

A Deliberation on the English Education in China in the Future Under the Background of “Double Reduction” Policy

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Abstract

Over the years, the growth of English education has been fast in China, with remarkable achievement in various types and levels of English education as well as significant improvement of citizens' overall English competence. The fast growth of English education contributes greatly to national economy, cultural construction and foreign exchange. At the same time, “excessive off-campus training” on subjects at primary and secondary education stage has also attracted attentions of the society. For a long term, the formal education at schools and the off-campus training have been getting along with each other in terms of English learning, giving birth to numerous off-campus English training institutions. Although examination-oriented English education has cultivated students with good grades, excessive involution is not favorable for benign national and social development. In this paper, the author gives a deliberation on the development of English education in China in the future under the “double reduction” policy.

Keywords

“Double reduction” policy; English education; Deliberation on development.

1. Introduction

Recently, China issued the “Opinions on Further Reducing the Burden of Students' Homework and Off-campus Training in Compulsory Education” (hereinafter referred to as the “double reduction” policy). This policy aims to improve education quality, implement the carry out the essential task of virtue education and construct a satisfactory ecological environment of education. Following this policy, a number of detail rules were issued. For example, strict management of off-campus trainings, prohibition on unified examination of any subject for grade one to grade three students at primary schools. As the number one metropolis of China, Shanghai serves as the wind indicator in national education. While endorsing the “double reduction” policy, it directly announced cancellation of English examinations at primary schools. This rule triggered heated Internet discussions, followed by the opinions that “English learning is futile”. In view of the present trend of “involution” of domestic education, as to what concept and goals of English education should be insisted and how to develop an objective view of the problems with English education, the author gives a deliberation on the English education in China in the future under the background of “double reduction” policy.

2. The Influence of “Double Reduction” Policy to English Education

In recent years, young learners' English training education has been “overheated”. All teenagers are learning English and even start to learn it from kindergartens. As a result, English education and training markets are booming for English learners within and outside of campus. However, compared with other non-English speaking countries and regions, the English competence of Chinese citizens is not high. At the stage of primary and secondary education in particularly, due to various drawbacks of examination-oriented English education, a large number of

students are only capable to deal with English exercise and examinations. When it comes to face-to-face communication with outside world in reality, they cannot speak fluently or even make correct pronunciation. In examination-oriented English education, English is taught and tested as a written language other than as a practical tool. Therefore, drawbacks of examination-oriented English education are justified. In addition, there is an outstanding problem that the burden has been excessively heavy for students at primary and secondary schools at present. Short-term utilitarian off-campus trainings are not thoroughly solved. In off-campus training, premature and excessive off-campus trainings were conducted and some trainings charge high fees. Excessive inflow of capital also brings not only higher risks but also excessive economic and energy burden to parents. This offsets the achievement of education reform and development, provoking a strong social response. After issuance of “double reduction” policy, the expected influences are: first, the off-campus training institutions will be overall more conforming, with basic elimination of disordered off-campus trainings and further degreed popularity of off-campus training; second, it will further improve education and services at schools, with more scientific and reasonable assignment homework. The after-class services by schools basically satisfy students’ demand and students’ learning will return to campus.

3. Analysis of the Importance of English Education in China

3.1. Foreign Language Competence Is A Key Competence of Students in Primary and Secondary Schools

Since the 21st century, all countries have started the study of key competence-based education objective system, constructed a core competence model that satisfies national or regional practical needs, and further proposed a curriculum reform scheme targeting at cultivating students’ key competence. All students’ core competence systems established or proposed by the U.S., France, Finland, Hungary, Australia, Japan, EU and some other countries and international organizations include language and text competence, among which there are tongue language competence and foreign language or second language competence. The specific expressions are “the competence to use language, symbols and text interactively”, “the competence to make exchange in foreign language”, “language skills” and “reading comprehension and communication”, etc. In order to improve the international competitiveness of Chinese education, there are many competences closely related to foreign languages in students’ key competence system such as thinking ability, cross-culture communication capacity, global awareness, international understanding and information technology competence, etc. The cultivation of these competences is closely related to foreign languages. In some cases, they are even based on foreign language competence.

