

# Research on the Current Situation and Pedagogical Suggestions of High School English Education in Underdeveloped Regions of China

Ting Huang

Zhejiang Yuexiu University, Shaoxing, China.

## Abstract

**With the accelerating process of urban-rural integration in China, the education problem in underdeveloped areas has become increasingly prominent. In these regions, high school English teaching faces various difficulties, such as insufficient teaching staff, weak student foundation, and lack of teaching resources. How to improve high school English teaching in underdeveloped areas has become a difficult problem facing us. This article will start with a dilemma analysis, explore solutions, and provide some pedagogical suggestions.**

## Keywords

**Underdeveloped Areas, Senior High School, English Pedagogical Suggestions.**

## 1. Introduction

English is an internationally recognized language widely used in various fields worldwide, including business, technology, education, politics, and culture. In the context of globalization in today's world, English has become an indispensable tool. Therefore, the importance of the English subject is increasingly prominent. In light of the educational policy in China, English is organized as a compulsory course for every learner from their third year of primary school to university [1]. Currently, the multilingual turn has become a mainstream in the EFL course at the majority of schools in China, especially in developed areas, where learners can use English, Mandarin, and their local dialects in the EFL classes [2], while monolingual ideologies still exist in some underdeveloped areas such as Henan, Shanxi, and Sichuan.

In underdeveloped areas, high school English education generally faces problems such as lack of educational resources, weak teaching staff, and outdated teaching methods. Due to economic constraints, schools in these regions often lack advanced teaching equipment and abundant teaching resources, which cannot meet the diverse learning needs of students. At the same time, insufficient teaching staff is also an important factor restricting the development of high school English education. Many teachers lack a systematic background in English education and rich teaching experience, making it difficult to effectively guide students in English learning. In addition, due to geographical limitations and information barriers, students in underdeveloped areas often lack practical opportunities to learn English, resulting in relatively weak English application abilities.

However, despite facing many challenges, high school English education in underdeveloped areas still has important educational value. Effective English education can not only help students master basic language knowledge, but also cultivate their cross-cultural communication skills, thinking abilities, emotional attitudes, and values, laying a solid foundation for their future development.

## 2. Literature Review

Monolingualism can be regarded as an individual who can speak only one language or a society where only one language exists, and it is often seen as the social norm [3]. Monolingual ideologies advocate for the exclusion of the mother tongue from the foreign language in the process of learning [4]. Teachers are required to use English as the only medium of instruction in the EFL course, and English is also the only means allowed for students to engage in teaching activities. However, such rules for monolingual ideologies are not always beneficial for learners' development of language skills, especially for EFL learners with relatively weak English speaking ability since they might choose not to speak and engage in the learning activities so as to avoid making mistakes [5]. Furthermore, the monolingual ideologies in the language classroom are distinct from the actual social practices with more than one language in the Chinese context, and this mismatch between the EFL classroom and real life might make learners feel bored or meaningless, which is likely to implicitly lower learners' EFL learning motivation. Consequently, this might cause negative influences on their EFL performance since motivation is an important psychological factor affecting learners' EFL achievement [6]. In addition, Kachru [7] argues that empirical research into the multilingual turn seems to be quite scanty.

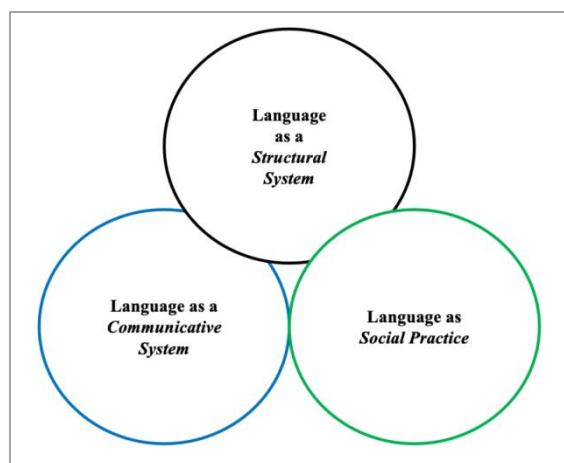
Therefore, in the field of education, as a challenge to monolingual ideologies, multilingual turn and its practices in foreign language classrooms have gained increasing attention from many researchers in recent decades [8]. In China, considering that the educational policies require Chinese students to learn English throughout the majority stages of the learning period, the multilingual turn in Chinese society is becoming more and more obvious [2]. Multilingual turn can be explained as two separate concepts: multilingual and turn. Multilingual refers to individuals who use or have the ability to use multiple languages, and turn means a phenomenon or a trend that has happened and has been observed for a period of time [9]. The multilingual turn puts more emphasis on the dynamic and blended language repertoires of each individual, and it encourages more complicated and flexible interpretations of the spoken discourse [10]. Furthermore, under the viewpoint of multilingual turn, languages can be perceived as the tool for social practice as well as transportable linguistics materials [11].

