

EFL Teacher's Integrated Key Competency Cultivation Mode in Western Rural Areas from the Socio-Cognitive Perspective

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Abstract

Teachers' professional development is a continual and dynamic process, in which key competency cultivation is the core. This essay probes into key competencies that EFL teachers in western rural areas should be entitled with, including language knowledge techniques, English course knowledge, teaching cognition ability, teaching planning ability, teaching performance ability, teaching evaluation ability, teaching research ability and humanity literacy. The focus of this essay is the construction of EFL teacher's key competency cultivation system based on the theoretical construction of teacher's competency cultivation at home and abroad, on the background of new curriculum standard background, guided by socio-cognitive teacher's view. Based on this, an integrated cultivation mode cooperated by the government, universities and high schools is put forward, which is a curriculum system infused with pre- and after-service, securing the cultivation process interacted by practice and inner-reflections.

Keywords: EFL teacher, key competency, integrated cultivation, socio-cognitive perspective

1. Introduction

Scholars at home and abroad commonly refer to seven types of teacher's knowledge by Shulman (1987), which consist of course knowledge, regular pedagogy knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge about students and student's characteristics, educational environmental knowledge, educational targets, purposes, values and philosophical and historical background information. Gang Han (2011) constructed course knowledge, theoretical knowledge, strategy knowledge and educational knowledge from three functional angles of being narrative, programming and strategic. He noted that the strategic knowledge resulting from personal practical experiences can influence actual teaching performances more directly. Dingfang Shu and Zhixiang Zhuang (1996) held that the professional competency is a comprehensive performance of knowledge, ability and personal quality and an EFL teacher should be equipped with sound professional knowledge and abilities, satisfactory teaching organizational abilities and educational enforcement abilities, high humanity literacy, desirable character, systematic modern linguistic knowledge, theoretical EFL acquisition knowledge and pedagogy knowledge. Richards (2011) held that an EFL teacher should be equipped with six professional competencies, including teaching theories, teaching and communication skills, teaching inferences, decision-making ability, course expertise, social, cultural and professional background knowledge. He also held that EFL teacher's education is rooted not only in course knowledge and curriculum knowledge, but also in the teacher's own teaching understanding and teaching beliefs. Yian Wu (2005), by empirical studies toward EFL teachers, found that excellent college EFL teachers are commonly equipped with satisfactory course teaching ability, EFL teaching view, EFL teacher profession view, professional morale, EFL teacher development view. Among them, according to him, EFL teacher development view agrees with the teaching understanding and teaching beliefs put forward by Richards (2011). The teacher profession view and professional morale indicate that humanity literacy is included in EFL teacher professional competencies.

The above views are only targeted at primary school EFL teachers, rather than high school EFL teachers. Towards that goal, Yafu Gong (2011) defined key competencies including linguistic literacy, linguistic knowledge, teaching methods, learning process, learner, curriculum, teaching process, evaluation, assessment, education technique, social culture and mentality cognition from such teaching elements as process, routes, activity, technique, environment and cognition. Jiafeng Wang (2012) summarized seven competency modes of content, processing, principle, technique, adjustment, motive and condition. Wu & Wang (2015) noted, after an investigation of high school EFL teachers in Taiwan, how to apply new educational techniques should be the focus of teacher's education. It can be seen that EFL

teacher's professional competency researches are gradually stepping into a deeper phase, from static descriptive phase into a dynamic deconstructed one, from a single mode of teacher's knowledge analysis into a multidimensional competency systematic construction.

2. EFL Teacher's Key Competency Cultivation on the New Curriculum Standard Background

English Curriculum Standard in Compulsory Education (National Ministry, 2012) regulated that school English curriculums have double features of being both humanity and acting as a tool. Teachers should face all students, care for all their individual differences, adopt multiple teaching activities of listening, acting, speaking, singing, playing, performing, reading, writing and watching, create as many opportunities for students as possible to apply languages in actual language contexts, to help students to discover linguistic rules, master language knowledge and skills gradually, form effective learning strategies, develop self learning abilities and make foundations for further English study and future development in the processes of experiences, practices, involvement and explorations. Therefore, EFL teacher's key competencies should be inclusive of sound linguistic knowledge techniques, adequate English course knowledge, proficient English teaching abilities and researching abilities. Targeting at actual school EFL teaching needs, the author analyzed connotations of key competencies. Please refer to table 1.

