

Research on Satisfaction of Curriculum for English Majors

Yudan Zeng

Department of Foreign Languages, China West Normal University, Huafeng Campus,
No. 1 Shida Road, Shunqing District, Nanchong City, Sichuan Province, China

Email: yudan.zeng@yahoo.com

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Abstract

From the existing literature, the literature on the study of curriculum is still relatively large, but it is mainly reflected in the curriculum setting mode and value orientation. The investigation of students' satisfaction with the current curriculum system will lay bare the problems, with a view to providing some suggestions for optimizing the teacher training curriculum system. The study focuses on the following issues: (1) What's students' overall satisfaction with the curriculum? (2) Are there differences between the degree of satisfaction of graduates and undergraduates? (3) In which aspect does significant difference exist on the degree of satisfaction between the graduates and undergraduates? The results show that students' overall satisfaction with the curriculum is still relatively high, and the degree of satisfaction of graduates is much higher than that of undergraduates, but the consensus on the three aspects tends to be consistent.

Key words: Curriculum; English Major; Satisfaction

1. Introduction

“Excellent Teacher Training Program”, as an important measure in the reform of cultivate teacher education talents, attracted great attention of the institutions of higher education both in abroad and at home. Early in the 20th Century, some countries like Australia and America began to implement the ETTP to cultivate more specialized teachers (Bi Jingtang, 2014). In 2010, the Ministry of Education of China and other relevant departments jointly launched the ETTP and proposed a pilot scheme for excellent teachers, aiming to cultivate teachers of a new era who are highly qualified and competent teachers and who are willing to serve the grass roots. Curriculum, with characteristics of systematic, scientific and basic, is to bring up qualified teachers and is directly related to the realization of training objectives(Wei, Ren & Yan, 2011). As one of the first universities to implement ETTP, China West Normal University (CWNU) conducted a pilot program in 2011 with three major programs in English, Mathematics and Chinese towards the undergraduate level 2010, and four sessions has successfully graduated so far. After getting more professional learning and training, to what extent are the students content with their learning? Are they satisfied with the upbringing of knowledge and ability? This research intends to set the curriculum under the excellent teacher training program for English majors as the starting point making a practical investigation from the perspective of students’ satisfaction, and try to find the existing problems of ETTP curriculum setting system to give the corresponding countermeasures and suggestions in order to provide reference for the relevant policy-making departments to develop more scientific and rational courses, which will promote students’ level in the professional development of teachers is helpful to cultivate outstanding English talents as a result.

2. Literature review

2.1 Definition of Curriculum

Daniel Tanner(1995) thinks curriculum is “the planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experiences, under the auspices of the school, for the learners’ continuous and willful growth in personal social competence. In Gatawa’s (1990) view, curriculum is “the totality of the experiences of children for which schools are responsible”. Starrat (1988) consider curriculum as which the student is supposed to encounter, study, practice and master in short and stuff of what the student learns, while Beach & Reinhatz (1989) define curriculum as a “prescribed series of courses to take”.

To sum up the definitions above, curriculum refers to the establishment and arrangement of various courses upon anticipated and unanticipated knowledge and experiences that learners are expected to learn, teacher equipping, and learning and teaching methods within an institution of school.

2.2 Previous Researches on Curriculum

2.2.1 Researches on curriculum abroad

Many scholars who come from abroad have studies on the curriculum and have discussed it from different aspects. First are the studies on the curriculum development: Robert C. Pooley (1968) presented selected items of recent research in English teaching, making up the body of information and expert opinion which will largely direct curriculum work. Major findings indicate pre-service teacher training, teaching experience, and teacher content and teaching styles were significant motives behind classroom-level curriculum developments (Saad Shawer, 2016). Second are the studies on the curriculum model: for example, Joyce Van Tassel-Baska & Susannah Wood (2009) explicates the Integrated Curriculum Model (ICM), which has been used worldwide to design differentiated curriculum, instruction and assessment units of study for gifted learners. The ICM model is effective and has several specific implications for use in classroom settings in schools. García-López, Luis M, Gutiérrez, David, Pastor, Juan Carlos & Romo, Vicente (2018) developed a scale to measure primary and secondary school teachers perception of a competence-based curriculum model in Spain, and the result demonstrates good criterion validity in explaining teachers' beliefs about the competence-based curriculum model, and thus reveals teachers' perceptions of the impact of this curricular reform. The third are the studies on the comparative study of different types of curriculum: for instance, Wilms, Ulrich Heinz (2011) made a comparative study of the national math curriculum with curricula from four nations (Singapore, Netherlands, Germany, and Japan), which indicated that the rigor and depth of the elementary math curriculum under the CCSS is in line with the elementary curricula of the peer-nations, yet the secondary math curriculum differs. Graham Mcphail & Elizabeth Rata (2015) theorized a curriculum model containing four features to distinguish two distinctive curriculum design types: Powerful Knowledge and 21st Century Learning and draw a conclusion that Powerful Knowledge approach has a stronger claim to the coherence between the four features than 21st Century Learning.

