

# Research on Professional Learning and Support of English Teachers in Rural Primary and Middle Schools

Zhai Hongying

School of Foreign Languages and Literature, Longdong University, 745000, China

**Keywords:** English teachers; rural primary and middle schools; professional learning; supporting strategies

**Abstract:** The professional growth of English teachers in rural primary and middle schools is the key to improving the quality of English teaching and developing disciplines, which is also a tremendous force to promote rural reform and development. Based on the analysis of the value basis of teachers' professional learning, this paper puts forward some supporting strategies for the professional learning of English teachers' in rural primary and secondary schools from the following aspects: teachers' posts, school units and competent departments.

## 1. Introduction

With the further intensification of economic globalization, China's exchanges and contacts with other countries in various fields are becoming more and more frequent, and the importance of English, as the language widely used in the world, is also being attached more and more importance. In order to comply with this trend, the Ministry of Education issued the Guiding Opinions on Actively Promoting the Opening of English Courses in Primary Schools in 2001. According to the document requirements, since the fall of 2002, primary schools in townships and towns across the country have gradually opened English courses. English education in primary and middle schools in rural areas began in the absence of preparation, weak teacher resources, lack of teaching resources, and lack of experience in teaching management. After more than a decade of bumpy development, English education in primary and middle schools in rural areas has also made significant progress. However, in order to shorten the gap in English education between urban and rural primary and middle schools, it should continue to optimize the structure of rural primary and secondary school English teachers' quality<sup>[1]</sup>.

## 2. The value basis of professional learning of English teachers in rural primary and secondary schools

In 1966, UNESCO stated in its "Proposal on the Status of Teachers" that teacher work is a a "major of learning" and a "major of lifelong learning". The so-called teacher learning refers to the process in which teachers acquire and grow their professional knowledge and ability under the influence of their own efforts or external environment<sup>[2]</sup>. For 40 years of reform and opening up, the practice of primary and secondary school education has shown that the key to effective teaching lies in the improvement of teachers' literacy, which, in turn, depends on teachers' professional learning ability<sup>[3]</sup>. Although China's education has shown a trend of narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas at the macro level, the phenomenon of continued backwardness and slow development of English education in rural areas cannot be ignored. So it is crucial to strengthen the learning ability of English teachers in rural primary and middle schools. Its value is mainly reflected in the following two aspects.

First, it is conducive to the balanced development of urban and rural education.

From the perspective of the college entrance examination system, students' English achievement is directly related to the opportunity to receive higher education. The huge gap in English education level between urban and rural primary and secondary schools will inevitably affect educational equity. The problem of shrinking opportunities for rural children entering higher education

institutions caused by “English weakness” has become increasingly prominent, which will definitely affect the sustainable development of China’s rural economy, culture, science and technology industries in the long run. Strengthening the professional learning ability of teachers to achieve their professional quality improvement plays an important role in improving the English performance of rural children, and is also an important part of “Education for poverty alleviation”.

Second, it is conducive to promoting the construction of rural teachers team.

The healthy and stable development of rural education is inseparable from the construction of excellent teachers. According to the Cannikin Law, English teachers play an active and effective role in improving the overall level of the construction of rural teachers. As a part of the teaching staff in rural schools, there is more room for English teachers on the development in educational activities, teaching management, and teaching method innovation. Professional learning based on the needs of actual teaching work can continuously enhance the stability of the teaching staff and improve the overall level of rural education.

### **3. Supporting strategies for professional learning of English teachers in rural primary and middle schools**

The professional ability of English teachers is the guarantee of the quality of English teaching, and it is also the prerequisite for the professional study of English teachers <sup>[4]</sup>. Combining the current situation of English education in rural primary and middle schools and the requirements for English teachers’ professional learning ability, it can be provided supporting strategies from the following three aspects.

#### **3.1. Providing supporting strategies based on teacher posts**

The professionalism of teachers is manifested in many aspects of specific teaching behaviors. Teachers in any subject have a “basic function” in their own posts, and they can well grasp the characteristics of the subject by providing specific support strategies <sup>[5]</sup>.

First, to construct the theoretical knowledge system. Theory is the basis of practice. For novice English teachers, whether they major in the specialty English education or not, they should rebuild their theoretical knowledge system according to the characteristics of rural primary and secondary education when taking up the teaching post. Thus, the balance between “content knowledge” and “pedagogical content knowledge” can be achieved. In classroom teaching, it can satisfy the requirement of “speaking out, doing it”, but cannot be confined to general knowledge points, concepts, frameworks and so on. In other words, according to the objective conditions of English education in local schools, English teachers should construct their own theoretical system and knowledge structure to form a flexible “knowledge output” mode in accordance with teaching methods, teaching aids, and teaching materials.

Second, to acquire practical teaching experience. Practice is the only way to verify the truth. Under the background of the new curriculum reform, it is necessary to constantly emphasize the cultivation of “expert” teachers, instead of staying in the “pedagogue” status for a long time. To reach the level of experts, the English teachers must continuously carry out professional learning, and widely dabble in the knowledge of psychology, education and other subjects. And then, when they put the theory into practice in the English courses, they may well integrate all kinds of teaching resources, refine experience, and sublimate the theory so as to realize the improvement of professional quality.