It has been well-documented that translanguaging may happen naturally in the multilingual classroom, and this is unlikely to be impeded by teacher's requirements for monolingual practices [12], which means that multilingual turn is the paradigm that is closer to the teaching and learning realities in the multilingual society. Therefore, the EFL teacher in underdeveloped areas could utilize the translanguaging strategy to realize the multilingual turn in the classroom. Translanguaging refers to a kind of language usage of multilinguals, which implies the shift from monolingual to multilingual ideologies [13]. The concept of translanguaging is originally used to describe a teaching method, which requires the learner to get information through one language and express information through another language. However, the meaning of translanguaging has experienced some changes in recent years. Currently, translanguaging is defined as the individual's ability to change among different languages and use these languages in an integrated way. Translanguaging is also defined as the production and application of mixed and interrelated language systems, which constitute the person's full linguistic repertoire [8]. The former emphasizes the shift from one language to another, while the latter focuses more on the use of an individual's entire linguistic resources. Combining these two perspectives, languages are seen as an interconnected language repertoire available for multilingual users rather than as separate and discrete systems. Moreover, Taylor and Snoddon [14] maintain that the purpose of these discursive language practices is to realize the goal of meaning-making. In a broader sense, the application of translanguaging strategy in the classroom could allow learners to use any language to make sense flexibly, and this will to some

extent protect those who speak minority languages, which might be conducive to the social justice.

In comparison with the monolingual ideologies in the EFL course in underdeveloped areas, the teacher at the author's undergraduate university in a developed area in China advocate for the multilingual turn and apply the translanguaging strategy in actual teaching practices. Most students and the author are positive about the translanguaging strategy, and this approach could effectively facilitate students' language learning since the difficult concepts can be explained in Chinese to help learners understand them more clearly. Thus, it is vital for the teachers to make a shift to the multilingual turn. Moreover, some empirical studies regarding the implementation of translanguaging into EFL lessons in the Chinese context have shown similar results. For example, Fang and Liu [15] conducted mixed-methods research to scrutinize teachers' and learners' feelings and attitudes towards the actual implementation of translanguaging in a university in China. Analysis of the data from questionnaires, observations, and semi-structured interviews revealed that most students had a positive attitude towards translanguaging, and most teachers realized the effect of translanguaging on students' learning processes. The results also showed that implementing translanguaging may enable learners to have a better understanding of the course, establish more harmonious relationships among learners and improve their EFL performance.

Liddicoat and Scarino [16] developed three views of conceptualizing language learning (see Figure 1). To realize the goal of cultivating multilingual practitioners, the teachers' underlying view towards the language system also needs to be improved. If the centre of language education is about teaching prescriptive forms of a specific language [17], the language is virtually seen as a structural system (consisting of grammatical rules and vocabulary knowledge), and this view tends to place more emphasis on grammatical aspects than on vocabulary knowledge in the actual teaching practices [16]. The teacher instructed and analyzed sentence structures into separate elements such as subject, predicate, object, and modifier, and all types of sentence components are taught through an 18-week semester. However, students at such schools are still unable to produce sentences with correct structures in many situations, which means that teaching English as a structural system may be problematic since students are confined to such a restrictive linguistic system with poor flexibility [16].