As can be seen from the above, most of the studies are from the angle of the teachers and curriculum designers, but precious few choose the perspective from the students. For all there are quite a few researches on the curriculum, while studies on the field of English major curriculum are relatively few and there are in lack of empirical studies.

2.2.2 Researches on curriculum for English majors at home

So far there have been so many researches on the curriculum for English majors at home. From 2005 to 2010: Zheng Yuqi (2006) analyzed the challenges that traditional English major curriculum meet with and suggested a new curriculum for cultivating English talents with strong language ability, creative quality and specialized professional knowledge. In 2009, Wang Xuemei made a concrete analysis of the curriculum for English postgraduates and discussed the way of designing curriculum so as to develop English postgraduates' academic competence. Zhang Xuemei and Dai Weidong (2010) made an analysis on the development of English major curriculum, based on which they proposed some personal opinions on the curriculum development. Sun Youzhong and Jin limin (2010) studied

on the status quo and limitations of the curriculum of English majors' professional knowledge, and then repositioning them. From 2011 to 2016: the partiality of English curriculum provision for English majors lies in the overall-designation of language competence and skill training. Therefore, the directionality of English major curriculum follows the principle of humanity development, meets the needs of educational subjects and transfers the direction from "skill training" to "cultural comprehension" (He Lingmei, 2013). In 2015, He Huaqing made an investigation on the arrangement of English educational practical curriculum and found that there should be more practical curriculum and educational practice duration should be prolong. Zhong Yongwei, Cheng Sihui and Cai Zhaohui (2016) took the Math and English majors as an example under the background of ETTP, explored and revealed the main problems and improvements in the curriculum structure and curriculum setting of the teacher education major path.

Generally speaking, the English teacher education, through long term of exploration and development, has formed a cultivation system with Chinese features. While the current studies are mainly focus on the angle of basic theory and comparative research. The studies on the students' satisfaction with the curriculum designed under background of ETTP are in bad need.

3. The Current Study

This investigation is carried out for the sake of finding out to what degree the current curriculum for English Majors is in accordance with the students' needs analysis, from which can the problems be seen so that pertinent advises would be proposed. The following research questions are formed:

- (1) What's students' overall satisfaction with the curriculum?
- (2) Are there differences between the degree of satisfaction of graduates and undergraduates?
- (3) In which aspect does significant difference exist on the degree of satisfaction between the graduates and undergraduates?

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

This research picks up the four classes of graduates and two classes of undergraduates who have taken the main courses already in Foreign Language Department as subjects, 150 students in total including 15 males and 135 females.

4.2 Methods and Instruments

This investigation adopts the way of questionnaire and interview, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, to do a research on the curriculum of English Majors. Significant time was invested in the development of the questionnaire, in the belief that research findings are of little value unless the means through which they are generated are sound. First, I reviewed the literature on curriculum (for example Zhong Yongwei, Chen Sihui and Cai Zhaohui, 2016) in order to find out the general items that should be investigated about curriculum. One final source of guidance was the research methods literature, where much advice is available on how to improve the design of

questionnaires (Qin Xiaoqing, 2009).

A version of the questionnaire was piloted with 25 students in Class 2015. The analysis of these students' responses and suggestions led to considerable further revision; some questionnaire items were deleted, others reworded, and there were also cases where, while the question remained unchanged, the options for answering it were revised. The final version of the questionnaire had four sections. The first three sections (professional knowledge and ability, teacher education knowledge and practical skill, and the cultivation of new curriculum reform consciousness) contained 34 Likert Scale items addressing the key knowledge or ability relevant to curriculum and which students responded to on a five-point scale of agreement. The final section collected background information about the participants.