Table 1. EFL Teacher's Key Competencies and Connotations

Competency Modes ^o	Connotations ^o
Language Knowledge Techniques ^o	English phonetic, morphological, syntactical and pragmatic knowledge, English listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation abilities and comprehensive application abilities ^o
English Course Knowledge ^o	English country's social and cultural knowledge, Linguistic knowledge, second language acquisition knowledge, English-speaking country's children's literary knowledge ^o
Teaching Cognition Ability ^o	Cognition of Education policy, common teaching pedagogy and psychology, modern education techniques, EFL teacher's professional connotations, cognition of English development and reforms, cognition of English teaching guidelines and curriculum standards, cognition of different teaching genres and methods, teaching strategies, English curriculum teaching resources, English evaluations ^o
Teaching Design Abilities ^o	Teaching planning ability, integration and innovation of teaching resources, teaching goal design ability, teaching activity design ability, ability to master teaching focus, difficulty and to allocate teaching time, teaching <u>powerpoint</u> design ability, teaching tool design ability, student extracurricular English learning guidance and management ability, English level evaluation tool design ability ^o
Teaching Manipulation Ability ^o	English expression and presentation ability, class management and teaching activity organization, enlightening teaching ability, guiding students to do self-study ability, class response ability, class decision-making ability, music ability, art ability, game organization, teaching tool making ability, teaching monitoring ability, modern education technique application ability ^o
Teaching Evaluation Ability ^o	Overall evaluation ability towards students' study process and results, evaluations towards students' intelligence type, characteristic, study style, test paper design, test results, teaching self-reflection and peer-review abilities ^o
Teaching and Researching Ability ^o	Research topic seeking ability, research process design ability, document consulting ability, corpus collection and analysis ability, academic regulation ability, application ability from research results into practice, cooperative research ability, research promotion ability ^o
Humanity Literacy ^o	Cultural deposits, professional morals, teamwork, professional ideals ^o

Among the above eight competency modes, linguistic techniques, English course knowledge and humanity literary are the focus and main content of English teaching, and also the necessary prerequisites of EFL teacher's teaching ability development and teaching work. Teaching cognition is the theoretical guidance of teaching designs. Teaching designs are the concrete planning of teaching manipulations, which are the outer manifestation of teaching designs. Teaching evaluations are observing reflections of teaching knowledge, teaching design and teaching manipulation. All-round high school EFL teacher's professional competencies are organic infusion of the above all knowledge, abilities and attitudes. Based on the comprehensive features of competencies, high school EFL teacher's key competency cultivation can desirably take an integrated approach.

3. Integrated Cultivation Mode of EFL Teacher's Key Competencies in Western Rural Areas

Cognitive psychology stresses learner's individual understanding and constructions in the learning process, and that teaching is a teacher's individual interpretation of the teaching practice based on his own experience contexts and environments (Freeman 2002; Billett 2014). The social culture theory holds that effective study comes from interaction among people with different knowledge and expertise, and knowledge is mutually constructed by people

in the process of social participation, and learning is a dynamic process of mutual interactions among teachers, students, tasks and environments. The social cognitive teacher's education view, absorbing the above two theories, notes that teacher's learning is the result of his professional work and social interaction, taking place in the specific social cultural background of a teacher's career, with features of being dynamic, interactive, generative and social (Thorne 2005). Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002) pointed out that the teacher's development is manifested in personal area (teacher's belief), exterior area (exterior information), practical area (professional experiment) and result area (prominent effect), in which practice and reflections are the bridges to connect. Borko *et al.* (2010) holds that teacher's education should focus on how to create a teacher-centered cooperative and researching mode in the long term, to help them acquire professional knowledge they need in their own teaching scenario.

In recent years, EFL teacher's professional development has switched from teacher's act to why teachers teach. The teacher education modes have accordingly switched from imitational practicing mode, applied scientific mode of applying theories into practice, internalizing personal interior and exterior input into personal practical and reinforcement reflection mode of one's knowledge and experience (Potocka 2011; Fehring & Rodrigues 2014). The author holds that the key competency cultivation of high school EFL teachers needs to be supported by an integrated cultivation mode mixed in integrated pre and after-service curriculum system, aided by an integrated cultivation process interacted by practice and inner reflection, secured by an integrated cultivation mode cooperated by the government, college and the high school. The inter-relational mode can interpret the above cooperative efforts from three angles. Integrated cultivation efforts of EFL teacher's key competencies and inter-relationships can be shown in Figure 1.

