries, sharing teaching resources with urban schools, training teachers on resource collection, helping self-build information libraries, participating regularly or remotely. In this way, information diversification can be achieved, and teachers can timely grasp teaching-related information. In particular, English teaching is a constantly improving curriculum in China, and timely information can enable teachers to grasp the new curriculum requirements, syllabus, teaching methods, etc. in a timely manner.

However, some teachers have no confidence in the career development space of rural English teachers, and 47% of teachers believe that there is little room for development in this profession. In terms of occupational economic income requirements, 87% were dissatisfied with the economic income as a rural English teacher, and all respondents believed that the treatment of rural English teachers needs to be improved. 96% believe that the income gap between urban and rural English teachers is large.

Therefore, to improve the level of rural English education, we must not only promote the development of education as the primary goal, but also combine education development with teacher professional development and personal development to cultivate teachers' enthusiasm for education, while providing a broader professional and personal development room, such as providing further education, training opportunities and caring about the life and treatment of

rural teachers. That is to say, rural education should pay attention to the development of teacher themselves, and realize the development of education and society.

Hongqing (2015) argues from the policies that China adopt an education system with a dual urban-rural split, that is, a school system at the urban and rural levels. The city government funds are allocated by the city government, while the county, town, township, and village funds are borne by the county, township, and village, respectively. Governments at all levels have huge financial capacity gaps, and education funds that can be invested in their jurisdictions are very different. Therefore, their origin determines the level of students' educational access. Low salary, relatively backward living and teaching environment, social honor, low perception and geographical location make it difficult for rural areas to attract and cultivate excellent English.

The current problems of rural education in China are directly manifested in the full guarantee of educational opportunities and the universal implementation of compulsory education. Tianlong and Xiuying (2018) say that some students in rural area couldn't go to school and had to quit school because of their poverty, death of parents and so on.

The challenges of rural English education are not only related to the overall development of the countryside in the future, but also to the improvement of China's education level. With the rapid development of society, people's requirements' standards for rural education are getting higher and higher, and society has higher requirements for the comprehensive quality of talents. So, we should make some effective strategies to face the problems and solve them.

The Strategies of Facing the Problems

Create an English Learning Environment and Stimulate Students' Interest in Learning. For rural school English teaching, to stimulate students' desire for knowledge, they

must create a good atmosphere for English learning. The quality of the English learning atmosphere is directly related to the interest of students in learning English.

For example, in English classes, teachers often organize students to give lectures, or let students answer questions. Facing the success of the student's speech and the correctness of the question answering, the teacher will give smiles to the students and put forward the points that should be paid attention to in the future learning process, then praise and affirm the students. (Xiaodi,2013) The purpose is to create a good atmosphere for learning English and enhance the teacher's own affinity so as to constantly stimulate students' desire for knowledge.

Sizhen (2010) argues that because rural middle school students rarely have access to English knowledge in their daily lives, their English foundation is relatively weak. As a language subject, compared with other subjects, English learning itself is relatively boring, and it is easy to cause students to feel bored and resistant. Therefore, in order to better mobilize the initiative of students to participate in English knowledge learning and improve the quality of English teaching in rural middle schools, teachers can consciously enhance the fun of the classroom during the teaching process, combine with the teaching content, and design various games that are in line with the actual situation of the rural classroom. Or create some activities to encourage students, let them participate in these activities to master English knowledge in a relaxed and pleasant classroom atmosphere. Lili (2019) has given us a good example in her essay, English teachers can create interesting classroom activities for students when they explain the knowledge content of "there be" sentence patterns, encourage students to use "there be" sentence patterns to make their own sentences, and teachers can also directly use the classroom environment. When using "there be" sentence pattern to describe the class environment, some students replied: "There is a teacher in the classroom." Some students will use the blackboard to make sentences:

"There is a blackboard in the classroom." and many more. Through the construction of sentences, students can not only deepen their mastery of "there be" sentence patterns, but also concentrate on participating in classroom teaching and forming good communication and interaction with teachers. This has played an important role in building a diverse teaching environment and optimizing English classroom learning.

