

# **Current Situation and Reflection on Junior Middle School English Teaching and Learning in Lhasa of Tibet**

**Xianjun Tan**

(Corresponding Author)

Sichuan University of Science and Engineering

International Cooperation and Exchange Office

Zigong, China - 643000

Email: tanxianjun@aliyun.com

**Xueqin Jiang**

Sichuan University of Science and Engineering

School of Foreign Languages

Zigong, China - 643000

Email:512133501@qq.com

(Received: 14-6-13 / Accepted: 22-7-13)

## **Abstract**

Under the background of go-west campaign in China, more college students in China are willing to devote themselves to supporting the development and construction of the western region. This essay probes into the current situation of junior middle school English teaching and learning in Tibetan capital Lhasa and reflects on it, which aims to know about the current situation and conducts the fundamental research for improving the construction of western development.

**Keywords:** Lhasa, Junior Middle School English Teaching and Learning, Current Situation.

## **1. Introduction**

Language education is an important political project, which is the most basic work of quality-oriented education in teaching and the priority for improving the all-round development in minority areas of China. Junior middle school English teaching and learning plays an important and fundamental role in the whole process of foreign language learning. A solid foundation in junior middle school is essential for the students to conduct the following-up learning. Until now, the research on English teaching and learning in Tibetan area of China is rare in China and abroad and there is no empirical research on the English teaching and learning in Lhasa area. The previous research mainly focused on the rural middle school of Tibet. This essay probes into the current situation of junior middle school English teaching and learning in Tibetan capital Lhasa and reflects on it, which will enlighten the English teaching and learning in other areas of Tibet and be a model for other areas of Tibet.

## **2. Respondents and Methods**

The project team went to Lhasa and conducted the field survey in Lhasa Middle School, Lhasa No.2 Middle School, Lhasa No.3 Middle School, Lhasa No.8 Middle School.

## **3. Current Situation**

### **3.1 Current Situation Concerning Teachers**

Teachers give the English lesson just according to the content of the text books. Most of the English teachers are of Han nationality and female teachers; the proportion of young teachers is high.

The survey indicates that teachers who only use English in their classes account for 38%, teachers who mostly use Chinese in their classes account for 46%, teachers who use three languages (including English, Tibetan language and Chinese) in their classes account for 13%, teachers who mostly use Tibetan language in their classes account for 3%.

During the teaching process, teacher is the core of the classroom teaching and learning. The class which is dominated by teacher's explanation accounts for 41.3%, the class which is composed of teacher's explanation and student exercises accounts for 38.7%, the class in which the time of teacher's explanation is equal to the time of students' exercise accounts for 11.2%, the class which is mostly composed of student exercises accounts for 8.8%.

In terms of homework design, 46% of the teachers mostly give written work and give listening and speaking work as aid, 6% of the teachers give oral communication exercise, 29% of the teachers mostly give listening and speaking work and written work as aid, 9% of the teachers give reading, dictation and recitation work.

Generally speaking, junior middle school English teaching and learning in China is composed of listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to the survey, in terms of listening comprehension teaching, some teachers ask the students to practice listening comprehension after class and the time should be 30 minutes; there is no listening teaching and learning in some schools and the teachers in these schools pay no attention to whether the students really practice listening comprehension, because listening is not included in the examination. In terms of oral English teaching, teachers set up learning groups in the class to practice oral English. The survey found that some teachers had problems in English pronunciation themselves. In terms of reading teaching, teachers asks the students to read in the morning and set apart a special period of time to practice reading comprehension in class. In terms of writing teaching, teachers set topics for the students and the students write compositions in accordance with the requirements of the teacher. Teachers ask the students to write compositions once or twice every week and correct the compositions.

The teachers who were interviewed by the project team pointed out that the English level of Junior One students is various, which brings much inconvenience and obstacles for the teachers and becomes the major difficulty for the teachers. The teachers don't know how to start, which greatly influence the teaching quality and teaching efficiency.

### **3.2 Current Situation Concerning Students**

Students in Lhasa city began to learn English when they are Grade Three students in elementary school. Students in pastoral areas of Tibet began to learn English when they went into junior middle school. The English level of the students is various.

When asked whether they like English, most of the students who were interviewed by the project team answered "yes", because they think it is interesting for them. But they also dislike English because English is very different from their local language and it is difficult for them to grasp Chinese, Tibetan language and English at the same time. Most of the

students of Tibetan nationality find it very difficult to learn English and grasp English, because the pronunciation of English is very similar to the pronunciation of Tibetan language and it is easy for the students to get the two languages confused.

Students have English class three times each week and the class period each time is 45 minutes. The textbook for the students in Lhasa of Tibet is the junior middle school English book published by Hebei education press and the vocabulary of the book is 1200. The students think the vocabulary is very large and it is difficult for them to grasp, the knowledge of grammar is not systematic and there is a shortage of exercise book for the textbook. 52.3% of the students think the textbook is very difficult for them.