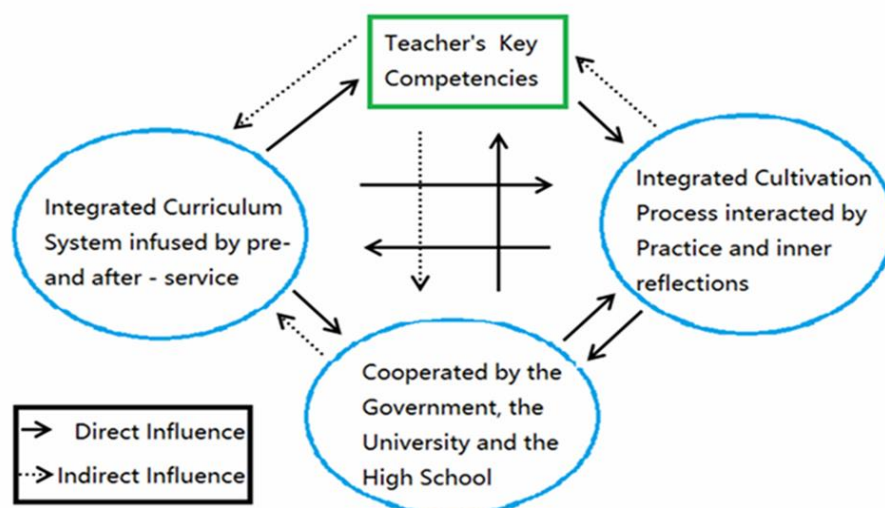


Figure 1. Integrated Cultivation Efforts of EFL Teacher's Key Competencies and Inter-relationship

In Figure 1, the curriculum determines the overall width of learning content, influencing teacher's key competency scope; the cultivation process determines the interaction of teacher's professional development paths, influencing the depth of teacher's competencies; the cultivation modes determine the supporting degree of developmental environment, influencing the effects of key competencies. The status quo also influences interaction degree directly, and indirectly influences enforcement quality of the curriculum system as well as the cooperation degree of cultivation modes. The following discusses concrete measures on the integrated cultivation of teacher's key competencies.

3.1 Integrated Curriculum System in Pre- and After-Service

Teacher's professional development is a lifelong and voluntary growing process of teachers (Crandall 2000), featuring long-term, periodic and generative. Regarding high school EFL teacher's education, the practical teaching should be a bridge, an integrated curriculum system in pre- and after-vocation should be constructed, and immersed curriculum environment from teaching behaviors through related theories to further teaching behaviors should be constructed, teacher's teaching decision-making abilities of how to do it in different teaching environments, what

else can be done in the same teaching environment should be stimulated and prompted. Ultimately, high school EFL teacher's educational teaching problems and continual professional competencies as well as related abilities can be acquired. Combined with high school EFL teacher's key competencies in table 1, the author constructed a high school EFL teacher's integrated curriculum system in table 2. Please refer to table 2.

Table 2. EFL Teacher's Integrated Education Curriculum System

Competency Modes	Concrete Courses
Language Knowledge Techniques	English phonetics, English Grammar, English Audio-visual speaking course, English Reading and Writing, English translation, Comprehensive English, Mandarin Chinese
English Course Knowledge	English country's social and cultural knowledge, Introduction to English linguistics, Second language acquisition, English country's literature (children's literature)
Teaching Cognition Ability	Educational policies and rules, pedagogy (children), psychology (children), modern education techniques, EFL education psychology, English curriculums and pedagogy, English curriculum standards in compulsory education, EFL evaluation, Use and development of high school EFL teaching multimedia courseware design, High school English teacher's class discourse, art, music, performance, High school EFL teaching practice, Teaching comments and different structures in the same class of high school EFL class, Education research methods, High school EFL teaching research practice
Teaching Design Abilities	
Teaching Manipulation Ability	
Teaching Evaluation Ability	
Teaching and Researching Ability	
Humanity Literacy	Education philosophy, Chinese culture, Western culture, Educational thought lectures of excellent teachers, Moral ethics, Teamwork cooperation, Vocational ideal lectures

The teacher education curriculums have some concern on the organic combination of English course competencies, education teaching competencies, teaching practice abilities and professional development abilities, technique curriculums, practice curriculums and culture curriculums, achieving the unity of being scientific and educational, being academic and teaching, course profession techniques and educational profession techniques. Regarding English course professional competencies, adequate language technique curriculums and course professional curriculums can be set up to help teachers acquire sound language knowledge, language techniques, rich course knowledge, communicational abilities and scientific teaching knowledge.