With China’s further reform and opening up, internationalization will be increasingly intensified. Only an international language will enable association and communication with any person in the world. As one of the most widely used language in the world, the English competence is the priority among all foreign language competences. The cultivation of English competence must be based on corresponding curriculum system and appraisal system. Therefore, English education at the basic education stage is of great significance and matters the cultivation of key competences of students in China.

3.2. English Learning Promotes Students’ Mental Development

Language is the basis for all cognition activities. It is a medium for learning other subjects, as well as an important factor that promote students’ cognition. Although a foreign language differs from the tongue in many aspects, they are all languages and share some common grounds. Language competence (including tongue language competence and foreign language

competence) is clearly correlated to students' cognition competence. An 18-year follow-up study in U.S. suggested that, bilingual teaching mode of schools improved not only the grades of second language, but also the overall grades. What's more, in English learning, the people-to-people exchange is not merely about language, but also about transpositional consideration and caring for the others. Therefore, in English learning, both learners' character and mode of thinking will be improved.

3.3. English Education Helps Promote Educational Equality

At present, educational equality is one of the major social concerns. Some believe that the English education policy may aggravate educational inequality, because listing English as a subject in entrance examinations will deprive some students of opportunities to enter a higher school. Although some students fail to enter a higher school due to poor English examination result, some other students also fail because of poor examination result of Chinese, math, physics and chemistry, etc. In fact, if the absence of English education policy will truly aggravate educational inequality. When the state does not enforce English education policy, there won't be adequate national input in English education. As a result, students from families with favorable economic and educational conditions will receive more and better English education, while others will have less opportunity and conditions for receiving English education. The lack of opportunity to learn English may cause more social inequalities.

4. Deliberation on Development of English Education in the Future

Currently, the greatest misunderstanding about English education is that, "English teaching is merely to enable students to master a tool of communication". This viewpoint should be corrected in the English education. The Ministry of Education proposes establishment of a key competence system, in which the requisite characters and key competences of students are clarified. Furthermore, it highlights self-cultivation, social care and the sense of responsibility to the country, requiring fulfilling the requirements on key competences and academic quality in the teaching of all subjects. The "key competences" proposed by OECD includes not only knowledge and skills, but also moral and social behaviors and the capacity to get along with other and settle conflicts, etc. The "21st century skills" proposed in U.S. are also much the same. It can be seen that all countries attach great importance to human development. Therefore, a deliberation should be made on how to cultivate "key abilities" and "key competences", clarifying that language exchange is merely one objective other than full objective of foreign language learning. The teaching of foreign language is not merely to enable communication in foreign language but also to guide students to think with another cognition and cultivate healthy values. This involves students' mental development and may have influence on their character. Therefore, the teaching of language is equally important to development of students' characters and it should be clarified that "English education is also a form of quality education". The author believes that the long-term English education should always stick to the values of humanistic education. John Henry New-man pointed out that, "the trainings on humanistic education are not for a specific or occasional purpose of pragmatism nor for a specific behavior or occupational purpose, nor for academic or scientific research purpose. Instead, it is for the humanistic education itself. The entrance into universities for receipt of humanistic education is to practice the concept of humanistic education." Therefore, in essence, English education is humanistic education. Humanistic education is one that advocates free and all-round development, aiming to cultivate people's belief, sentiments, virtue and aesthetical values. English education cannot simply consider skills by neglecting the essence of humanistic subjects. Otherwise, there will be an imbalance where ability falls short of materials, obstructing all-round human cultivation. As an important component of education, English

should not only focus on interpersonal communications but also cultivation of upright individuals with all-round moral and intellectual grounding.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the English education at primary and secondary schools should skip beyond the mindset of native-speakerism and change its objective that purely centered on language application. It should design multiple objectives such as “social culture objective”, “cognitive thinking objective” and “language exchange objective”, integrate language learning with cognitive thinking and personal quality cultivation, etc., and see the category of learning motivation from the perspective of “whole-person development”. Such objectives will be more favorable for students’ development, mobilize students’ enthusiasm, reduce difficulties in teaching and give play to the value of English education in promoting students’ characters and development of thinking.

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