### **3.3 Current Situation Concerning External Factors**

In order to have an effective classroom teaching and learning good interaction and cooperation between teachers and students is needed, good social environment and family environment is needed too.

The survey found that the English level of the junior one students being various is mainly due to the following reasons: first, there are already clear differences of English level among Grade Six students in elementary school, which is caused by various factors. Second, the attention to English teaching and learning is different among parents. Parents of the children who live in the city and are good at English pay more attention to English teaching and learning and actively encourage their children to take additional English class. However, most parents don't pay attention to English teaching, seldom supervise the English learning of their children, and let alone ask their children to take additional English class. Parents in pastoral areas of Tibet pay no attention to English teaching and learning of their children. Most parents who are migrant workers going to Lhasa cannot provide a good learning environment for their children. Third, the students enrolled by Lhasa middle school come from different areas. The survey found that the students in these schools include students leaving primary school from pastoral area and from rural areas in the mainland. The structure of students is complicated.

There is no atmosphere of English learning on campus. One doesn't hear the students reading English aloud except in the English class. Even in the English class, tape recorder is still the primary and almost sole auxiliary equipment for the students. Most students don't have the access to multimedia.

## **4. Analysis of the Current Situation and Reflection**

### **4.1 Teachers**

The educational background of English teachers in China's middle school and elementary school has not fully met the demand of the relevant regulations of the country, which is explicitly shown in the educational background of the teachers who responded to the survey. Even if the teachers are graduated from normal universities or normal colleges, not all of them are qualified English teachers due to the problems concerning the training system, training objective and curriculum provision (Xiaotang Cheng, Xiaohui Sun, 2010). There is a fact that pre-service teaching training does not conform to the reality of English teaching and learning in middle school and some teachers who responded to the survey are not English majors and don't receive the relevant pre-service education and training. Therefore, the professional development after becoming an English teacher is even more important for the local English teachers. The development of teachers is the key to implement the concept of life-long education and promote educational reform. The English teachers should be encouraged to improve the educational background and establish the awareness of sustainable development, autonomous learning and life-long learning.

English teachers should be able to give lessons in English freely and conduct interactive communication with students in class after learning and training. Using three languages (including Chinese, Tibetan and English) in class is the objective requirement of ethnic

solidarity, cultural fusion and common prosperity in Tibetan area; grasping the three languages is the inevitable choice of the ethnic minority area to develop economy, culture and education(Quanguo, Liu, Qian Li,2011). Hence, in terms of methodology, local English teachers may increase the proportion of Chinese and English and decrease the proportion of Tibetan in English class if the students come from pastoral area of Tibet, because these students are good at Tibetan but are not so good at Chinese and English. Using three languages in English class is a measure suitable for the conditions in Tibetan area.

## 4.2 Students

The various English levels of the students are a reality in Tibetan area and the fact that Tibetan students think it difficult to learn English is understandable. Response to the reality, local English teachers should pay attention to the feelings of the students and lead the students to appreciate the mainstream culture and foreign cultures and avoid the negative transfer of Tibetan and Chinese to English. In daily life, English teachers should try to find the difficulties of the students (especially the Tibetan students) concerning English pronunciation, English writing etc, make a comparison between the languages and encourage the students to overcome difficulties.

## 4.3 External Environment

The students who come from pastoral areas of Tibet or from rural areas in the mainland don't get active support from their families. The English learning atmosphere is not so good in the local schools and the school is relatively lagging behind in teaching facilities. The external environment mentioned above restricts the English learning of local students. Hence, the local English teachers should try their best to gain the support of the parents and gain the support of the local educational authorities and the public as well. Local English teachers should make full use of the available facilities and try to create English language learning environment. For example, local teachers can put their own hand-painted pictures on the bulletin board to let students learn English in daily life.

## 5. Conclusion

The project team went to Lhasa, conducted the field survey and got to know the current situation of junior middle school English teaching and learning in Tibetan capital Lhasa and reflect on it. The raw material in this essay provides historical material for the English teaching theorists and is of the value of being reused and reprocessed. This essay is a preliminary investigation for the college students in China who are willing to devote themselves to supporting the development and construction of the western region in China as well.

*The research is financed by College Students' Innovation Fund Project of Sichuan University of Science and Engineering (Item number: cx20120801)*

## References

- [1] X. Cheng and X. Sun, Teacher educational and professional development in China: Issues and Challenges, *Foreign Language Teaching in Theory and Practice*, 3(2010), 3-8.
- [2] B. Han, On the English education of elementary and secondary schools in China, *Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 4(2010), 62-64.
- [3] Q. Liu and Q. Li, The exploration of English-centered trilingual teaching mode in China's ethnic minority areas, *Nationalities Research in Qinghai*, 1(2011), 75-78.