

A Study on Problems and Strategies of Curriculum Resources Development and Utilization by Teachers in Rural Junior Middle School: A Case Study of a County of Sichuan Province in China

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Abstract

Curriculum resources are the source for forming curriculum and the essential condition for curriculum implementation, that is to say, meeting the requirements of curriculum activities. The role and value of the curriculum resources can be realized by practitioners' discovery and effective utilization. What's more, teachers are the subject of developing and utilizing curriculum resources, and their quality determines the identification range, development and utilization degree, and benefit level of curriculum resources. This paper regards junior middle school teachers of a county, Sichuan, as the respondents, in which it has already implemented the curriculum reform. In this way, the rural junior middle school teachers' awareness and ability to develop and utilize curriculum resources and the influencing factors can be known from the aspects of teachers' understanding, requirements and the degree of curriculum resources development and utilization. At last, corresponding suggestions will be put forward.

Key words: Teacher; Curriculum resources; Development and utilization

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INTRODUCTION

Main research methods are questionnaire, interview and observation. The respondents of the questionnaire are 220 teachers from 15 junior middle schools of a county, Sichuan. Most of the teachers are between 31 and 45 years old, accounting for 67%; the teachers with the bachelor degree account for 76.4%; the teachers with primary titles and senior titles are 14.9% and 22.4% respectively. The recovery rate of the questionnaire is 95%. Meanwhile the author has observed 20 lessons of all subjects of junior middle school.

1. RESEARCH RESULTS

1.1 Teachers' Awareness of Curriculum Resources

Curriculum resources are the source for forming curriculum and the essential condition for curriculum implementation, which include material resource and conditional resource. The material resource is the direct source of the curriculum, such as knowledge, skills, teaching materials, experience, activity mode, emotional attitude, sense of value, etc.. It also can be divided into predefined resource and non-predefined resource. And the non-predefined resource is generated dynamically. The conditional resource is not the direct source of the curriculum, but to a great extent, it determines the scope and level of the curriculum implementation, such as manpower, materials, facilities, environment, etc.. At the same time, Teachers' awareness of curriculum resources affects the development and utilization of curriculum resources.

The research results show that, regarding the words of "curriculum resources", 78% teachers know them, while 22% don't know much about them. Furthermore,

regarding the contents of curriculum resources, teachers favor the material resource, whose contents give obvious bias to predefined resource. That is to say, teachers are easier to identify the explicit resources and resources directly related to teaching contents, such as teaching materials, multimedia equipment, courseware, network resources, etc.. However, fewer teachers choose implicit or out-of-school resources. The teachers who select the community resources account for 54% and they have low recognition to the natural environment, various folk customs, etc.. When asked about the subject of curriculum resources development, 53.4% of the teachers think the subjects are themselves; 11.8% the education experts; 25.5% the administrative department of education. (Base on interview records)

1.2 Teachers' Understanding of the Significance of Curriculum Resources Development

The research results show that 40.3% of teachers highly agree with the significance of curriculum resources development, while 45.3% basically agree with it. During the interview, some teachers said, "it is necessary to develop curriculum resources for them, and the quality of the class is much better when they add some extra corresponding materials besides teaching materials". While there are different ideas, "the development of curriculum resources doesn't matter, because teachers could teach students to learn before the concept of curriculum resources development comes out. Current situation is that teachers just add some extra-curricular knowledge to students by using multimedia". Due to lack of time and effort, 69.8% of the teachers are unwilling to participate in development and utilization of the school-based curriculum, which is mainly developed with joint efforts of the backbone teachers, teaching researchers and school leaders. Concerning the objective of the development and utilization of curriculum resources, 6.8% of the teachers think that the objective is to stimulate students' study interest; 56.5% to promote the change of teaching and learning styles; 1.2% to enhance teachers' professional development; and 35.5% to improve teaching quality. Teachers center on the teaching, when they choose the contents of curriculum resources. When asked whether teachers will be active in development and utilization of curriculum resources, they said they will search for relevant materials based on teaching condition.