In the follow-up interview, interviewees were chosen using stratified random sampling, for selection are represented in the same proportions as they are in the larger group the sample comes from. This makes the sample more representative of the larger group. Thus, 10 people are chosen in total from the six classes respectively. The purpose of the interviews was to explore in more detail issues addressed in the questionnaire. The interviews were then analyzed qualitatively in combination with the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire.

4.3 Data Collection

The pilot test was conducted in class 2015, which showed high reliability with coefficient 0.881. Being revised and improved technically, it began to conduct formal survey on the six classes of English Majors. In this study, a total of 150 questionnaires were issued, 118 were recovered, of which valid questionnaires were 116, thus the recovery rate was 78.7% and the effective rate is 98.3%. For the data reflected in the effective questionnaires, the paper used SPSS16.0 for processing.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Students' overall impression on the curriculum

As can be seen from the data in the Table 5.1, the mean is greater than 3 ($M=3.82$), which indicates that the students on the whole are satisfied with the current curriculum setting. Whether it is professional knowledge and ability, educational knowledge and skills, or new curriculum reform consciousness, students show a somewhat affirmative attitude. It is a powerful proof of the certain reasonableness and scientific nature of the current curriculum for the English majors of the ETTP of CWNU. This phenomenon is to some extent well confirmed its realization of the training goal that is to cultivate outstanding educators in the field of basic education who have advanced modern education concepts, solid professional knowledge, strong teaching and research capabilities, advanced teaching method skills, strong educational innovation ability etc.

Table 5.1 Students' Overall Satisfaction

	Three Dimensions		
	M	N	SD
Satisfaction Degree	3.82	34	0.32

5.2 Comparative Analysis of Satisfaction Between Undergraduates and Graduates

Among the 116 valid questionnaires, 53 of which are from the undergraduates, and the left are from the graduates. To distinguish between the undergraduates and graduates, an independent sample t-test for different groups was made at the same time. Table 5.2 shows that the satisfaction degree of undergraduates is significantly different from that of graduates ($t(114)=-3.788$, $p<0.05$). Inspections of the two group means indicate that the average satisfaction degree of graduates (134.62) is significantly higher than that of undergraduates (124.02). The difference between the means is 10.06 points on a 170-point test.

Table 5.2 Comparison of Overall Satisfaction Degree between Undergraduates and Graduates

Undergraduates		Graduates		MD	t(114)
(n=53)		(n=63)			
M	SD	M	SD		
Satisfaction					
Degree	124.02	14.64	134.62	15.32	-10.6-3.788*

* $p<0.05$

In response to this phenomenon, the post-questionnaire interview specifically addressed this issue. According to the an graduate surnamed Pan who have worked as an English teacher for 4 years, "Well, I think when we are still at school, we didn't realize the practicality of studying those courses, but when work we does. Another student who have 3 years' teaching experience added, "Before stepping into society, we were sense of scared and often thought that we were not so excellent and not well-prepared, but actually it's not the case. We are often better than we have thought. Hahahaha". This also reflects the success of the current curriculum setting from another perspective.

Moreover, this result is also closely related the graduates' working experience or experience of further study, during which process their own knowledge and capabilities get improved, especially teaching skills and related teaching ideas and theoretical knowledge. Students who have already worked feel more profound. They point out that the curriculum learning in the school has a good guiding role for their work, which also makes it easier for them to find a satisfactory job after graduation. It is just a change in their identity --- students become teachers that makes them more serious and diligent in order not to mislead their students. Furthermore, their practical teaching experience has greatly improved their teacher training skills. This result may seem not so relevant to the curriculum setting, but it does have important enlightening effect on our curriculum reform.

