

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Shifting Perspectives of the English Curriculum in the Compulsory Education in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Education has been playing an invisible role to take the responsibility for cultivating the next generation in a society. Especially, its curriculum has further far-reaching influence on not only a nation's competitiveness but also the allocation of education resources. Along with the phenomena of Global Village, English as a Lingua Franca enters different countries to suggest its special position. It has turned into a similar case in Taiwan since the Government adopted and implemented some new educational policies. It is also the reason why this paper is aimed at looking into the language curriculum in the compulsory education in the hope of peering at the inter-action between the domestic and global language education through the historical context. However, it is not the case like human being for people to perceive the abstract and inconcrete power relations. In other words, it means the difficulty will be the process of how to make the invisible vagueness comprehensible. Further speaking, it would be a challenge for a researcher to turn the power allocation into concrete comprehensible description between the lines. Adhere; some of the readers could be the true believers with this statement, but some may not.

Keywords: compulsory education, English curriculum, education policy, historical context

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INTRODUCTION

The Historical Transition of English Curriculum

A variety of languages have been playing an important role in a society that connect different group of peoples and enable them to come across the barrier of communication for mutual understandings. Without any hesitation it is worthy of paying much attention on this language issue when people are concerning about the educational policies that language would be a part of it. It is the similar case in Taiwan that the government started to concern about this issue how to take an appropriate interaction with the inevitable globalized trend. Chan (2004) addressed such a historical development that the Taiwan's government engaged in the educational reform in the hope of promoting the national competitiveness and the English teaching would be one of the new members in Grade 1-9 Curriculum.

With the accumulation of influence of internationalized English it was to catch more and more countries' attentions for its eye-catching existence that engaged in catching up with the predictable development in order to either maintain or promote their national competitiveness. Corson (1999) echoed this language context that for most everyday human purposes, power is exerted through verbal channels: Language is the vehicle for identifying, manipulating, and changing power relations between people. To some degree, it is noted that some of them started to adopt English as a language course for developing their citizens' international perspectives to strengthen the international connectivity for a long term. It is absolutely an unexceptional challenge for Taiwan to either follow or take a reaction that would be forged one of the national policies to propel the enactment of Grade 1-9 Curriculum in favor of the fields of both the elementary and junior high schoolings.

In the year of 2000, Minister of Education in Taiwan followed the global trend and public will to adjust the curriculum goals that adopted English as a formal language course to be a part of the compulsory educational system along with Mandarin. Ke (2016) disclosed the curricular intervention that the latest change involves the rise of English as an international language as countries around the world have gradually started to include English as a compulsory education. Under this circumstance, English started to play a role in elementary schooling that young generation were about to learn it when they become the 5th graders. In terms of their language learning area, they were obliged to build up a new unfamiliar language system from monolingual to bilingual schooling that offered them guidance toward the outside world.

The English Teaching Specialists for the New Curriculum

It is a very truth that a successful educational system must need a sound well-planned structure to support the entire requirement for satisfying its domestic expectation toward the future national competitiveness. In a sense, either the customized curriculum or abundant professional manpower would be a must-to-do option for a country to make a well preparation. One of the famous curriculum scholars, Tyler, (1979) mentioned the importance of objectives in a curriculum that objectives concentrating on specific knowledge are more attainable and the results more permanent when there are opportunities for this knowledge to be used in the daily lives of the students. Meanwhile, it would be a feasibly thoughtful proposal before implementing an upcoming language policy to support a subsequent curriculum that must concern its domestic language context. Adhere; here come two sections for observing the interaction between two streams of workforce—the foreign teachers and the Taiwanese teachers—with the deliberation.

THE RECRUITMENT OF FOREIGN TEACHERS

It is an undeniable truth for people in Taiwan that English has been an unfamiliar bystander to stay away from Taiwanese daily life before the people and government commenced to perceive its potential influence and tried to understand its necessity. It is a matter of fact that native English speakers would be one of the direct sources and possible shortcuts for novice language learners to acquire the new international tongue. The recruitment of native English teachers turned into one of the main national educational policies as a measure to satisfy the abruptness.