**Figure 1:** Different views of conceptualizing language learning

As a response, language can be seen as a communicative system, which represents a shift of emphasis from grammatical and linguistic forms to communicative purposes. To be specific, communication is realized by employing both grammatical and linguistic knowledge to convey

the speakers' minds to listeners. Such a view influences the EFL teaching at the author's university. When students are equipped with the necessary grammatical and linguistic information through explicit teaching, communicative teaching activities such as role-play are organized to provide students with the opportunity to utilize the knowledge obtained to practice and express meanings. During this process, most students are highly motivated and highly engaged in the activities, and this view is more flexible than the structural view.

### **3. The Era Value of High School Foreign Language Curriculum**

#### **3.1.1. Developing students' cross-cultural communication skills**

In today's globalized world, cross-cultural communication skills have become an important criterion for measuring a person's overall quality. High school English education guides students to learn about the culture, history, and social customs of English speaking countries, helping them understand their thinking and behavioral habits in different cultural backgrounds, thereby cultivating their cross-cultural communication abilities. This ability not only helps students better integrate and adapt in future international exchanges, but also helps them broaden their horizons, expand their thinking, and better understand and respect the differences and diversity between different cultures. Through learning high school English, students can actively participate in cross-cultural communication activities both inside and outside the classroom, such as Model United Nations conferences, international cultural festivals, etc., further enhancing their cross-cultural communication abilities.

#### **3.1.2. Enhance students' thinking ability**

High school English education focuses on cultivating students' thinking abilities, including logical thinking, critical thinking, and innovative thinking. By learning English grammar, vocabulary, and discourse structure, students can gradually master English thinking patterns and expression habits, thereby improving their thinking abilities. The improvement of this ability not only helps students achieve better grades in English learning, but also helps them better cope with various challenges in other subjects and future careers. Meanwhile, high school English education also encourages students to engage in independent and critical thinking, cultivating their critical thinking abilities by analyzing and evaluating viewpoints and information in English texts.

#### **3.1.3. Shaping students' emotional attitudes and values**

High school English education not only imparts knowledge, but also emphasizes the cultivation of students' emotional attitudes and values. By studying excellent literary works and biographies in English texts, students can feel a positive attitude towards life and correct values. The positive energy and emotions conveyed by these works help stimulate students' inner motivation and potential, cultivate their confidence and sense of responsibility. At the same time, teachers can also guide students to discuss and think about relevant issues during the teaching process, helping them establish correct worldviews, outlooks on life, and values. The shaping of such emotional attitudes and values has a profound impact on the personal growth and future development of students.

#### **3.1.4. Promoting the improvement of students' comprehensive quality**

High school English education not only focuses on cultivating students' language knowledge and skills, but also on improving their overall quality. By participating in various English learning and practical activities, students can exercise their organizational, communication, and teamwork abilities. The improvement of these abilities helps students better adapt and cope with various challenges and changes in their future learning and work. At the same time, high school English education also encourages students to actively participate in social practice

and volunteer services, and improve their comprehensive quality through personal experience and practical operation.

## **4. Issue Analysis and Pedagogical Suggestions on English Teaching and Learning**

### **4.1. Issue analysis**

Firstly, the teaching staff of English is weak. The population in underdeveloped areas of our country still accounts for a large proportion, which means that there are a large number of students in the school-age stage in these areas. However, the reality is that due to the backward economic development in underdeveloped areas, most English education talents often do not consider underdeveloped areas as their employment choices, but instead flow to urban areas. In this situation, many schools have very weak teaching staff, with a serious imbalance in the teacher-student ratio, and even the phenomenon of one English teacher taking on the entire grade of English teaching.

Secondly, English teaching lacks relevant equipment and facilities. After entering the 21st century, China's education development has also kept up with the pace of the times and gradually moved towards modern education. Underdeveloped regions are unable to implement modern teaching or have lower levels of modern teaching due to limited educational funds and other reasons. The main manifestation is that there are few or no audio classrooms, multimedia classrooms, etc., which are outdated and cannot be used normally, and there is a lack of relevant books and audiovisual materials, etc. The scarcity of modern educational facilities and equipment resources has limited the modernization of English education in underdeveloped areas, directly resulting in a low level of English teaching in these areas.