1.3 Teachers' Demand for Curriculum Resources

This study shows teachers' demand for curriculum resources is ever-increasing after the new curriculum reform, but the school often lacks the relevant materials. Thus, some teacher said,

relevant superior departments or school should provide more corresponding resources, like multimedia facility, laboratory, library, etc. so that teachers needn't change teaching contents due to lack of corresponding supporting resources";

"now the school is free to choose the version of the teaching materials and the new version is very different from the old one, but some unfamiliar contents are not suitable for us. What's more, owing to lack of relevant ancillary resources and rare corresponding exercises, it brings the teaching implementation a certain difficulty";

"Usually, teachers search for materials, such as excellent courseware, extra reading materials and cases, etc. through the Internet. It takes time to search for materials by the Internet, but it will cost much more time without good results to prepare the materials by themselves. Besides, what is mentioned above often happens in the schools with good condition, while many teachers in rural schools have no choice but to adopt traditional teaching methods". (base on interview records)

1.4 Teachers' Development and Utilization of Inner School Curriculum Resources

The research results show that 69.5% of the teachers tend to choose the teaching materials, reference books, downloaded materials, attendance of classes to get inner school curriculum resources, while there are few teachers choosing what is dynamically generated during teaching activities. The dynamically generated curriculum resources are the events, which have education value and support the teaching activities. Compared with the static resources, the dynamic resources are difficult to utilize. Thus teachers must discover them in time, or the dynamic resources will disappear promptly. Teachers are more likely to develop and utilize the static resources. However, the classroom observations show that teachers develop and utilize the dynamically generated curriculum resources intentionally or unintentionally, which mainly come from teachers' enlightenment, mistakes of the teachers and students, interaction between them, emergent events, etc.. The classroom observations show that when teachers deal with students' mistakes, 47.8% of teachers guide students into deep thinking from mistakes; 32.9% enlighten students to find the answers by themselves; 15.6% turn to other students to analyze together; 3.7% point out mistakes and give right answers directly. When teachers deal with the emergency of the classroom, 88.2% of teachers make full use of the opportunity to solve problems together with students; 5.6% just give few comments; 3.1% ignore; 3.1% stop hurriedly.

1.5 Teachers' Development and Utilization of Out-Of-School Curriculum Resources

Firstly, teachers develop and utilize the parents resources. The ratio of teachers' understanding of the parents' occupations is as follows: 3.7% know them well; 42.2% know most of them; 40.4% know a little; 13.7% have no idea. Teachers think that 15.5% members of parents committee often offer the assistance; 35.4% sometimes; 29.2% hardly; 19.9% never. In the investigation of the parents' assistance, 27% of parents show their occupations and 25% offer the convenient conditions. The research results show teachers don't have a good understanding

of parents' occupations. Comparatively, parents support the school work. Nonetheless, the teachers said many parents can't meet school's expectations due to their own conditions, like different education concept. Therefore, it is not easy to make full use of the parents' resources.

Secondly, the teachers develop and utilize out-of-school resources. The research results show that the students have few opportunities to participate in out-of-school activities due to security. 43.5% of teachers scarcely organize students to go out, and 42.9% sometimes. When in need of out-of-school materials, 9.3% of teachers hold that the out-of-school personnel support; 77% comparatively support; 13% not supportive. Teachers generally consider that it is not so easy to get the support from out-of-school personnel, even a little difficult sometimes.

1.6 The Influencing Factors of Teachers' Curriculum Resources Development and Utilization

As to development and utilization of curriculum resources in rural middle schools, 39.5% of teachers think it is unlikely to do that; 50.5% possible; 10.5% impossible. The chart below shows that the obstruction factors for teachers' development and utilization of curriculum resources mainly focus on improper understanding of curriculum resources, lack of experience and ability to develop and utilize curriculum resources, lack of corresponding curriculum resources, lack of budget and teachers' heavy work burden affect teachers' development and utilization of curriculum resources. Meanwhile, teachers lack the social support and contact way of out-of-school departments concerned.

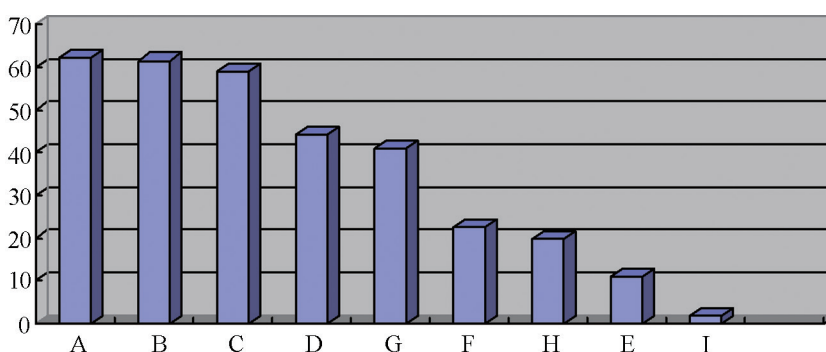


Figure 1
Obstruction Factors for Teachers' Development and Utilization of Curriculum Resources

Note. A: improper understanding of the curriculum resources; B: lack of experience and ability to develop and utilize curriculum resources; C: lack of corresponding curriculum resources; D: lack of budget; E: lack of enough support from the leaders; F: lack of social support; G: heavy work burden; H: lack of contact way of the out-of-school departments concerned; I: others.