Before the implementation of new language policy, there has not been a friendly and unfamiliar language environment for English-speaking users to co-exist with the other vernacular languages in Taiwan. With the straight assistance of either political manipulation or economical stimulus the educational system created the opportunity for the foreign teachers to be capable of seizing their position to join the game. Liao (2004) expounded the recruitment that the enrollment of foreign teachers offers students multiple learning experiences from the perspectives of both global education and multicultural education. These native English speakers, as a perfect target learning model, carried their own culture and judge of value to instruct young generation in Taiwan on the purpose of English oral-speaking. On the other hand, here comes the next section that would talk about the local English teachers' situation.

The Urgent demand of Indigenous Teachers

There had never been a formal and official educational system for English teacher training, except the Mandarin teachers, to satisfy the upcoming shortage of professional manpower in the real educational context until the new revised adaptation of the educational policy for the Grade 1-9 Curriculum [Guidelines]. Referring to the compulsory elementary and junior high schools that all the young participants have neither freedom nor objection but to be instilled, educated and cultivated with well-programmed schooling system in accordance with the Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines. The language teachers, Mandarin only, were strategically designated as a national political agent to perform the task; on the contrary, English was unable to do the same things as Mandarin before the curriculum was revised.

In light of the original teacher training system for the compulsory education, there had been a long history and operation mechanism for language teachers' cultivation to coordinate with both the national monolingual policy and the purpose of learning Mandarin. Jong (2004) stated that curriculum could be the interaction and competition among different interest groups in a society based on different value and tradition systems. The immediate shortage of professional manpower for English teachers was given the authority to adopt various recruitment measures in the name of serving the Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines. Under this circumstance, it was noteworthy that the interaction between curriculum and English was somehow a flowing correspondence to make one non-existent language course visible on spot.

The Expanding Role of English in Curriculum

When it comes to the compulsory educational system, a curriculum has been one of the most important issues for parents, students, policymakers and administrators as the stakeholders to make a thorough

enquiry. Meanwhile, it would be a controversial topic for many people to have the endless discussion or argument due to a variety of either different understandings or dissimilar standpoints to define the term “curriculum”. To some degree, curriculum would be the specific lessons with the academic content in schooling for learners either to absorb from the knowledge and skills or to be evaluated how much they learned. Ager (2001) stated that: The national curriculum and the political agenda underlying its introduction and contents originated in a political ideology, clearly expounded and openly stated as the aim of government. Insofar as language was concerned, the aim was to ensure that standard English was taught to all children, while their own social dialects or languages other than English were kept out of mainstream education. The general motive was therefore the implementation of a political agenda aimed at developing a particular type of society. In this respect, the revised educational policy had empowered the Compulsory Educational Curriculum as a higher guidance to obtain more possible space for English as an unfamiliar foreign tongue and its coexistence in the schooling system. For the next two sections, the reallocation of subjects and after-school-learning would be the issues for further statements.

The Reallocation of Various Subjects

English had never been authorized to acquire its legitimacy in the compulsory educational system in Taiwan until the National Language Committee commenced to pay their attention on it. It had been a long time for Mandarin both to play a mono-drama alone and maintain its unique privilege in securing the abundant resources and powerful assistance through the curricular arrangement. Mao (2008) stated the historical reform movement that Taiwan’s curriculum reforms in the 1990s could be seen as part of identity construction process in which various social groups fought with the state to set new social and political boundaries and reestablish some certainty into

Taiwan’s social fabric. As the time goes, the subject, English, broke the original roles of Mandarin as the monolingual for learning and turned over a new leaf with the in-visible prevailing global trend and visible political intervention in the curriculum his-tory.

It is a thought-provoking question for people in Taiwan that the reallocation of subjects in compulsory educational schooling in cause of the emergence of English as prevailing global tongue to seduce the non-English-speaking countries into creating a co-existence space. With the assistance of historical contextual repositioning, the compulsory educational curriculum turned itself into lucky charm for English itself to pave the way for its future development. By chance of striving for its academic status, the curriculum was not only a scheme in favor of structuralizing the course patterns but also an authority in the interest of facilitating the flexible power allocation.