5.3 Comparison Between Undergraduates and Graduates Among Three Categories of Curriculum

From what being analyzed above we know that a conspicuous difference exists between undergraduates and graduates' overall satisfaction towards to the current curriculum. But do they show a significant difference among different dimensions? To find evidence for this speculation, an inferred variance analysis between groups was performed (Table 5.3.1), which shows there does exist a significant difference between groups. Then a 2×3 between subjects ANOVA was conducted with the satisfaction degree as the dependent variable and the types of participants (undergraduates/graduates) and the three aspects of curriculum (proficient knowledge and ability/teaching knowledge and skills/cultivation of new curriculum reform awareness) as the independent variables (Table 5.3.2). The results indicate that there is only a significant main difference existing between the undergraduates' contentment in professional knowledge and ability and the graduates' contentment in knowledge and ability of teacher education ($p=0.014<0.05$). Overall, the graduates' satisfaction degree is substantially higher than that of undergraduates in every aspect (Table. 5.3.2), from which the sequence of satisfaction of those six groups can be drew (graduates (D2)> graduates (D3)> graduates (D1)> undergraduates (D2)> undergraduates (D3)> undergraduates (D1)). Graduates and undergraduates show surprisingly consistent satisfaction with the three dimensions of the curriculum. This result indicates that the current curriculum set for English majors achieve a good effect in cultivating the teaching skills of pre-service English teachers. Nervelessness, both undergraduates and graduates show a relative low contentment towards proficient knowledge, and this point deserves deep thinking.

Table 5.3.1 Inferred Variance Analysis Between Groups

	F	P
	(5, 62)	
Between Groups	3.391	0.009

* $p<0.05$

Table 5.3.2 Comparison of Undergraduates' and Graduates' Satisfaction in Different Dimensions

Undergraduates (n = 53)			Graduates (n = 63)									
Dimension1		Dimension2		Dimension3		Dimension1		Dimension2		Dimension3		
(n = 11)		(n = 16)		(n = 7)		(n = 11)		(n = 16)		(n = 7)		
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Satisfaction												
Degree	3.55	0.21	3.72	0.30	3.64	0.18	3.87	0.31	4.01	0.46	3.98	0.41

To figure out the deep causes for this phenomenon, related questions are designed in the interview. A student surnamed Yang said, "Maybe I think the order of the arrangement of the courses accounts for part of the reason. For example, it is rather hard for freshmen to study the Lexicology and An Introduction to the Society and Culture of Major English-speaking Countries". Student Li added,

“Perhaps it is related to the teaching method of our teachers. They focus more on knowledge and strategy than ability”. Another interviewee Shen said “ it is difficult for students to internalize knowledge at one time due to the profound content but lack of enough class hours, such as the courses like British and American Culture, Linguistics etc. Often once we have passed the final exam, we have little chance to touch it again”. Also as an English major, the author myself think that an indispensable reason is the lack of practice, resulting in forgetfulness of knowledge.

6. Conclusion, Limitations and Suggestions for further research

The pilot ETTP on English Majors in CWNU has been carried out for several years, but whether its cultivation program fulfills students’ expectation is unknown. This study mainly makes an exploration on the current curriculum in order to propose some useful suggestions for related departments for a consideration.

Firstly, the majority of students are partially satisfied with the cultivation of knowledge and ability of the current curriculum, especially in the aspect of teacher education. Secondly, by the analysis of the data from the questionnaire and follow-up interview, some existing problems are being exposed. In both undergraduates’ and graduates’ opinion, the satisfaction of professional knowledge and ability is relatively low compared with other two aspects. Thirdly, when it comes to the optimization of the program, most pre-service teachers hold the belief that there is room for the improvement such as the teaching methods, curriculum structure, order and monitoring on some practical courses.

Curriculum setting is a large project, which not only related to the students but also related to the teachers, the facilities of school, institutions, and so on. There for it is rather difficult to study it in details due to the limited resources and limited abilities of the author. In addition, the study of curriculum can from different angles such as the teaching materials, teaching content, the way of assessment etc. The author just focuses on one aspect. And many other deficiencies exists in this paper, for example superficial study on theories, pale suggestions for curriculum setting, the incomplete data collection due to various reasons.

For further study, several aspects need to pay attention to. First, it is advisable for further research to cover more parties related to this cultivation model such as the teachers and the administrative officers who are in charge of this model. Second, the research focus can be more narrow down to a special aspect. Third, the sample size of the research needs to be enlarged. More participants should be engaged in this survey to expand the scope of the research subjects.

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