Based on the research data and brief analysis above, the problems of rural junior middle school teachers' development and utilization of curriculum resources can be summed up as follows:

- (a) Teachers don't understand well of the connotation, denotation and relevant theories of curriculum resources. Usually, teachers tend to regard the resources which have direct effect on the teaching activities as curriculum resources, while teachers don't realize that the resources which are often used, are the real curriculum resources, like dynamically generated curriculum resources.
- (b) After the curriculum reform, teachers have more comprehensive understanding of the curriculum and have increasing need of curriculum resources, but teachers can't find enough supporting materials for the new teaching materials. What's more, teachers are lack of active awareness to develop and utilize curriculum resources, most of the teachers prefer to adopt whatever resources the school provides or from the Internet. In all, teachers want more curriculum resources from the outside.

- (c) Teachers don't fully develop the existing curriculum resources, and just utilize few types of resources. The development and utilization of curriculum resources mainly focus on the teaching materials, along with the multimedia, courseware, network resources in the class. Teachers more often make use of school's explicit curriculum resources, not the out-of-school implicit curriculum resources. Besides, teachers don't take advantage of themselves and out-of-school resources, like the parents resources.
- (d) The reason why teachers in rural middle schools don't fully develop and utilize curriculum resources is that teachers lack the ability to understand, develop and utilize them. Firstly, teachers lack the basic technology and ability required by modern information technology education to realize the development and utilization of curriculum resources, for instance unable to make the teaching courseware, etc.. Furthermore, they lack the ability to develop the potential curriculum resources. Besides, most teachers haven't possessed the stable strategies for the development and utilization of curriculum resources.

- (e) The curriculum reform puts forward higher requirements to teachers and adds more workload to them, especially for the class advisers who are also in charge of the class management. Therefore, they have less time and energy to study the curriculum and instruction. Because the school will not put the development and utilization of curriculum resources into the evaluation system, teachers don't have enough motivation and need more constraints.

2. STRATEGIES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND UTILIZATION OF CURRICULUM RESOURCES BY RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS

2.1 Promoting Teachers to Form Correct Concept of Curriculum Resources and Making Clear the Principle of Curriculum Resources Development and Utilization

The concept of curriculum resources is teachers' understanding of the value, connotation, denotation, and characteristics of curriculum resources; of the contents, principle, of ways to develop and utilize curriculum resources. Thus, the correct concept of curriculum resources is the prerequisite and guarantee for curriculum resources development and utilization to teachers. The development and utilization of curriculum resources has strong subjectivity and individuality. In other words, "the curriculum design and development and utilization of curriculum resources not only consider students' generality, but their characteristics". In addition, teachers should ensure the pertinence and effectiveness of the development of curriculum resources. The pertinence means teachers should consider the physical condition of the rural schools and select appropriate and effective curriculum resources, rather than copy curriculum resources from the city blindly. The effectiveness means teachers should choose and integrate curriculum resources which are good for the realization of curriculum objective, not only focus on the quantity of curriculum resources which makes the development and utilization of curriculum resources a mere formality.

Moreover, the formation of the correct concept of curriculum resources and possession of the principle can't be achieved overnight, but can be achieved gradually with external requirements, teachers' study and reflection in the practice. In the light of the characteristics of rural middle school, it is suggested that the education department can enhance the training efforts, like attending lecture, demonstration of the excellent teachers, case analysis, group discussion, observation, etc.. Besides, the teaching and research group can hold the theme activities of development and utilization of curriculum resources or carry out school-based teaching and research activities.

2.2 Teachers' Good Understanding of the Procedure and Mastery of Skills in Curriculum Resources Development and Utilization

The procedure is as follows: Firstly, teachers should study the curriculum objectives and consider how to realize them with what kind of curriculum resources, then how to develop these curriculum resources and how to utilize them in teaching activities. Secondly, teachers should select curriculum resources based on certain objective. That is to say, teachers should widely collect suitable curriculum resources to make use of. Thirdly, teachers should integrate curriculum resources and teaching materials. Because curriculum resources are just the basis of curriculum implementation, teachers should integrate curriculum resources into teaching contents. Teachers can directly regard the developed curriculum resources as teaching contents, or integrate the processed curriculum resources into teaching contents. It means curriculum resources can supplement and replace the existing teaching contents after integration. Fourthly, teachers should be sensitive to dynamic curriculum resources, so that teachers can convert some problems with unexpected, potential value into resources and make use of them. These resources mainly come from teachers' enlightenment, mistakes of teachers and students, interaction between them, emergent events, etc..

