

A Research Report on English Training Industry in China: from the perspective of its teaching faculty

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Abstract

This paper is a research report on the cultivation and management strategies concerning teaching faculty working in English training industry in China. As for the cultivation, English training institutions in China should make a comprehensive and flexible use of young faculty strategy, full time faculty strategy, standardized teaching strategy and specialized faculty strategy. As for the teaching management segment, institutions should make use of both payment management and in-class teaching management. The supervising authorities of English training institutions in China, namely, the Social Education Management Offices at various levels, are responsible for the supervision of teachers working in the industry, which includes the management of teachers' qualifications and teacher advertisements.

Key words: China's English training industry, teaching faculty, cultivation strategies, teaching management strategies.

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I. Introduction

According to the statistics provided by *An Investigation Report on English Training Market in China in 2005*, which was issued by Social Survey Institute of China (SSIC), there was a market share of RMB 15 billion in the field of English training in China in 2005, and the figure will reach RMB 30 billion in the year 2010. In recent years, with the constant expansion of English training industry in the country, the quantity of its teaching faculty has been mounting tremendously. An excellent teaching team is the key element that forms core competition force for English training institutions. Consequently the cultivation and management of teaching faculty is an important issue which all training institutions have to face. As the supervising authorities of English training industry, Social Education Management Offices are responsible at various levels for the supervision of teaching faculty working in English training institutions.

With sponsorship from the Eleventh Five-Year Plan of Hubei Education Science, we conducted an investigation into English training industry in the Province to find out its history, present development status, existing problems and their management countermeasures. As one of the outputs of our research project, this paper will focus on the cultivation and teaching management strategies concerning teaching faculty working in the industry from the perspectives of English training institutions themselves and that of Social Education Management Offices.

II. Research Settings and Methodology

Three of the research members in our project are themselves management of English training institutions in Hubei Province, who have attributed tremendous information and knowledge to the research work. Apart from that, we carried out an investigation into the English training industry in the Province. The investigation involves two management staff from Social Education Management Offices, and 20 teachers, five management staff and 185 trainees from three English training institutions. The three investigated training institutions are all leaders in Education both in China and in the Province, and therefore are representative enough to ensure convincing research findings.

Both questionnaires and interviews were used in our investigation. Questionnaires were designed and circulated for the investigated trainees. Interviews were organized to obtain information from teachers and management staff from both Social Education Management Offices and the training institutions. Interviews were used for some trainees when it was deemed necessary.

III. Cultivation strategies for English training institutions

We found that, as for the cultivation of their teaching faculty, English training institutions adopted different strategies. The most common ones, however, were the following four: young faculty strategy, full time faculty strategy, standardized teaching strategy and specialized faculty strategy. Institutions normally choose the ones that fit them and make a comprehensive and flexible use of them all.

3.1 Young faculty strategy

Making an observation into the English training industry in China, we can see that most teachers serving in it are between the ages of 22 and 35. Compared with the age of those who serve in full-time education institutions, they are of a much younger group. The fact itself is proof of the benefits of young faculty strategy for English training institutions.

Why is the young faculty strategy right for them? First of all, young teachers are in the prime of their lives and their health conditions are relatively better. This ensures their full passion when doing training in the classroom, and makes their class teaching more informative and fast-paced. In addition to that, as youths, they are more open to changes, and can easily accept and adapt to the specific teaching philosophy and modes of an institution. More importantly, with their youthful enthusiasm, they are willing to put all of their energy into work, and love being integrated into the cause of the institution, and taking it as their own.

However, young teachers may possess shortcomings, such as a lack of teaching experience, weak job stability and so on, which makes young faculty strategy a “double-edged sword” for institutions. Therefore, institutions adopting the young faculty strategy should, on one hand, give their young teachers more chances to practice and progress, and on the other hand, provide them with attractive payments and good chances for promotion so as to ensure their working stability. Otherwise, institutions may take the risk of cultivating young teachers for their competitors.

3.2 Full-time faculty strategy

Teachers working in the English training industry in China are of two types: full-time and part-time teachers. Investigation showed that full-time faculty strategy was widely adopted by most institutions, especially the large ones. We have identified the following reasons:

1) Due to their close link with the institution, full time teachers are always at the institution's disposal and their interests are closely related to institutional interest. Full time teachers are stable and, comparatively speaking, are willing to put more of

their heart and soul into their teaching work, which is, in turn, expected by the institution.

2) In most of the training institutions, full time teachers and part time teachers are paid differently. Full time teachers are often paid with a fixed salary, while part time teachers are paid according to their teaching hours. As a usual practice, the payment for part-time teachers is often comparably higher than that of full-time teachers. Therefore full-time faculty strategy helps to decrease the operation cost of training institutions.