Modernization of Teaching Facilities. Popularity of the Internet has made it possible to modernize education. Shuzhi (2018) said that the school's teaching facilities are very crude, and the basic teaching equipment is inadequate. These are very real problems. The shortage of funds not only prevents the quality of rural education from being guaranteed, but also restricts the development of rural quality education. Government should increase financial investment to ensure that every family can enjoy the Internet, promote smart campuses, and improve the infrastructure construction of education. On the one hand, we must strengthen teacher skills training, improve teachers' basic computer operation ability, emphasize the use of Internet-assisted teaching, and force teachers to adjust traditional classroom teaching modes to stimulate students more enthusiasm; learning the urban English education teaching system and concepts to apply them to daily teaching practice, which can create a culture and atmosphere of English learning, and arouse students' enthusiasm in English learning.

At the same time, relevant education ministry should not only pay close attention to the development of rural English education, and promote new teaching models such as flipping the classroom.

Put More Funds into Rural Education. At present, there is a clear gap between the investment of rural education funds and high-quality resources compared with cities. Hongyong and Fenfen (2013) suggest that government should continue to increase the investment in rural

education. First of all, we must increase the total investment substantially to ensure that more funds are available to support the development of education; second, we must improve the investment mechanism, not only to be willing to spend money, but also to be efficient to spend money well to avoid wasting resources; finally, we must strengthen urban-rural co-ordination, adapt to local conditions, fully consider the new situation and new changes such as the rapid urbanization process and migrant children's entry into cities, and rationally allocate resources.

Improve the salary and welfare of English teachers. Teachers' wages have been raised all the time, but the increase is not very strong, especially in the implementation of slow and inefficient (Xuefang, 2012). She also argued that many teachers hope to have strictly implement the national policy, the rise should rise, and the rise should not be slow. The school should continuously improve the working, living and learning conditions of English teachers, attract excellent teachers to teach for a long time, and ensure that the average salary of teachers is not lower than or higher than the average of national civil servants wage level, and gradually increase; appropriate policy tilts on rural English teachers in terms of salary, job title, etc. And implement and improve social security policies for rural English teachers such as medical pension.

Family Education. Firstly, Parents are a motivator of interest in English learning, Yuan (2019) says the school's centralized class teaching system has improved teaching efficiency to a certain extent, but because there are many students, teachers cannot really teach according to their aptitude, and there is no way to stimulate the interest of each student in learning English, so family education can do it well. This is because parents understand the characteristics of their children and students have a strong curiosity about things, and parents can make full use of the children's curiosity at home to arouse students' interest in learning English, and the education

environment is more relaxed and free than school education, For example: parents can attract children's attention through online videos, English painting, etc., They have a strong desire to learn and learn English, only if there is a strong interest in learning English, the following learning content can be carried out smoothly.

Chapter III Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper aims to find the problems and the challenges of English teaching in rural area in China. It mainly focuses on middle school. And this chapter gives some suggestions to help solve the problems and presents directions for further research.

Conclusions

In short, for rural English teaching, teachers need to carry out teaching methods, innovation, create a diversified teaching model for students, clarify the purpose of classroom teaching, and use activities and games to stimulate students' interest in learning, so that students can enter more freely English knowledge learning, try to stratify according to students' English level, to improve students' learning ability. And the governments should pay more attentions to rural teachers. They should develop the standards of teachers and raise teachers' salaries, give them more chances to make them better.

If English teaching is to achieve certain results, it must pay attention to actual results, because the language is for communication and use, not for the test, and it can't focus on pursuing the English test scores, we should change the nature of English learning. Teachers should pay great attention to students' subjective initiative as much as possible, consciously cultivate students' good study habits and interest in learning English, let students like to go to school and learn English.

Recommendations for the Future Research

The empirical studies reviewed in this paper have several limitations. The first limitation is that all the studies are focusing the middle school in rural area, so there are some problems in primary schools and high schools. Further studies on primary schools and high schools in rural area are needed.

Secondly, the strategies of solving those problems are mainly about school and governments. Family is also an important element of English education background. Thus, more thorough research on background family in rural area in China is needed.

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