On this basis, teachers also could develop and utilize curriculum resources creatively to broaden the ways of the development, such as development with cooperation and communication between colleagues and the teachers, enrichment by interaction with the community, development and utilization with the teaching and research activities and the daily life.

2.3 The Development of Teachers' Own Resources

The teacher is the active subject in classroom teaching and the developer, user of curriculum resources. As the important curriculum resources, teachers should pay more attention to develop and utilize their own resources.

First of all, teachers should strengthen their own education culture and understanding of education idea, as well as relevant subjects. The education culture means education experience and practice wisdom for students, teaching, scientific research, etc. formed in teaching activities. And the formation of education culture mainly depends on teachers themselves, so teachers should have a comprehensive understanding of their own potential and tap it. The full understanding of the education idea and professional knowledge of the subject have a profound effect on teachers' professional development and their teaching ability. To begin with, teachers need to clarify the value of the education idea implied in the daily teaching behavior and the value of the concept of learning how to teach, and try to avoid blocking their professional development due to inappropriate belief or idea.

What's more, teachers should attach great importance to the value of the curriculum from their own life experience. Teachers' life experience is also an important part of curriculum resources and its value is as follows: broaden contents of the curriculum and increase its connotation; help realize the curriculum objective and promote students' development; change the way of curriculum implementation and realize the equal dialogue between teachers and students; convert the pattern of the curriculum management to promote the humanized management of the curriculum; enhance teachers' ability to develop the curriculum. Therefore, teachers can choose and apply the appropriate own life experience into teaching to achieve the teaching objective based on the specific teaching situation.

2.4 Developing Parents Resources Actively

The training goal can't be reached without parents' support and cooperation, just as the school's education initiative and the curriculum reform can't be realized without parents' support. Firstly, the teacher should give full play to the students' role of bridge and promote the communication and understanding between the teacher and parents by a variety of ways so as to build fruitful family-school relationship. Furthermore, teachers should try to get the parents' support and cooperation and take advantage of parents' experience and social resources. The school and teacher should actively take advantage of the parents meeting, school open day, parents school, etc. to promote mutual multi-level communications, guide parents with advanced education idea, and influence parents with practical education behavior. Based on good understanding of the parents, teachers can invite them to participate in school's teaching management and implementation, and introduce their suitable experience and social resources into the teaching. Besides, teachers can make use of the parents committee to promote mutual communication and cooperation, so teachers and parents can give advice and suggestions together to promote development of the school and education.

2.5 Establishing the Guarantee Mechanism of Curriculum Resources Development and Perfecting the Evaluation System

To a certain extent, the insufficient curriculum power of rural teachers limits their initiative and creation on curriculum resources development and utilization. First of all, the superior administrative department of education

can supply policy support and empower the school to develop curriculum resources. Thus, school can make fully use of the existing curriculum resources and develop new curriculum resources with more freedom. Gradually, school can form its own characteristics. Meanwhile, school should return more curriculum power to the teacher on curriculum implementation and encourage them to energetically develop and utilize curriculum resources. In this way, teachers can select suitable curriculum resources to promote realization of curriculum objective based on their actual demands. In addition, the administrative department of education should endeavor to provide rural school with definite support of finance, material and manpower to help the development of curriculum resources when the departments are supplying relevant resources.

The evaluation system can directly guide teachers' education idea, encourage and control their behavior. The administrative department of education's evaluation to school should not only emphasize its academic achievement, but take its sustainable development into consideration. Thus, the department should establish scientific and effective incentive mechanism to promote the development of school, teachers' healthy competition and professional growth. At the same time, school should set scientific, reasonable evaluation standard and design corresponding evaluation tools on the basis of school's actual situation with the guidance of evaluation idea in curriculum reform. Additionally, when evaluating teachers, school should try to collect the materials which can reflect the development of teacher's teaching and quality, not just students' academic achievement. By this way, school can make a fair and reasonable evaluation for teachers' hard work. What's more, the development and utilization of curriculum resources should be added into the evaluation system to motivate teachers and eliminate their inertia.

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