3) Some well-known teachers, once employed as full-timers, form a kind of “monopoly” for a training institution, which enhances its core competition force.

Of course, the use of full-time faculty strategy does not necessarily exclude the use of part-time teachers. In fact, there are a lot of excellent part-timers in the industry, especially those part-time teachers from colleges and universities. Some of the full-time teachers actually started their teaching job as part-timers. English training institutions adopting full time faculty strategy, as we found, also employed a significant number of part-time teachers.

3.3 Standardized teaching strategy

In recent years, chain business and franchise business models have gradually become popular in English training industry in China. We learnt that large institutions running in these models were the major users of standardized teaching strategy. Standardized teaching strategy refers to the institutional practice of standardized teaching objectives, contents, methods and styles. The standardization strategy has important significance for large English training institutions operating with chain business and franchise business models, as the strategy assists them in unifying their training products and providing standard services for their clients in different parts of China.

However, their use of standardized teaching strategy does not necessarily require the classroom teaching to be completely the same, which, in fact, is not always possible. Under the principle of standardized teaching, they grant their teachers a certain freedom. This is because, on one hand, the advantages of a teacher may not be included in the teaching standard; and on the other hand, due to his or her lack of related competence, a teacher may not be able to demonstrate some of the components required by the teaching standard.

3.4 Specialized faculty strategy

In the 1990's, English training language institutions in China were “all-powerful” , which means they tried to provide training programs to cover the needs of all kinds of learners. In recent years, they were found to be more and more specialized. With the development of the English training industry and the promotion of its products, the industry's target market has undergone divisions and subdivisions. English

training institutions have had to refine and subdivide their training products constantly so as to meet the needs of the market subdivisions. They tried to provide their customers with specialized training services of their own features. These corresponding subdivided training courses required teaching faculty of expertise. The use of specialized faculty strategy helps English training institutions, especially those of greater size, to cultivate their expert teachers who specialize in teaching those subdivided training courses. And it is no wonder that we found specialized faculty strategy to be so popular in the industry today. We believe that the strategy serves as an important driving force for the optimization of teaching faculty and for the promotion of service levels in the entire industry.

IV. Teaching Management strategies for English training institutions

As for the teaching management of teaching faculty, the investigation revealed that two major strategies were most effective for training institutions, both of which were adopted by all the investigated institutions. They are payment management strategy and in-class teaching management strategy.

4.1 Payment management strategy

Payment management strategy includes three aspects. First of all, it is a common practice for institutions to connect teachers' payments with their teaching effectiveness. And for the evaluation of teachers' teaching effect, investigated institutions normally adopt students' scoring system. In the process of each training program, The Department of Teaching Affairs organizes students' scoring once or twice to evaluate teachers' work, the result of which is the teachers' payment basis, since the management believes the degree of students satisfaction from training is largely dependant on their satisfaction with class teaching effectiveness and their teachers. They trust the establishment of a payment-performance system as a tool both for inspiring the in-class teaching enthusiasm of teachers and for improving the degree of student satisfaction in class learning and hence their satisfaction with the entire training program.

Secondly, some institutions connect teachers' payment with their qualifications and experience, which includes the number of years working in the institution, as well as their working experience in English training industry and teaching awards they have obtained. We found that such a link helped to stabilize an institution's core of excellent teachers, and also enhanced the working stability of the entire teaching faculty working for the institution. Of course, it was found that placing too much emphasis on the impact of teacher qualifications and experience for their payments produced a negative effect on teachers who excelled in teaching, yet had less experienced in

the profession. Therefore institutions adopting the strategy should establish a complimentary salary promotion system.

Thirdly, some institutions found it useful to set up reasonable gaps among the payment ranks, which adds pressure to teachers with high payments and can motivate teachers in the lower payment ranks. In this way, the teacher enthusiasm gets a boost, the teaching team can be more stable, both of which are beneficial for the health and comprehensive development of the team.

4.2 In-class teaching management strategy

We found out that in-class teaching management strategy worked more directly than payment management strategy. The Department of Teaching Affairs, teachers and trainees are the main bodies concerning in-class teaching management. High-speed, effective information flowing among these bodies is the key to maintaining good in-class teaching management. Among these main bodies, the Department of Teaching Affairs should make good use of its function as a “bridge”. With questionnaires and face-to-face conversations with students, the Department of Teaching Affairs should collect student suggestions on teaching and present feedback to teachers. The information reported in the student-Department information flow is usually comprehensive and true, though it is not always timely and can be provided only on a regular basis.