With regard to education professional competency cultivation, educational theories and teaching practices should be infused to a deep degree, humanity literacy cultivation and basic teaching skills can support each other. Teaching resource reconstruction and multimedia courseware can be important content of basic teaching skills and the English curriculum and teaching methodology can be divided into two phases. Before teaching practice, student teachers study professional knowledge and educational knowledge, and gradually form initial teaching cognition ability and teaching design ability. During the practice, student teachers carry out teaching designs, teaching practice, teaching evaluation and teaching research activities in open vocational settings. They can keep on recording teaching experiences by keeping teaching logs, educational accounts and share them with peer teachers. After teaching practice, with teaching events in practice as research topics, workshops, featuring "heterogeneous forms for the same subject", are cooperation platforms to cultivate teaching beliefs and teaching wisdoms.

With regard to professional teaching competencies, firstly, specific requirements of high school phase are put forward, targeting at general education curriculums. Meanwhile, music, art and performance curriculums are set up to help teachers to cultivate overall practice abilities such as listening, acting, speaking, singing, performing, reading, writing, audio-visual skills. Furthermore, necessary teaching research training can be carried out to promote teacher's continual professional development and self-style development abilities.

3.2 Integrated Cultivation Process Interacted by Practice and Self-Reflections

The socio-cognitive education view holds that exterior knowledge instillation is ineffective; while truly effective education should be founded on students' understanding, and educationalists should prepare study environments rich in personal significance so that students can construct knowledge by themselves in mutual communications with others (Johnson 2009). Specific and quiet teaching behaviors can't be infused into teacher's knowledge and behavioral systems by means of formal lecturing and other's direct teaching behaviors. Teachers' personal language

learning experiences, education experiences, teaching practices can be formed into their knowledge and beliefs on teaching and studying in specific teaching environment and they can support teachers' own teaching behaviors (Borg 2006). The knowledge from teacher's self-reflections can come from their personal direct experience, and can also be other's mentality input from practice recognition. However, the knowledge needs to be infused into teacher's personal active reflection cycling before being internalized and absorbed.

The inner-reflection study platform should be set up for teachers by high school EFL teacher education. On the one hand, double-professionally-titled teacher teams can be cultivated, so that the teacher's pre-service training can be initiated in high school EFL teaching vocational scenarios appropriately. On the other hand, expert teachers can be cultivated into behavioral tutors to inherit high school EFL teacher's sound and all-round competencies to student teachers. Only in this way can student teachers form behavioral theories by behavioral reflections and can they gradually understand the essence and connotations of English curriculums, actual connotations of teaching and learning concepts in specific high school English class needs and gradually know how to apply course knowledge and teaching theories into class teaching needs as well as how to analyze, reflect on, summarize and explain teaching behaviors from correct education pedagogical concepts. Then, teachers can infuse their own English course knowledge, English teaching knowledge and teaching practice into teaching beliefs, so that they can construct a sound and all-round high school English course teaching knowledge system and form excellent high school EFL teaching understanding, decision-making and management abilities to acquire continual teaching autonomous development ability and finally achieve nimble and open-minded professional selves.

3.3 Integrated Cultivation Mode Cooperated by the Government, Universities and Schools

The integrated cultivation mode cooperated by the government, universities and high schools is a curriculum system infused with pre- and after-service, securing the cultivation process interacted by practice and inner-reflections. Firstly, on pre-service education phase, a strict basic teaching skill assessment system should be enforced, including mandarin and oral expressions, English phonetics, Chinese calligraphy, English calligraphy, multi-media courseware design and teaching resource construction. Only with basic teaching abilities, teachers can have access to the vocational scenarios. Secondly, the double-professionally-titled tutor modes cooperated by universities and high schools can promote pre-service cultivation targets, practice and malleability. Student teachers do visits to different schools irregularly in first and second years of their college studies, investigating high school EFL teacher's key professional competencies. From the third year of their studies, student teachers regularly do teaching practices in a curriculum and carry out teaching action researches so as to play seamless roles, switching from learning currently to teaching in future by means of learning in acting and acting in learning. Thirdly, on the after-service education phase, the advantage of theoretical teaching and researches of universities can be made most of to construct a diversified, dimensional, individual and menu sized in-service curriculum system, providing in-service teachers with supplementary education and developmental education by concentrated training and website trainings.

In order to secure English teacher's cultivation measures to be enforced, the government should try to set up high school English EFL teacher's education national standards and quality monitoring system as soon as possible, to fasten the paces of constructing multimodal and open after-service research and study platforms and put credits of teachers into their lifelong development assessment network, to rationally construct professional teacher development communities by top teachers at different levels so as to create platforms for teachers at different stages to discuss problems and communicate experiences. The government should also make wise decisions timely to guide high school teachers from being adapted to curriculum reforms to new teachers with modern education conceptions and optimized and expert knowledge.

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