Thirdly, the teaching philosophy and methods are relatively backward. English is a highly systematic discipline with its own teaching characteristics, thus gradually forming a set of modern educational concepts and methods. However, most English teachers in underdeveloped areas do not possess modern language education concepts. Their understanding of English teaching still remains limited to memorizing vocabulary, memorizing grammar and sentence structures, and their teaching focus is on imparting knowledge. The teaching methods are relatively rigid.

Fourthly, students have a lower starting point in English learning. Under normal circumstances, students should start learning English from primary schools, but many primary schools in underdeveloped areas of China do not offer English courses, or offer English courses but do not actually teach them as a main subject. In this way, students have almost no foundation in learning English, and often find it difficult to learn English after entering junior high school. In addition, some schools with English teaching conditions also have unsatisfactory actual English teaching results. The key reason is that students and parents insist that English has no practical use in underdeveloped areas, so students have a very perfunctory attitude towards English learning.

### **4.2. Pedagogical suggestions**

#### **4.2.1. Strengthening the construction of teaching staff and improving the quality of teachers**

Teachers are the key force in high school English education, and their professional competence and teaching ability directly affect the learning effectiveness and educational value of students. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the training efforts for English teachers in underdeveloped areas, improve their teaching level and educational philosophy. By organizing regular training and learning activities, teachers can continuously update their knowledge structure and master

advanced teaching methods; Encourage communication and cooperation among teachers, share teaching experience and resources together, and improve the overall teaching quality.

#### **4.2.2. Innovating teaching methods and means to improve teaching effectiveness**

In response to the actual situation of high school English education in underdeveloped areas, we can actively explore and try new teaching methods and means. For example, using modern information technology to carry out distance education and online education, breaking geographical restrictions, and providing students with broader learning resources and platforms. By utilizing modern technologies such as multimedia and the internet, teaching content can be made more vivid, vivid, and interesting; At the same time, combining local culture and actual situation, carry out distinctive English teaching activities to stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in learning.

#### **4.2.3. Strengthening the cultivation of practical and application abilities, and improve the comprehensive quality of students**

English is a highly practical subject, and high school English education in underdeveloped areas should pay more attention to cultivating students' practical and practical abilities. By organizing English corners, English speech competitions, English cultural festivals, and other activities, more practical opportunities can be provided for students; At the same time, actively cooperate with local enterprises and institutions to carry out English internships and practical activities, so that students can improve their English application ability in practice. In addition, students can be encouraged to participate in various English competitions and activities, and improve their overall quality by challenging themselves and showcasing their talents.

#### **4.2.4. Increasing policy support and optimize the education environment**

The government and education departments should increase support for high school English education in underdeveloped areas and optimize the educational environment. We can provide strong support for the development of high school English education by increasing education investment, improving teaching facilities, and improving teacher treatment. At the same time, strengthen the supervision and evaluation of high school English education to ensure its educational value is realized. In addition, it is also possible to actively guide and encourage social forces to participate in the development of high school English education, forming a diversified education investment mechanism.

## **5. Conclusion**

Although high school English education in underdeveloped areas faces many challenges, its educational value cannot be ignored. By strengthening the construction of the teaching staff, innovating teaching methods and means, strengthening the cultivation of practical and application abilities, and increasing policy support, the educational value of high school English education can be effectively enhanced, providing better educational resources and broader development space for students in underdeveloped areas. At the same time, we should fully recognize the important role of high school English education in cultivating students' comprehensive qualities and promoting their comprehensive development, actively promote its reform and development, and contribute to the cultivation of more outstanding talents.

The educational value of high school English education in underdeveloped areas is not only reflected in the growth and development of individual students, but also has a profound impact on the progress and prosperity of the entire society. Through high school English education, students can not only master an internationally recognized language, but also cultivate cross-cultural communication skills, enhance international perspectives, and contribute to future international cooperation.

In summary, high school English education in underdeveloped areas not only carries the mission of imparting language knowledge, but also shoulders important tasks of cultivating students' cross-cultural communication ability, thinking ability, emotional attitude, and values. We should actively respond to challenges, fully tap into their educational value, and make positive contributions to the development of education and student growth in underdeveloped areas.

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