Apart from this, we found that the student-teacher and teacher-student information flows are also very important. Course teachers should be encouraged to make use of a little bit of class time to exchange ideas with trainees on class teaching so as to get timely teaching feedback. This can be carried out whenever it is deemed necessary. These information flows are usually timely, and consequently give teachers chances to adjust their later teaching of the course. However, the authenticity and comprehensiveness of these information flows are normally not perfect for teaching management, which is due to a lack of “bridge” in their communication.

Another effective method in collecting teaching information, which often gets neglected by the management, is the teacher-Department information flow. It is definitely important to hear all parties. Teachers’ suggestions have definite significance for the accumulation of experience for future running of the business.

We believe it is crucial to make comprehensive use of all information flows mentioned above, which will guarantee high-speed, effective information flows, and will help to improve the teaching quality in return.

V. The management strategies for Social

Education Management Offices

Social Education Management Offices at various levels are, at present, supervising bodies for English training institutions. As a supplementary form for full-time school and college education, the status of English training education has not been well recognized. Our investigation showed that the management of teaching faculty from the Social Education Management Offices had lagged behind, and suggested the following two aspects in terms of strengthening such management.

5.1 The management on the qualification of teachers

For a long time, China has conducted a permit system in the employment of teachers of full-time education from kindergartens to institutes of higher learning, which has guaranteed that teachers at various full-time education levels have their corresponding qualifications. However, this is not the case for teachers working in English training institutions.

We have perceived that as far as the qualifications of teachers are concerned, the Social Education Management Offices and English training institutions share basically, but not exactly, the same interests. When selecting their teachers, institutions are fundamentally influenced by the market need. As long as teachers are welcomed by the trainees, they are considered excellent and thus will be employed by training institutions. It is true that the majority of teachers welcomed by trainees are qualified teachers, yet there are, however, some exceptions. Things like teachers’ corresponding qualifications and possible criminal records are usually and easily overlooked by institutions who employ them. In this context, Social Education Management Offices should be assumed the responsibility of supervision. Through our interview with the two management staff from the Social Education Management Offices, we learnt that, at present, during the approval procedures for the establishment of English training institutions, there are supervisions of teachers’ qualification from Social Education Management Offices. However, in the latter management, such supervision becomes scarce, which is caused, as we have learnt, by the lack of hands in Social Educational Management Offices.

In response to the present situation, we deem it necessary for Social Educational Management Offices to change from a static supervisor to a dynamic one. Only in this way, can the management become accustomed to the mobility of teachers in English training industry. To do this, Social Educational Management Offices should require English training institutions to provide updated name lists and corresponding certificates of teachers at the time of their annual assessment. And so as to guarantee a credible supervision, we strongly recommend that governments at all levels should add

extra staff to their Social Education Management Offices.

5.2 The management on teacher advertisements

Our questionnaire revealed that 32% of the investigated trainees felt suspicious about advertisements from English training institutions, their teacher advertisements in particular. We thus did a more careful investigation into it and we found some surprising discovery. Since the teaching staff is the core competitive element for English training institutions, all institutions do their utmost to advertise their teachers. That includes many exaggerated and fictitious propaganda. For instance, our investigation reported that a teacher, who was described as a scholar from overseas, had actually been to that country only as a tourist. Another surprising finding revealed a teacher without a college degree was advertised as a post-graduate from a famous Chinese university. We believe that these are not rare cases, for we found many similar reports in newspapers.

The exaggerated or fictitious advertisements from English training institutions have actually cheated their trainees. And in a larger sense, this practice has caused devious competition among English training institutions. We induced that the weak management from Social Educational Management Offices has caused the prevalence of such phenomena in the industry. Though with very limited hands, Social Educational Management Offices are expected to conduct random inspections of institutions' advertisements so as to stop the exaggeration and falsification of propaganda. This will not only help to protect the interests of the trainees, but also to standardize the conduct of institutions so that an honest, fair and just competition among the institutions can be maintained.

VI. Conclusion

With the end of the "gold rush period" and the arrival of the brand competition era for English training industry in China, consumer demands for good teaching quality have become higher than ever. Thus the competition of teaching faculty among institutions grows increasingly fierce. Our research concludes that, as for the cultivation of their teaching faculty, institutions should make comprehensive and flexible use of young faculty strategy, full time faculty strategy, standardized teaching strategy and specialized faculty strategy. And as for the implementation of teaching management, institutions should make use of both payment management and in-class teaching management strategies. Our research has also shown that effective management of the teaching faculty working in the industry from Social Educational Management Offices at various levels will help English training institutions to standardize the qualifications of teachers and to

maintain an honest, fair and just competition order in the industry.

VII. References

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