Third, to participate in in-service training actively. Under the concept of lifelong learning, “in-service training” is an effective way of supporting professional learning. On the macro level, English teachers in rural primary and secondary schools in China have reached the “academic qualification threshold”, but they still lack of professionalism. Based on their posts, they actively participate in in-service training and obtain professional learning support from training institutions, which can effectively keep pace with social development and surpass the narrow space of “school education” <sup>[6]</sup>.

### **3.2. Providing supporting strategies based on school units**

The school is the main place for teachers to work and an important base for the development of teachers. Schools can create a platform for teachers' professional development. It can be carried out from the following three aspects.

First, to establish a sound hardware support system. The smooth and orderly development of school education is inseparable from the support of the necessary educational hardware system, including the space, resources and equipment needed for professional learning of English teachers in rural primary and middle schools. However, from the actual development situation, the economic conditions in rural areas are relatively poor. The establishment and sound planning of hardware support system are often based on the overall needs of schools, which cannot be clearly reflected in the development of English teachers. Therefore, the school should fully realize the particularity of English teaching in rural primary and secondary schools. Under the premise that English teaching is still in the "primary development stage", the school should give appropriate support to English teaching. In addition to providing necessary hardware support, the school should further establish and improve relevant facilities according to the concept of school-based curriculum development.

Second, to create a professional learning culture. The professional learning of English teachers in rural primary and middle schools depends on a good learning atmosphere. The spiritual space of freedom, democracy, openness and innovation can effectively eliminate the pressure of interpersonal relationships and mobilize the enthusiasm of the majority of English teachers. For example, school administrators can organize a variety of learning activities, such as giving lectures, attending lectures, teaching and research sessions, etc., to enrich the professional learning style of teachers.

Third, to construct a school-based professional learning model. Based on the concept of school-based curriculum development, we should constantly innovate the ideas and methods of English teacher training in rural primary and secondary schools, so as to make it more in line with the objective needs of rural primary and secondary school education, jump out of the constraints of textbooks, explore the applicable resources of ecological classroom, and highlight the characteristics of rural social environment. For example, under the professional learning mode of "school-based training", teachers should pay attention to the judgment of "uniformity and standardization" according to the existing problems in English teaching in our school, and adopt the method of "suit the remedy to the case" to enhance the professional learning quality of teachers.

### **3.3. Providing supporting strategies based on competent departments**

Support strategies from local education authorities are "vague", and are usually presented in the form of policies, documents, etc., but the support is not strong enough. The competent education authority should pay more attention to the English education in rural primary and middle schools, and provide all convenient conditions and advantageous resources to support the professional learning of teachers, so as to catch up with the level of urban English teaching in the shortest time.

First, to establish a quality supervision mechanism for professional learning of English teachers in rural primary and middle schools. To supervise and manage the professional learning ability of English teachers in rural primary and secondary schools by means of unified assessment or selective examination can form a "local-based" guarantee mechanism for the professional development of English teachers.

Second, to ensure the welfare of rural primary and secondary school English teachers. Solving the "worries at home" in terms of economic income and introducing effective competition incentive mechanism can enhance the motivation of rural primary and secondary school teachers in professional learning, such as performance-based salary reform, implementation of housing supporting policies and vacation benefits.

Third, to create a shared network of professional learning resources for urban and rural integration. Objectively, it is unrealistic to eliminate the gap between urban and rural primary and secondary school English education in a short period of time, because in the process of narrowing the gap between teachers, it needs more time to narrow the gap between students. Educational

authorities should take the lead in establishing a sharing network of urban-rural integration of professional learning to quickly and efficiently shorten the gap among teachers and eliminate the obstacles of insufficient resources, which is more in line with the needs of professional learning support under the current Internet environment.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In summary, the curriculum reform aiming at the core literacy of English subjects has put forward new requirements for teachers in primary and middle schools in rural areas. The quality of teachers is the lifeline of education development, and teachers' learning is the basic way to improve the quality of teachers. From the perspective of teacher professional development theory, the overall goal of teacher learning should focus on cultivating teachers who have a deep understanding of education and can introspect and reflect on their own professional development. English teachers in rural primary and secondary schools need to improve their professional ability through continuous professional learning, and achieve continuous improvement of professional knowledge, abilities, beliefs, etc., thus promoting the improvement of the teaching quality of English classrooms in rural primary and secondary schools as well as the overall development of students' core literacy skills.

#### **Reference**

- [1] Qu Xiaohui, Yu Jiaying. Discussion on the Strategies of Optimizing the Quality Structure of English Teachers in Primary and Middle Schools in Rural Areas [J]. Research on Continuing Education, 2015(9):76-77.
- [2] Zhang Min. A Study on the Strategic Structure of Teachers' Learning [J]. Educational research, 2008(6):84.
- [3] Liu Liyan, Zhang Guanqun, Sun Huiqi. Research on Effective Teaching and Professional Knowledge Development of Primary School English Teachers [J]. Journal of northeast normal university, 2018(3):171-177.
- [4] Xiao Zheng, Yu Yueqing, Rong Fengjing. Analysis on the Demand of Professional Development of English Teachers in Primary and Middle Schools of "National Training Program" [J]. Teaching and management, 2018(30):64-66.
- [5] Zhang Li. Exploration of the Integrated Cultivation of English Teachers' Core Literacy in Primary Schools from the Perspective of Social Cognition [J]. Foreign language community, 2017(6):79-86.
- [6] Han Baocheng, Qu Xin. Discussion on the Evaluation of Professional Ability of English Teachers in China [J]. Foreign language journal, 2017(5):69-74.