The Prosperity of After-Schooling Learning

It is a very truth for parents, children and teachers when one new subject was put in the Grade 1-9 Curriculum that means it would turn out to be one of the learning areas on the purpose of passing the Academic Attainment Testing: Comprehensive Assessment Program for Junior High School Students annually held by Minister of Education. During that time, a variety of national policies were enacted to either emphasize the global influence of Lingua Franca or remind the unelectable coexistence of invisible soft power. Joseph (2004) mentioned the globalized influence that the spread of English is held to be connected with ‘globalization’, a sort of economic imperialism that entails not just linguistic homogenization but cultural leveling as well. In other words, it was a public announcement for people to restate the indirect globalized impact with the inevitability that transformed a breeding bed for English learning in the society.

A greenhouse in favor of English-learning was a perfect lucky charm for a number of the proponents to introduce the globalized language movement into Taiwan that created a variety of forms of after-school learning programs to offer people of all ages for language acquisition. Globalization, National Competitiveness, English Capabil-ity and Career Development were pushed forward in public to transform a nationwide trend even a popularized fad to educate people how important the global tongue was. Kliebard (2004) emphasized that the curriculum for new education needed to be ex-panded far beyond the traditional subjects..., and curriculum differentiation became a necessary concomitant to that expansion. In the drive to implement such a reform, the mental-measurement movement performed a vital legitimating function. Further speaking, it was obviously that a large number of parents sent their children to take part in the English course in the cram school in order to acquire the language capabil-ity for enhancing their individual future competitiveness.

Reshaping the Self-Identity with Curriculum Reform

A curriculum has been playing an unobtrusive role in the issue of shaping the recognition toward self-identity in the compulsory educational system that people would pay much more attention on its controversial national policies with regard to the public exposure. Kliebard (1992) mentioned that curriculum metaphors provide a language or explanation which permit us to “see” things that otherwise

might not be visible to the naked eye...metaphors are not identical to theories as we know them in the curriculum field, they provide the seed from which theory may take root...can be nurtured into theories to the extent that they serve certain functions. In terms of the national language policy in favor of globalization, the government in Taiwan engaged in creating a possible atmosphere of the English-speaking-friendly from the original context of the non-English-using.

When it comes to the [compulsory] educational system, such a kind of topic would be a public issue arousing controversy that various believers express their points of view with either contrast or similar recognitions. Ahead of the publication of revised Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines, the young generation's recognition of language acquisition was clear and simple to construct a pure monolingual system with a particular ideology toward national unity under the guidance of educational policies. The role of revised curriculum functioned as an invisible representative to open a new window toward the whole world; on one hand the curriculum was authorized to re-form the original curriculum structures in favor of the reallocation of both Mandarin and English, and on the other hand it was obliged to carry the political over-tones to re-position the compulsory educational curriculum.

In such a way that means the curriculum development was merely not an educational movement for different requirements, to be more precisely, it would be an overall planning of reshaping a new self-identity for the next young generation in response to the globalized ever-changing trend.

CONCLUSION

National educational policies have been playing either an active role to create a beneficial condition or an aggressive carrier to impose a powerful implementation in order to satisfy a specific purpose behind. Yang (2015) mentioned that curriculum would be changing for the conditions of politics and society to arouse the continuous occurrence of curriculum fashion without consciousness. In other words, the Grade 1-9 Curriculum was obliged to be revised and implemented by the invisible globalized trend that compelled Taiwan's compulsory education to move forward. This lesson allows the understandings clues from the past curriculum that people should concern much more about the current globalized trend as global citizen. In terms of the national language educational policy as Tyler's sayings in 1979 that education is expected to bring about some changes in the students and they also indicate in general the kinds of changes with which the educational program is expected to deal. It reminded us of historical alteration of the English curriculum that straight implementation of Grade 1-9 Curriculum Guidelines was to not only a means to instruct people but also an inclination to induce them to construct the prevailing globalized tongue coexisted in Taiwan's compulsory education. The English curriculum would be an invisible carrier with specific connotation to indicate people what they should concern more about when it comes to the linearity of curricular movement.

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